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FROM THE CAUCASUS TO THE BALKANS: SOME ASPECTS OF THE BULGARIANS' EARLIEST HISTORY

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Özet

Proto-Bulgar'ların pek çok yazılı kaynak ve arkeolojik bulgularla desteklenen Kafkasya bölgesindeki varlığına dair bugüne kadar çok şey söylendi fakat hiçbir zaman dilsel açıdan incelenmedi. Halbuki, hangi etnik gruba ait olduğu önem taşımayan herhangi bir kültürün bir yerdeki izlerini bulmada en iyi yol, bahsi geçen kültürün komşu kültürlerle olan dilsel yakınlığını belirlemektir. Bu makalenin ana konusu, genel itibarıyla, Proto-Bulgarların Kafkasya'da mesken tuttıkları sahalardan bitişindeki yerli nüfusla olan dilsel bağlantıları çerçevesinde geçmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Proto-Bulgarlar, Kafkasya, Bağcılık, Balkanlar

There are still too many controversies about the origins, the ancient homeland and the earliest history of those Bulgars or Bulgarians, who started to penetrate the Balkans by the end of the 5th century AD to become the ethnic core of the present-day Danubian-Balkan Bulgarians. Equally numerous and controversial are the theories about the meaning of the "Bulgar" ethnonym. There is no doubt, however, that the emergence of Bulgarians in the Caucasus region is an important moment of the long and sinuous history of their migration from Asia to Europe.

According to the Syrian chronicler Mar Abas a Bulgarian horde fled from some intestine strife and reached the Caucasus toward 127-114 BC. Somewhat later some of these Bulgarians moved to the south of the mountain and began to cultivate the land, occupied by them, and to build cities. Mar Abas's account was based on a more ancient Armenian chronicle but many scholars believe that he erroneously placed this event in such an early time. Chinese sources confirm, though, that the death of the ruler of the Hsiung-nu and legendary founder of the Dulo tribe Mao-tung or Bogatur (201-174 BC) marked the beginning of intertribal wars, which forced part of the Hsiung-nu to look for refuge in the West, toward the Caucasus.¹

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¹D.D.Süsülov, *Pütyat na Bülğariya* (Sofia: Pridvorna pechatnitsa, 1936), pp.238-249.

The continuous presence of Bulgarians in the Caucasus region is evidenced also by the Armenian historian Moses Khorenats'i. According to his "*History of the Armenians*" toward 200 AD a united army of Bulgarians and Khazars crossed the Caucasus and invaded the lands to the southeast of the mountain. Eventually the Bulgarians and the Khazars were defeated and repulsed to the north, although they managed to kill the Armenian king Valarsh.²

Relating the reign of the Armenian king Chosroes from 210 to 258 AD, Moses Khorenats'i mentions some mixed marriages between representatives of the Bulgarian and of the Alan nobility, which is considered as evidence of the growing mixture between Bulgarians and Alans. At the same time a growing number of Bulgarians settled in Armenia and some of them attained high positions not only in Armenia, but also in neighboring Georgia. The Bulgarian colonization of certain lands to the south of the Caucasus was to some extent encouraged by the Armenians, who hoped to "domesticate" them in this way. It should be noted that in settling in this area, the Bulgarians quickly became farmers and, among other things, started to cultivate grapes and grapevines.³

Everything seems to indicate that "taming" the Bulgarians was not an easy task and another war broke out during the reign of the Armenian king Tiridates (287-340 AD). The Bulgarians were defeated again and this time Tiridates personally cut with his sword the Bulgarian ruler into two. In fact the Bulgarians had to fight against an alliance of Armenia with the Roman emperor Constantine the Great (306-337). Their main enemy was the Persian emperor Shapur II (309-379) and the Bulgarians apparently acted as allies of Persia.⁴

The description of the Caucasus Bulgarians as builders of cities and as farmers clearly corroborates the conclusion of the American scholar Peter Golden who rightfully rejects the dogmatic view that the Eurasian peoples were nomads breeding only cattle, unlike the Indo-Europeans who were predominantly farmers. The very distinction between nomadic and sedentary societies is artificial, since no society can survive, if based only on cattle breeding or, respectively, only on agriculture. From time immemorial the Hsiung-nu knew both how to breed cattle and how to cultivate the land and the Great Migration that started in the 3rd-4th centuries AD was motivated by the search for land.⁵

According to primary sources the Caucasus Bulgarians were good farmers and this account is confirmed, among other things, by linguistic data as well. Thus, for instance, modern Bulgarian words like "*grozde*" ("grape"), "*chepka*" ("cluster of grapes"), "*tsapardosva*" ("to strike, to smite, to slap, to hit") from "*tsap*" ("a flail, a stick for threshing"), "*tor*" ("dung, manure") and "*mor*" ("murrain") are totally different from their Slavic counterparts but they have their parallels in Chuvash, in Mari and in some languages of the Caucasus region (e.g. Georgian

²D.Tabakov, *Khhorizontiut na poznaniyata. Bŭlgarite prez vekovete* (Sofia: 1999), pp.13-14.

