

OPINION

by Prof. Krasimira Dimitrova Gagova, DSc, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", medieval history, for the dissertation on the topic "Bulgarians and Khazars VII-IX centuries" for the acquisition of the scientific and educational degree doctor, in professional direction 2.2. History and archaeology, with candidate Ivan Plamenov Dragov.

The proposed dissertation aims to present the early history of the Bulgarians and the Khazars in parallel, looking for analogies in the state development of the two ethnic groups, as well as, of course, the contacts and military clashes between them. The topic is not very popular in modern Bulgarian historiography, and therefore such research should be welcomed. The chronology is limited to the period VII-IX centuries. The emphasis is on the Khazars and their empire and, accordingly, on the Bulgarian communities inhabiting their territories.

The structure is appropriate. Dividing the chapters into smaller sub-topics allows for a neat outline of the exposition and makes it clearer.

The text begins with an overview of medieval sources and their value, followed by an analysis of historiography. Bulgarian interest in the subject is not very great, but the author has evaluated everything written so far, with the exception of Ts. Stepanov's last book, which may have been published after his text was already ready. Hungarian historiography, which is less well-known in Bulgarian studies, is very important for those dealing with the subject environments. In addition, he also offers some texts from the sources, not published in their entirety until now.

I. Dragov begins his presentation with the origin of the Bulgarians, accepting them as part of the Ogur tribes. Traces, as far as exist in medieval sources, the events of the formation of Old Great Bulgaria. He avoids the term "state" and

uses "tribal union". If we draw an analogy with the alliances formed by the Germanic tribes during the migration from the north to the borders of the Western Roman Empire, then it is clearly a question of rather loose short-term ties between different ethnic groups, which, depending on the circumstances, can break up and even become hostile or to coalesce into a single state union.

The next issue concerns the origin of the Khazars – equally obscure, but usually broadly defined as Turkic. The earliest notices of their state and quasi-state associations are from the time when they were part of the West Turkic Haganate.

As they moved west, the two groups inevitably met in the lands of Eastern Europe. The pressure of the Khazars was unstoppable, the clash led to the defeat of Great Bulgaria and the creation of a large Khazarian state with imperial ambitions and imperial rule. The dissertation notes that, as a result, the Khazars communicated with at least three groups of Bulgarians - those who settled in the borders of the Eastern Empire and created their own state there - Danube Bulgaria, the rest of the Bulgarians under Khazar rule and the forming Volga Bulgaria.

This is followed by an overview of the military clashes between Bulgarians and Khazars and of some analogies in the exercise of state power, such as the succession of the father from the son, unlike in Byzantium, where the emperor, according to Roman custom, was at least nominally elected.

An important part of the study is devoted to the country of the Khazars. Attention has been paid to the nature of the centralized management carried out by two separate individuals - the hagan and the bey, whose functions are complementary. Over time, the bey, whose prerogatives were primarily military, acquired complete power. The dissertation dwells in detail on the assumptions expressed by prominent researchers on the subject. The rest of the state positions that have reached us have also been examined in sequence. The huge territory on

which the Khazarian power is organized also implies the inclusion of numerous ethnic groups with different lifestyles, intertwining of the religions listed by the dissertation in the "Khazar Empire". With a clear and precise statement, the author traces the administrative structure of the empire.

Nomadic animal husbandry dominates. In this situation, it is natural to look for luxury goods outside. Trade was facilitated by several significant trade routes passing through Khazarian territory. It brings serious revenues to the treasury and allows money circulation to develop.

A variety of religions are practiced among the Haganah's diverse population. I. Dragov has followed not only the confessions, but also the way in which they are accepted. He has published a separate article on this topic. The official Jewish faith is very convenient politically, because according to the Old Testament, the ruler is high priest, legislator and military leader.

There are several Christian enclaves among the Khazars. Byzantium's attempts to expand the influence of its official religion with the mission of Constantine-Cyril the Philosopher were not successful, while Islam, which entered a little later, undoubtedly owed its success to Arab trade and the inclusion of Khorezmians in the Khazar army. The military conflicts with the neighbors are successively considered.

Special attention was paid to the Bulgarians in the Khazar Empire. Episodic mentions of the Khazars north of the Black Sea do not allow us to establish whether they have anything to do with the former Bulgarian federation. A Bulgarian group existed around the Don River for a longer time, which the author believes accepted the Khazar political power. As for the Bulgarians near the Volga River, the author quite justifiably prefers not to look for a connection with the previous Bulgarian state or quasi-state formations, especially since their dependence on the central Khazar power was indisputable at the beginning.

Gradually, they managed to break away from the control of the Khagan and created their own organization, which existed until the Mongol invasion.

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I. Dragov has also published two articles on the subject. The Abstract is written according to the requirements.

To the qualities of the dissertation student, I would add his pleasant writing style.

After all that has been said up to now, I think that the esteemed jury can with full reason award him the educational and scientific title of doctor.

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Prof. Krasimira Gagova, DSc