



ON THE ETHNIC AFFILIATIONS AND CONNECTIONS OF THE TWIN TRIBES UTIGURS AND KUTRIGURS

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ABSTRACT

Utigurs and Kutrigurs were two tribes associated with each other, living respectively in the eastern and northern shores of the Sea Azov. They appeared with their clear names in the mid- 6th century only for a few decades. After that, the Utigurs disappeared from the sources, although there are no accounts about what happened to them, and traces of the Kutrigurs, who faced great calamities that affected even their existential capacities according to the sources, can be found only in some ethnic and personal names that can be associated with them. This is a contradictory and enigmatic situation. The latter are described in the sources as a division or offspring of the former, thus the original or one former abode of the Kutrigurs should be also in the east of Azov. Therefore, if they are related to each other, there should be a supra formation unifying the two tribes, and perhaps some others unknown to us. Sources describe the eastern shores of Azov and the lower banks of Kuban as the home of the Asi people, before and after the Utrigur period, but the name Asi is never mentioned around the 6th century. This paper suggests that, as a new theory, the twin tribes represent a temporal rise of the member tribes of the Asi union.

Keywords: Utigurs, Kutrigurs, Byzantium, Asi, Bulgars, Avars.

İKİZ BOYLAR UTİĞUR VE KUTRİĞURLARIN ETNİK AİDİYET VE BAĞLANTILARI ÜZERİNE

ÖZ

Utigur ve Kutrigurlar sırasıyla Azak denizinin doğu ve kuzey sahillerinde yaşayan birbiriyle ilişkili iki boy idi. Bu şekildeki isimleriyle 6. yy ortalarına doğru sadece bir kuşak için belirmişlerdir. Bundan sonra, kendilerine ne olduğuna dair haberler olmasa da, Utigurlar kaynaklardan tamamen kayboldular. Kaynaklara göre varolma yetilerini etkileyecek derecede felaketler yaşayan Kutrigurların izleri ise ancak onlarla ilişkilendirilebilecek bazı kişi veya topluluk adlarında bulunabilmektedir. Bu çelişkili ve gizemli bir durumdur. Kutrigurlar kaynaklarda Utigurların bir kopuntusu veya kola olarak anlatılır, dolayısıyla bu öncükilerin bir önceki yurdu da Azak'ın doğusunda olmalıdır. Bu yüzden, birbirinin akrabası olduklarına göre, bu iki boyu ve belki bilmediğimiz başkalarını birleştiren bir üst yapı olmalıdır. Kaynaklar Utigur döneminden önce ve sonraki çağlarda Azak'ın doğusunu ve Kuban'ın aşağı boylarını As halkının yurdu olarak anlatır, fakat Asların ismi 6. yy çevresinde asla anılmaz. Bu makale yeni bir düşünce olarak işbu ikiz boyların As birliği içindeki üye boyların geçici bir yükselişini temsil ettiğini önermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Utigurlar, Kutrigurlar, Bizans, Aslar, Bulgarlar, Avarlar.

In the mid of the 6th century, a new people associated with the Huns, the Kutrigurs came to the scene to trouble the Byzantine lands in the same way and through the same routes as the Bulgars, who were depicted likewise as a Hunnic people, but their fame and presence under that clear name lasted only for two decades. Furthermore, they had their twin brothers, the Utigurs, who were not unfriendly towards the Romans, in contrast to their brothers. According to Prokopios, the Utigurs inhabited eastern shores of the Azov Sea, on the Lower Kuban basin

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and its north, and the Kutrigurs were on the opposite side of the sea, namely, in the plains to the north (Prokopios, 2014, p. 469, 471).

A detailed story of the Kutrigur raids onto the Balkans is not aim of this study, but we need to tell about them briefly. Prokopios rigidly accuses of the north politics of the Justinian regime in his *Secret History*; his book of *Wars* also contains the same dissatisfaction without directly targeting Justinian.¹ As usual, “although they (Kutrigurs) receive many gifts from the emperor every year, they still cross the Danube River and overrun the emperor’s land, being both at peace and at war with the Romans.” (Prokopios, 2014, p. 471)

The first recorded Kutrigur attack came in 539 when Byzantium was relaxed of the northern affairs, after settling the Bulgar issue for a while:²

“A large army of Huns immediately crossed the Danube River and fell upon all of Europe, a thing that had happened many times before but had never brought evils of such number or magnitude to the people of that land. From the Adriatic Sea these barbarians methodically plundered everything as far as the suburbs of Byzantion. They captured thirty-two fortresses in Illyria and took by force the city of Kassandreia, though they had never fought against walls before. Taking the money and leading 120,000 captives, they all withdrew homeward without encountering any opposition. In later times too they often came there and inflicted irreparable harm upon the Romans.” (Prokopios, 2014, p. 80)

The Thracian Chersonesos was also one of the victim cities occupied by the Kutrigurs. A nomadic formation does not usually like to deal with fortifications, as Prokopios underlines, but such a success of the invaders shows their well preparation, likely including many allies from other ‘Huns’, perhaps including also Bulgars, and also a multitude of the Slavs, as recorded by Prokopios in another place (Prokopios, 2014, p. 407). Logistic support of the Germanic Gepids, who liked to transfer every single enemy of Byzantium to the south of Danube and Sava, by their river navy, helped the Kutrigurs ease and cheapen their facilities. Otherwise, human source of the Kutrigurs alone would hardly be sufficient to make such a large-scale raid which reached to the walls of Termopylai and which “destroyed almost all the Greeks except the Peloponnesians.” (Prokopios, 2014, p. 80).³

This expedition lasting two years should have encouraged the Kutrigurs and their allies for future adventures, while Byzantium was hesitant about repetition of the invasion, without neglecting some diplomatic measures.⁴ Three years later the Kutrigurs did the same: “A Hunnic

¹ Curta defends Justinian (Curta, 2001, p. 83-89). See also Sarantis (2009, p. 34).

² There might be earlier attempts of them to invade the imperial lands, surely, but we need to confine ourselves with the direct use of the name Kutrigur. Otherwise, if we refer to the names ‘Bulgar’ or ‘Hun’, or even ‘Scythian’, while searching for the Kutrigurs, then we may find a lot of acts and actors, but without a firm base. Cf. for instance Zlatarski (1970, p. 85), who believes that the Scythians killing Julianus, the master of the Roman soldiery, in a skirmish in Thrace (493) were “Hunno-Kutrigurs”. That account is given by Marcellinus Comes (1995, p. 31). Also cf. Golden (1980, p. 32), who sends them to Italy in 530. It is not impossible, but there is no source for that identification, as far as I know.

³ Their troops included also women as narrated by Prokopios: “There were women among the dead Huns in battles in the tradition of the Amazons.” (Prokopios, 2014, p. 467)

⁴ Likely the long-during Byzantine favours to their kinsmen Utigurs caused them to be envy and increased their anger towards the empire (Agathias, 1975, p. 147, 159). According to the ‘other’ Prokopios in the *Secret History*, the beginning of the payments to the Hunnic peoples started almost with the enthronement of Justinian and even before it (Procopius, 1961, p. 40, 57).

army had fallen upon Illyria and enslaved their women and children.” (Prokopios, 2014, p. 402) In 545, Justinian’s envoys succeeded in persuading the Antae Slavs, living then in north-central Ukraine, to separate their ways from the Kutrigurs and even to block their passage to the Roman soil (Prokopios, 2014, p. 80). This might have been efficient for several years, until the Kutrigurs were awakened in 551 by the Gepids of Pannonia, who were then enemies of both the Romans and the Langobards living just to their west, around modern Slovenia. The Gepids invited Chinalon, the supreme ruler of the Kutrigurs with his 12,000 warriors, against the Langobards. We do not know how they acted in the inter-Germanic strife, but perhaps their task was to make the Romans busy in another front. Thus, we see the Kutrigurs in their habitual facilities: “They had plundered practically the whole country (of the Romans) there.” (Prokopios, 2014, p. 503, 511).⁵ Since Byzantium was busy in other fronts and since the attacks were frequent in those days, the Kutrigurs were not opposed in the field, as happened to the Slavs in the previous year (Sarantis, 2009, p. 34).