³*Ibidem*, pp.19-20 and 27-43.

⁴*Ibidem*, pp.21-23.

⁵P.Golden, *Nomads and Sedentary Societies in Medieval Eurasia* (Washington, DC: Published by the American Historical Association, 2003).

“gurzeni” for “grape”, Balkar “chypitsya” and Chuvash “shupkam” for “cluster of grapes”, Chuvash “shap” and Talish “shap” for “to thresh”, Mari “terys”, Avar “tyrys” and Talish “tyr” for “dung, manure”, Chuvash “mur” for “plague” and Talish “mor” for “a venomous snake”, etc.). The same applies to the modern Bulgarian word “vosûk” (“wax”), which has Slavic and Indo-European parallels, but it may be also associated with Ossetian and Chechen “aus”.⁶

“Vosûk” for “wax” is only one of too many ancient Bulgarian words that are present in all the Slavic languages, but have by no means a Slavic origin. Everything seems to indicate that the Slavs emerged as a separate ethnicity from the Balts only after their original homeland, corresponding to the territories of today’s Poland, Western Ukraine and Western Belarus, was invaded by the Huns toward the end of the 4th century AD and became a part of their empire. The ancient Bulgarians (Bulgars), or an ethnicity close to them, played apparently a crucial part in the very formation of the Slavs as an ethnicity. In any case, there are some ancient Bulgarian words, which have clear parallels with the Caucasus region and which are at the same time present in all the Slavic languages. Thus, for instance, the Volga-Bulgarian words “hvili” for “death” and “dzhori” for “soldier” are considered by some authors to be Caucasian loanwords. On the other hand, “dzhori” for “soldier” might have evolved into the modern Bulgarian word “zhrets” for “pagan priest” in the same way as Latin “sacerdos” (“pagan priest”) is related to “sacramentum”, which means “conscriptio, pledge of military allegiance, military oath”. Similarly “hvili” (“death”) might correspond to modern Bulgarian “hvala” (“praise”) in the same way as the Greek verb “hymneo” means both “to extol, to glorify, to laud” and “to mourn”. Both “zhrets” and “hvala” have their Slavic counterparts but their relation to the other Indo-European languages is uncertain.⁷

An interesting hint at a possible Caucasian connection is the modern Bulgarian word “zvezda” for “star”, which is identical only with its southern and eastern Slavic counterparts, e.g. Serb “zvezda”, Croat “zvezda”, Slovene “zvezda”, Ukrainian “zvizda” and Russian “zvezda”, whereas in Slovak it is “hviezda”, in Czech it is “hvězda”, in Polish it is “gwiazda”, and in Sorbian it is “hwězda” or “gwězda”. Many scholars believe that there is a phonetic law of correspondence of the initial western Slavic *hv-*, *gv-*, *gw-*, *hw-*, *kv-*, and *kw-* with the initial Russian, Ukrainian, Slovene, Croat, Serb and Bulgarian *zv-*, *sv-* and *tsv-*, if *gv-* and *kv-* have been once followed by an *-e-* or an *-i-* deriving from diphthongs. However, this apparent phonetic law is applicable only to one more word, namely modern Bulgarian “tsvyat” for “flower; blossom, color”, which is “cvet” in Serb, Croat and Russian, but it is “kvet” in a Russian dialect, “kvit” in Ukrainian, “kvet” in Slovak, “květ” in Czech, “kwiat” in Polish and “kvěť” in Sorbian. Moreover, the Bulgarian word “tsvyat” is usually associated with such Indo-European counterparts as Lat-

⁶P.Dobrev, *Stopanskata kultura na prabûlgarite* (Sofia: The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Press, 1986), pp.139-141.

