

UDC 94(=163.2)  
DOI 10.24919/2519-058X.21.246898

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**Bibliographical Description of the Article:** Borysova, O. (2021). Who are the Ancient Bulgarians – Ethnos or Military Community? *Skhinoieuropeiskyi istorychnyi visnyk [East European Historical Bulletin]*, 21, 18–30. doi: 10.24919/2519-058X.21.246898

**WHO ARE THE ANCIENT BULGARIANS – ETHNOS  
OR MILITARY COMMUNITY?**

**Abstract.** *The “Proto-Bulgarian problem” is a traditional topic in Bulgarian medieval studies, as well as the questions related to the Bulgarians’ ethnic origin, the location of their ancestral homeland, their early history and their role in the formation of Bulgarian statehood. These topics were and remain the most important ones in the development of the historical consciousness of the Bulgarian people, and at the same time leave many unresolved issues. The purpose of the research is to outline the problematic points which exist in the literature relatively to the origin of the Bulgarians, and to give arguments for our point of view, who the ancient Bulgarians could really be. Research methodology. We used both general scientific methods (analytical, logical), historical (chronological, historical and comparative), and source studies – heuristic, critical. The scientific novelty is determined by the fact that the article substantiates the point of view that the term “Bulgar” was not an ethnos term at the time of the presence of the ancient Bulgars in the Eastern European steppes, but it meant belonging to a certain social status, namely – the military elite. Its maturation into an ethnos term took place later – when the Bulgarians moved to the Balkans and began the process of their own state formation. Formations similar to the medieval Bulgarian military class existed in other nations until the Middle Ages and later. The Conclusion. The results of our study gave grounds for the following conclusions. The ancient Bulgarians were not an ethnic but social-class union, a military community; the term “military order” could be used. The tradition to create such military orders resided in the Indo-Aryan tribes and their ancestors from ancient times and can be traced back to the end of the Middle Ages in the community of the Ukrainian Cossacks. Destruction of the Zaporozhian Sich by the Russian authorities in the XVIIIth century interrupted this ancient tradition forever.*

**Key words:** Bulgarians, Military order, ethnos term (ethnonym), “proto-Bulgarian issue”, class and social association.

**ХТО ТАКІ ДАВНІ БУЛГАРИ – ЕТНОС ЧИ ВІЙСЬКОВА СПІЛЬНОТА?**

**Анотація.** *Актуальність проблеми. “Прабоългарська проблема” є традиційною темою болгарської медієвістики, як і пов’язані з нею питання щодо етнічного походження болгар,*

місцезнаходження їхньої прабатьківщини, їх ранньої історії та ролі у становленні болгарської державності. Ці теми були і залишаються найбільш важливими у розвитку історичної свідомості болгарського народу, однак і донині залишається багато нерозв'язаних питань. **Мета дослідження** – висвітлити ті проблемні точки, які є в літературі з теми походження болгар, і аргументувати нашу точку зору, ким насправді могли бути давні болгар. **Методологія дослідження.** Нами використовувались як загальнонаукові методи (аналітичний, логічний), історичні (хронологічний, історико-порівняльний), так і джерелознавчі – евристичний, критичний. **Наукова новизна** визначається тим, що у статті обґрунтовується точка зору, що термін “булгар” не був у часи перебування давніх булгар на терені Східноєвропейських степів етнічним, а позначав приналежність до певного соціального стану, а саме – військової еліти. Його визрівання в етнізм відбулося пізніше – коли болгар переселились на Балкани і започаткували процес власного державотворення. Подібні до середньовічного болгарського військово-станові формування існували також в інших народів і до часів Середньовіччя, і пізніше. **Висновок.** Результати нашого дослідження дали підстави для таких висновків. Давні болгар були не етнічним, а соціально-становим об'єднанням, військовим співтовариством; можна вжити термін “військовий орден”. Традиції створення таких військових орденських об'єднань були характерні для індоарійських племен та їхніх нащадків з давніх-давен і простежуються аж до кінця Середньовіччя у співтоваристві українського козацтва. Знищення Запорозької Січі російською владою у XVIII ст. перервало цю стародавню традицію назавжди.

**Ключові слова:** болгар, військовий орден, етнізм, “праболгарська проблема”, станово-соціальне об'єднання.

**The Problem Statement.** The “Proto-Bulgarian issue” is a traditional topic in Bulgarian medieval studies, as well as the questions related to the Bulgarians’ ethnic origin, the location of their ancestral homeland, their early history and their role in the formation of Bulgarian statehood. These topics were and remain the most important ones in the development of the historical consciousness of the Bulgarian people and at the same time leave many unresolved issues.

