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The Bulgars in Transoxiana: Some Inferences from Early Islamic Sources

SUMMARY

The question of the origins and *Urheimat* (original homeland) of the (proto-) Bulgars places challenges before scholars of Eurasian history as one of the most complex of issues. Studies in this area have remained in recession for a long time, and we need some new approaches. This essay includes such an original proposal. The word Bulgar occurs even today in Central Asia both as a geographical name, and as an ethnonym in Transoxiana in Medieval texts. These records have been largely ignored, with the pretext that they contain anachronism or complexities in geography. The Transoxiana Bulgars, who were likely of some significance in the first centuries of Islam in Central Asia, and who were clearly differentiated from the local Iranic peoples, but not classified among Turkic tribes due to their dialects, seem to have passed over in time to Common Turkic, in consequence of the rising Eastern Turkic population in the region. They eventually contributed to the present Uzbek ethnoses. The harshest impact to their presence probably came from the Mongols. The Bulgars in Europe were descendants of those leaving their ancestral land in Transoxiana and coming to the Caucasus in the second century BC.

KEY WORDS: proto-Bulgars, Transoxiana, Samarkand, Alans, As, Sarmatians, the Caucasus, Turkic tribes, Islamic geography

A Roman almanac, which was written in 354 AD and which reached us thanks to several Renaissance scholars, however, only in their carelessly copied versions of the complete 9th century version called *Luxemburgensis*, contains a genealogical tree of nations in its Part 15 titled *Liber Generationis*. This *Liber* lists “all” peoples from Genesis up to 334 AD. The Vienna version of the almanac counts the *Ziezi ex quo Vulgares* (“Ziezi, from whom the Bulgars”) among the descendants of Sem, son of Noah. This seems to be the first occurrence of the ethnonym Bulgar, if the *Vulgares* are indeed the Bulgars (Mommsen, 1850: 591; Tryjarski, 1975: 160).¹ On the

¹ V. Stojanov reconsidered all current etimologies of the word “Bulgar”, and developed his own thesis (Стоянов, 1997: 2–51). I would advise only consideration of the Magyar word *polgár* (“civil”, “burgher”, “commoner”) – in addition to his many samples such as the German *Volk* – in finding the meaning of *balk* “tribe” < *bal* “man” (Стоянов, 1997: 21).

other hand, this is the first and last case, as far as I know, of the Ziezi being included in a generation list. This Biblical tradition, abundantly applied in Medieval Jewish, Christian and Muslim works, of sharing nations among the sons and grandsons of Noah, was open to renewals and updates. Extinct peoples were deleted from the lists, and newly emerged nations were included.² Thus, we can see an actualisation in the presence of the two words in the *Liber Generationis* reflecting the ethnic appearance of the world in the first decades of the 4th century.³ *Ziezi* occurs as an anthroponym in the document, but one can also see the name of the *Zich* people of the Western Caucasus, known from Strabo onwards, since the Bulgars were to be researched there with great expectations.⁴ This people should have been given utmost importance in the ethnic sense in those days, because they were virtually unmentioned as a solid ethnic group by later, Medieval sources. But, the word was used to depict the same region for a long time, indicating the deep roots of the word in history.⁵

The major part of the relevant historiography, which accepts the date for the coming of the Bulgars to Europe as 463, relying on the famous account of Priscus, would object to this idea. However Priscus makes no mention of the Bulgars: “About those days there came to East Rome, embassies from the Saraguri, Urogi and Onoguri” (Priscus, 1829: 158). There is no mention of the Bulgars in those pages. The connection is made with the assumption that these tribes were observed later within the Bulgaric union (of tribes), and were thus Bulgars. Tribal unions were not necessarily ethnically homogenous unities, but heterogeneous political groupings containing numerous elements from many different races or linguistic affiliations

² In the Bulgaric context, for instance, *Kemārī* (Cimmerian) became the ancestor of the Bulgars, according to some Islamic sources such as the anonymous 12th century book *Muğmal al-Tawārīḥ* (Şeşen, 1988: 30, 34). Byzantine sources also support this Cimmer connection, by making the Utrigurs, widely accepted as a Bulgar tribe, descendants of the Cimmerians (Златарски, 1970: 60; Ögel, 1993: 579).

³ This actualisation in our case would not necessarily lead us to think “annihilation” of a peoples whose time had passed, and thus my sentence does not mean that the list contains only peoples of the 4th century. It is an accumulative list in contrast to other accustomed genealogies.

⁴ Cf. The first known activity of the Bulgars, as widely accepted, was the invitation extended to them by the Byzantine Emperor Zeno in 482 to subdue the Ostrogoths, a troublesome people North of the Black Sea (Златарски, 1970: 81; Tryjarski, 1975: 160).

⁵ The Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII (10th century) drew its borders: “After Tamatarcha (on the eastern shores of the Kerch Strait), there is a river called Oukrouch [Kuban, O.K.] some 18 or 20 miles from it, which divides Zichia and Tamatarkha, and from the Oukrouch to the Nikopsis rivers, on which stands a city with the same name as the river [the city now known as Afon Tshyts ‘New Afon’, just north of Sukhumi in Abkhazia] is the country of Zichia; the distance is 300 miles. Beyond Zichia is the country called Papagia [the land to be associated with the territory of today’s Karachay-Cirkassian Republic] and beyond the country of Papagia is the country called Kasachia [the land to be associated with the territory of today’s Kabardin-Balkar Republic] and beyond Kasachia are the Caucasian mountains, and beyond the mountains is the country of Alania [c. today’s Osetia]” (Constantine Porphyrogenitus, 1967: 187–189).

in many cases. (An analysis of the relations of these tribes with the Bulgar “entity” is made in Karatay, 2003: 18–45.). There is no need to certify that the Bulgars came from Asia, although our early Medieval sources do not tell of, or intimate, migration of the Bulgars from Central Asia to Europe.⁶ Thus, we may barely have any reasons to refute the account of Moses Khorenats’i, an Armenian author from the 7th century, who narrates about *Bulkars* just to the north of the Central Caucasus at the end of the 2nd century BC (Moses Khorenats’i, 1978: 135–136; A comprehensive examination of this account can be found in Karatay, 2005: 419–428). So, it seems that the Latin imagination in the 4th century associated the older Zich people, and thus their country Zichia, with the Bulgars, then being of greater importance and dominance in the region. This is exactly what we could expect from an author of late Antiquity and Medieval times.