⁷St.Mladenov, *Etimologicheski i pravopisen rechnik na bûlgarskiya knizhoven ezik* (Sofia: “Hristo G.Danov”, 1941), pp.666-667; M.Fasmer, *Etimologicheskiy slovar' russkogo yazyka*. Vol.4 (Moscow: “Progress”, 1987), p.228; M.Voynov, Al.Milev, *Latinsko-bûlgarski rechnik* (Sofia: “Kazanlûshka dolina”, 1937), pp.563-564; *Starogrûtsko-bûlgarski rechnik* (Sofia: “Knipegraf”, 1943), p.839.

vian “*kvitěl*” (“to twinkle, to glimmer, to shimmer, to shine”), Lithuanian “*kvietj̃s*” (“wheat”) and Sanskrit “*kētūs*” (“clearness”), but this presumable connection doesn’t seem very convincing. On the other hand, though, there seems to be some phonetic and semantic similarity between the modern Bulgarian word “*tsvyat*” for “flower; blossom, color” and Turkish “*çiçek*”, Uzbek “*çeçak*” and Buryat Mongolian “*sisig*”. All these Indo-European and Ural-Altaic forms might have come from a common protolanguage. Unlike “*tsvyat*” the modern Bulgarian word “*zvezda*” for “star” apparently has more reliable Indo-European counterparts, such as Lithuanian “*žvaigždė*” (“star”) and Latvian “*zvaigzne*” (“star”), but according to some scholars these are eastern Slavic loanwords. Nevertheless, the Bulgarian word “*zvezda*” and its Slavic counterparts might be associated with Ossetian “*aezvestae*” (“silver”), deriving from Alan **zvestae*. The Ossetians descend from the Alans and they still live in the Caucasus as the Alans did at the time when at least part of the Bulgarians was in the same region. If “*zvezda*” has been an old Alan loanword in ancient Bulgarian (“Protobulgarian”), it is possible that the Serb “*zvezda*”, Croat “*zvezda*”, Slovene “*zvezda*”, Ukrainian “*zvizda*” and Russian “*zvezda*” are Bulgarian loanwords, whereas the Slovak “*hviezda*”, Czech “*hvězda*”, Polish “*gwiazda*”, and Sorbian “*hwězda*” or “*gwězda*” might have been influenced by the Bulgarian word as early as in Proto-Slavic times.⁸

The presence of the Bulgarians in the Caucasus is evidenced also by a number of personal names, which have their counterparts especially among the Georgians. Thus one of the names of Kurt’s eldest son was *Bezmer*, which may be associated with the Georgian name *Pshymar*. The same applies to *Vineh* (a ruler of Danubian-Balkan Bulgaria who reigned from 754 to 760) and the Georgian name *Vinea*, as well as to *Sevar* (a ruler of Danubian-Balkan Bulgaria who reigned probably from 721 to 737) and the Georgian name *Zepar*, to *Krum* (a ruler of Danubian-Balkan Bulgaria from 803 to 814) and the Georgian name *Kurum*, to *Oslavna* (a high official at the time of Omurtag, who reigned in Danubian-Balkan Bulgaria from 814 to 831) and the Georgian name *Aslaina*, etc. A curious evidence of the relations the Bulgarians once had with their Caucasian neighbors is another high official under Omurtag, whose name was *Tsok*. Under the forms of *Tsoko* and *Tsokov* this name is quite popular even in present-day Bulgaria and, interestingly enough, *Tsok* is identical with the Chechen personal name *Tsok*.⁹

Words go easily from one language to another but the same cannot be said about the grammar. Nevertheless, bearing in mind that the Armenians are also a Caucasian people, there are some curious coincidences between Bulgarian and Armenian. Thus modern Bulgarian is distinguished by the use of postpositive definite articles, which is totally unknown to the Slavic languages, for instance, “*biser*” (“pearl”) and “*biserūt*” (“*the* pearl”), “*bŭlgarin*” (“Bulgarian”) and “*bŭlgarina*” (“*the* Bulgarian”) “*dete*” (“child”) and “*deteto*” (“*the* child”), “*kŭshti*” (“houses”) and “*kŭshtite*” (“*the* houses”). Some scholars try to find parallels in

⁸*Bŭlgarski etimologichen rechnik*, Vol.1 (Sofia: The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Press, 1971), pp.621-622; M.Fasmer, *Op.cit.* Vol.4, pp.292-293.