Only after that Justinian put forward his famous plan in diplomacy: “Sending to the rulers of the Utigur Huns (Sandil/Sandilkh), who live on the other side of the Sea of Azov, he reproached them and branded as unjust their inactivity with regard to the Kutrigurs, if indeed one ought to consider as the height of injustice the act of passively watching the destruction of one’s friends.” (Prokopios, 2014, p. 503; Agathias, 1975, p. 160-161). Justinian sent many gifts and money. Thus the Utigurs destroyed the Kutrigurs remaining behind and some 2000 Kutrigurs under a certain Sinnion surviving from the Utigur attack took refuge to the Romans and were settled in Thrace. When Utigurs learned this, they protested, but Justinian did not reply to them, since the problem was resolved (Prokopios, 2014, p. 504-5; Agathias, 1975, p. 161; Whitby, 2021, p. 271-272).

In March 559 the Kutrigurs acted again, to show that they were still alive. The imperial favours to their kinsmen Utigurs seems to have caused resentment among the Kutrigurs, according to the observation of our source, Agathias. Some of the invaders advanced against Thessalonica and the main group under the leadership of Zabergan took the road to Constantinople. The Byzantines did not expect such an attack, it seems: “By their sudden and unexpected raids they did incalculable damage to the local populations, even to the extent of displacing the original inhabitants and occupying their lands.” (Agathias, 1975, p. 146). Agathias makes a long literary description of the Kutrigur cruelties. According to Malalas, “the Huns and the Slavs made an attack on Thrace. They killed many in battle and took some captives, including the magister militum Sergius, the son of Bacchus, and Edermas, major domo of Kalopodios, making them prisoners. They found parts of the wall of Constantinople had collapsed and, entering there, they raided as far as St Stratonikos. Everyone fled with their possessions into the city. On being informed of this, the emperor conscripted many and sent them to the Long Wall. They engaged the enemy there and many Romans, especially scholarii, were killed.” (Malalas, 1986, p. 297; Theophanes, 1997, p. 341).

The famous Byzantine general Belisarius was sent against them and won a victory behind the Long Wall (Agathias, 1975, p. 154-7; Malalas, 1986, p. 298; Theophanes, 1997, p. 341-342), though it was not possible to get rid of the invaders. Casualties of the Romans were great and

⁵ In his Secret History, Prokopios says that “no place, mountain or cave, or any other spot remained uninjured; and many regions were pillaged more than five times.” (Prokopios, 1961, p. 57). He gives the number of dead or enslaved Roman citizens as “more than two hundred thousand.” (Prokopios, 1961, p. 91).

among the numerous captives, there were famous commanders. The Kutrigurs received a vast sum of money as a condition of withdrawal and of freeing the captives (Agathias, 1975, p. 160; Menander, 1985, p. 43. See Whitby, 2021, p. 275-277, for a chronicle of the attack).

After the request of the Byzantine envoys, the Utigurs under the same Sandil for the second time in the same play attacked onto both the defenceless abodes of the Kutrigurs, by captivating their civilian population, and the troops crossing Danube to return home. It was a calamity for the Kutrigurs, if we believe a group of sources. Their scattered troops were regrouped soon and started for revenge wars with the Utigurs. During this warfare, "they have so weakened themselves and their numbers have become so seriously depleted that they have lost their national identity." (Agathias, 1975, p. 161). Agathias relates these developments to the wisdom and foresight of the emperor Justinian. Interestingly, the succeeding emperor Justinus II said to the Avar envoy that both the Kutrigurs and Utigurs were "completely eliminated" by the Byzantines (Menander, 1985, p. 141).

Menandros, on the other hand, relates that the Utigur leader rejected the full destruction of the Kutrigurs, since "they not only speak our language, dwell in tents like us, dress like us and live like us, but they are our kin, even if they follow other leaders." (Menander, 1985, p. 43, 45). Therefore, the case may not be so dramatic for the Kutrigurs as described by Agathias, and their losses were not so great as to pave the way to their ultimate end.

Malalas mentions about the capture of a certain Obaisipolis in 562 by the same Huns. This is possibly Odessus, namely Varna (Whitby, 2021, p. 278 d. 77). The emperor sent out his nephew Alarcellus, the magister militum, with a large force to rescue both this city and Persis. In April Anastasioupolis in Thrace was also captured by the same Huns (Malalas, 1986, p. 299; Theophanes, 1997, p. 347). So, we may deduce that the Utigur activities were ineffective against the Kutrigurs, and maybe Prokopios is right in blaming the Justinian regime of being deceived by the twin tribes, who constantly increased the price "to keep the peace", and who were intercommunicating with each other to benefit more and more from this case: "(Justinian) for no reason at all sent for the Hun chieftains, and with idiotic magnanimity gave them large sums of money, alleging he did this to secure their friendship. This he had also done in Justin's time. These Huns, as soon as they had got this money, sent it together with their soldiers to others of their chieftains, with the word to make inroads into the land of the Emperor; so that they might collect further tribute from him, to buy them off in a second peace... This encouraged still others of them to rob the poor Romans; and after their pillaging, they too were further rewarded by the gracious Emperor. In this way all the Huns, for when it was not one tribe of them it was another, continuously overran and laid waste the Empire." (Prokopios, 1961, p. 57).

We see a little bit later that the Kutrigur remnants were annexed by the Avars on their march to Central Europe and were commissioned to invade the Illyrian provinces of the empire. The words of Agathias that they had been reduced to servitude in the lands of other peoples should refer to it (Agathias, 1975, p. 162). The Avars came in 558 to the Caucasus, and the afore-said Kutrigur attack was made in 559. Furthermore, after the withdrawal of the Kutrigurs from the Balkans in expense of a great payment, the Utigurs accepted to start an action against their kins. The appearance of such a minatory and even horrible people as the Avars just in their vicinity would prevent them normally from those expeditions (the Kutrigurs to the Balkans and the Utigurs to the Kutrigurs), but we see no worry of them in the Avar case. Just as, the sources does not account their names among the peoples crushed by the Avars; instead the Unigurs, Zali

and Sabirs were beaten by the Avars for the sake of Byzantium or for showing their hectorship to the Romans and to everybody around (Menander, 1985, p. 51). Th. Simocattes lists the victims as “the Barselt, Onogurs, Sabir, and other Hun nations.” (Theophylactos Simocattes, 1986, p. 225).

The Kutrigurs seem to have been allies and counsellors of the Avars in the new lands of the latter, as shown in a case when a Kutrigur leader advised the Avar qagan to kill Mezamer, the envoy of the Antae Slavs (Menander, 1985, p. 51). When the Avars migrated to Central Europe, and when they returned to deal with Byzantine affairs, after settling their problems with the Franks, the Avar qagan Bayan ordered 10,000 Kutrigurs to cross the river Sava and to invade Dalmatia (indeed and mostly, Bosnia) in 568 (Menander, 1985, p. 137). In those days, Targitau, the Avar envoy to Byzantium wanted the money paid in the time of Justinianus to the Kutrigurs and Utigurs to be paid to the qagan of the Avars, “who conquered and who was then the lord of the Utigurs and Kutrigurs.” (Menander, 1985, p. 139).

So, it is very difficult to reconstruct the way of the first Avar-Kutrigur encounter. The Avars seem to have ensured the Kutrigurs, as well as the Utrigurs, that they would not disturb them. In this way, the Kutrigurs attacked the Byzantine Balkans in 559. Perhaps the Avars incited them to do it, because it was in benefit of the Avar horde to make Byzantium straitened in that front and thus to be obliged to appeal for the Avar help. After the twins exhausted each other in that year, it seems, the Avars made use of the facility and easily subdued them, likely just after the year 559. In addition to the above words of Targitau, the sentence of the Avar qagan Bayan to the Byzantines that “I shall send against the Roman lands those who, if they happen to be destroyed, shall cause me no pain”, meaning the Kutrigurs, indicate that the Avars and Kutrigurs were not in so lovely terms, although it would not be a mistake to define them as allies.

The mutual diplomatic bluffs of the emperor and the Avar envoy seem to show that the dependence of the Utigurs alleged by the Avars should be right; otherwise the Byzantines would object it in some way. This probable truth might help us set up the chronology of the Kök Türk advance in the Caucasus. In 576 the Utigurs were subjects to the Kök Türks, and their ruler Anagai had an authority to rule over the region in the name of the Kök Türk qagan (Menander, 1985, p. 173). The regional governor of the Kök Türks, Turxanthus, threatened the Roman envoy Valentinus in that year of capturing the Byzantine city Bosphorus in the Crimea, and the envoy witnessed that he sent a detachment under the command of a certain Bokhan to carry out that task. On that occasion, Anagai of the Utigurs was waiting for the reinforcement troops of Bokhan (Menander, 1985, p. 179). So, the lower Kuban basin was conquered by the Kök Türks not earlier than the year 569, however the latter does not mention the Utigurs among those crushed peoples.