This Caucasian connection in the *Liber Generationis* seems, in my opinion, to be very plausible, but other questions arise when we compare the passage with other versions of the calendar, which use *Hi omnes Bactriani* (“they [are] all Bactrians”) instead of the above-mentioned phrase. Bactria is the ancient name of what is northern Afghanistan today, where there was a Greek state established by comrades of Alexander the Macedonian. Ancient Indian sources called the region *Bahlhika*, while Medieval Muslims used to call it *Balh*. The Hellenic Bactrian state was destroyed by nomadic peoples, pressured by the Xiōngnú/Huns, just before the appearance of the Bulgars in the Caucasus (according to Moses Khorenats’i). The Latin word *omnes* could not mean that all those mentioned above are Bactrians, because the above-mentioned *Liber* lists the nations descending from the line of Abraham: the *Hircani, Arabi, Armenii, Evilath from whom Indian sophists (Gymnosophiste)...* They have nothing to do with Bactria. Hyrcania is nearby, but cannot be associated with it. The Indus Valley, possible Evilath country, is also different from Bactria. (India and Bactria are included in the same immediately preceding context: *Elmodal de quo Indi, et Salef de quo Bactriani*. They are clearly distinct from each other.) Armenians and Arabs were by no means connected with that region, even in legend. What is more, all versions of the text cross over to Egypt after our phrases. We should not tend towards a solution of the question by simply referring to a mistake

⁶ Only Michael Syrius followed by Bar Hebraeus, not a contemporary of early Medieval events, but with some information among his sources concerning traditions, says that *Bulgaris*, together with his two brothers (forefathers of the Khazars and Oğurs), came from “Inner Scythia” and settled between the Don and the Dnieper (*Chronique...*, 1901: 364; Gregory Abū’l-Farac, 1999: 165). I exclude here accounts about the Oğurs by Priscus (above-mentioned) and Th. Simocattes, who says the Onoğurs had a city called Βαχάθ, which had been destroyed by an earthquake, and which is believed to have been in Central Asia, due to the Sogdian character of the name (Theophilaktos Simokattes, 1834: 286). Though this information is constantly used in Proto-Bulgar studies, I am still hesitant about it, since we need to enlighten and to analyse the Oğuro-Bulgaric affinity to a more satisfactory degree.

and the confusion of copyists. The phrase *Hi omnes Bactriani* is completely meaningless in connection with above-mentioned people, unless we put *Ziezi ex quo Vulgares* before it. The writer does not habitually repeat the word *omnes* after every group of people. This is virtually the only case. “All of them” were not and cannot be Bactrians. Thus, perhaps we should reserve only the latest group, the Gymnosophiste, as Bactrians. It is usually expected that copyists omit text (largely through forgetfulness), rather than add to it. Neither of the phrases seems to be an addition; even if this is so, no Medieval or Renaissance man would seek out such “absurd” names as *Ziezi* and *Bulgar* in order to fill certain blanks. We should thus compose them as: “*Ziezi*, from whom the Bulgars, all of them Bactrians”. This is not, of course, a proven reconstruction, but I do not see any fatal mistake in compiling these different statements in different versions of the text, unless a better explanation can be produced for this particular case.

So, what is the relation of the *Ziezi* and Bulgars with Bactria, in the case that even the Indians had none? Bulgars were not likely to have been natives of the Caucasus. Indeed, as a Turkic people, they could be expected to have come from Central Asia. Thus, a Bulgaro-Bactrian connection is expectable in all cases, and it is feasible to look for Bulgar traces in Central Asia. Ancient geographers do not seem to place Bulgars at all in any region. Early Muslim sources might have preserved some relics of them. However, the very confusing situation of the Bulgars during the Middle Ages warns us to read their accounts very carefully. The chapters on the Bulgars were likely to have been the most difficult parts of geography books, because several Bulgar entities existed at that time: The (Christian) Danube Bulgar, the (Muslim) Volga Bulgar, the Black Bulgar horde in the Don Basin, the Bulgar relics in the Caucasus, etc. Their individual accounts were mostly confused with each other, and thus we have, for instance, the Volga Bulgars attacking the Byzantine capital. So, any account about them could well be speaking of any of their entities.

Ibn al-Nadīm of Baghdad from the second half of the 10th century says in his *Fihrist*, a bibliography book, that “the Bulgars and Tibetans write in Chinese and Manichean (alphabets)” (Dodge, 1970: 36–37). The Bulgars are anomalies here, as the other three elements belong to Asia. Though claimed so (Golden, 1992: 258, after Faxrutdinov, 1984),⁷ there is no mention here of Runic script. Neither the Chinese nor the Manicheans or, more expectably, the Sogdians, used the Runic alphabet. These Bulgars cannot be those living along the Volga, because Ibn al-Nadīm surely knew that they were Muslims, as is mentioned in many books listed in his bibliography, and since an ordinary enlightened citizen of Baghdad would know this

⁷ Zeki Velidi Togan is of the idea that he was well acquainted with Turkic Runic script, whose use he attributes only to the elite. However, this is not that case (Togan, 1932: 856).

fact. The Danube Bulgar is out of question (I mean in the context of this sentence; otherwise, Bulgars naturally used the Runic alphabet). Then, all the four elements should belong to the same location. Otherwise, Bulgars and Tibetans vs. China and Manichaeism can hardly be grouped together. Manichaeism was then a Central Asian belief; its centre was Samarkand (Frye, 1984: 351–352).⁸ True enough, many Turks were under its influence, as we know from the Uygur example (Amoretti, 1975: 502–503). Manichaeism reached as far as Bosnia in the form of Bogomilism (though we do not know the self-denomination of the Bosnian dualists), and gained critical importance in the history of that country. It travelled via Anatolia and Bulgaria (or, was one of the components of Bogomilism with its Gnostic and dualistic doctrines: Ангелов, 1993: 81–83; Babić, 1972: 214–215). However, sources do not give any information about its existence in the Western Eurasian steppes, especially in the Volga Bulgar. Ibn al-Nadīm is probably talking about another community somewhere in Central Asia.