**The Analysis of Sources and Recent Researches.** The attempts to answer the above mentioned questions have been made by scholars since the Middle Ages (Saint Theophanes the Confessor, Patriarch Nicephorus (see: Chychurov, 1980)). This topic has been touched upon in this or that way by many scientists – O. P. Smirnov (Smirnov, 1951), Merpert (Merpert, 1957), V. F. Genning, A. Kh. Khalikov (Gening, Khalikov, 1964), M. I. Artamonov (Artamonov, 1962), O. V. Gadlo (Gadlo, 1968) and the others. In 1990 – 2020 many historians, archaeologists, ethno-linguists, and the others put forward various hypotheses: V. V. Sedov (Sedov, 1995, Sedov, 2002), M. I. Zhykh (Zhykh, 2011), V. F. Butba (Butba, 2005), Zh. Voynikov (Voynikov, 2016), R. K. Bariiev (Bariiev, 2005), G. I. Tafaiev (Tafaiev, 2010), O. O. Tortika (Tortika, 2006), S. V. Finniki (Finniki, 2015, Finniki, 2018), M. Bakirov (Bakirov, 2019), V. Kaloyanov (Kaloyanov, 2019), etc. We also did not miss the issues of early Bulgarian history (Borysova, 2018; Borysova, Karpitskyi, 2019; Borysova, 2021). However, the problems still remain. V. V. Ageieva (Ageieva, 2014) wrote about the controversial issue of the ethnicity of the ancient Bulgarians in details.

**The Purpose of Publication** is to outline the problematic points which exist in the literature relatively to the origin of the Bulgarians and to give arguments for our point of view, who the ancient Bulgarians could really be.

**The Main Material Statement.** The first time our opinion on the problem of Bulgarian origin, which will be presented in this article, was formulated in 2013 at the International Scientific and Practical Conference “Current Issues of Philosophy, History and Political Science” in Novosibirsk. The author was a graduate student of Luhansk National University named after Taras Shevchenko Yu. Stefanov (Stefanov, 2013), and I was his scientific

supervisor. Unfortunately, Yurii Anatoliiovych died tragically in 2014. And in memory of him, I have decided to write this article to complete what we did not have time to do with the studied problem.

The hypothesis that the ancient Bulgarians were some Proto-Turkic tribes who came to Eastern Europe with the Huns of Attila was popular in the first half of the XXth century. This opinion was defended, in particular, by the patriarch of modern Bulgarian historiography V. Zlatarsky (Zlatarsky, 1972) and his followers. And the idea that the Bulgarians came with Attila, who was their first king, became an axiom in science. Although, as it noted by J. Voynikov, no one paid attention to the fact that no source reports on the presence of the Bulgarians among the tribes of the Hunnic Union (Voynikov, 2016, p. 6). Even A. Burmov in the 1930s denied V. Zlatarski's opinion that the Utigurs and Kutrigurs were the proto-Bulgarians and that the Kotragis should be identified as the Kutrigurs, and the Onogurs as the Unogundurs. The opinion was expressed that the Proto-Bulgarians were an independent ethnic group, which eventually included the Kotragi and Onoguri (Burmov, 1936). Nowadays, the theory of the Turkic origin of the Bulgarians is actively supported and popularized, in particular, by the Bulgarian researcher, Professor I. Dobrev (Dobrev, 2005, Dobrev, 2011).

Also Hungarian researchers of the Turks (Turkologists) (V. Tomashek, A. Vamberi, D. Hemet) and historians closely connected the Bulgarians with the Huns. They hypothesized about the Proto-Turkic Proto-Bulgarian language and its influence on Old Hungarian one, which continues to exist in Hungarian historiography. Thus, P. Juhas in his book (Juhas, 1985) devoted an entire section to the analysis of the Hungarian language, which he called "Turko-Bulgarian Borrowings", although as evidence he gave the examples from different Turkic languages. However, if we take into account the scheme of division of Turkic languages, then in it the Bulgarian group includes, in particular, the alive Chuvash language, and the Magyars, in its history, had a long-term relationship with the Savirs – the ancestors of the Chuvash. So we can suppose that the examples of borrowings, which were given by P. Juhas, and his attempt to explain the use of the living Chuvash language, actually arose as a result of ancient contacts of the Magyars with the Savirs. There are reports that among the Magyars there were three Khazar tribes of Kabars and they spread out the Khazar language among the Magyars there. Hence, taking into account the closeness of the Khazar and Bulgarian languages, which is noted by medieval Arab authors, it might be suggested that Kabars might influence the Hungarian language. Thus, the idea that many borrowings in Hungarian are the result of the Bulgarian influence does not look well-grounded. Moreover, the Bulgarians themselves could borrow such words from other Turkic languages. However, a number of scholars continue to claim that the Bulgarians came from the union of the Ugric and the Turks.