Like the Avars, the Kök Türks also liked to count the names of the peoples in the same region that they had subdued: “The Alan nation and also the tribe of the Unigurs. Full of confidence and trusting in their own strength they faced the invincible might of the Turks. But their hopes were dashed, and so they are our subjects and are numbered amongst our slaves.” (Menander, 1985, p. 175, 177). Besides, the tribes Tarniach and Kotzager fled from the Kök Türks and took refuge to the Avars (Theophilactos Simocattes, 1986, p. 191).

Menandros tells about the return trip of the Byzantine envoy Zemarchos from Central Asia in 569. After crossing Volga, the leader of the “Ugur” tribe, representing the authority of the qagan there, became their host. After the Ugurs, they passed to the Alan country. During the journey, they were afraid of a Persian ambush on the way (Menander, 1985, p. 125). Th. Simocattes also puts those Ugurs just to the west of Volga: “These make their habitations in the east, by the course of the river Til, which Turks are accustomed to call Melas.” (Theophilactos Simocattes, 1986, p. 189).⁶

So, they used the Darial/Alan gates to pass to the south, and had nothing to do with the northwest quarter of the Caucasus, where the Utigurs lived. The Utigurs are mentioned by Menandros with their clear names, and the Ugurs seem to be a different people, likely the Onogurs. They were under the Kök Türks in 969, but the Alans not. The sources do not say or imply anything about the freshness of the Kök Türk administration or presence there; for that reason, the latter should have arrived there several years ago, perhaps in c.561, to follow the Avars living then in the North Caucasus, because the latter were annoyed and migrated to Central Europe in 562. Therefore, we may surmise that the Kök Türks conquered the northeast quarter of the Caucasus in their first entrance c.561, and in the second attempt they started to extend their territories towards the Black Sea coasts c. 568, and finally they crushed the Alans in the Central Caucasus, likely to descend easily to Georgia, in order to find an easy way to attack Persia. This is implied by Th. Simocattes, who says that “after the Ogur had been quite soundly defeated, the qagan handed over to the jaws of the sword the ruler of the nation of Kolch. Then three hundred thousand of this particular tribe were slain in the battle, so that the continuous line of fallen corpses extended for a four days’ journey.” (Theophilactos Simocattes, 1986, p. 190).

Georgian sources refer to such a case in those years. The Byzantine emperor sent great treasures to the Georgian king Guaram and “ordered him, in payment, to gather and bring an army from the north, and to add troops from Kartli and send them to Persia.” (*Kartlis Tskhovreba*, 2014, p. 107). That happened really and the Turks were in the south of the Caucasus, however, after they and the Byzantines were defeated by Bahram Chubin, the newly emerging heroic ruler of Persia in the words of the Georgian annals, then the Turks had to return home (*Kartlis Tskhovreba*, 2014, p. 108). Gumilëv suggests the years 570-576 for the Kök Türk conquests and activities in the region (Gumilëv, 2004, p. 56).

The story is very complicated in Th. Simocattes, however, I’m not inclined to think that he was confused between “Ugurs” and “Uygurs”, and that the Kolch people are somewhere in the east, at least in Central Asia. It should be Georgia. Killing of 300,000 Georgians by the Kök Türks is not recorded elsewhere, however, nor in Central Asia we have accounts of such a ‘genocide’. That number is too great for the conditions of the Eurasian steppes, especially for a unique people or tribe. The Georgian accounts describe a pro-Byzantine, and thus a pro-Turkic Georgia in the 570’s, however, it is not certain to exclude that the Georgians left their forever and traditional pro-Persian attitudes peculiar to the early medieval days.

In any case, the Ogurs/Ugurs of Menandros and Th. Simocattes seems to have lived in the Don-Volga triangle, and were totally separate from the Utigurs living in the peninsular around

⁶ The attribution *melas* (lit. ‘black’, but indeed ‘greater’) shows that the Turks differentiated between the rivers Volga and Belaya even in those times, calling the second *Ak İdil* (lit. ‘White Volga’, that is ‘Belaya’, but indeed pointing to the ‘smaller one’).

the lower Kuban basin. The Utigurs seem to have preserved a great part of their ethnic might and passion after the Kök Türks came, and to what degree the Kutrigurs lost their population is not certain. Indeed, those words of Agathias might be over-exaggerated. By the year 562 the Kutrigurs continued their operations in the Balkans, and just after that they were taken to Illyria by the Avars. There is no much room to surmise a long and exhausting Utigur-Kutrigur war. I dare at this point to suggest a final encounter of them in connection with the Kök Türk and Avar policies. Th. Simocattes tells about the Kotzagers expelled by the Kök Türks. We should not hesitate to identify them with the Kutrigurs (Gening and Halikov, 1964, p. 114).

Maybe the Kök Türks sided with the Utigurs, taking them under their vassalage, and helped them in their struggle with the Kutrigurs, then the latter had to take refuge to the Avars before the great might of the Kök Türk Empire. Thus we do not have accounts for a Utigur-Kök Türk tension. Likely because of it, we find the 'Turk' nation in those days in the land of the Utigurs, according to the *Armenian Geography*, and the latter are not mentioned at all in that book (Hewsen, 1992, p. 55). In any case, we hear no more about the Utigurs after the late 6th century. Despite that we know their supposed grandsons did not experience great calamities, and that, in contrast, lived usually in peace during the long ages of *Pax Khazarica*, the sudden disappearance of the name Utigur is interesting. Below, we will deal with that problem.

What is more interesting is that the Kutrigurs lived as a people – a little – more than their kinsmen, in spite of the great human losses and the forever adventures that they allegedly experienced during the mid-6th century. Furthermore, it seems they gained some prominence during the mid-7th century, under the Great Bulgaria. The famous chroniclers of the early 9th century, Theophanes and Nikephoros, who used also some sources unknown to us, mention about a certain 'Kotrag' people: "It is now time to speak of the dominion of the Huns (as they are called) and the Bulgarians and their affairs. In the area of the Maotic Lake, by the river Kophis, lies Great Bulgaria (as it was called in olden times) and (here lived) the so-called Kotragoi, who are also of the same stock." (Nikephoros, 190, p. 87). Almost the same sentence is repeated by Nikephoros: "...starting from the same lake in the direction of the river called Kouphis (where the Bulgarian fish called xyston is caught) is the old Great Bulgaria and the so-called Kotragoi, who are of the same stock as the Bulgars." (Theophanes, 1997, p. 498). Great Bulgaria as a political formation belongs to the earliest three quarters of the 7th century and the Kotragoi were of almost the same gravity as the Bulgars. The same happens in some other sentences, too: "In this year (679), too, the tribe of the Bulgars assailed Thrace. It is now necessary to relate the ancient history of the Ounnogoundour Bulgars and Kotragoi." (Theophanes, 1997, p. 497). "Kro-batos, the chieftain of the aforesaid Bulgaria and of the Kotragoi..." (Theophanes, 1997, p. 498).

This 'bare' or shorter form of the name does not occur in the earlier sources that we referred to. So, Theophanes likely took both the name of the actor and its acts from another source describing the affairs of the 7th century in more detail. Thus, we may trust in the authenticity of the account.

An even shorter form might exist in the *Armenian Geography* of Ananias of Shirak: "Between the Bulgars and the Pontic Sea live the *Garšk'*, *K'ut'k*, and *Swank'* nations. They extend as far as Pityus, a coastal city of the land of the Abaza." (Hewsen, 1992, p. 55). Hewsen, in reference to Eremyan, identifies the *K'ut'k* with the Ossetian tribe *K'urt'aur*, known in the later centuries (Hewsen, 1992, p. 111). The latter was recorded only in the new ages, and we do not know about prominence of such an Osseto-Alanic tribe in the medieval. The geography is clearly far

from the traditional Alanic lands. If the Garšk' is to be the Kasog (proto-Adige-Circassians), then near them and Swans we may hope to find the Kutrigurs. Otherwise, the absence of the names 'Utigur' and 'Kutrigur' in the *Armenian Geography* with clear references is very troublesome. Meanwhile, I cannot agree with Gening and Khalikov associating the Kupi-Bulgar of the same source with the Kutrigurs, or truly, with the horde of the second son of Kubrat (Gening and Halikov, 1064, p. 114).