⁹P.Dobrev, *Op.cit.*, p.138.

certain northern Russian dialects that have such expressions as “moya-ta zhonka” (“my wife”). In these Russian dialects, though, the *-ta* or *-to* particles usually don’t agree with the gender and number of the noun they refer to. Moreover, their functions are of a completely different nature, since they can be added not only to nouns, but also to pronouns, adverbs and even to verbs (e.g. “on-to prishel” – “it was he who came”, “khorosho-to popeli” – “we sang well in fact”, “posmeyalis-to” – “well then, we laughed”, etc.). As a matter of fact, one may guess the presence of the *-a* definite article in the form “kana” (“the King, the Kan”) from “kan” (“King, Kan”). “Kana” instead of “kan” stays almost always in the very beginning of a number of 8th-9th century Bulgarian stone inscriptions and it clearly means that a particular ruler has something to announce or to do.¹⁰

It is therefore highly probable that the postpositive definite article was already present in ancient Bulgarian (“Protobulgarian”) as it is characteristic of modern Bulgarian. On the other hand, there are definite articles in many Indo-European languages, but only in six of them these articles are put in the end of the word: Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Romanian, Albanian and Armenian. It should be noted that the Armenian definite articles are used in a way similar to that of the northern Russian dialects but, in indicating the distance from the speaker of the object they refer to, they remind the *-s-*, *-t-* and *-n-* articles in the Bulgarian dialect of the Rhodope region, where “cheshmasa”, for instance, means “the fountain here”, “cheshmana” is translated as “the fountain there”, while “cheshmata” is simply “the fountain”.¹¹

Definite articles are not an exclusive feature of the Indo-European languages. Such articles are common in Hungarian, whereas the Mordvinian definite articles are postpositive. Moreover, the Bulgarian *-t-*, *-s-* and *-n-* articles are almost identical with the Mordvinian *-t’-*, *-s’-* and *-n’-*, which appear in various case inflections. Thus “kudo” (“house”), which is probably of the same origin as the Bulgarian noun “kúshata”, becomes “kudos” (“the house” or “kúshata” in Bulgarian), “kudon’*t*” (“the house” in genitive) and, respectively, “kudot’*ne*” (“the houses”).¹²

Postpositive definite articles are a form of agglutination, which is a Ural-Altai and Caucasian rather than an Indo-European feature. It is not by chance that they are found in those Indo-European languages, whose speakers have been in contact with the speakers of an agglutinating language: the Scandinavians and the northern Russians with the Finns, the Romanians with the Hungarians and the Bulgarians and the Albanians with the Bulgarians. The Armenians, in their turn, have a long history of close neighborhood with the Georgians, whose Caucasian language is also similar to the Ural-Altai family by its agglutinations. On the

¹⁰Iv.Gülübov, *Problemüt za chlena v búlgarski i rumûnski ezik* (Sofia: The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Press, 1962); V.Beshevliev, *Pûrvobúlgarski nadpisi* (Sofia: The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Press, 1992), pp.72-74 and 101-226.

¹¹*Gramatika na súvremenniya búlgarski knizhoven ezik*, Vol. (Sofia: The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Press, 1983), pp.151-158; Iv.Gülübov, *Op.cit.*, pp.87-96; E.G.Tumanyan, *Drevnearmyanskiy yazyk* (Moscow: “Nauka”, 1971), pp.276-277.

¹²B.A.Serebrennikov, *Istoricheskaya morfologiya mordovskikh yazykov* (Moscow: “Nauka”, 1967), pp.41-44.

other hand, though, the way the Armenians indicate by their definite articles also the distance of the objects referred to might have been influenced by the Caucasian Huns, if not directly by the Bulgarians.¹³

The Caucasus region is famous for its viticulture and so are the Greeks. The fact is, though, that the Bulgarian viticultural terms have nothing to do either with the Slavs or with the Greeks, which also suggests at least a Caucasian influence, if not a Caucasian origin. Thus, for instance, the attempts to find a relationship of the Bulgarian words “*lastar*” for “a vine sprout”, “*loza*” for “a vine” and “*loze*” for “a vineyard” with the Slavic and Indo-European languages are not very convincing. Scholars usually associate “*loza*” (“vine”) with Serb “*loza*” (“a vine, a flexible cane, a vine sprout, a kin, a tribe”), Croat “*loza*” (“a vine, a flexible cane, a vine sprout, a kin, a tribe”), Slovene “*lôza*” (“a vine sprout, a forest), Slovak “*loza*” (“a vine”), Ukrainian “*loza*” (“a branch or a cane of basket osier, a withy”), Russian “*loza*” (“a flexible cane of willow or of vine”), Byelorussian “*laza*” (“a cane or a branch of willow”), Polish “*loza*” (“a kind of willow”), Lithuanian “*lazdà*” (“a cane of hazel, a stick”), Latvian “*lazda*”, Old Prussian “*laxde*” (“a hazelnut, a hazel-wood”) and with Albanian “*laithi*” (“a hazel”). It should be noted, though, that the closest Slavic counterparts come from the descendants of the so-called Avar Slavs, namely from the Serbs, Croats and Slovaks, whereas the kinship with the other Indo-European languages is dubious, the more so as the Lithuanian, Latvian, Old Prussian and Albanian forms, quoted here, obviously refer to “hazel”, but not to “vine”. Moreover, the Bulgarian word “*lastar*” (“a young branch, usually of vine”), which might derive from the same root as “*loza*” (“vine”), is distinguished by the absence not only of Slavic, but even of Indo-European counterparts. It is highly improbable that “*lastar*” comes from the Greek word “*blastari(on)*” (“a young branch, a sprout”), as some scholars claim. In the best case the Greek word may have had an impact on the Bulgarian one.¹⁴