In Russian historiography, the views expressed by G. G. Litavrin in 1985 are mostly adhered to, that the so-called "proto-Bulgarians" were one of the varieties of the Turkic ethnos related to the ethno-genesis of the Bulgarian people (there is no longer identifying with the Utigurs, etc.). (Ageeva, 2012). Therefore, A. P. Novoseltsev wrote about Bulgarians as "mixed Ugries", which under "unspecified circumstances" were assimilated into Turk community (Novoseltsev, 1990). Although, precisely those "unspecified circumstances" is the line which attracts the Bulgarians to the Turks. Other examples of similar opinions could be given. However, the hypothesis that the ancestors of the Bulgarians belong to the Turkic ethnic groups, and their language – to the Turkic languages of the Bulgarian group is not supported by all scholars. Thus, the Bulgarian historian P. Dobrev claims about the East-Iranian origin of the ancient Bulgarian language and considers the territory near the spurs of

the Hindu Kush and the Pamirs as the historical homeland of the Bulgarians (Dobrev, 2005). This version is supported by Zh. Voynikov, I. Ivanov, I. Androvskiy and the others.

As we can see, today the language and ethnicity issue of the ancient Bulgarians in the literature has problems with justification. And there are objective reasons for that. The fact is that the reports of historical sources about the Bulgarians during the period from the II<sup>nd</sup> to the VIII<sup>th</sup> centuries is extremely tiny. V. Bezverkha noted that “during the period of the V<sup>th</sup> – the VI<sup>th</sup> centuries there is no historical information about the Bulgarians”, except for brief reports of participation in two wars on the side of Byzantium (Bezverkha, 2015, p. 202). Archaeology does not help in this case. In the territory of Ciscaucasia, where, as the matter fact, the search of traces of the ancestors of the Bulgarians is taking place, the significant evidence of the existence of a special Bulgarian archaeological culture during this period is not found. Artefacts from excavations in the eastern regions of the North Caucasus, the city of Belenger and other objects, which, in fact, are presented as evidence of the existence of a separate Bulgarian culture, are questionable, because there is still no evidence of their belonging to Greater Bulgaria in Kuban.

And in general, by the end of the VII<sup>th</sup> century, in fact, the Bulgarians themselves might not be accurately identified. The question either the Kutrigurs and the Utigurs were a part of the Bulgarians or they were allied or closely related tribes, has been debated. In particular, A. P. Novoseltsev wrote according to this: “Procopius of Caesarea, our main informant of the events of the first half of the VI<sup>th</sup> century, in the description of the south of Eastern Europe had no ethnos term (ethnonym) “the Bulgars” and the Utigurs and the Kuturgurs are followers of the Huns. The first of them lived in the east, the second in the west of Meotida and the river Tanais (Don). Out of this, researchers make the conclusion that the Bulgarians hide under the names of the Utigurs and the Kuturgurs. But this could be doubtful if we suppose that the Bulgarians according to Procopius hide under the name of “Bruhiya”, who lived between the Abasgams and Alans, i.e., in the western Ciscaucasia. This area probably was the original place of residence of the Bulgars, from where some of their groups could go to the west in the IV<sup>th</sup> – VI<sup>th</sup> centuries. This area is called Greater Bulgaria according to Theophanes and Nicephorus. Pseudozacharia and “Armenian geography” of the VII<sup>th</sup> century fixes Bulgar here” (Novoseltsev, 1990, p. 40). Therefore, Novoseltsev also had doubts about the identification of the Bulgars with the Utigurs and the Kutrigurs. However, here we could also make our remark to Anatolii Petrovich – against unambiguous “the Don” according to Tanais is also doubtful. After all, the ancient and medieval “Tanais”, which Procopius Caesarea could actually mean, is not the Don, but the entire Seversky Donets and the lower flow of the Don (the so-called Slavic “the Great Don”). Accordingly, the geography of residence of the Turkic tribes indicated by him should also be clarified.

In general, as it becomes clear that specific evidences of the process of ethnogenesis of the Bulgarians before and including the VII<sup>th</sup> century are absent. Later, Arab scholars identified the Danube Bulgarians as the Slavs and the Volga Bulgarians as the Turks.