Above descriptions of Theophanes and Nikephoros locate the Kotrags/Kutrigurs on the lower Kuban basin, at least to the south of Don at the first glance. But the famous passage in the both chronicles mentioning about the dismemberment of the Great Bulgaria clarifies that they lived to the west of Don, in the same place as described by Prokopius some centuries ago:

"The eldest son, called Bayanos, in accordance with his father's command, has remained until this day in his ancestral land. The second, called Kotragos, crossed the river Tanais and dwelt opposite the first." (Nikephoros, 1990, p. 89)

"The eldest son, called Batbayanos, observed his father's command, and has remained until this day in his ancestral land. His younger brother, called Kotragos, crossed the river Tanais and dwelt opposite his eldest brother." (Theophanes, 1997, p. 498)

Albeit the authors seem to tell about a person, clearly we are to understand a folk (Gening and Halikov, 1064, p. 113). In Eurasian terminologies, it is quite normal to use a personal name to refer to a people, and vice versa: *Chagatai Ulus* "The horde of Chagatai", *Osmanlı* "Ottoman(s)", while *Urum Qagan* "the emperor of the Romans", *Altun Qagan* "the emperor of China (under the Jin dynasty)". The Great Bulgaria encompassed much of the current Ukraine in its height, and thus, the movement of the second son Kotrag should not be perceived as a military maneuverer or political dispersal during the decline of their empire; instead, the anonymous son had been assigned by his father to rule over the Kotrags living on the other side of Don, since the heartland of the Bulgar Empire was in the North Caucasus. Gening and Khalikov believe that the Kutrigurs/Kotrags remained there even after the collapse of the Bulgar state, and perhaps they crossed the Seversky Donets to settle behind it (Gening and Halikov, 1064, p. 113). Those are the latest news from the Kutrigurs in the north of the Black Sea.

Thus ends their recorded history, but this does not mean their 'diaspora' in the Balkans ended in living. Zlatarski underlines that their history was from then on a component of the Avar history in the mid-Danube region, however, under the name 'Bulgar' (Zlatarski, 1970, p. 120). It is an expected case that the Kutrigurs assumed the upper name 'Bulgar' in the course of time, but why not the names Avar or Slav also? There were wandering Bulgars in Central Europe even before the rise of the Kutrigurs in the mid-6th century, and the Bulgars mentioned occasionally within the Avar realm were either those 'wanderers', or the fugitives of the Great Bulgaria.

The Kutrigurs invaded –seemingly– Bosnia by the order of the Avar qagan, however, we do not know about the withdrawal of the Avar power from there in the succeeding ages, until up the end of the Avar Empire.⁷ They and likely some Avaric elements as the over-lords stayed in the country as the conquerors (Klaić N., 1989, p. 33; Ćirković, 1964, p. 40-41). It is not difficult

⁷ The 'Kuduger' discussion hereinafter is based on the concerning texts in my previous paper of 2006, however, with several updates and adoptions.

to surmise that they were assimilated into the crowded Slavic comrades of them, and their siblings has lived forever within the Bosnian or Bošnjak population.

The 15th century Byzantine or 'Ottoman' authors, Symeon, archbishop of Thessalonica, Gennadius Scholarius and Laonikos Chalkokondyles mention about a certain *Kuduger* people. The former uses it as a synonym of the term 'Bogomil', while Gennadius and Chalkokondyles mean the heretics in Hercegovina, the latter implying that it is a special term to refer to the population of Hercegovina, then under the duke Sandalj (Dragojlović, 1977, p. 130; Babić, Boris, 2012, p. 42-46). There are countless studies on this mysterious term. Among them, as one of the most notables, Dragojlović refers to the earlier usages of the word meaning firstly Paulician, and then iconoclast, and then in the 13th century, it came to mean the Balkan Bogomils: *Kategoros > Kudugeros* (Dragojlović, 1977, p. 133).

However, this is not the answer of the question, which deals with the ultimate origins of the term and concept. Its semantic content alone would say nothing, unless we find its origins. Today we call all actors of vandalism as 'vandals' in a global perspective, without interrogating their connection with the so-called medieval Germanic tribe. Furthermore, we pay not a sequence to think about the ethnic content and origin of that word. Thus, Obolensky marks the meaning and also origin of the term Kudugeri as 'unknown' (Obolensky, 2004, p. 166).

I appreciate that the Hercegovina attribution of the above authors does not provide a certainty for a geographical survey, since it was where the Bogomilism had accumulated and concentrated in the late middle ages, but, on the other hand, that concentration might have been the source of the generic appealing *kuduger* for 'heretics'. That is, maybe we had the Kudugers in Hercegovina at the beginning, who insisted to be off baptism. This is not necessarily to be connected with the spread of Paulicianism in the form of Bogomilism in the Balkans. Bosnia and Hercegovina is recorded as the region resisting to baptism even in the age of mass conversions, in the 10th century.

I do not want to go into much detail, but I need to be clearer at this point. Konstantinos Porphyrogenitos of the mid-10th century gives interesting data on the ethnic groups of the region. One of the 'nations' living in the ancient Dalmatian province mentioned by the Emperor is the one called *Arentani* by the Romans (It was given likely in reference to the Illyric tribe living in the same region in ancient times) and *Pagani* in their own language. They rejected Christianity and stayed in their old beliefs (Constantine Porphyrogenitus, 1967, p. 125). Historians, who rely on the fact that the Pagani deals with piracy on the Dalmatian islands (Constantine Porphyrogenitus, 1967, p. 147), unanimously think that they were the Slavic group, which is known as *Neretljani* (Neretvans), and which lived in Western Hercegovina (Budak, 1994, p. 59; Goldstein, 1995, p. 153, 183, etc.; Raukar, 1997, p. 54-55).

Konstantinos also includes some Dalmatian cities and islands in the country of the Pagans (Constantine Porphyrogenitus, 1967, p. 165). But the Neretljani are given as a separate people in the same book. If their name is connected with the river Neretva, about which there is no doubt, then their land equates to the western and coastal Hercegovina, while the Pagans lived in a mountainous and remote place and resisted to it (Constantine Porphyrogenitus, 1967, p. 127). Western Hercegovina, where the Neretljani lived, is by no means mountainous, and to the contrary, is the most level land in the region. There is a plain from the coast to the city Mostar.

This area is not only accessible, but also the most accessible part of the Dalmatian coastal region. The south and east of Mostar is mountainous, but this cannot be Paganía, since it was called *Hum* and since there lived the people called *Zachlumi* (Constantine Porphyrogenitus, 1967, p. 161). The Pagans could be nor in the south of Mostar, because the *Terbouniotes* and *Kanalites* lived there (Constantine Porphyrogenitus, 1967, p. 163). To the north and northwest was Croatia simply. Therefore, Paganía can only be in the interior regions to the northeast of Mostar, which is today's Northern Herzegovina and Central Bosnia. It may not be accidental that in the succeeding years, in these regions Christianity was the weakest, and Bogomilism the most powerful.

It is very rare that linguistic assimilation is associated with the abandonment of one's group or ethnic name. In the majority of the related cases, the conquering people keep their tribal names after changing their languages within a majority, and contrarily they spread their name to the others as in the most famous cases of the Rus', Franks, Bulgars and Croats. There seems nothing to prevent us from thinking that the Kutrigur remnants in the central parts of Bosnia and Hercegovina kept their group name, and their name was applied later by the Romans to the other groups stubbornly resisting in their Paulician/Bogomil tendencies. Just as, comically, we use the name 'Pagan' of the same population for the believers of non-Abrahamic religions or of tribal religions, while the word originally denoted an innocent "villager" (Partridge, 2006, p. 2251). Some historians previously suggested to associate the Kudugers with the Kutrigurs (Cf. for instance, Babić, Anto, 1972, p. 38), but did not satisfactorily explain the sequence of the developments. In that sense, I would take the attentions to the names of the Kutrigur leader Sandil and the famous duke of Hercegovina in the 15th century Sandalj Hranić, if it is not merely accidental.