Archaeology and epigraphy may also support such a Bulgar link. Some Runic scripts on a jug found in Transoxiana, belonging to the 8th century AD, were characterised by Kljaštornyj as the “Eastern European type” (Malikov, 2002: 144), which is associated with the Bulgars, known for their extensive use of the Runic alphabet. The silver ingots with Runic script found in Northern Afghanistan (historical Bactria) in the Ay-Hanim settlement, destroyed in 129 BC (Haussig, 2001: 81, 111), are of great interest in this sense, since the date is very meaningful within our context. However, it has not yet been possible to decipher them. If they are related to the early/ancient Bulgar dialect, reading them would cast light on the linguistic history of this very enigmatic language. We should also mention E. Möxemmedi, who identifies some inscriptions found in the Volga Basin with those found in the south of Transoxiana, adjacent to Bactria, and reads all of them in the Hunnic language (Зэкиев, 1998: 543).⁹ But we cannot regard these kinds of works, open to many objections and improvements, as definite and absolute results. More archaeological investigations are needed to establish certain links between Eastern Europe and Transoxiana-Bactria on this special issue. Thus, it is better to trace written and readable sources for this moment.

⁸ Samarkand continued to be the religious centre of Manichaeism until 712; then the centre moved to Čaganiyan (Haussig, 2001: 258).

⁹ The Bulgar state in Europe emerged on the remnants of the Hun Empire, and early Bulgar traditions, namely *The List of Bulgar Princes*, starts with rulers of the Huns. Thus, it is customary to accept the Bulgar entity as a continuation of the Huns. The linguistic relation is, however, above this political connection. Of the two main branches of Turkic, the Bulgar dialect (or LiR as it is linguistically expressed) is believed to represent the basic features of Proto-Turkic more than Common Turkic, the second branch. Hunnic is thus associated with the earlier Turkic speech, that is, the Bulgar dialect, in contrast to the more recent Common Turkic.

Mas‘ūdī, one of the greatest geographers of the Islamic Medieval period, says in his *Kitāb al-Tanbīh wa’l-Isrāf* that “the reason for their (the Bulgars, Pečenegs, Beğni and Baškirs, that is, Magyars) coming from the east to the Balkans is that wars happened between them and the Oğuz, Qarluqs and Kimaks, and their forays to the neighbourhood of Ğurğān” (Şeşen, 1988: 57). The author simply speaks of the Oğuz and Qipčak pressure on the Pečenegs and Volga Bulgars in the late 9th and early 10th centuries. The Qarluqs could hardly have had contact with those tribes living in the Volga basin and on the westernmost plains of the Kazakh steppes. They helped the Oğuz push the Pečenegs from Central Asia at the beginning (mid-9th century). That is all. They had never been to the west of Samarkand.¹⁰ On the other hand, the Volga Bulgars had never been in a position to attack Ğurğān (ancient Hyrcania) on the southwest shores of the Caspian Sea. The Pečenegs might have done so, when they were on the Sir Darya banks, but we do not know anything at all about their history in Central Asia, and whether they were remnants of the previous Türgiř union, or even whether they existed as a people in the Sir Darya region.¹¹ This is very obscure, and the presence of any Pečeneg role in the history of the region in those days is disputable. In any case, the Volga Bulgars, the closest Bulgaric entity to Central Asia, do not seem to have anything to do with the Ğurğān or Qarluqs. If the above account can be taken seriously and if any of the Bulgars participated in those events in Central Asia, then we would do better to look for other closer entities. Only the Bulgars located in Transoxiana were capable of fighting the Qarluqs, who caused a great deal of trouble in the region before their Islamisation in the 10th century (Salman, 2002: 423), and only those Bulgars could have disturbed the immediate Ğurğān region.

According to Šihāb al-Dīn Marğānī, a Kazan scholar writing at the end of the 19th century, “Sovereignty of this Bulgar folk reached to Bāb al-Abwāb, namely Darband and Tbilisi and Širvan and the Caucasian mountains and the Caspian Sea in the south... the Ural ranges and Xwarezm and Signak and Šāš...” (Mercānī, 1997: 9). We do not know the sources he called upon to draw such a map. His book is very precious and significant, but his first-hand sources are not available to us. If “Bulgar folk” means a state, then such a Bulgar state comprising all of Transoxiana and reaching as far as to inland Russian regions never existed. If the Hun Empire of Attila is being referred to, as regards Bulgar state tradition inheriting Hun domains,

¹⁰ The Qarluq state, which once became a khaganate, conquered Ferghana as the westernmost point. To their south was Tibet, and to the east the Uygur city states. They could hardly have been in such western regions (Salman, 2002: 422–423).

¹¹ Cf. Constantine Porphyrogenitus says the Pečenegs were formerly called Kangars (1967: 171), when they were in Central Asia. However, Kangars were only a part and component of the wider Pečeneg union, that is, the Pečenegs were a newly-formed people when they were settled to the immediate east of the Volga in the second half of the 9th century.

it was a more western state. If ethnic dispersion is alluded to, as frankly shown by the word *ahali* (folk), then that means he was well aware of the Central Asian/Transoxiana Bulgars. Marḡānī, a close friend of Radloff, was a modern historian who must have read all the sources that we read, and, moreover, was of the rich Bulgaro-Tatar tradition, which was destroyed to a great extent before and after the Bolshevik Revolution.

The anonymous Muḡmal al-Tawārīḡ quoted above states: “(Of the sons of Japheth) The name of the seventh, who was father of the Bulgars and Burtas, was Kemārī. Offsprings and lineages of all these children continued. Each of them had a different language. They shared among them the Ğayhūn (Oxus) climate in the east” (Şeşen, 1988: 30). The anonymous author mentions Bulgar and Burtas together, and thus clearly refers to the Volga Basin. But he uses the words “east” and “Ğayhūn” very consciously. This cannot be a mistake. The sentence and all the words are very clear. So, he was aware of some traditions telling of at least a Bulgar *Urheimat* in Transoxiana.