Thus, the identification of ancient Bulgars at the ethnic level is a big problem. This applies not only to the theory of the Turkic affiliation of the ancient Bulgarians, but also to the theory of their Slavic origin mentioned by Yu. Venelin, D. I. Ilovaisky, G. Tsenov, and the theory of Iranian origin by P. Dobrev. However, there are reasons to consider this problem not in the ethnic but in the social aspect – not as a single ethnic group that appeared on a particular tribal or generation basis but as a community that emerged on a social, caste, supra-ethnic basis. And such examples could be found in very ancient history. In particular, scholars have

drawn attention to the Achilles' Myrmidons from the Homeric epic. And such an address to them is strange only at first sight.

The fact is that the Bulgarians are just identified with the Achilles' army of the Myrmidons, who besieged Troy in one of the Greek lists of John Malala's "Chronography" (the VIth century): "Achilles... led his own army in three thousand people, who were called Myrmidon, who now are – the Bulgarians" (Greek Sources on Bulgarian History, 1954, pp. 196–197). This statement was transferred to the Slavic translation of Malala's work, where, in addition to the Bulgarians, there were the Huns among the participants in the Trojan War (The Chronicle of John Malalas, 1986, p. 48). And Procopius of Caesarea (the VIth century) already directly called the Bulgarians by name the Huns (Gyndyn, 1994, pp. 176–177, 209–210). Therefore, scholar' attention to the Myrmidons was based on historical sources but not on any strange reasons.

Thus, the Russian Slavic scholar N. V. Braginskaya, writing about the Myrmidons who took part in the Trojan War, finds that they all are refugees and exiles, notes such an interesting point: "What do we know else about the Myrmidons and what do not we know? We do not know any Myrmidons except those who are soldiers of Achilles or who are the part of the retinue of Peleus. We do not know any Myrmidon woman, any child or grandfather of Myrmidon tribe. When speak about choosing a wife for Achilles out of women living in Phthia and Greece, they are not daughters of Myrmidons, they are not Myrmidons women, but Achaeans ones. Thus, both Achaean women and Myrmidon men live in Phthia and Greece. In the "Iliad" there are not only women, old men and children of Myrmidons, but there is no single form of the word like *Myrmidon*... And so, all such exiles go on a campaign to Troy and become the fiercest force of the Achaeans. Their epithet is "armor-loving". Phthia is not their motherland, but it is their "home", Peleus and Achilles are not their fellow tribesmen, but leaders, they themselves, like King Peleus – aliens" (Braginskaya, 1990, p. 42). According to these considerations we have that Achilles and his warriors are not an ethnic tribe, but a military community, a social group, which represents the martial law, who arrived at the walls of Troy from the "Meotid Swamps", where their fortified Headquarter were probably located.

However, Mrs. Braginskaya draws the following conclusion herself: "All these oddities could be explained if we imagine that these Myrmidons are not an ethnos, but a term denoting "warriors", "guardsmen" standing in the garrison in Phthia, and willingly accept into their environment the new "passionaries". The warlords, father and son are at the head but not the indigenous kings of the land and the people. The separation of the Myrmidons from the population of the territory under Achilles and Peleus is shown in later sources. Those of Achilles' people who came after Peleus from Aegina are called Myrmidons to emphasize their foreign, foreign tribe origin (Strab. IX, 433)" (Braginskaya, 1990, p. 43).

Now let pay our attention to the first known from historical sources inhabitants of the Azov and Don-Donetsk regions – the Cimmerians, who were mentioned by the same Homer in the "Iliad". And immediately note an interesting coincidence with the theme of the Trojan War – here is a remarkable fact given by Ukrainian archaeologist V. Shcherbakovskiy: "During excavations in Kherson region, I was lucky to find in one of the graves a twisted ocher skeleton, the heel bone of which was green for some reason. A closer look revealed that in that heel bone there was the so-called triangular bronze arrow of the Scythian type. It reminded the story of the Achilles heel. The deceased apparently died, from an arrow that hit his heel, as well as Achilles did. Such contemporaries, that is existing simultaneously with the Scythian "hermits", could be called the Cimmerians" (Shcherbakivskiy, 1967, p. 571). We noted in one of our articles that, as we can see, Vadim Shcherbakivskiy has the

honour of discovering a unique burial, which might be called the burial of the “Cimmerian Achilles” (Borysova, 2008, p. 153). Noticeable, isn't it? However, the Cimmerians were contemporaries of Homer's Achilles, so there is no wonder. It should be noted that in Book 1 “The Ancient History of Ukraine” the Cimmerians are marked as “a mysterious people” (Tolochko, 1994, p. 94), but it is not explained why. The explanation is simple: there are graves of soldiers, there are many of them, and they were found in the vast geographical area of Eurasia, but there are no settlements. So what kind of “people” were they who did not have settlements? As we can see, with the identification of the Cimmerians from ethnical point of view is impossible. That is why, we offer to pay attention to other opinions about them.