I dare to suggest another connection with the Kutrigurs. The medieval royal dynasty of Bosnia was the Kotromanić family. According to E. Imamović, they governed Bosnia for about 600 years, from the end of the 8th century, when the state was founded or became independent of the Avars, up to its fall in 1463 (Imamović, 1996, p. 21). We have no sufficient sources to prove the continuity of the dynasty, but we can refer to the view of Nada Klaić in this matter, who says that no foreign power changed any of the Bosnian bans and župans, that is, local/feudal rulers (Klaić, 1989, p. 25). That means, the administrators (of mostly Avar and Kutrigur stock) were appointed by the Avar state, and their descendants ruled Bosnia by the end of the Bosnian state.

However, there is no clear information about the origins of the Kotromanić family. Sources point to the existence of a small polity between Sarajevo and Zenica. It seems this polity continued from the very beginning until the known periods, under various circumstances and status; and there is no account about change of line of its rulers. According to Mavro Orbini, a Croatian/Latin author of the enlightenment age (1603), the king of Hungary sent one of his commandants called Kotroman the German to govern Bosnia, after the demise of Ban Kulin, who was the most famous and legendary ruler of Bosnia (1180–1203). Finding Bosnia without any ruler and defence, Kotroman easily seized it, and the king appointed him the new ban of Bosnia (Mavro Orbini, 1999, p. 411). A document intimating such a case was found in the archives of Dubrovnik. This is a diplomatic note of the city government of Dubrovnik sent to the Bosnian king in 1432. It reminds that the friendship between Bosnia and Dubrovnik had a very rich past, that previous Bosnian rulers appreciated importance of Dubrovnik, and that this view

took its roots from Kotroman the Goth, ancestor of the Bosnian kings, who provided help of the Hungarian king, then his relative, to Bosnia, and who established very good relationships with Dubrovnik, by regarding the latter city as his dome (Imamović, 1996, p. 22).

Mavro Orbini likely used this document or another narration or belief in his thesis. Relying on his claims, many historians accepted in advance that the Kotromanids were of German origin. Additional proof is found in the "German" suffix *-man*. However, this suffix is not peculiar to the German language alone, and some other information that we have contradicts with the Dubrovnik letter. In accordance with the ban and king lists, the first Kotroman must be Stjepan I Kotroman succeeding Prijezda, if they had come from abroad. Thus, the son of Stjepan has the surname Kotromanić. Kulin Ban died in 1203. Stjepan I Kotroman was throned c.1270 at the earliest (Perojević, 1942, p. 234). Between the two is a great interval of time. Tvrtko, the famous Bosnian king of the late 14th century, states in a decree that his uncle (so his father also, following his uncle) renowned the decision about an ecclesiastical land, given by Prijezda, his grandfather. Therefore, the first Kotroman known to us was of the same family as the previous kings and bans.

A document from the archives of the Papacy takes it to earlier dates. In a letter of the Pope Gregorius II, dated to 1233, Ban Ninoslav and the later Prijezda are shown to be from the same family. The letter tells that "ancestors of Ninoslav ruled in Bosnia from the ancient times on." (Imamović, 1996, p. 23). The days of Kulin Ban (1180s and 1190s), or even those of Borić (1154?-1164?) cannot be "ancient times" in the year 1233. Thus, it becomes clear that all the known rulers of Bosnia belong to the same family, and their root goes to the "unknown" period. By confirming this, Tvrtko I tells in another letter that his family had ruled Bosnia from its appearance (as a country) on (Imamović, 1996, p. 23).

Imamović, who believes that the Bosnian ruling dynasty was native, suggests that the ancient settlement Kotorac, which is now just near the Sarajevo airport, and which is mentioned by Konstantinos Porphyrogenitus, might have given its name to the Kotromanids. In this context, he points also to the fact that the medieval Bosnian polity emerged in this region. In his opinion, the name had the phonetic development of *Kotorac* > *Kotoranić* > *Kotromanić* (Imamović, 1996, p. 24-25). However, such a phonetic development has no any parallel in linguistic history of this region as far as I know, and is very hard to explain. If the place name kept its form for such a long time, a family name generated from that word, especially the name of the royal dynasty, would also expectedly have kept the original form. Even the suggested form *Kotoranić* is unusual in usage with the unreasonable addition *-an*. Expected forms would be likely *Koto-ročević*, *Kotorević*, *Kotorić* etc.

According to Perojević, Stjepan Kotroman, ban of Bosnia in the second half of the 13th century, established kinships with famous families of Central Europe like the Arpad (Hungarian), Angou (Napolitan/Norman, later Hungarian), Nemanja (Serbian) and Šubić (Croatian) dynasties and it caused later some confusions about the origins of the Bosnian dynasty, and led to the fabrication of relevant stories. In his opinion, the narration about Kotroman, the German noble coming from Hungary, does not get along well with historical facts, because we know well that the Kotromanićs lived in Bosnia before that date. Perojević, a Croatian historian of ultra-nationalist école, rejects not only a Hungarian, but also a Croatian connection of the family (Perojević, 1942, p. 236). Hungarian scholar Thallóczy, making the first special study in this matter, also believes that the Kotromanić family was originally Bosnian, and claims that Mavro

Orbini fabricated the story about the German origin or narrated it from a source unknown to us (Thallóczy, 1914, p. 66-70). When Thallóczy was writing his article, the Dubrovnik letter was not known to the scholarship.

Indeed, Orbini points to a historical fact with the narration of the imported German, but makes a mistake in dating. A Kotroman is mentioned in the time of Borić, mid-12th century. While Hungarians and Bosnians were fighting Byzantium in the time of Géza II, the latter died and an internal strife began in Hungary. Borić supported István IV in this struggle, but the eventual victory was of István III, the son of Géza II. After consolidating his position, István III started to punish his opponents, including Borić of Bosnia. He sent one of his commandants, a German called Gotfrid, to Bosnia. Borić was defeated by the punitive forces and a man called Kotroman was enthroned with the Hungarian support (1163). This man was likely from the ruling family, and not certainly an outsider. That is, the Bosnian crown was changed by a German, and not with a German (Ćorović, 1925, p. 16-17). With the full enlightenment of this event, a very obscure period in Bosnian history would be explained. Borić left the throne probably in 1163, and Kulin Ban was enthroned probably in 1180 thanks to the support of the Byzantine Emperor Manuel Komnenos. What about the 17 years between them? Thus, we can conclude, not with certainty for now, that the ban or one of the bans in those years was somebody called Kotroman. Succeeding Bosnian rulers, it seems, used his name in their surnames. Therefore, the German theory loses its base.

The claims about the Serbian or Croatian origins of the Kotromanićs stem from the assumption that the Bosnian people were indeed Serbs or Croats. Kotromanićs were natives of Bosnia in these views, too. But such a thesis that Bosnians were indeed Serbs and Croats, is wrong at all and meaningless from the very beginning of the post-Illyric ethnic history of the region. Thus, we will not deal with those ideas.

After fixing that this dynasty was native of Bosnia, it is very easy to suggest for their far ancestors an Avar or Kutrigur connection. In Bosnia, which was governed via administrative institutions headed by bans and župans in the Avar time, it was very natural to see governors of Avar or Kutrigur origin. After the collapse of the Avar state at the end of the 8th century, many bans remained independent and almost all of them were in Bosnia. There is no record on changing of these local rulers by foreign powers, and they continued ruling the country until the Ottoman times. The little banate of Bosnia, composed of the lands on the Sarajevo-Zenica line, was one of them. It is highly probable that they were of Kutrigur origin. Owners of high ranks from other ethnic origins, mainly Slavs, are also never excluded in our theory.

Etymologizing the word Kotroman would help us go further in fixing the identity of the dynasty. It is very hard to explain this word or its components in Slavic. Thus, due to the lack of a substantial Slavic explanation, the Germanic theory has got some base. A few etymologies are based on the toponyms *Kotor-*, but these have linguistic difficulties, and do not well illuminate the problem, as there are a lot of *Kotors* in the region from Montenegro to Austria.⁸ Almost all

⁸ Skok refers to the word *kot* of proto-Slavic origin meaning "booth, stall" (Skok, 1971, p. 168; see also Derksen, 2008, p. 241) to get the place names *Kotor-*. I would suggest the Church Slavonic **katora* "quarrel, fight" in pursuit of the root of the name Kotroman, although it did not survive in the South Slavic region (Derksen, 2008, p. 240). But the lack of a Slavic suffix *-man* at this point is a great problem.

of them may be candidates to be homeland of the Kotromanićs. Just as, some German scholars related the Bosnian dynasty to the settlement Kotrou to the southeast of Austria, and claimed that they had found a new proof for the German theory (Imamović, 1996, p. 25).