The Bulgarian words “*loza*” (“a vine”) and “*lastar*” (“a vine sprout”) are often considered to be parallel forms of “*list*” (“a leaf”), which has indeed its Slavic counterparts, but the only other Indo-European word that can be associated with it is Lithuanian “*láiškás*” (“a leaf”). Some etymologists try to find a kinship also with Latvian “*laiska*” (“a leaf of a flax stem”) and Old Prussian “*laisken*” (“a book”). However, if the Bulgarian words “*loza*” (“a vine”), “*lastar*” (“a vine sprout”) and “*list*” (“a leaf”) come from one and the same root, they are much closer semantically and phonetically with such Uralic forms as Udmurt “*lištas*” (“a leaf”), Lappish “*lasta*” (“a leaf, foliage”), Finnish “*lehti*” (“a leaf”) and Estonian “*leht*” (“a leaf”) from Protouralic **lešte* (“a leaf”).¹⁵

¹³P. S. Tzvetkov, *Narodnostno poteklo i natsionalno samosúznanie* (Sofia: The New Bulgarian University Press, 2007), pp. 371-372.

¹⁴*Búlgarski etimologichen rechnik*, Vol. 3 (Sofia: The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Press, 1986), pp. 318-319, 370-371 and 457-458.

¹⁵*Búlgarski etimologichen rechnik*, Vol. 3 (Sofia: The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Press, 1986), pp. 319 and 424-425; K. Rédei, *Uralisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, L. 6 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1988), p. 689.

Thus “*loza*” (“a vine”), “*lastar*” (“a vine sprout”) and “*list*” (“a leaf”) seem to be ancient Bulgarian (“Protobulgarian”) words and the same might be said also about “*vino*” for “wine”. The origin of this word is not quite clear, since it is present in a number of Mediterranean languages, no matter whether these languages belong to the Indo-European, Caucasian or Hamito-Semitic family. Thus “*wine*” is “*oino*” in ancient Greek, “*vinum*” in Latin, “*gini*” in Armenian, “*venë*” and “*verë*” in Albanian, “*wein*” in Gothic, “*waynun*” in Arab and “*jajin*” in Old Hebrew. The existence of the Georgian form “*ghvino*” for “*wine*”, which is quite close to its Bulgarian counterpart, suggests that the word may have existed in ancient Bulgarian (“Protobulgarian”) as well. In other words, the ancient Bulgarians had been familiar with viticulture and wine production long before they contacted the native population in the Balkans and, in any case, not later than the time when they inhabited the Caucasus.¹⁶

This guess seems to be corroborated to some extent by the traditional rites, accompanying the celebration of St. Trifon’s Day on February 14. On that day the Bulgarian peasants go to the vineyard and cut symbolically a vine. In Bulgaria at this time of the year it is still too cold for cutting the vines, but mid-February is an appropriate time to such an activity in the Caucasus and in Southern Greece.¹⁷

