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**Abstract**

The article is devoted to the consideration of the Bulgarian problem in the historiography of the Russian Empire of the 19th century. Ethnic Ruthenian Yuri Venelin became interested in the Danube Bulgarians during his stay in Chisinau (modern Moldova) and for the first time tried to give a complex social-cultural, ethnographic and historical description of this people. From the point of view of Venelin, Bulgarians, like all Eastern Europeans peoples, were Slavs by origin, while the Volga Bulgars were Muslim people and were not associated with them genetically but have received their name for their main city, Bulgar. Venelin's theory almost did not rise any polemics in the Russian printed press; however, it was sought by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Empire and had an impact on the doctrine of Pan-Slavism. Kazan nobleman Andrei Likhachev gained fame as a collector of art and amateur archeologist, his ancestral estate was located at the distance of 25 km from the ruins of the Bulgar on the Volga. Likhachev got a degree in natural sciences, but his interest in numismatics led to the study of the Arabic and Persian languages. On the material of Bulgar coins Likhachev established the sequence of Bulgarian rulers and proved the Turkic origin of Bulgars; he considered them one of the Uighur tribes. However, for a number of reasons, scholars of Kazan University remained on the positions of the Slavic origin of Bulgars. Likhachev's book on the history of the Volga Bulgaria remained unpublished.

In this paper we use the biographical and comparative research methods. The article is intended for experts in the history of science and Asian and African studies, as well as the history of relations of the Russian Empire with the states of the Balkans and Central Asia in the 19th century.

**Key words:** Oriental Studies, Cultural Studies, Ethnography, Russian Empire, Balkan peoples, Volga region, Volga Bulgars, Danube Bulgarians, Yury Venelin, Andrei Likhachev.



## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The growth of the foreign policy activity of the Russian Empire in the Balkans, including the Danube region, also led to an intensification of interest to the history of the peoples inhabiting these regions. In parallel, there was a process of the so-called national revival of the Balkan peoples, primarily Bulgarians and Serbians. Yuri Venelin (1802-1839) became an interlink between the interests of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the self-identification of the Bulgarian culture. He also initiated the research of the ethnography of the Bulgarian people, their literature and spiritual culture. Venelin's works were carefully studied in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Empire and this contributed to the increased political interest in the Balkans in general. The historical and linguistic views of Venelin had an impact on the Russian academia throughout the nineteenth century. His first theory of the unity of the Danube and the Volga-Kama Bulgarians and their common Slavic ancestry became standard setting, and even in the last third of the 19th century it hampered the development of Volga Archeology and Turkology, including the city of Kazan and Kazan University. An example of this negative attitude is the fate of the academic legacy of the famous Kazan collector and archaeologist Andrei Likhachev [1, p. 122]. His "History of Bulgaria", in which the Turkic origin of the Volga Bulgars was proved on the basis of archaeological material, remained unpublished. Scholars of Kazan University consistently defended the Slavic theory of the common origin of the Volga and Danube Bulgarians.

## **2 METHODS**

The article is based on the use of the historical-comparative and biographical research methods. The authors believe that any scientific theory includes both an empirical basis, i.e. the facts with which it operates, and the social-cultural environment that shapes the views of the researcher and the audience that they are designed for. The comparison of the academic heritage by Y. Venelin and A. Likhachev is reasonable and meaningful, because they both did not have a specialized historical or philological education and could not professionally combine their empirical base (ethnographic and archaeological, respectively) with the existing complex of narrative sources. For a number of reasons, the Moscow and Kazan university professors were also not able to take a comprehensive approach to the theories of both Venelin and Likhachev.

## **3 RESULTS**

### ***The Yuri Venelin Theory***



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Yuri Ivanovich Venelin (nee Georgius Hutza) was born in the Hungarian Kingdom, in the area of modern Transcarpathian Ukraine. By origin, he was Ruthenian, and he graduated from the Philosophical Faculty of Lemberg University (currently the University of Lviv, Ukraine). As the son of a priest, he should have belonged to the ecclesiastical estate, and to change his name, to get rid of the supervision of the church department. In 1823, together with his own brother, Yu. Venelin decided to move to Russia. Having entered Chisinau without passports, they were able to naturalize, and in 1825 Venelin arrived in Moscow. His compatriots helped him enter the medical faculty of Moscow University, which Yuri Venelin graduated from in 1829. Despite his diploma of a doctor, he devoted himself entirely to historical research. At some point he met well-known journalist and apologist for Ancient Russia Mikhail Pogodin, and with his help in 1829 he published his own first study of the Bulgarians. Venelin was the teacher of Konstantin Aksakov and in no small measure contributed to the formation of his views. In 1830-1831 Venelin traveled to Bulgaria. During this trip, he was engaged in collecting Bulgarian folklore, letters, and others materials for his Bulgarian grammar book. Philological research by Venelin allowed him to claim the Chair of History and Literature of the Slavic dialects which was established in 1835 under a new university charter. He did not receive the chair, and the reason for this was his lack of a profile: philological or historical education, as well as his theoretical views.