The South Slavic *kotar* "territory, county, march" is naturally the best and unique candidate for the *Kotor*- place names. But, Kotorac in Bosnia means "Kotorian, of Kotor"; therefore, the form *Kotorac* implies belonging to a place or group called Kotor, namely to an ethnic or regional identity. It might be both the just mentioned Slavic *kotar* and Turkic *Kotur*, the likely bare form of the name Kutrigur. Such a word has several meanings in Old Turkic (i.e. *kut* "the favour of heaven", pl. **kutur* "favours"; *kutu* "a class or group of people", pl. **kutuVr* "clans"; *kadğur*- "to be grieved, sorrowful; to be anxious"; *kodı* "situated below; of inferior men"; *kadır* "grim, brutal, oppressive, dangerous"; *kotur* "various kinds of cutaneous disease"; *kadrak* "something hard, rough"; *kadır*- "to twist back, turn back", *katur*- "to harden"; *kutur*- "to be excessive, exceed reasonable limits"; *koduru* "energetically, vigorously" ec. (Clauson, 1972, p. 594, 596, 599, 603-605). I need here only to express that the suffix *-man* is a productive one used mostly in stressing adverbs in Turkic as in the examples *kocaman*, *koloman*, *toraman*, *kopraman*, *ataman*, etc. In addition, this suffix is widely used in making ethnonyms: *Türkmen*, *Karaman*, *Koluman*, *Yulaman*, etc. Thus, the word *Kotroman* in Turkic would be a proper equivalent of the Bosnian word *Kotorac*. This is only an assumption and suggestion.

We need a few more words regarding the origins of Kutrigurs and Utigurs. Scholarship usually does not hesitate to unify the raids of the Bulgars proper with those of the Kutrigurs, accounting the latter among the Bulgar hordes. Indeed, the few expeditions onto the Balkans attributed to the Kutrigurs were by no means humbler than the Bulgar ones. On the other hand, we are to suspect, instead, whether some earlier Kutrigur activities were given to the Bulgars by the sources in the aforementioned accounts.

The Kutrigurs, together with their kinsmen Utigurs are designated in the sources as Huns, or a Hunnic people, like the Bulgars, but there is no such a mention as 'Kutrigur Bulgars'. The only account associating the Kutrigurs and Bulgars are the one repeated by Theophanes and Nikephoros, who wrote 250 years later than the Justinian age. We quoted that sentence above. They say the two peoples are "of the same stock", and there is no such a case that one belongs to the other. The reference is to the Great Bulgaria and the Kotrags/Kutrigurs were under that state, and were not a sub-tribe of the Bulgaric ethnic unity. Furthermore, the text begins with the Huns, and we should read it as "the Bulgars and Kotrags/Kutrigurs are of the Hunnic stock."

It is very troublesome at this point to explain how the Bulgars in the north of the Caucasus passed to the west of Don to reach the Balkans in the late 5th and early 6th centuries, because the lands on their road were settled by the Utigurs and Kutrigurs. Adding to them the Onogurs on the Don basin, just to their north, things become more complicated. We need once again to have a glance at the locations of the twin tribes of Utigurs and Kutrigurs.

Their lands were touching each other perhaps on the mouth of the Don River, but it is not likely that they had long common borders. After the Goths (of Ermanaric) were expelled from the north of Azov, the Kutrigurs settled in their empty lands according to Prokopios (Prokopios, 2014, p. 470). Agathias makes them cross to the west of Maeotis within the Hunnic wave (Agathias, 1975, p. 146). So, we should suppose a westward expansion of them, likely from the east of Don, from the same area as their kinsmen Utigurs. The latter were in good terms now both

On The Ethnic Affiliations and Connections of the Twin Tribes Utigurs and Kutrigurs

with the Romans, and with the Goth remnants in the Crimea. Some other groups associated with the Huns should have leaked to the Crimea, for Prokopios says that “Barbarians, Hunnic nations, hold everything between the city of Bosphorus and the city of Cherson.” (Prokopios, 2014, p. 471).

Although their name does not occur frankly in any previous source, Prokopios relates such an ethnogenetic story for them: “In ancient times a vast host of the Huns who were then called Cimmerians ranged over this region that I have just mentioned, and one king had authority over them all. At one time this power was secured by a man who had two sons, one of whom was named Utigur and the other Kutrigur. These two sons, when their father came to the end of his life, divided the power between them and each gave his own name to his subjects.” (Prokopios, 2014, p. 469).

Another text about the origins of the Kutrigurs is from Theophilaktos Simocattes. He says: “At that time the Tarniach and Kotzager, who are also from the Var and Chunni, fled from the Turks and, on reaching Europe, united with the followers of the Avar Chagan. It is said that the Zabender also originated from the race of the Var and Chunni. The additional force which accrued to the Avars was accurately assessed at ten thousand.” (Theophilaktos Simocattes, 1986, p. 191). The “Var-Chunni” of Theophilaktos is as comprehensive as the generic term “Hun” of the other Byzantine authors, thus neither he, nor Agathias speaks on a restricted definition, in contrast to Prokopios. The Zabender should be not a tribe, but the person, who ruled over the Kutrigurs during the 559 raid. It seems he lived long, at least by the 570s, and gained some fame in Constantinople. Therefore, once again, there seems no room to suspect for matching the Kotzager with the Kutrigurs.

It is noteworthy that ethnic maps of the two contemporary authors, Jordanes and Prokopios, contradict with each other; however, as for the two shores of the Azov, there seems no problem. The former author does not have the twin peoples at all, although the Kutrigur operations were done almost in the days when Jordanes was writing his book *Getica*. I suspect at this point that the list of Jordanes belongs a little bit to the earlier generation, around the year 520, when the Sabiri were on the scene and when the Ultinzur tribe was still prominent, but when the Utigurs and Kutrigurs were still silent.

The real problem is that these two tribes are mentioned only within a very restricted time span, only for half a century in total. They are not counted among the proper Hunnic tribes of the early authors, and are affiliated only to each other. In that context, only Agathias gives their names among “the rest of the barbarian peoples referred to by the general name of Scythians or Huns, whereas individual tribes had their own particular names, rooted in ancestral tradition, such as Kutrigurs, Utigurs, Ultizurs, Brugundi and so on and so forth.” (Agathias, 1975, p. 146). In another place, he separates between the Huns proper or Hunno-Bulgars and Kutrigurs by saying “Huns and Kutrigurs” (Agathias, 1975, p. 152), although he always uses the ‘general name’ Hun to describe the deeds of the Kutrigurs. We do not know about their migration to the Azov shores from remote regions under their own name. Their mysterious past should perhaps be looked for in some other ethnic groups.

As stated above, it is troublesome that the well-known passage of Jordanes describing the appearance of Eastern Europe in the mid-6th century lacks the twins Utigurs and Kutrigurs. They should have descended from one and same people, but the sources does not give the name

of that people, except for the generic 'Huns' and legendary 'Cimmerians'. Thus, Zlatarski suggests that the name 'Bulgar' in Jordanes was used to denote both Utigurs and Kutrigurs as respectively Eastern and Western Bulgars (Zlatarski, 1970, p. 67, 70; followed also by Gjuzeev, 1999, p. 87). It is more troublesome, however, that the two tribes are not associated with the Bulgars in the sources, and especially Prokopios abstains from using the name Bulgar while narrating the deeds of the Utigurs and Kutrigurs. Besides, the addenda of Pseudo-Zacharias Rhetor mentions Bulgars and Kutrigurs as separate peoples (Zachariah, 2011, p. 449). These are appreciated by Zlatarski, too. Instead, perhaps the very short life of the twin tribes may help us make further analyse of their origins.

First of all, we do not deal with a crowded people, as for the Kutrigurs especially. Afore-said 2000 people or men settled in Thrace was regarded a significant number by their rival kinsmen. The Avars took 10,000 Kutrigurs with them on their westward journey in the 560s, and they were commissioned to invade the great and fertile Byzantine province of Illyria. Even though the Utigurs had killed allegedly several thousands of them during their sudden attacks, which does not seem likely, we have about 20,000 adult males as the Kutrigur population.⁹ It is an unnecessary question how did they succeed to ravage the entire Balkans with so less troops. They were briefly continental-type Vikings, however, of Turkic origin. That number is equal to the Avar fugitives from Central Asia, who settled in Central Europe and who survived for about three centuries as a formidable polity. That number is equal also to the Ottoman special troops operating in Central Europe in the 16th century. We do not need to share them a large land in the north of the Azov, and we do not need to exaggerate the case by equating these Eurasian tribes with the 'national' peoples of the sedentary world.