The advanced stage of agriculture among the Caucasus Bulgarians is evidenced further by such a fundamental agricultural word as “*zürno*” (modern Bulgarian for “grain”). The word is widespread among the Indo-European languages: “*zrno*” in Serb, Croat, Slovene, Slovak and Czech, “*zerno*” in Ukrainian and Russian, “*zerne*” in Byelorussian, “*ziarno*” in Polish, “*zarno*” in Sorbian, “*syrne*” in Old Prussian, “*žirnis*” for “a pea” in Lithuanian, “*ziŕnis*” in Latvian, “*kaurn*” in Gothic, “*Korn*” in German, “*grán*” in Old Gaelic, “*grānum*” in Latin, “*gergerimoi*” for “ripe or rotten fruits” in Greek, “*jirnah*” for “ground, pulverized, knitted, old” in Sanskrit, etc. However, both semantically and phonetically, the Bulgarian word “*zürno*” doesn’t seem to be less close to its Ural-Altaic counterparts such as “*širla*” for “a grainy fruit” in Chuvash, “*zärnäk*” for a “nutmeg” in Koman-Turkic, “*yiläk*” for “a grainy fruit” in Tatar, “*yeläk*” for “a grainy fruit” in Bashkir, “*jedegene*” for “a kind of grainy fruit” in Mongolian, “*šuro*” for “wheat grain” in Mordvinian, “*šəväs*” for “sand, groats, gruel, mess” in Mari, “*sōra*” for cracked stones” in Estonian, and “*sora*” for “fine gravel, sand” in Finnish. The root apparently comes from that protolanguage that has given birth to the Ural-Altaic and Indo-European families. According to the phonetic laws the initial *y-* in the Turkic words corresponds to an initial *s-* in Bulgarian (“Protobulgarian”), which makes probable the existence of “*zürno*” for “grain” in ancient Bulgarian (“Protobulgarian”) as well.¹⁸

¹⁶M. Fasmer, *Op.cit.*, Vol.1, pp.316-317.

¹⁷P. Dobrev, *Op.cit.*, pp.139-140.

¹⁸*Bŭlgarski etimologičen rečnik*, Vol.1 (Sofia: The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Press, 1971), pp.669-670; W. Radloff, *Versuch eines Wörterbuchs der Türk-Dialecte* (Saint-Petersburg: The Russian Academy of Sciences Press, 1905), Vol.4, Part 1; K. Rédei, *Op.cit.*, Lieferung 7 (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1988), p.776; O. Pritsak, *Die bulgarische Fürstenliste und die Sprache der Protobulgaren* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1955), p.74.

Despite the high level of agriculture, including viticulture, the economic model of the Bulgarians was not totally strange to some elements of mobility. In their long road from Asia to Europe the Bulgarians apparently preferred settling on the northern side of a particular mountain range: the Caucasus, the Crimea and, eventually, the Balkan and the Rila-Rhodope range. Thus they found pasture for their sheep to the north of the mountain in summertime and to the south of the same mountain during the winter. The Bulgarians raised, therefore, mostly sheep, cows and horses and much less hogs, a fact, that was duly reported as late as the 20th century by a Hungarian research institute, founded by Pal Teleki immediately after the end of World War II. On the other hand, the same economic model had existed in the Balkans since time immemorial, which made Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia an attractive place in the eyes of the Bulgarians.¹⁹

In the 370s most Caucasus Bulgarians seemingly rejoined the rest of the Huns in their campaign for the conquest of Europe. After Attila's death in 453 and the disintegration of the Empire of the Huns the Bulgarians formed a realm to the north of the Danube and the Black Sea. By the end of the 5th century AD this Bulgarian polity split into two: the realm of the Utigurs and the realm of the Kutrigurs. Due to a growing pressure by newcomers from the East, ever more numerous masses of Bulgarians started to settle in the Balkans, especially in the three Roman provinces of Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia. In the first half of the 7th century Kubrat or Kurt succeeded in unifying practically all the Bulgarians to the north of the Danube and the Black Sea in an empire that stretched from the Carpathians to the Caucasus.

After Kurt's death in 665 Great Bulgaria was partitioned between Asparukh to the West, Kotrag to the North and Batbayan or Boyan to the East. Another son of Kurt, Kuber, settled with his people in Macedonia, apparently joining a Bulgarian community that had moved to the same area back in the end of the 5th century AD. Asparukh is considered to be the founder of Danubian-Balkan Bulgaria, while Kotrag's successors formed a Bulgarian realm in the Upper Volga region (Volga Bulgaria).²⁰

Kurt's eldest son, Batbayan or Boyan, remained with his people in the lands between the Black and the Caspian Seas. The Armenian geographer Ananias of Širak mentions as many as four Bulgarian hordes, inhabiting the region between the Sea of Azov and the Caucasus: Kup'i-Bulgar, Duči-Bulgar, Olchontor-Blkar, and Čdar-Bolkar. ("Olchontor" may have evolved into the present-day Bulgarian personal name "Khlûtev", while "Čdar" might be associated with "Chavdar", a rather popular personal name among the Danubian-Balkan Bulgarians of today.) A horde included several tribes and it could consist of as many as one million people. In any case, according to some scholars the horde, led by Asparukh, num-

¹⁹ A. Stoynev, *Svetogledûit na prabûlgarite* (Sofia: The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Press, 1985), pp.41-47; P. Dobrev, *Op.cit.*; Pl.S.Tzvetkov, *Narodnostno poteklo...*, p.283.