The historical views of Venelin were formed under the influence of the ideas of Romanticism; he believed that historical research should be carried out “from all sides and in all parts,” believing that “only the whole can represent the full meaning.” The other side of this was the extreme imperfection of the method: Venelin considered any ethnos unchanged in the course of its historical development. To a certain extent he denied ethnic migration and language diffusion. This was very clearly manifested in his teaching about the autochthony of the Slavs in Eastern Europe in ancient times.

The question that is of interest to us is addressed in the second chapter of Venelin’s magnum opus “The Ancient and Modern Bulgarians in Their Political, Ethnic and Religious Relations with the Russians”, entitled “Analysis of the Evidence of Bulgarians’ Tatar Descent”. His main arguments boiled down to the following: the names of the same ethnicity changed in the course of historical evolution, whereas “writers accepted... a revolution in the nomenclature for the revolution in the peoples” [2, p. 72-73]. However, the obstacle was the similarity or dissimilarity in the phonetics of the surviving Old Bulgarian names with the Turkic ones [2, p. 32-34]. As a result, Y. Venelin came to the following conclusions:



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1. Danubian Bulgarians (the “real” Bulgarians) lived on their territory at least since the fifth century and were the descendants of Goths.

2. The Volga Bulgarians, mentioned by Russian chroniclers in the 11th-12th centuries, “were really Tatars, and Mohammedans by faith” [2, p. 52]. A remarkable passage follows right after that: “Bulgarians [...] were not what they called themselves; for they were not this people, but one of the Tatar tribes; but they were called Bulgarians only by Russians, or rather by Russian chroniclers, because they occupied, after the returning of these Bulgarians for the Danube, this ancient Bulgaria or, better still, because they inhabited the ancient Bulgar city on Volga. So, the Bulgarians on the Danube signify the real people, while Bulgarians on the Volga – only townsfolk, regardless of where they come from; in that sense, until recently foreigners called Russian people Muscovites (like Romans, Athenians, etc.)” [2, p. 52-53]. That is, according to Venelin, the Bulgarians are not the modern Volga Tatars, “because nowadays there is not a slightest trace of this name between the Tatar-Turkish tribes” [2, p. 53].

With extreme irritation Y. Venelin wrote about the “transformation” of the language of the Bulgarian Turks into Slavic: “the ancient Greek language changed into its present form within 2,000 years, and the Tatar [...] I will not say changed, but completely turned into Slavic within 163 years! Greek did not turn into another language, having been almost continuously under the yoke, mixing with foreign languages, and Tatar turned into a completely different language while being the dominant one!” [2, p. 60]. In proving the immutability of peoples in a foreign environment, Venelin referred to the Saxons who moved to Transylvania in the 13th century and Armenians in Hungary and Galicia, who for 300 years or more have not lost their own language or cultural identity [2, p. 64].

***Andrei Likhachev***

Andrei Fedorovich Likhachev was born in the Kazan Province and was a descendant of an ancient noble family. Among his ancestors were participants of the Zemsky Sobor of 1613 (on which the Romanovs became tsars), Kazan voivodes and governors; Likhachevs were also related to a number of noble families in Russia and were well-known figures of Russian Freemasonry. Their family estate was located 25 kilometers near the ruins of the ancient city of Bulgar on Volga. Andrei Likhachev graduated from the natural-science department of Kazan University and collected insects in his student years. Even during his education, he became interested in numismatics and reading inscriptions on Eastern coins, and independently mastered Arabic and Persian. After graduating from the university in 1853 Likhachev served in the chancellery of the Kazan governor for four years, but



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in 1858 he retired and since then led a very private life [3, p. 41-44]. Until 1875, he made three long trips to Europe, during which he accumulated a huge collection of works of art, including Ancient Egyptian pectorals, an Ancient Greek vase and over 200 paintings by artists of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries [3, p. 107]. In 1865 Likhachev became engrossed by Archeology, joined the Imperial Russian Archaeological Society and participated in the All-Russian Archaeological Congresses in 1871 and 1877. At the same time, Likhachev created an archaeological atlas of the Kazan Province, published only in 1923 [3, p.74-81]. In 1878 Kazan University hosted the Society of Archeology, History and Ethnography. Andrei Fedorovich Likhachev took an active part in its creation and entered the Society's Council as a founding member. In 1878 and 1879, Likhachev began his archaeological exploration of the traces of the Stone Age around Kazan. He did not engage in the excavations as such, and characterized his artifact collections as "pulling out" – that is, pulling objects out of erosions or precipices [3, p. 63-64]. Archaeological excursions of A. Likhachev were accompanied neither by field descriptions nor by scientific reports [4, p. 189].