Philological inquiry of their names is the matter of a special study, thus we refer to those debates on the meaning and origins of the names Utigur and Kutrigur. We need here only to emphasize that, besides aforesaid attributions connecting them to the Bulgars and Huns, the suffix *-gur* at the end of their names, which was widely used also in medieval and modern Turkic ethnonyms, for instance, ties the Utigurs and Kutrigurs to the Turkic world. Although it can never be referred to as an ethnic marker, their nomadic lifestyle is also a factor associated with the general Turkic identity of those ages.

Sandil, the leader of the Utigurs, says once to the Romans that his people were illiterate (Prokopios, 2014, p. 504). This should be a general evaluation of a nomadic horde by their leader, and does not necessarily mean that the Utigurs were alien to literacy at all. Even in the sedentary populations of the 'civilised' regions, a bulk of the common people did not know reading and writing. That percentage was surely higher in the nomadic societies. In any case, there is a group of runic inscriptions found in and classified as the Kuban basin. They are different from the classical Kök Türk scribe and might have belonged to the Utigur-connected Turkic population of the region (see for an examination, Karatay, 2022, p. 213-214). At least we know that just in the booming days of the Utigurs and Kutrigurs or a little bit earlier, the Bible was

⁹ Komar estimates a population of minimum 10,000 families and 30-50,000 people (Komar, 2004, p. 172). In several cases their armies numbered 10,000. Keeping in mind that all males at once could not go abroad, they should have had 10,000 plus adult males at least; thus I lean to suggest the number 20,000. That means some 80 to 100,000 peoples in total. Besides, it may not realistic to assume one mobilised soldier per family in the steppe conditions, although all adult males and many females were well educated soldiers; instead, maybe we should think that the numbers for Kutrigur troops should have contained also some allies and adventurers from around, however, not constituting the majority.

translated into Hunnic (Zachariah, 2011, p. 453). We have no any news about that the Huns behind the Caucasus adopted the Greek alphabet; rather, there are a lot of Turkic inscriptions from the region, of which dating debates still continue.

As before mentioned, following Zlatarski, perhaps we need to search for them in some other ethnic formations. In those terms, the Utigurs lived exactly where the Asi people lived before and after the 6th century.¹⁰ The latter disappear from the sources for a while, during the early medieval, and appear again in the same region. What did the latter do meanwhile? If we leave aside the likely suffix/word *-gur* used in ethnonyms, there remains Uti. Can we think that 'Utigur' represents a temporary rise of the sub-tribal name Uti among the Asi? Plinius Secundus mentions the peoples Uti and Udini in the north of Georgia (Iberia) (Pliny, 1855, p. 26), and Ptolemy speaks about the Udon river and Udae people (Claudius Ptolemy, 1991, p. 121-122).¹¹ It is customary and easy to relate them to the so-called ancient and modern Azerbaijani people Uti, but the transitory nature of those names in the north of the Caucasus may be due to the transitory nature of the As domination there, while in Azerbaijan that name has continued forever.

The 'Asii' were first recorded by Strabon, according to whom they, the "Pasiani, Tochari and Sacarauli, who originally came from the country on the other side of the Iaxartes River (Sir Darya)", took away Bactriana from the Greeks (Strabo, 1928, p. 261). The latter country is simply the north of Afghanistan. Here is an allied attack from the steppe direction. Pompeius Trogus of the 1st century BC also relates this event: "... Scythian peoples, the Saraucae and the Asiani invaded Bactria and Sogdiana." (Alemany, 2000, p. 17). According to the Chinese *Shi-chi*, the Yüeh-chih did it, who were expelled from the north of China by the Huns/Hiong-nu (Ssu'ma Ch'ien, 1968, p. 265; Onat et al, 2012, p. 30, 36). Thus, they are identified with the Tocharians. Another passage of Pompeius Trogus mentioning "the Asiani kings of the Tochari and the destruction of the Saraucae" (Alemany, 2000, p. 17) may explain why we now have only two peoples, and what happened then. It seems the Yüeh-chih controlled all around and became masters of Central Asia in the first years of their arrival. *Shi-chi* mentions their victories over the local people (Ssu'ma Ch'ien, 1968, p. 268). Furthermore, K'ang-chue is said in those days (120s BC) to have acknowledged nominal sovereignty both to the Yüeh-chih in their south and the Huns/Hiong-nu in the east (Ssu'ma Ch'ien, 1968, p. 267). The steppe alliance and balance of power were very temporary in nature and changed afterwards: To comment on the account of Trogus, the Tochari coming from the north of China were eventually subdued by the Asi, and the Saraucae were destroyed. Then the Asi became the dominant force of Central Asia, their country being named after K'ang-chue in Chinese sources. In the 1st century BC, they were, together with the Wu-sun, the most powerful nation of Central Asia in the Chinese eyes (Onat et al, 2012, p. 37-38).

The Asi people of South Kazakhstan origin had spread as far as the Don river in the west by the mid-1st century AD, according to Czeglédý (Czeglédý, 1983, p. 32, 50). And, likely the name of the Sea of Azov likely comes from their name (Karatay, 2022, p. 191 n. 546). Ptolemy mentions about a group of them living near the Don, likely to the south of it towards lower

¹⁰ Hereafter I copied and adopted the relevant parts about the Asi from the chapter 9 of my book 2022, p.190-198, with several additions.

¹¹ The river Kuma, cited by Ananias as 'Udon' (Hewsen, 1992, p. 45, only in the Long Recension). It is read as 'Awdon' in the Eremyan edition (*ibid.*, p. 115).

Kuban (Claudius Ptolemy, 1991, p. 121). That is where the Scandinavian sagas mention a certain 'Asaland', just to the east of Don, being the westernmost component of 'Turkland' (Snorri Sturluson, 2002, p. 7). The same account is repeated in the story *Tháttir Sörli* taken from the long Saga of Olaf Tryggvason (Kershaw, 1921, p. 43).

But the Alans coming likewise from Central Asia in pursuit of the Asi became dominant in the area to the north of the Caucasus in the succeeding generations and ages, and likely subdued also the Asi. Ammianus Marcellinus of the late 4th century may help us understand what happened between the Alans and Asi: "The Alani, so called from the mountain range of the same name, inhabit the measureless wastes of Scythia; and by repeated victories they gradually wore down the peoples whom they met and like the Persians, incorporated them under their own national name." (Ammianus Marcellinus, 1939, p. 389). "Thus, the Alani whose various peoples it is unnecessary now to enumerate are divided between the two parts of the earth, but although widely separated from each other and roaming over vast tracts, as nomads do, yet in the course of time they have united under one name and are, for short, all called Alani..." (Ammianus Marcellinus, 1939, p. 391). There is no reason not to include also the Asi to the defeated and subdued peoples. Thus, there is no news about the latter after that date, except for a short record of the *Armenian Geography* from the 7th century in the way "the Aš-Digor Alans" (Hewsen, 1992, p. 55). This records also seems to imply the Alan dependence of the Asi.

The Asi reappear in the same region in the 10th century under their own names. According to the *Reply* of the Khazarian qagan Joseph written to the Andalusian court in c. 960, they attacked Khazaria in alliance with the Oghuz (Torqu) and some other tribes, and the Alans were the only allies of the Khazars (Kokovcov, 1932, p. 116-117). An anonymous Khazar letter known as the *Cambridge Document* or *Schechter Letter* written a little earlier than the *Reply* confirms this (Golb and Pritsak, 1982, p. 113). Just a few years later than the date of *Reply*, the Kievan Rus' prince Svyatoslav "defeated the Khazars and took their city of Bela Veža. He also conquered the Yasi and Kasogs" in 965 (Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, 1953, p. 84).

These accounts display that the Asi were in the same region during the 1st millennium AD, but disappear from the sources in the early middle ages. When they were absent, we find the Utigurs living in the same land. It is very hard to surmise that the Asi temporarily left their abodes and then returned back, meanwhile the Utigurs hiring those lands! It seems the Utigurs, together with the Kutrigurs and perhaps some others recorded or not, were a sub-tribe of the Asi union. When their tribal names rose, the sources did not refer to the upper name As. This also explains the accounts that the Kutrigurs dispersed to the north of the Azov from its eastern shores.