²⁰ Pl.S.Tzvetkov, *A History of the Balkans: A Regional Overview from a Bulgarian Perspective* (San Francisco: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), Vol.1, pp.56-76.

bered between 500,000 and 1,000,000 people. Otherwise he could hardly mobilize an army capable of defeating the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium) in 681.²¹

The “*List of the Bulgarian Rulers*”, or at least the first part of it, was apparently prepared after Asparukh’s victory in 681. It was not only a concise Bulgarian chronicle, but also a kind of appeal to the rest of the Bulgarians to come to the lands to the south of the Danube. This seems to be the meaning of the reference to the “*shorn heads*”: “*These 5 kings [Avitokhol, Irnik, Gostun, Kurt, and Bezmer] ruled over the kingdom [or just “reigned”] on the other side of the Danube 500 and 15 years with shorn heads*”.²²

Everything seems to indicate that the “*shorn heads*” was to serve as a sign or as an evidence of Bulgarian descent. Indeed, the Bulgarians settled in Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia in several successive waves in search for land. In those times the three Roman provinces were inhabited mainly by descendants of the ancient Thracians and of the Roman colonists, as well as by Greeks, who were much more numerous than the Slavs. The Bulgarians apparently treated the native population in the same way as the European settlers treated the native inhabitants of North America: they massacred whomever they could, while the rest was deported into reservations. In the case of the Bulgarians such a reservation was the area to the north of the Danube, corresponding more or less to the territory of today’s Romania. It is not by chance that the very name of *Romania* obviously comes from “*Rome*” and initially the word “*Romania*” was used for designating the Balkan territories of the Roman Empire.²³ Although the Slavs acted sometimes as allies of the Bulgarians against the Eastern Roman Empire, they were clearly considered a hostile element. Thus in the eyes of the Bulgarian ruler Omurtag (814-831) both the “*Greeks*” and the Slavs were enemies of the Bulgarians: “*And he [Omurtag] moved his army against the Greeks and against the Slavs*” (“*me tigagen tin dynamin tous tous Grikous ke Sklabous*”).²⁴

After their baptism in 864 or 865 the Bulgarians gradually replaced Greek with Cyrillo-Methodian as their official and church language for purely political reasons: Boris I (852-889) and Simeon the Great (893-927) saw in this an efficient way to secure the independence of the Bulgarian church without risking the accusation of heresy. Cyrillo-Methodian or Old Slavonic has never been the spoken language of the Bulgarians in the same way as Latin has never been the spoken language of the English, the Germans or the Hungarians and in the same way as Arab has never been the spoken language of the Turks or the Iranians.²⁵

²¹V.Zlatarski, *Istoriya na bŭlgarskata dŭzhava prez srednite vekove* (Sofia: “Nauka i izkustvo”, 1970), Vol.1, Part 1, p.153; D.D.Sŭsŭtov, *Op.cit.*, pp.307-308.

²²O.Pritsak, *Op.cit.*, p.35.

²³E.Hösch, *Geschichte der Balkanländer. Von der Frühzeit bis zur Gegenwart* (München: C.H.Beck, 1993), pp.31-33; G.Giurescu, D.Giurescu, *Istoria românilor din cele mai vechi timpuri pînă astăzi* (Bucureşti: 1975); *Bŭlgarski etimologichen rechnik*, Vol.6 (Sofia: The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Press, 2002), p.317.

²⁴V.Beshevliev, *Op.cit.*, p.216.

²⁵Pl.S.Tzvetkov, *A History of the Balkans....*, Vol.1, pp.95-147.