By the 1880s Likhachev's academic views were fully formed. His main interests were still the history of the Volga Bulgaria and the Stone Age archeology in the Volga region, but he actively collected ethnography items, although he never published a single ethnographic work. He devoted over two decades to writing the "History of the Great Bulgaria", polemicizing with Y. Venelin. A. Likhachev believed that the Bulgars were descended from Uighurs, one of whose tribes was called "Bulgars". Initially, he believed that the Bulgars' foundation of the state belongs to the 5th century, but then he corrected the views and attributed this process to the 8th century. In many respects he idealized the relations between the Bulgars and Khazars and declared, "The government life of the Great Bulgaria was organized on a federative basis". He also managed to establish the continuity of the rulers of the Bulgars on the basis of numismatic data [3, p. 77, 94].

During his lifetime, A. Likhachev was known primarily as a collector and, in part, an archaeologist-amateur, but not a theoretical scientist. In the academic literature of his time, including such by researchers of Kazan University, the Volga Bulgarians were associated with the Danube in the framework of a common Slavic hypothesis of their origin. The support and attempts to use archaeological data to justify the ethnogenesis of the Volga Bulgarians did not find support, as the artifacts were only an illustration of his theories, but not the basis for the conclusions. The archaeological findings of A.F. Likhachev were also perceived ambiguously: in the absence of controversy, other researchers considered the same problems and came to dissimilar conclusions. The



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intellectual environment of Kazan was not very favorable for a recluse like Likhachev. Among the reasons that caused A. Likhachev's isolation in Kazan society and its academic environment, there were also some purely social ones. Nobleman Likhachev did not fit into the circle of university professors, who mostly belonged to the class of *raznochintsy* [4, p. 190-193].

Andrei Likhachev, due to the nature of his character and his education, was not able to become a social scientist. He was unable to analyze and systematize the messages of ancient authors and link them to the archaeological data. His real contribution to science was that he was one of the first people in Russia to demonstrate the intellectual potential of the province in the fields of archeology, source studies and collecting, as well as the presence of people outside Moscow and St. Petersburg that were capable of not only collecting artifacts, but also of carefully and professionally studying them [4, p. 195-196].

#### **4 DISCUSSION**

The academic legacy of Yuri Venelin and Andrei Likhachev, in addition to the obvious differences, is similar in one thing: during their lifetime, they both were hardly noticed by their contemporaries, and there was no polemic around the theories they put forward. Venelin's views on the common ancestry of the Volga and Danube Bulgarians were commonplace in the Russian historical science and anthropology before the end of the 19th century. On the contrary, during the twentieth century views on the nature of the Bulgars radically changed; as a result, it turned out that Likhachev was on the right track. The first professional study of the origin of Proto-Bulgarians was published in 1900 [5, p. 362]. According to modern views, the Danube and Volga Bulgars really had something in common, which was their Turkic origin. The ethnonym originated from the ancient Turkic word *bulgha* – “to mix, to disturb”. Byzantine sources provide information about the relationship of the Bulgars with onoghurs, tribes that attacked the Sassanid Iran of the 4th century. The first appearance of the Bulgars on the Danube, within the Byzantine possessions, was recorded as early as in 489, although in those days they inhabited the Black Sea steppes. Because of the formation of the Avar Khaganate in the West and the Khazar Khaganate in the East, the Bulgars in the early 7th century were divided, one part of them settling on the Danube, and the other part moving to the Middle Volga region. The further fate of these peoples turned out to be extremely different from each other: the Balkan Bulgarians, having adopted Orthodoxy, dissolved among the Slavs. Bulgaria became a serious competitor to Byzantium in political terms and an important center of the Slavic civilization at the



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Balkans. Volga Bulgars, on the other hand, adopted Islam in 922, becoming an organic part of the Muslim world [6, p. 354].

## **5 SUMMARY**

A. Likhachev's views are hopelessly outdated today; his works as a collector and numismatist were carried out at a high professional level and have not lost their practical significance [4, p. 187]. However, the significance of Y. Venelin's works is evaluated very differently in historiography. He was the first researcher to draw any attention to the development of the new Bulgarian literature [7, p. 12]. But this does not negate the fact that Venelin's most important work was performed in the vein of romanticism, which makes it a literary work, not a historical one [7, p. 25]. Venelin's influence on the ideology of Pan-Slavism was enormous [8, p. 248-249], [9, p. 113]. At the same time, his scholarly views can be described as amateurish [5, p. 350].

## **6 CONCLUSIONS**

The comparison of between Y. Venelin and A. Likhachev's views on the Bulgarian problem reveals the ways of development of academic research in Europe and Russia during the 19th century [10, p. 540]. A distinctive feature of the broad generalizations in the research works of that time was their unprofessional, amateurish nature. Venelin and Likhachev had degrees in natural sciences, the former being a doctor and the latter a biologist, and this, to a certain extent, contributed to their comprehensive approach to their researched subject. However, their lack of education in humanities and social sciences led to their inability to adequately use historical sources; with their methods of ethnographic research and archaeological investigations not having been developed, their results could only be an illustration to a theory. Venelin's theories were included in the broader context of the national liberation movement of the Slavic peoples in the Balkans, as well as the expansionist plans of the Russian Empire in relation to the Ottoman Empire. For A. Likhachev, there was no political factor at play, but the rejection of his theories by the academic community of Kazan stemmed from his social position.

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