



**To the question of urbanization in the territory of the Pre-Mongol
Volga Bulgaria**

Revista Publicando, 4 No 13. (2). 2017, 992-1000. ISSN 1390-9304

To the question of urbanization in the territory of the Pre-Mongol Volga Bulgaria

Zufar Gumarovich Shakirov ^{1,2*}, Almaz Rafaelevich Bagautdinov ¹

**1. Kazan Federal University, Institute of International Relations, History and
Oriental Studies**

**2. Institute of Archeology named after A. Kh. Khalikov, Tatarstan Academy of
Sciences, * zufaralchi@mail. Ru**

ABSTRACT

The achievements of archaeological research in the Republic of Tatarstan of the Russian Federation and in the adjacent territories allow us to reach a new level of generalization and coverage of the medieval urbanization in the Volga-Kama region of Eastern Europe. The purpose of the article is to cover the role of the early feudal state of Volgian (Volga-Kama) Bulgaria at 10 - the first third of 13 centuries. There are limited information from written sources to understand the process of urbanization closely related to the formation of the state of Volga Bulgaria. The basic source for the reconstruction of historical events is the materials of archaeological research. The main results of the study are to determine the development vectors of the Bulgarian urban structures in the general historical context. The influence of the urbanization of the Volga Bulgaria on the historical destinies of the Turkic-speaking, Finno-Ugric and Slavic peoples of Eastern Europe is reflected. This is due, among other things, to the fact that the Volga Bulgaria in the 10th century became the northernmost Muslim region on the periphery of the Islamic world. A comparative analysis was carried out with the processes of urbanization taking place in Russia in the same chronological period. The materials of the article can be useful for specialists dealing with medieval history and archeology of Eastern Europe, as well as in the reconstruction of ethno-cultural processes that led to the formation of state entities.

Key words: archaeology, High Middle Ages; urbanization; Volga-Kama region; Volga Bulgaria.



To the question of urbanization in the territory of the Pre-Mongol Volga Bulgaria

Revista Publicando, 4 No 13. (2). 2017, 992-1000. ISSN 1390-9304

1. INTRODUCTION

The genesis of urbanization from antiquity to the present is an important direction in understanding the state-forming mentality of various modern peoples (Storey G.R. (ed.), 2016.). Today, the process of urbanization is identified with complex and progressively developing socio-economic social phenomena. Undoubtedly, a bright indicator of urbanization in different historical periods is a city.

Unfortunately, in western European and American historical science, the existence of such a significant state entity as Bulgaria, located in the basin and at the confluence of the fairly large rivers of Eastern Europe, the Volga and the Kama, is very poorly covered. The urbanization of the Volga Bulgaria, the high noon of which occurred in the 11th - first third of the 13th centuries, allowed this state to play an important role in the region along with ancient Rus. If to study the problems of political, social and cultural history, religion, art, architecture, we can say that the Volga Bulgaria with its large urban centers and small towns possessed many signs and traditions of medieval urbanization of Western and Eastern civilizations.

It should be noted that having common ethnic origins with the Bulgarians who founded the state in South-Eastern Europe on the banks of the Danube, the Bulgars on the Volga developed along a different path tied with the Islamic civilization.

2. METHODS

The leading approach to research of the problem under disclosure is the structured system approach to the study of urban processes. The early feudal Volga Bulgaria state (in a number of historical literature, the Volga-Kamskaya, 10th - first third of the 13th century) is known for Arabic and Persian written sources, Old Russian chronicles and the story of Julian, Dominican missionary from Hungary (Khuzin F. Sh., 1997.). This state, which was almost on a par with other medieval powers, played a huge role in the historical destinies of many, primarily the Turkic-speaking and Finno-Ugric peoples of Eastern Europe. To date, archaeologists in the territory of the Republics of Tatarstan and Chuvashia, the Ulyanovsk, Samara and Penza regions of the Russian Federation know about 170 fortified settlements and more than seven hundred non-fortified settlements (Fakhrutdinov R. G., 1975, Belorybkin G. N., 1995, Sitdikov A. G. and Khuzin F. Sh. (ed.), 2007) correlated with the Volga Bulgaria and the regions under its



To the question of urbanization in the territory of the Pre-Mongol Volga Bulgaria

Revista Publicando, 4 No 13. (2). 2017, 992-1000. ISSN 1390-9304

influence. Some of the settlements were destroyed as a result of the Mongol invasion of 1236 and did not revive, and some became part of the Bulgar ulus of the Golden Horde (mid-13th - early 15th centuries) and later the Kazan Khanate (mid-15th - 1552).

