

## **REVIEW**

according to the procedure for the defence of a PhD thesis on

**„Bulgars and Kharzars in 7-9<sup>th</sup> cc“**

за придобиване на образователната и научна степен „доктор“

for the acquisition of educational and scientific degree PhD

from

PhD candidate: Ivan Plamenov Dragov

Scientific field 2. Humanities

Professional field: **2.2. History and Archaeology**

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The PhD thesis presented by Ivan Dragov on the topic "Khazars and Bulgars in 7-9<sup>th</sup> cc" is a result of research on the characteristics and peculiarities of nomadic cultures in a clearly defined chronological range and extensive geographical boundaries. There is a synthesis of a significant amount of already known and published material, as well as some personal observations and analyzes of the PhD candidate, thought out and analyzed in a generalizing study, which to some extent is an upgrade of the existing ones in Bulgarian historiography. The text is 224 pp. and consists of a text part and an appendix of translations of some of the most important historical sources for the history of the Khazars. The text is structured with a structured table of contents, a main body that includes a preface (4-40 pp.), three chapters divided into parts and subsections (41-192 pp.), a conclusion (193-195 pp.), an appendix (196-204 pp.) and bibliography being. An alphabetical index and a geographical index are missing.

The layout is clean, the set of computer pages is legibly presented. Citation in the text is according to one of the accepted standards for historical publications.

Historical studies on the early medieval cultures of Eastern and Central Europe, and especially those of the Eastern European steppes, have a long tradition, the beginning of which dates back to the end of the 18th c. During the individual periods, there has been a systematic decline and a respective increase in interest in the sources relating to the period of 7-9 cc.

Analytical research on medieval nomadic cultures has definitely marked a growing intensity in the last fifty years, accumulating empirical material, making it possible to summarize the old and new observations of Central and Eastern European historiography from the point of view of the current level of knowledge, to apply innovative research methods and theoretical concepts. Ivan Dragov's research is an attempt in this direction, which makes the choice of the topic very appropriate.

In the Preface, the PhD candidate explains the purpose of his research. Without the tasks by which this goal will be achieved, as well as the methods for their realization, being clearly defined, the reader still gets an idea of them in the subsequent explanations. It is understood from them that the goal will be realized through the analysis of the written information - some of them partially known or even unknown to Bulgarian historiography

The chronological framework is clearly defined, as well as the geographical ones - they cannot be defined in view of the rise of nomadic formations from the Early Middle Ages. Considerable information on the source base is provided in Part 1. A Critical Review of the Sources, divided into subsections. It should have been defined in a separate chapter and rather titled "Review of the Sources", since criticism on the part of the author is not detected. Their

origin and the caution with which they should be used are briefly mentioned. It appears in the analytical text, but is avoided in this part, although it is bibliographically comprehensive.

Part 2 of this Chapter - "Analysis of Historiography" is an overview of the research done in the individual historical schools and/or directions. Sufficient attention is paid to Bulgarian, Hungarian, Russian and English literature and "different languages". However, the Ukrainian point of view, especially that of A. Komar from the beginning of the 21st century, regarding the Bulgarian-Khazar relations during the Early Middle Ages, which also provoked an international discussion, is not advocated.

A separate positive aspect is the analysis that the PhD candidate makes regarding the state intervention in relations between Bulgarians and Khazars in view of state intervention and political action on historical science. Factual errors were also made in this part - for example, the statement that "... a remarkable author is V. Gyuzelev, who, although he deals more with the later eras...". In fact, the beginning of academician V. Gyuzelev's scientific career began precisely with his research on early medieval Bulgarian culture, and his analyzes created a serious basis for future studies.

In this theoretical part, Ivan Dragov initially fails to define terms that he uses in the analytical part - "nomads"; "country"; "empire". These remarks do not concern his personal understandings of statehood and applications in nomadic societies as well, which are fundamentally correct.

Instead, the doctoral student should acquaint the readers with the nature of the nomadic economy, its advantages and disadvantages, and also convince that the Bulgars of the period of "Old Great Bulgaria" and those of Danube Bulgaria had the idea of continuity. The statement is curious: "..The settlements of the Bulgarian tribes extend somewhere around the Sea of Azov, along the rivers Kuban, Don and perhaps Dniester and Bug...". Until now, not a single settlement complex has been discovered and documented, which can be connected with the Bulgarian presence in the mentioned region. Bulgarian dominance is proven there on the basis of the cemeteries

Chapter I with its parts and subsections concerns the early contacts between Bulgarians and Khazars. In the first subsection, I. Dragov introduces in detail the theories about the origin of the Bulgarians, not even omitting the eccentric theories of Gancho Tsenov, which, although rejected by his Bulgarian and European contemporaries, unfortunately arouse interest in today's society. Another popular researcher - Petar Dobrev - and especially Todor Chobanov's latest monograph - "The Origin of the Proto-Bulgars" have been omitted. The debate in the 21-st

century.” The dissertation does not lose its value from this, but it would be interesting one to know the opinion of the doctoral student about this “debate” and whether it is necessary at all. At the end of this sub-section concerning "Old Great Bulgaria", I. Dragov fails to clarify the definition of this concept and what exactly the Byzantine authors mean when they use it. Again, the terms "state", "empire", "union", "federation" were freely used. The discussion of the grave belonging to Malaya Pereshtepina is avoided, which may not be necessary for a historical study, but would contribute to the interdisciplinary approach in such a large-scale study and is also an important chronological marker. Judging by the coins found in the tomb, the death of Khan Kubrat was during the reign of Emperor Constans II (641-668).

Within “Origins and Early History of the Khazars”, the PhD candidate presents his perspective on the formation of nomadic tribal alliances of this nature. Their heterogeneous nature and the role of the "traditional core", which is Turkic and fulfills the role of "dominant ethnic group", is emphasized. The author is not committed to specific ethnic theories.

The analysis of the importance of the Crimean peninsula in the Khazar-Byzantine relations and especially the city of Chersonese makes a positive impression. In the text, this center is called a "fortress", which does not correspond to its characteristics. During the Early Middle Ages, Chersonese became an emporium city and throughout its history shows remarkable continuity with its earlier periods and is often cited as an example of continuity between antiquity and the Middle Ages. However, less attention has been paid to another identical center of Crimea - Bosphorus (now Kerch), which performs the same function.

Subsection 1.2.5 "The Disintegration of Old Great Bulgaria" is particularly intriguing. In it, the doctoral student convinces that, through the principles of migrationism, the Khazars are the main reason for the displacement of Bulgarians in different directions. This is undoubtedly an important factor, but other indicators must also be taken into account, such as the climatic changes during the early Middle Ages and the economic crises that followed. It is difficult to accept the conclusion that with the death of a leader "Great Bulgaria" ends its existence.

The abstract of the dissertation corresponds to its content and presents it fully. I consider part of the contributions mentioned at the end to be completed tasks related to the achievement of the set goals and therefore I find them redundant. The specified publications meet the requirements for obtaining the educational and scientific degree of PhD. In its current form, the proposed work is complete and usable. It is distinguished by informativeness and has appropriate visual representation. The contributions of the dissertation are also visible. On this basis, I propose to the respected scientific commission that Ivan Plamenov Dragov be awarded

the educational and scientific degree "PhD" in professional direction 2.2. History and Archaeology, field of higher education 2. Humanities.

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With high respect

/Assoc. Prof. Boyan Dumanov, PhD/