From the 7th century on there seems to have been a constant migration of Bulgarians to the Balkans from Volga Bulgaria and from the area to the north of the Caucasus. Toward 970 a group of Volga Bulgarians emerged on the Danube under the leadership of Billu, Boksu and Hessen. They apparently fled from the Russians, who had undertaken two consecutive assaults on Volga Bulgaria in 965 and in 985.²⁶

In the meantime those Bulgarians, who remained under Boyan in the lands between the Black and the Caspian Seas, fell under Khazar and later under Cuman rule. Curiously enough, they started to migrate more massively to the Balkans only after the fall of Bulgaria under Byzantine rule in 1018. True enough, they called themselves "Cumans" because they were under the supremacy of the Cumans, but an 11th century Bulgarian chronicle explicitly states that the Bulgarians were the third part of the Cumans: "And after the murder of Ispor [Asparukh], the Bulgarian tsar, they called the Cumans Bulgarians, and earlier, at Tsar Ispor's time, they were pagans and godless and in great impiety, and they were always foes to the Greek Tsardom many years". This account is followed almost immediately by the story of the Bulgarians' baptism. In other words, according to the 11th century Bulgarians, the only difference between the Bulgarians and the "Cumans" was that the former were Christians, while the latter were still pagans.²⁷

One may find a similar confusion between Cumans and Bulgarians in a Byzantine chronicle as well. The unknown author of this chronicle relates that in the beginning of his reign the Eastern Roman Emperor Nicephorus Botaneiates (1078-1081) defeated brilliantly the Bulgarians. As a matter of fact, in 1078 Nicephorus Botaneiates repulsed successfully a great invasion of Pechenegues and Cumans, who threatened to conquer Adrianople. It seems that the unknown chronicler referred to the battle of Adrianople and wrote about a Bulgarian army because it consisted mainly of "Cumans".²⁸

The very foundation of the Second Bulgarian Empire after the rejection of Byzantine rule in 1185 is closely linked with the Cumans. Unlike the last rulers of the First Bulgarian Empire the Assenids were obviously accepted as legitimate rulers from the very beginning, which might have derived from their kinship with both the old Dulo tribe and with the Terterobas, the ruling tribe of the Cumans. In 1237-1242 the Cuman realm was destroyed by the Mongols or the Tatars and most Cumans, as well as Caucasus Bulgarians found refuge in Hungary and in Bulgaria. These events might be considered the end of the Bulgarian migration from the East to the Balkans.²⁹

²⁶A. Khalikov, "Kul'turno-istoricheskie svyazi mezhdun Dunayskoy i Volzhskoy Bolgariyami (k izucheniyu problemy)", in *Pŕvi mezhdunaroden kongres po bulgaristika. Dokladi. Simpozium slavyani i prabŕgari* (Sofia: The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Press, 1982), pp.381-387.

²⁷*Stara bulgarska literatura* (Sofia: The Bulgarian Academy of Sciences Press, 1983), Vol.3, pp.61-65.

²⁸V. Zlatarski, *Op.cit.*, Vol.2, pp.161-162.

²⁹Pl.S.Tzvetkov, *A History of the Balkans...*, Vol.1, pp.170-189.

In other words, by the middle of the 13th century most, if not all Bulgarians had left the Caucasus region. Nevertheless, their presence in the area is evidenced by a number of ethnonyms and place names. The Balkars, who live nowadays on the northern side of the Caucasus, may owe their name to the Bulgarians. Moreover, some Old Bulgarian (Protobulgarian) words have apparently penetrated the languages of the neighboring Indo-European ethnicities, such as “*kavkhan*” or “*kapkhan*” (the title of a high official, holding the second highest position in the state after the king himself, in Tajik “*koſkhon*”), “*kan*” (“king”, in Iranian “*han*”), “*bagatur*” (“commander”, in Iranian “*bahadur*”), “*bagain*” (the title of a state official, in Iranian “*vagain*” for “defender, intercessor”). Some scholars believe that even the name of the *Baluchistan* province comes from “*Bulgar*”.³⁰

The history of the Caucasus Bulgarians still needs further research. It goes without saying that this history marks an important moment in the past of the Bulgarians and it may shed a light on the complicated and controversial problem about their origins.

Abstract

Much have been said concerning the presence of Proto-Bulgars in the region of the Caucasia, supported by many written sources and archeological findings hitherto but it has never been examined from the linguistic point of view. However, the best way in finding the traces of any culture, no matter whether ethnical group it belongs to, anywhere is to determine whether the linguistic affiliation of the before-said culture with its neighbouring ones. The main theme of this article revolves around the linguistic connection of Proto-Bulgars with the autochthonous population adjacent to the places, where they dwelt in the Caucasia as a rule.

Key words: Proto-Bulgars, The Caucasia, The viticulture, The Balkans

³⁰P.Dobrev, *Op.cit.*; D.Tabakov, *Op.cit.*