In the Russian archeological science, the study of urban processes develops on the basis of identifying the specifics of the origin and functioning of cities, being associated primarily with Old Russian lands (Avdusin D. A., 1980; Tolochko P. P., 1989; Rybakov B.A. (ed.), 1985; Sedov V. V. (ed.), 1989; Kuza A. V., 1996). Works on the urbanization of the Volga Bulgaria are known only to a narrow circle of specialists, what limits the possibilities of reconstructing the historical processes that took place in medieval Eastern Europe. As in other states of the Early and High Middle Ages, the cities of the Volga Bulgaria did not always have a full set of signs of a classical city, but reflected the complexity and uniqueness of the Volga-Kama region at 10th - the first third of the 13th centuries. (Khuzin F. Sh., 2001). The common for the beginning of the medieval urbanization process was the formation of a system of relations on economic and military-political subordination within the institutions of new state formations.

3. RESULTS

Probably, even in the first quarter of the 10th century, up to the arrival of the Baghdad embassy to Bulgaria, there were no cities in the Middle Volga. In written sources, the first cities of the Volga Bulgars begin to be mentioned only after Ibn Fadlan, i.e. from the second quarter of the 10th century. They originated in a country which main population was completely Islamized by the end of the century. In the letter from the Bulgarian ruler to Caliph Muqtadir, among other things, the latter was requested to send to Bulgaria qualified builders to build a fortress in order to protect the country from external enemies. Most likely, this request was fulfilled. On this occasion, a conversation took place between the Bulgarian ruler Jafar ibn Abdallah and Ahmed ibn Fadlan, during which the emir expressed his readiness "to build a fortress by his own silver and gold resources" (Kovalevsky A. P., 1956, p. 133).

To date, the relics of such pre-Mongolian Bulgarian cities as Bilyar (according to the Russian annals, the Great City), Bulgar (according to the Russian annals, Bryakhimov), Suvar, Oshel, Djuketau (Zhukotin), and Kashan, are comported with the specific cities mentioned in authentic written sources.



To the question of urbanization in the territory of the Pre-Mongol Volga Bulgaria

Revista Publicando, 4 No 13. (2). 2017, 992-1000. ISSN 1390-9304

According to the materials of archaeological research, first of all, ancient fortresses dating from pre-Mongolian times, many elements are considered that testify to the bright urbanization processes in the region under consideration. Among the generalizing works, the worth mentioning ones are those touching upon the problems of spiritual culture (Davletshin G. M., 1990), fortification (Gubaidullin A. M., 2002), trade and economic relations (Valeev R. M., 2007), high-tech industries (Valiulina S. I., 2005, Semykin Yu. A., 2015). In recent years, the development of issues on interaction between a city and its neighborhood reflected in the settlement structure, material culture, resource and demographic potential, and ecology has been increasingly developed (Rudenko K. A., 2007; Shakirov Z.G., 2014; Shakirov Z., 2016).

All the above-mentioned elements were determined by the following milestones of urbanization process in the Volga Bulgaria:

- 1) the gradual escape from control of the Khazar Kaganate and seizure of control over the strategic section of the Volga trade route at the confluence of the Kama River and the Volga River;
- 2) the origin of the Bulgarian cities is associated with the sedentification of the Bulgars and the time when the first permanent settlements appeared in them;
- 3) the quantitative growth of the population, which at first represented the confederation of polyethnic groups, including those that had traditions of sedentary farming;
- 4) proclamation of Islam as the state religion, what allowed to complete the unification of heterogeneous tribes within the framework of a single ideology;
- 5) stationary settlements became the basis for the agricultural system of the Bulgarian economy;
- 6) the flowering of the Bulgarian cities as major handicraft centers that provided economic growth, the accumulation of wealth and the complication of settlement structures.

4. DISCUSSION

Comparing the two large medieval state formations of Eastern Europe, the Volga Bulgaria and Ancient Rus, we can outline the general and tied to urbanization trends of genesis and development from the 9th century up to the Mongol invasion,:



**To the question of urbanization in the territory of the Pre-Mongol
Volga Bulgaria**

Revista Publicando, 4 No 13. (2). 2017, 992-1000. ISSN 1390-9304

The Volga Bulgaria	Ancient Rus
<p>9th - the beginning of 10th centuries. Change (or relegation to the background) of local ruling elites.</p> <p>The new elites had a stronger military organization and were loosely dependent on the former tribal elites who were in conflict with one another.</p>	
Bulgars and related tribes (from the territory of the Khazar Khaganate)	Varangians / Normans (from the territory of Scandinavia)
<p>Taking control of large international trade river routes and installing trade and craft settlements, cities and fortresses in their strategic sectors.</p>	
<p>The main artery was the Volga River, "The Great Volga Way", including the basin of the river Kama. It connected the north of Eastern Europe with the Caspian region.</p>	<p>The main artery was the Dnieper River, "The Way from the Varangians to the Greeks". It connected the Baltic Sea with the Black Sea region.</p>
<p>Proclamation of monotheistic religions as state ones. This made it possible to unite diverse ethnic tribes into single nations and led to the formation of their mentality. The religions of major states which were the main trading partners, were chosen in the capacity of state religions,.</p>	
<p>The basis of the Volga Bulgar ethnos were the Turkic tribes, the Volga Finns, the Ugrians (ancient Hungarians), and the Finno-Ugrians of Volgo-Kamia.</p> <p>In 922 in the Volga Bulgaria, the state religion of Sunni Islam was proclaimed the state religion.</p> <p>The main trading partners were the Transcaucasian and Central Asian provinces of the Arab Caliphate.</p>	<p>The Eastern Slavs, as well as some Finno-Ugrian, Baltic and Turkic tribes formed the basis of the ancient Russian people.</p> <p>In 988, the Orthodoxy was proclaimed the state religion of the Ancient Rus.</p> <p>The main trading partner was the Byzantine Empire.</p>
<p>Construction with use of brick and stone as building materials</p>	
<p>Religious sites:</p> <p>- mosques, minarets, mausoleums.</p>	<p>Religious sites:</p> <p>- churches, bell towers.</p>



To the question of urbanization in the territory of the Pre-Mongol Volga Bulgaria

Revista Publicando, 4 No 13. (2). 2017, 992-1000. ISSN 1390-9304

Public buildings:	
-------------------	--

- caravan-serais, baths.	
--------------------------	--

5. SUMMARY

For the young state of Volga Bulgaria, the region where its core was formed, the strategic location on the transcontinental trade routes along the Volga and Kama rivers was important. These rivers were also conditional boundaries of the steppe, forest-steppe and taiga landscapes that determined the ethno-cultural traditions of different groups of the population in the Bulgarian federation, which determined its originality. The formation of statehood and the development of the Bulgarian cities prepared the preconditions for the development of settlement structures and the widespread introduction of public amenities into the urban economy.

The likely state planning in the construction of cities can be witnessed by the archaeological research of the largest city of Eastern Europe, Bilyar, which area reached 800 hectares taking into account unfortified suburbs (Khuzin F.Sh., Valiulina S.I., Shakirov Z.G.,2017).

An important role in urbanization was played by the spread of Muslim rituals, the consolidation of the common Bulgarian people, and also the syncretic traditions that continued to exist.

Speaking about the features of a "Muslim city" (Stern S.M.,1970), regarding the urbanization of the Volga-Kamia through the prism of the early Muslim cities of the Middle East and Central Asia, it is worth noting the close relationship with the preceding late-antique traditions. They were reflected in the elements of brick construction and a number of elements of improvement (Khuzin F. Sh., Shakirov Z.G., 2016).

Despite the existing progressive technologies of brick-and-stone construction, the natural factor, expressed in richness in forest areas, determined the predominance of wood as the main construction material.

The trade-craft nature of cities, especially those located in major international trade routes, is evidenced by serial materials presented by the products of urban artisans.



To the question of urbanization in the territory of the Pre-Mongol Volga Bulgaria

Revista Publicando, 4 No 13. (2). 2017, 992-1000. ISSN 1390-9304

6. CONCLUSIONS

Thus, this study shows some results of research of the Volga Bulgaria before the Mongol conquest, and outlines further prospects.

Speaking about the results, I want to note that they are expressed in traditional approaches to the study of medieval urbanism and were focused on the reconstruction of city plans, their beautification and the study of trade and craft activities.

In recent years, more attention has been paid to the analysis of the historical landscape in its dynamics:

- Anthropogenic impact on the environment, reflected in the change of the forest areas and compaction of the network of settlements;
- Determining the level of similarity and difference between different urban centers or urban and rural life, determined by mutual dependence of different types of resources;
- Identification of the similarities and differences between different households associated with the type of activity, wealth or ethnicity.

The data already available today allow us to speak about active urbanization processes in the territory of the Volga Bulgaria of the 10th - early 13th centuries, which enabled this state, along with the Rus principalities, to play an important role in the history of Eastern Europe prior to the Mongol invasion.

7. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University and the grant for support of leading scientific schools, project NSH-7170.2016.6. "The processes of urbanization and urban development in the Volga region (X–XVI centuries)".