The most important data supporting this outline comes from the Sicilian Idrisī (12th century), and says: “Il y a des Turks de races très-diverses; tels sont les Tibétains, les Tughuzghuz, les Kirghizs, les Kimakis, les Kharlukhs, les Tchaghtris, les Petchenegs, les Turkechs, les Ezghichs, les Khifchakhs, les Khalachs, les Oghuz et les Bulghares; tous habitent les paysa u delà du fleuve, du côté de l’océan oriental et ténébreux” (Idrisī, 1840: 498). (Certain readings of his work were corrected here in accordance with Şeşen, 1988: 100.) Idrisī is an outstanding figure in geography of both the East and the West. He even knows villages in far-off countries. He speaks about both the Balkan and Volga Bulgars in his book *Nuzhat al-Muštāq*, but here locates the Bulgars firmly in Transoxiana, by mentioning them together with the Khalač and Oğuz. Although he was well-acquainted with the then-current geographical situation of the Old World, this list is such an early one as to be applicable only to the 8th and 9th centuries. In his day, the Oğuz were the overlords of Anatolia and Iran; the Pečenegs and Tūrgeš had disappeared from history; the Qipčaqs were hegemonic in the Black Sea steppes; the appellation *Tuğuzğuz* (“Nine Oğuz”) for the Uygurs was outdated, etc. In the 9th century, all those tribes, except for the Bulgars, really were in the region defined by Idrisī. The westward order of the tribes may provide an idea about their habitations. After the Tūrgeš, the order is lost. The last three are in no way ordered at first glance: the Khalač in what is today’s Afghanistan, the Oğuz on the Sir Darya plains, and the Bulgars, perhaps, on the Volga. However, Idrisī does say that he does not mention the climate west of the Sir Darya. The list would be meaningful only if we could locate the Bulgars in Transoxiana, thus, in the neighbourhood of both the Oğuz and Khalač.

If the Bulgars, who used to speak in the *-r* dialect of Turkic – *Rotacism*, compared to the *Zetacism* of Common Turkic – were the only people using that dialect, then all *-r* samples in linguistic relics and loanwords would be applicable to them. This would simplify our task. However, this is unlikely. In contrast, the *-r* dialect, commonly called “Bulgaric”, looks as though it was the common form of all Turks or Proto-Turks, according to the latest findings of linguistics. Togan, who is of the opinion that Bulgaric once used to be spoken in Central Asia, says that there remained many relics of it, but does not explain them (Togan, 1981: 22). I think the most significant trace of former Rotacism in the region is visible in the word Samar-kand. According to Maḥmūd al-Kāšgarī, the main authority on Turkic languages in the 11th century, what was then the most important city of Central Asia had two names: “... Again, they call it Semiz Kand; it is called so as it is big. In Persian it is called Semer Kand” (Kaşgarlı, 1998/1: 344). Towards the end of his glossary, he repeats this information: “Semerkand is called Semiz Kant” (Kaşgarlı, 1998/3: 150). Although he claims that he knows well all the Turkic dialects, Maḥmūd al-Kāšgarī provides no proof for his knowing Bulgaric. He says only that Bulgaric is a dialect, whose words are clipped from their ends (Kaşgarlı, 1998/1: 30),¹² but does not mention anywhere the radical phonetic changes peculiar to it. These changes made Bulgaric, like today’s Čuvaš, unrecognisable among the Turkic dialects. So, he does not see the identification of *semiz* and *semer*, based on the equation *-r* = *-z*, and signifies the second form as Persian. Maḥmūd gives the verb *semir-* (Clouston, 1972: 830: *semri-* “to be, or become, fat”) that can be applied to non-biological structures, too, in the meaning of “to grow up”. Its adjectival form in Common Turkic today is *semir*, as recorded by Maḥmūd, and the Čuvaš form is exactly as expected: *samir* “fat, fleshy, dense, thick” (Bayram, 2007: 179). It is also a fact that Persian has no such a word. It seems the *Semerkant* form was older than the *Semizkant* and well entrenched; thus domination of Common Turkic in Transoxiana did not ultimately change its spelling (Mongols called this city in the *-z* form “Semis-gab”. See *Mangḡol-un Niuča Tobča’an*, 1995: 257, 259, 263).

The old name of Taškent (“Stone City”), today’s capital city of Uzbekistan and the greatest settlement in Central Asia, might also have a Bulgaric tone: Čáč “stone” (Arabic books of the Middle Ages used to spell it Šāš due to absence of č in Arabic). Pritsak, who thinks that the Huns spoke in Bulgaric, accepted this as a Xiōngnú word (Pritsak, 2002: 535). We do not know well the tribal relationship and ethnic kinship of the Bulgars and the Huns, and we do not have enough material to decide

¹² In contrast to the neighbouring Suvar dialect, whose historical importance in those days is subject to debate, Mahmud does not count Bulgaric among those dialects, with which he was familiar, and provides no clues concerning it. He does not give even one word, for instance, which is peculiar to Bulgaric, while he gives many samples from Suvar.

on the dialectical features of the Hunnic language. However, its Bulgaric character is not an impossibility that could not be expected in the light of other examples given above and below.

Compared to the lack of acquaintance shown in Maḥmūd al-Kāšgarī about the features of Bulgaric, we have to be increasingly wary of the linguistic data given in Arabic and Persian sources (written by non-Turks). Another famous geographer of the Middle Ages, Maqdisī, who wrote his book *Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm* in 966 in Bust, in the east of Iran, mentions Transoxiana: “The language of the Šāš people is the most beautiful one in the Ḥaytal region. The Suġd people have a different language. The language of Bukhara villages much resembles it. This is a totally different language, known by only the natives. I saw the great Imam Muḥammad b. al-Faḍl speaking in this language. Different languages are spoken in the villages around most of the cities in this region” (Şeşen, 1988: 264). Maqdisī, a true Persian, displays that he knows the language and dialects of the Iranic Sogdian people, who were regional natives. The language of the Taškent region is said to be totally different from theirs. Maqdisī and/or his sources would have known if an Iranic language or dialect had been in question. He would have expressed this and also if, on the other hand, it had been Turkic, namely Common Turkic. We do not know whether there was another language there from another family. Here is a language understood neither by the Iranic population, nor by the Turkic inhabitants speaking in the -z dialect. Adding to the above-mentioned clues, this could be the Bulgaric dialect. Even today and even in written terms, anybody who is not a linguist or who is not familiar with this phonetic case, could hardly compare and find resemblances between the two branches of Turkic. The two look like totally different languages. Other Turks can by no means understand Čuvaš texts. Adding the long-lasting interaction with the neighbouring Iranic languages of the very exceptional and distinct features of Bulgaric, the speech of the Bulgars in Transoxiana would certainly have turned out to be a totally different language. Thus, Maḥmūd al-Kāšgarī did not classify the Central Asian Bulgars, whom he might have encountered on some occasions, among the Turkic tribes.