The Asi and Alans were definitely separate and irrelevant peoples, the former living in the lower Kuban basin and the latter to the north of the Central Caucasus. This is visible in the Mongolian epoch too, when they were engaged in some developments on different occasions with their own identities. This is supported by Islamic accounts. For instance, al-Magribî of the 13th century puts the Alans among the 'Christianized Turks', and next to them he locates "the As from the Turks" (Şeşen, 1998, p. 203). Abu'l-Fidâ, who wrote in the early 14th century, repeats the same. He says that in the east of Abkhazia there were the Alans, and next to them was a Turkic tribe called As (Alemany, 2000, p. 249; Ebü'l-Fidâ, 2017, p. 182). Early Islamic geographers knowing more about the region never tended to identify the Alans as Turks. Mas'ûdî reserves a detailed chapter for them and does not group the Alans among the Turkic peoples

(Şeşen, 1998, p. 52-53). The same is true for the anonymous *Hudûd al-'Alam*, which on the other hand includes the Qâsak (Western Circassians) country among the Alan subjects (Minorsky, 1937, p. 53, 161; Şeşen, 1998, p. 69). This spread of the Alans towards the Black Sea coasts is mentioned by al-İdrisî too (Şeşen, 1998, p. 117-118). The Qâsak people are the same as the Kasogs of the Russian chronicle mentioned just above.

The situation in the Caucasus tells us that the Alans and Asi were different nations. In the year 1404, the Archbishop of Sultaniye (in South Azerbaijan) Johannes de Galonifontibus recorded Christian peoples in the Caucasus: "The Greeks, many Armenians, the Zichs, the Goths, the Thats, the Volaks, the Russians, the Circassians, the Leks, the Yass, the Alans, the Avars, Gazikumyks and almost all of them speak the Tartar language." (Tardy, 1978, p. 91; Alemany, 2000, p. 159). Of the Tatar language, we should understand the Kipchak dialect of the Kumuks which was the lingua franca in the Caucasus up until the Russian invasion. However, at the first look, there does not seem to be a Turkic people among the listed ones, although there were Christian Turks like the Karachay-Balkars known to us in the succeeding centuries (they only converted to Islam in the 18th century). They all speak 'Tatar' language, but none of them is of Turkic stock! The bishop knew all about those nations and that they spoke different languages as well; he personally counted 35 languages in the area. If the Alan in the list was referring to the ancestors of the later Ossetians, then, who were the Yass? If both the Alans and Yass are ancestors of the Ossetians, then who were the grandfathers of the current Karachay-Balkars? Why are the latter absent from the list? And why do the Ossetians, who indeed bear an exonym, an outer name given by the Georgians, and who have their own national names of Digor and Iron for their own two groups, call their neighbouring Karachay-Balkars as simply As? (Laypantov and Miziyeu, 2010, p. 139; Alemany, 2000, p. 6).¹²

The Alans and Asi were not the same people. There were two separate peoples with separate names and with their own separate historical adventures. Except for a few careless geographers like al-Magribî, nobody identifies the Alans with Turkic peoples, while the Asi have always been among the Turks. It should not be accidental that not only Central Asian Kazakhs, Karakalpaks, Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, but also Bashkirs and Nogays have As/Az tribes in their components (Lezina et al., 2009, p. 114-115). The As in the Nogays should be the grandsons of those Kuban As mentioned above in connection with the Khazars and the Rus'. The Central Asian As should have descended from the ancient Kang-chü Asi. Moreover, the Kök Türk inscriptions of the 730s mention a certain tribal union Az living to the north of the Altai (in what is today the Tyva Republic) in the Kyrgyz neighbourhood.¹³ They constituted a reservoir of problems for the Kök Türks.

¹² Believing that the Karachay-Balkars should have conquered that region in the Mongol epoch, Minorsky in his commentary to the Alan chapter of *Hudûd*, and indeed to the "the Aş-Digor Alans" of the Armenian Geography (cf. below), asserts that the Ossetians transferred their own name 'As' to the newcomer Turks (Minorsky, 1937, p. 445). I do not know if there is another example in the world of omitting the ethnic name of a neighbour and applying one's own name to them instead. It would be easier to accept that the newcomers from the lower Kuban basin to the Central Caucasus had 'As' as their name.

¹³ They seem to have recognised the authority of the rival Türgish qaganate. Though their ruler, also with the title qagan, was assigned by the Kök Türks and became a relative of the latter through marriage with a sister of the qagan, he was betrayed under the auspices of the Türgish, and they were eventually conquered and punished by the prince Köli Çor (Tekin, 1968, p. 266, 269-270, 276, 293).

The Asi identification of the Utigurs helps us also explain deeds of the latter people after the early Kök Türk age, when they appeared in the sources last time. If the Utigurs did not live through great misfortunes hitting their population and therefore their ethnic passion, as far as we know, then they should have continued living under other ethnic names, as usually expected. And the only nominee is the name Asi reappearing in the sources during the Khazar age, which was only a successor state of the Kök Türks.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In the mid of the 6th century, a new people associated with the Huns, the Kutrigurs came to the scene to trouble the Byzantine lands in the same way and through the same routes as the Bulgars, who were depicted likewise as a Hunnic people, but their fame and presence under that clear name lasted only for two decades. Furthermore, they had their twin brothers, the Utigurs, who were not unfriendly towards the Romans, in contrast to their brothers. The Utigurs inhabited eastern shores of the Azov Sea, on the Lower Kuban basin and its north, and the Kutrigurs were on the opposite side of the sea, namely, in the plains to the north.

As usual, although they (Kutrigurs) received many gifts from the Byzantines every year, they still crossed the Danube River and overrun the imperial lands, being both at peace and at war with the Romans. The first recorded Kutrigur attack came in 539 when Byzantium was relaxed of the northern affairs. This expedition lasting two years should have encouraged the Kutrigurs and their allies for future adventures, while Byzantium was hesitant about repetition of the invasion, without neglecting some diplomatic measures. Three years later the Kutrigurs did the same. Since Byzantium was busy in other fronts and since the attacks were frequent in those days, the Kutrigurs were not opposed in the field. Only after that Justinian put forward his famous plan in diplomacy, sending to the rulers of the Utigur Huns, who lived on the other side of Azov, to provoke them against the Kutrigurs. The plan was successful to some degree only. In March 559 the Kutrigurs acted again, to show that they were still alive. The imperial favours to their kinsmen Utigurs seems to have caused resentment among the Kutrigurs. Some of the invaders advanced against Thessalonica and the main group under the leadership of Zabergan took the road to Constantinople. We see a little bit later that the Kutrigur remnants were annexed by the Avars on their march to Central Europe and were commissioned to invade the Illyrian provinces of the empire. The Kutrigurs seem to have been allies and counsellors of the Avars in the new lands of the latter. The Avars seem to have ensured the Kutrigurs, as well as the Utigurs, that they would not disturb them. In this way, the Kutrigurs attacked the Byzantine Balkans in 559. The Kutrigurs invaded –seemingly– Bosnia by the order of the Avar qagan, however, we do not know about the withdrawal of the Avar power from there in the

succeeding ages, until up the end of the Avar Empire. They and likely some Avaric elements as the over-lords stayed in the country as the conquerors. Some 15th century Byzantine authors mention about a certain *Kuduger* people in Bosnia. It is very rare that linguistic assimilation is associated with the abandonment of one's group or ethnic name. In the majority of the related cases, the conquering people keep their tribal names after changing their languages within a majority, and contrarily they spread their name to the others. There seems nothing to prevent us from thinking that the Kutrigur remnants in the central parts of Bosnia and Hercegovina kept their group name. As for the Utigurs, the Kök Türks likely sided with the Utigurs, taking them under their vassalage, and helped them in their struggle with the Kutrigurs, then the latter had to take refuge to the Avars before the great might of the Kök Türk Empire. Thus we do not have accounts for a Utigur-Kök Türk tension. In any case, we hear no more about the Utigurs after the late 6th century. In the same place where they dwelled, we find the people Asi, who were recorded there also before the appearance of the Utigurs. Thus, when the Utigurs and Kutrigurs existed, the Asi disappeared from the sources, and when the former disappeared, the Asi appeared again in the same terrain. This would lead one to think that they were indeed subdivisions of the Asi tribal union.