8. REFERENCES

- Avdusin D. A., 1980. "The Origin of Old Russian Cities (Based on Archaeological Data)", *Questions of History*, No. 2, P. 24-42.
- Belorybkin G. N., 1995. Settlements of the X-XIII centuries in Upper Posurye and Primokshanye (materials for a rheological map), Pages of the Volgo-Don history. Penza, Pp. 1-61.
- Davletshin G. M., 1990. Volga Bulgaria: spiritual culture. The pre-Mongol period. X - the beginning of XIII centuries., Kazan: Tatknigoizdat, 191 p.



**To the question of urbanization in the territory of the Pre-Mongol
Volga Bulgaria**

Revista Publicando, 4 No 13. (2). 2017, 992-1000. ISSN 1390-9304

- Fakhrutdinov R. G., 1975. Archaeological monuments of the Volga-Kama Bulgaria and its territory, Kazan: Tatkhniгоizdat, 219 pp..
- Gubaidullin A. M., 2002. Fortification of settlements of Volga Bulgaria, Kazan: Institute of History, the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan, 232 pp.
- Khuzin F.Sh., Valiulina S.I., Shakirov Z.G., 2017. "50th Anniversary of Bilyar Archaeological Expedition: results and issues of Great Town investigation", *Povolzhskaya Archeology*, No. 2 (20), pp. 8-27.
- Khuzin F. Sh., Shakirov Z.G., 2016. A Muslim city in the Middle Volga: pre-Mongol Bilyar, Materials of the Congress of Islamic Archeology of Russia and CIS countries, Kazan: Institute of Archeology, the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan, Pp. 275-287.
- Kuza A. V., 1996. Old Russian fortifications of X-XIII centuries. Archaeological Monuments Collection, Moscow, 255 pp.
- Khuzin F. Sh., 2001. A Bulgarian city in the X - early XIII centuries, Kazan: Master Line, 480 pp.
- Khuzin F. Sh., 1997. Volga Bulgaria in the pre-Mongol period (X - the beginning of the XIII centuries), Kazan: Fest. 184 p.
- Kovalevsky A. P., 1956. Akhmed Ibn Fadlan's book about his journey to the Volga in 921-922, Kharkov: Kharkov University Press, 348 pp.
- Rudenko K. A., 2007. the Volga Bulgaria in the 11th - early 13th century: settlements and material culture, Kazan: Shkola, 244 pp.
- Rybakov B.A. (ed.), 1985. Archeology of the USSR. Ancient Rus: City, Castle, Village, Moscow: Science, 431 p.
- Shakirov Z.G., 2014. "Bilyar Medieval District: Towards a Methodology for Studying the Settlement Structure and the Resource Potential", *Povolzhskaya Archeology*, No. 2 (8), pp. 37-48.
- Shakirov Z., 2016. "Anthropogenic impacts on the forest resources of the Volga and Kama rivers region in the Middle Ages (historical and archaeological aspects)", SMIA 2016: Benchmarking Interdisciplinary in Archaeological Research –



**To the question of urbanization in the territory of the Pre-Mongol
Volga Bulgaria**

Revista Publicando, 4 No 13. (2). 2017, 992-1000. ISSN 1390-9304

- Book of abstracts, XII Nordic Conference on the Application of Scientific Methods in Archaeology, Moesgård Museum, Aarhus, Denmark, pp. 28-29.
- Stern S.M., 1970. The constitution of the Islamic city, The Islamic city. Ed. by A.H. Hourani and S.M. Stern, Oxford, pp. 25–50.
- Semykin Yu. A., 2015. "Ferrous Metallurgy and Forging of the Volga Bulgaria in the VIII - the beginning of the XIII Centuries", *Archeology of the Eurasian Steppes*, Issue 21, Kazan: IA, RT, 228 pp.
- Sedov V. V. (ed.), 1989. The Emergence of an European Medieval City, Moscow: Nauka, 288 pp.
- Sitdikov A. G. and Khuzin F. Sh. (ed.), 2007. Archeology monuments collection of the Republic of Tatarstan, Vol. 3, Kazan, 528 pp.
- Storey G.R. (ed.), 2016. Urbanism in the Preindustrial World: Cross-Cultural Approaches. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 443 p.
- Tolochko P. P., 1989. Ancient Russian feudal city, Kiev: Naukova Dumka, 256 p.
- Valeev R. M., 2007. Trade and trade routes of the Middle Volga and the Urals in the Middle Ages (9th - early 15th centuries), Kazan: KSU Publishing House, 392 pp.
- Valiulina S. I., 2005. Glass of the Volga Bulgaria (Based on the materials of the Bilyar Settlement), Kazan: Publishing Center of Kazan University, 279 pp.