As stated above, we do not know the actual ethnic relationship between the Bulgars and the Huns. Tryjarski says that the Bulgars were by no means Huns, but were once included in their state (Tryjarski, 1975: 162). It is highly probable, however, that the Medieval Bulgar khans descended from the Hun dynasty. *The List of Bulgar Khans* clearly refers to this (Tekin, 1987: 12–13; see also Цветков, 1998: 61; Székely, 1981: 9–10). The legends about the Huns and Attila among the Magyars and Székelys, who might have had rulers from the same roots as the Bulgars, should also be regarded in this sense. Thus, it is possible to extract the name of the Danube

Bulgar khan *Krum* (c. 800–814) from the name of *Grumbates* (mid-4th century), a famous ruler of the White Huns of what is today Afghanistan and Uzbekistan. *Bat* was a Bulgar title that most likely meant “prince”. Theophylaktos Simokattes, in mentioning the Oğur and Bulgar tribes, then dynamic forces of Eastern Europe, says that “previous leaders of this people were called Ούάρ and Χουβί” (Theophylaktos Simokattes, 1834: 284). This passage contributes to the White Hun connection of the Bulgars in keeping with our line of thought. That is to say that not the people, but its leaders, were of Hunnic stock. According to Czeglédý, the White Hun entity (*Xiyôn, Hyaona, Hyon, Chionitae*) was nothing other than a tribal union of Avars and Huns; this dual structure was transferred to Europe to create the 2.5 centuries long Avar state (Czeglédý, 1999: 95–100). One may even venture to say that the name of the Ilak region in Transoxiana is associated with Ilel/Ellak, the son of Attila. These are distant possibilities, but should be kept in mind.

Al-Bakrī of Andalusia (11th century), in his book *Kitāb al-Masālik wa al-Mamālik*, which is criticized as being a careless sum-up of previous sources that nevertheless provides rich information on Eurasia, narrates some very interesting things about the Bulgars: “Most of their (Turks) countries are in Khorasan and China. The mightiest of them are the Bulgars. The Bulgars are owners of the cities around Kūsān and its surroundings. Their ruler is أفّر khan, and their religion is the Manichean religion. Their countries are many: Šāš, Farghana, and Huttāl. They live in Sugd between Samarkand and Bukhara. Their ruler is in Farghana. The king of kings (the khaqan, qagan) is from among them. This khaqan used to unify their lands. Their countries dismembered when he died. A king in Tibet is called by this name. This king was previously subjected to the Turkish khaqan” (Şeşen, 1988: 201). If al-Bakrī really gathered all that he found in old books, he really did help us. Maybe he transferred some information that did not reach us via other sources. Al-Bakrī, who is well informed about both Bulgarias, namely of the Danube and the Volga,¹³ narrates ancient Bulgar history in the above-quoted text. The Manichaeism connection and mention of Tibet are interesting in the sense that he supports al-Nadīm, about whom we talked above. Historical reality, if this account contains it, can likely be found only among the White Huns. One could think that al-Bakrī might be referring to the West Turkic epoch, but it lasted only 80 years (551–630), and has nothing to do with the Bulgars.

Faḥr al-Dīn Mubārakšāh, who wrote in India at the beginning of the 13th century, provided a list of contemporary and past Turkic peoples and tribes. He mentions *Oğur* (عغور) and *Qarâğūr* (قراغور), who do not appear in other Islamic sources (Şeşen, 1988: 153; Golden, 1992: 230). The former cannot be a distorted form of

¹³ “Bulgar country adjoins to the Khazar country. Their ruler is Moslem. Their ruler became Moslem after the year 310 (921 AD)...” (Şeşen, 1988: 202).

Oğuz (> >), because this ethnonym is clearly mentioned in the same list. It is hard to imagine that this could be a duplication. The *alf* in the second syllable of *Qarâğûr* probably indicates neighbourhood and thus fusion of the vocals *a* and *o* in Turkic, which does not have long vocals: Qara Oğur. It is difficult to find order in the list of Mubārakšāh, but these two tribes seem to have lived in Central Asia. The most interesting point is that the detailed list does not contain the Bulgars. This absence might display the truth. The author also tells us about some tribes belonging to the past. For instance, the Khazars virtually disappeared in the second half of the 10th century, but Mubārakšāh lists both the Khazars and Qara (Black) Khazars. The ethnonym Oğur had disappeared well before the word Khazar, and has survived only in the word Hungar (< On ‘Ten’ Oğur), the outer-name of the Magyars. However, this word could have had a way to enter Mubārakšāh’s list via old books. The original relations of the Oğurs and Bulgars are obscure and even unlikely; they were later identified and associated with each other, especially within the Great Bulgar Empire of the 7th century. Thus, the author might have analysed the topic, if he had the necessary sources, and included only one of the two names of the same nation in his perception.

According to the Eastern Anatolian, Bar Hebraeus, who lived during the Mongol invasion in the 13th century, the Great Khan of the Činggizzid Mongols Ögedei, just after he acceded to the throne, sent an army in the year 1228 against Ğalāl al-Dīn Ĥhwarezmšāh, who was active in Khorasan in those days. Apart from that, “he sent Sunatai Agonesta with an army against the Cappadocians and Bulgars, mobilised many troops towards India, and marched himself with his brothers and relatives against China” (Gregory Abû'l-Farac, 1999: 526). The author, who was on good enough terms with the representatives of the Mongol invaders in Anatolia to be able to hear about some of their previous deeds, speaks frankly here about their activities in Central Asia. Mongol armies crushed Ğalāl al-Dīn during their expeditions in 1222–1223 under the command of Jebe and Sübedei, and put them to flight to India. Virtually no Mongol horseman had been seen in Anatolia before the Kösedağ Battle in 1243. Bar Hebraeus, who completed his chronicle in 1286, should have known this fact. It is likely that he confused various accounts about the same case. The narrated Indian expedition was carried out to pursue Ğalāl al-Dīn, but in Činggiz’ days. In 1228, when Ögedei succeeded his father, three years had passed from Ğalāl al-Dīn’s coming to Azerbaijan from India. Moreover, the *quriltai* (general assembly), which was assembled after the enthronement of Ögedei, decided to put an end to warfare, except for ongoing expeditions and in obligatory cases. The punitive expeditions launched by Činggiz to catch Ğalāl al-Dīn on his journey southward would have affected all the local people to the south of Samarkand, as well as the Bulgars. We do not hear from them after that date; thus, one can reconstruct that

the Mongolic invasion was a fatal stroke for the local Bulgaric community, which had just lost its ethnic passion, in Gumilev terms, and was about to be extinguished. Dire conflicts could have occurred between them and the Mongols, with news of them reaching as far as Bar Hebraeus, most likely by way of some of the veterans of those wars.

And now, how can we associate Cappadocians and Bulgars within the same text? This account also facilitates our task and casts light upon the question. At the beginning of the Turkification of Anatolia, there was a Bulgar community in the mountainous south, just west of Adana.¹⁴ They might have come before the Oğuz/Turcomans. Mas'ūdī speaks about a group of Bulgars, who had helped Muslims from Tarsus (near Adana) in the year 922/923 to invade the Christian country of *Fandiyyah* (Venetia?, although the context offers a location somewhere in the Black Sea, since the Arabian navy went there after passing the Bosphorus), and came together with the Arabs and settled there (Mesudī, 2004: 74; Şeşen, 1988: 48). Later, after the conquest of Anatolia by the Turcomans, they became part of the mighty Karamanid Principality. Medieval sources speak about their quarrel with the Crusaders, as well as with the Mongols (Şikârî, 1946: 15, 22). (Their ruler bore the title “khan”, which was never crucial for independent Oğuz rulers in various parts of Anatolia.) In the days when Bar Hebraeus was writing his book, the Karamanids were champions of the Anatolian resistance to the Mongol rule. They would be called Cappadocians by the author, stemming from the location of their lands; thus, it is not illogical to mention Cappadocians and Bulgars together and within the same context. Otherwise, there seems to be no way to explain this text. Then, what about a Mongol attack to the south of Anatolia in 1228, when they were not even in Iran and Azerbaijan? Bar Hebraeus was well informed about the East European Bulgars, and had heard about the Cilician ones' conflict with the Mongols, but was not aware of Bulgaric existence in Transoxiana. Thus, he attributed the Bulgaro-Mongolic wars in Central Asia to the Cilician Bulgars, together with their comrades, the Karamanids/Cappadocians.

We should add to the above-mentioned clues some toponyms that might have been remnants from the Bulgars. The most important of them is directly *Bulgar*, the name of a town, a county and a river. This name occurs in Medieval Islamic sources

¹⁴ There is a mountain range called *Bolkar* just to the northwest of Adana. Only Fahrettin Kırzioğlu (1967: 322–328) investigated this oronym, together with the “Bulgar” mountain in Northeastern Turkey. İbrahim Tatarlı (Татарль, 1982: 385–396) from Bulgaria wrote a good introductory essay on these Mediterranean Bulgars. Tatarlı, however, followed the paper by Venedikova (Венедикова, 1981). Venedikova later wrote a book on this matter (1998). Тіпкова-Займова updated their findings (2002: 241–245). These authors believe in the presence of Bulgars in Central Asia in Islamic times, but their reconstruction of migration from the Balkans to Anatolia, and from there to Central Asia, is almost impossible to defend, as there was no such eastward movement during the Saljukian period.

in the forms *Burgur* (Yāqūt), *Bārgar* (Ibn Rustah), *Bārgar* and *Pārgar* (Ḥudūd), *Burgar*, *Bargar* and *Fārgar* (Ibn Ḥawqal), *Fārgar* (Istaḥrī), *Burgar* and *Fargar* (Maqdisī) (compiled from Barthold, 1990, and Şeşen, 1988). *Pārgar*, which was “a prosperous town with much cultivation and very populous” (*Hudūd al-Ālam*, 1937: 119),¹⁵ was in the Upper Zarafšān region, and the river of the same name had its source in that region. The Fan River, which originated from the Mashā region of Ušrūsana, joined the river Zarafšān near the village of *Burgar*. Today, the Tajikistani town of Ayni, known until very recently as *Pargar* and *Falgar* (Barthold, 1990: 72, 86–87, 129, 182–183), stands exactly at this location. Another Tajikistani city with the same pronunciation, *Falgar/Pargar*, is situated in the South, near the Afghan border. Interestingly enough, the – literally – “Bulgar” mountains of Rize in the Black Sea region of Turkey are called *Parkhar* in folk language. The unique connection of the Upper Zarafšān valley with the rest of the world is via Samarkand, on the lower course of the Zarafšān River. Thus, geographical adjacency would also support a possible ethnic relation with the Samarkand region. The fact that the region is extremely mountainous could be a reason for retention of local identities for such a long time (but not eternally).

These are enough indications to consider a Bulgar community and entity in Central Asia, especially along the Zarafšān Valley. We do not have much data to enable us to go back into the history of this people. An accurate and professional analysis by Sogdian and Indian sources might lead to new paths. It could be that these Bulgars lived in the region very early on. For instance, *Kardama*, the name of the Zarafšān River in ancient Indian sources,¹⁶ is associated with the name of the Bulgar khan *Kardam* (777–803), who put an end to the Bulgaro-Slavic internal strife – an interregnum in the Danube Bulgar history – and brought back the very might of the khanate.

While obscurity on the *Urheimat* of the Turks was still going on, it is not likely that we could easily define the original homeland of the Bulgars, a Turkic people. They might be a people related to the ancient Wusun, as claimed by some scholars; and Xiōngnú pressure might have propelled them towards Transoxiana. It is probable that when the Wusun in alliance with the Xiōngnú attacked the Yuè zhī, that the latter took revenge by attacking the Transoxiana Bulgars in turn. However, there would not necessarily have been a Wusun kinship for the Bulgars to face such a catastrophe. These are totally fictional ideas constructed only on a logical base. No

¹⁵ There is even a monograph published on this topic, but I have not received it as yet: Юсуф Якубов, *Паргар в VII-VIII вв. н.э.: Верхний Зеравшан в эпоху раннего средневековья*, Душанбе, 1979.

¹⁶ I am grateful to Dr. Mehmet Tezcan for this information. According to Tzvetkov (Цветков, 1998: 66), the year 153, 300 years before the reign of Attila, according to the *List of Bulgar Khans*, marks the beginning of the Bactrian Bulgar state.

proof of this exists. What we can feasibly say is that the mid-2nd century BC events in Central Asia (the migration of the Yuè zhī and the decline of Bactria) coincide with the appearance of the Bulgars in the Northern Caucasus. Khorenats'i recounts the events in the days of Val-Aršak in such a way that one can easily deduce that the Bulgars were newcomers in the region. Those were the days when they were in their dynamic phase. Their forays troubled all the region, and Val-Aršak had to act to subdue and pacify them. This would lead us to think that the Bulgars were merely one of several tribes that crossed the Volga in the so-called Sarmatic wave. Perhaps Al-Bīrūnī is speaking about those chaotic days. He says that the homeland of the Alan and As was between Oxus and the Caspian Sea; they left their homes due to drought: "(Oxus) vivified the plains here for a long time. Eventually, this land also fell into ruin. Those living in this basin migrated to the Caspian coast. They were the al-Lān and Ās people" (Şeşen, 1988: 197). If Al-Bīrūnī knew that more than one thousand years previously the homeland of the mentioned people had been Xwarezm, a historical fact well-known today to the scholarly world, then he might have known much of the truth. The two peoples left the defined region in the 2nd century BC, and came to the north of the Caucasus in the Sarmatian wave (Durmuş, 1997: 68). The Xiōngnú started to rise in the east, and the Sarmats in the west, after the decline of Saka in the Eurasian steppes. The Sarmats, who spoke the Scythian language in an inferior way (Herodotos IV/117), were indeed the dominant and leading tribe of the union of the same name, which included many other tribes and peoples. The Aors, the Alans and the As, who originated from the same region, were among those included in the Sarmatic confederation. They moved into Europe between 130–125 BC. That was just after the invasion of Transoxiana by the Yuè zhī and the decline of the Bactrian state. Drought, which made life impossible in the region, together with the pressures in the aftermath of the Yuè zhī invasion, could well have forced these people to migrate westward. Thus, these two movements should be related to one another (Durmuş, 1997: 68–69; Czeglédy, 1999: 35–36). As stated above, the Bulgars are firstly mentioned in the Caucasus in those days. The Aorsoi were the leading tribe of the wave coming from the Sir Darya banks, and were then replaced by the Alans, after they lost their power and authority (Czeglédy, 1999: 39). These people filled the plains north of the Caucasus.

The Bulgars of Khorenats'i might have come with the same wave of this *Völkerwanderung* (mass migration). The fact that they settled in the central parts of the Caucasian ranges, and the Alans in the plains north of them (Durmuş, 1997: 68) would be a reminder that the Bulgars moved first. This leads us to think that their migration from Transoxiana started due to the Yuè zhī invasion. As was usual and general in Eurasia, a part of them remained at home to await their fate. The

first generation of migrating peoples represented the most dynamic phase of their – new – history (cf. Avars and Magyars in Alföld, Pečenegs in the Black Sea steppes, Oğuz in Iran and Anatolia, etc.) and their pressing need for a new home caused much upheaval among local peoples. This was what made the newcomers visible in sources. After they were exhausted and life reverted to being ordinary, they disappeared from sources. We can recall that we know almost nothing about the deeds of the Avars after 631, until their destruction by the Franks and Bulgars at the end of the 8th century. The same is what probably occurred with the Bulgars who invaded the Central Caucasus.

Perhaps the Massagetae people of the Western Turkistan, as a parallel case, could cast some light upon our question. They are not counted among the tribes of the Sarmatic confederation, like the Bulgars, but they seem to have had the same fate as the latter. According to Herodotus, the Massagetae, who lived in Central Transoxiana (the Bukhara region), expelled the Scythians to Europe (Durmuş, 1997: 88). Ammianus Marcellinus says that the Alans were formerly Massagetae people (Alemany, 2000: 33),¹⁷ while his contemporary Claudian depicts them as two separate but comrade peoples, even within the Sarmatic alliance, if not the confederation: “There comes down a mixed horde of Sarmatians and Dacians, and the brave Massagetae who wound their horses in order to fill cups, and the Alans who drink, after breaking the ice, the waters of Maeotis...” (Alemany, 2000: 45).¹⁸ Procopius of the 6th century was of the opinion that the Massagetae gave birth to the Huns (and, indeed, the Bulgars).¹⁹ In any case, we are including them in the Sarmatic *Völkerwanderung* of the 2nd century BC. The Hunnic reference is very understandable within the post-Hunnic process, which saw the Bulgars raised to be the most eminent and leading tribe of the Easternmost Europe as heirs to the Huns of Attila. Armenian sources record their name as the *Mask'ut'* (Huns) of the Caucasus. This word is related to the Huns called *Μασσαγέται* in Byzantine sources (Golden, 1992: 107; Федоров and Федоров, 1978: 40). The Massagetae, who were mighty in the days of Alexander the Macedonian, lost their power and authority gradually, and were likely deleted from Central Asia totally some time in the 2nd century BC. This may inspire one to think that they participated in the great migrations, defined

¹⁷ He emphasises the same knowledge: “(the Huns) reached the Alans, the ancient Massagetae” (Alemany, 2000: 35). Ammianus Marcellinus explains the ethnic process that he claimed: “The Alans, so-called from the mountains of the same name, inhabit the measureless wastelands of Scythia and, like the Persians, have incorporated bordering people, gradually weakened by their repeated victories, under their own national name” (Alemany, 2000: 35).

¹⁸ Indeed Marcellinus, too, was aware of the still existing ethnic structure of the Massagetae, apart from the Alans: “... near them Massagetae, Alans and Sargetae, as well as many other obscure peoples, of whom we know neither their names nor their costumes” (Alemany, 2000: 33).

¹⁹ Procopius (2007: 105): “Aïgan was by birth of the Massagetae whom they now call Huns.”

by Al-Bīrūnī, of peoples from Transoxiana and the surrounding regions. Here is another example that could be seen a parallel to the Bulgaric thesis: The Massagetae also did the same thing as the Bulgars, and their migrations were not recorded in sources.

The powerful ages of the Sarmatic Empire or Confederation should have – provisionally – settled affairs in the steppes east and west of the Volga. This was a relatively peaceful age in West Turanic history. Though the decline of the Xiōngnú in the east and the respective migratory movements caused much chaos there, the Goths, who conquered the Black Sea steppes in the 2nd century AD, closed the westward route for tiny entities, who increasingly strived to move on further. Thus, many peoples coming from the east passed into a phase of resting and intermixing in the Caucasus and Caspian steppes. This long process led to the creation (and, indeed, consolidation) of the Alans and Bulgars, in the sense we perceive them during the early centuries of the Middle Ages. After the Huns crushed the Alans in the Don-Cuban plains, the Bulgars remained as the mightiest entity, and waited for the decline of the Hun Empire to enter history again.

The fact that ancient sources, including such marvellous works as those of Ptolemy and Strabo, do not talk about the Bulgars in the Caucasus can be explained by their relative weakness as ethnic unities, and their subordination to broader unions. There were many peoples emerging in East Europe during and after the Huns, and their names and whereabouts were never recorded by these authors. A small tribe or even a clan could transform itself into a multitude, into a royal people, as long as it possessed and retained a passionate character and motivation. We should keep in mind that no old source contains full information about “the 72 nations” of the Caucasus. We know few of them, and we also know that there were many of them apart from those we know. The Bulgars took their place in sources and history with much emphasis, but after they had deserved it.

These consequences are based on a rough scanning of Medieval Islamic geography books. Other books may also contain very precious information. A re-examination of Chinese, Sogdian and Indian sources would show many new facts, or clues at least. Meanwhile, there are numerous documents from Eastern Turkistan remaining after the Uygur Turks and other local and neighbouring peoples, among whom were many followers of Manichaeism (with great probability, just like the pre-Islamic Transoxiana Bulgars). The objection founded on the fact that there were no Turks in Transoxiana in those times would be completely baseless. True enough, there were no tribesmen from the Türk tribe, whose name eventually extended to cover all their co-linguals, but there were many peoples of the same linguistic stock in the south of Central Asia. This region was either their homeland, or adjacent to

their original habitations, and moreover, there was no obstacle to prevent them from coming and settling in the fertile river valleys and basins of Transoxiana.

At the moment, we can say to some degree of certainty that the earliest Bulgars, who used to speak in *-r* Turkic, seem to have been found in Transoxiana. However, this is not to say that their *Urheimat* was there. It seems that the author of *Liber Generationis*, namely Roman intelligence (in both senses), had heard about two Bulgar entities, without knowing the details. They were confused on how to define the case; thus, earlier knowledge about the Bactrian Bulgars was transferred to the Caucasus, to create a new nation embedded into the Zich. This transfer included the grandfather Sem, too. Otherwise, we could expect Japheth to be a forefather of the Bulgars, as of other Turks and other Nordic/Scythian peoples, as seen in Medieval genealogies. When they re-emerged in history in the second half of the 5th century, after about half a millennium of silence on the outskirts of the Caucasus, lasting from Val-Aršak's subduement to the century-long Hun domination, they were radically different from their Central Asian relatives in the sense that they had passed through a new ethnogenetic process in the Caucasus. This included long-term ethnic relations with the Caucasian natives, and inevitable kinships with visitors to the North Caucasian plains, such as the Huns, Alans and Massagetae. Today's Karachay-Balkar Turks of the Central Caucasus seem to be directly (but not totally) related to them. Their closest relatives are the mid-Volga Bulgars, or the Kazan Tatars in the current denomination. The contemporary "Bulgarian" nation in the Balkans has less to do with the Ancient and Medieval Caucasian Bulgars, and almost nothing in common with the Transoxiana Bulgars. Thus, results offered herein cannot be applied to the prehistory of the Bulgarians, who only inherited the ethnonym Bulgar, after many developments throughout history.

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Bugari u Transoksijani: neki zaključci iz ranih islamskih izvora

SAŽETAK

Pitanje podrijetla i prvobitne domovine Protobugara kao jedan od najkompleksnijih problema stvara teškoće istraživačima euroazijske povijesti. Istraživanja na tom području već su dugo u krizi i potrebni su novi pristupi. Ovaj rad sadržava takav originalni prijedlog. Ime »Bugar« čak se i danas javlja u središnjoj Aziji i kao zemljopisni naziv i kao etnonim u Transoksijani u srednjovjekovnim tekstovima. Ti su se zapisi uglavnom ignorirali s izlikom da su u geografiji povezani s anakronizmom ili kompleksnostima. Transoksijanski Bugari, koji su vjerojatno imali neku važnost u prvim stoljećima islama u središnjoj Aziji i koji su se jasno razlikovali od lokalnih iranskih naroda, ali se nisu svrstavali u turska (turkijska) plemena zbog svojih dijalekata, s vremenom su, čini se, prihvatili općeturski (općeturkijski jezik) kao posljedicu rastućega istočnoturskog stanovništva u regiji. To je u konačnici pridonijelo današnjoj uzbečkoj etniji. Na njihovu su prisutnost vjerojatno najjače utjecali Mongoli. Bugari u Europi bili su potomci onih koji su napustili svoju pradjedovsku zemlju u Transoksijani i došli na Kavkaz u 2. stoljeću prije Krista.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI: Protobugari, Transoksijana, Samarkand, Alani, As, Sarmati, Kavkaz, turska (turkijska) plemena, islamska geografija

Osman KARATAY

Les Bulgares en Transoxiane : quelques conclusions des premières sources islamiques

RÉSUMÉ

La question concernant l'origine et *Urheimat* (la patrie première) des (proto-) Bulgares pose, comme un des problèmes les plus complexes, des difficultés aux étudiants de l'histoire euro-asiatique. Les recherches dans ce domaine sont en crise depuis longtemps et il faut de nouvelles approches. Cet essai comprend une telle proposition originale. Le nom de « Bulgare » apparaît même aujourd'hui dans l'Asie centrale en tant que nom géographique et ethnonyme en Transoxiane dans les textes médiévaux. Ces écrits étaient en grande partie négligés, sous prétexte qu'en géographie, ils comprendraient d'anachronisme et des complexités. Les Bulgares de Transoxiane qui ont probablement joué un rôle important dans les premiers siècles d'islam en Asie centrale et qui étaient bien différents d'autres peuples iraniens locaux, mais qui n'étaient pas considérés comme des tribus turques à cause de leurs dialectes, durant le temps ont adopté le turc commun, conséquence de la croissance de la population orientale turque dans la région. Cela aboutit, à la fin, à l'ethnie uzbek d'aujourd'hui. La plus forte influence sur leur présence a été probablement exercée par des Mongoles. Les Bulgares en Europe étaient les descendants de ceux qui ont quitté leur pays ancestral en Transoxiane et qui, au II^{ème} siècle av. J.-C., sont venus s'installer dans le Caucase.

MOTS CLÉS : proto-Bulgares, Transoxiane, Samarkand, Alains, As, Sarmates, Caucase, tribus turques, géographie islamique