Thus, with regard to the Cimmerians, N. I. Vasilieva (Vasilieva, 2009) expresses the opinion that the Cimmerians are not an ethnos term (ethnonym), but a gens term (geonym) that could be interpreted as “steppe dwellers”, and it is quite problematic to talk about their ethnicity. Yu. A. Stefanov in his theses, referring to our monograph (Borysova, 2010), notes our opinion on this as follows: “Olha Vasylyvna Borysova is inclined to believe that the Cimmerians are not an ethnic structure at all, but a “military order” of a certain religious orientation, whose knights had large-scale plans to establish their control over Eastern Europe. O. V. Borysova gives several possible interpretations of the name “Cimmerians”. She suggests that this name might be a play of words in Sanskrit from the name of the people: kim arya – “those who are arya”, pronounced differently: kim marya – “born to die”. From the standpoint of the ancient Iranian language, the name of the Cimmerians might be interpreted as “rapid troop”. Thus, at the beginning of the written period of history we encounter a supra-ethnic structure in the Azov Sea, which is a military community” (Stefanov, 2013, p. 144).

A similar situation developed with the Alans. Their origin and identification do not seem to be in doubt, but A. A. Tuallagov expresses the following opinion about them: “The Alans seemed (Aryans) to be called the social supra-tribal stratum of the “Asian Scythians” of ancient sources, related to the aristocratic houses of various nomadic associations. Its representatives were hereditary professional warriors, whose power was sacred on the basis of the traditions of the Iranian-speaking nomadic world” (Tuallagov, 1997). This opinion continues and complements the mentioned above assumptions of other authors.

Over time, the ethnic picture in the Azov and Don-Donetsk steppes changes – Germanic tribes appear here. In the middle of the II century the Goths and Hepids tribes, who lived on the “Gotyskandza island” (Gotland island), gathered and all together with their families and the acquired goods swam to the mouth of the Vistula. Approximately in 155 the Goths, the Hepids, the Heruli, the Taifals, the Vandals, the Rugii, and the others moved from the southern coast of the Baltic Sea to the southern and south-eastern directions. Their resettlement covered the territory of modern Ukraine. We cannot ignore the main motive in this Gothic “Drang nah Austen” – that the goal of the settlers was not simple, but *legendary content*, because the Goths went to search for their historical homeland – “Greater Switod” (“Greater Sweden”), from where “Little Switod” was settled, i.e., Sweden as such. And this legendary country is compared with the lands from the Azov Sea to the Don River. By the way, the famous Swedish traveller Tour Heyerdahl was also looking for the “Greater Switod”, and it was exactly on the Don at the end of the 1980s. It is clear that he did not find anything there, because myths are not such a simple phenomenon that they could be so easily deciphered. But they always have some real basis. This is a separate topic, but it should be noted that here, in our opinion, we should see the Great Idea of those times – the idea of revival of someone Ancient Empire under the leadership of an Indo-European tribe or military clan,

which conquered at least part of other Indo-European tribes. Probably, for Indo-Europeans it was ancient Ariana, the western border of which ran right along the Dnieper. And at that time everyone, who considered themselves as a descendant of its creators, wanted to revive it – under their supremacy, naturally, because the others were considered as incapable one to do such an action. Great Ideas are always powerful motives of the historical process.

Now, among all the Gothic tribes that travelled to the steppes of Proto-Ukraine, we are interested in the Geruli, namely, what they were. Once again, we are confronted with the opinion of a number of authors who note not the ethnic but the social, caste organization of Reidgotland society. P. Zolin writes: “The Eruli used in their army many slaves, at least, slaves in appearance, but probably free, even in their battles. They were forced to fight almost naked and unarmed – if they coped with this task, they were given the opportunity to become full members of the Erulian society” (Zolin, 2009). This testifies in favour of the existence of a class organization, which carried out admission to join its ranks by a certain test (initiation) of applicants. We find a similar point of view in G. S. Lebedev, who noted that the Geruli, who also awarded them the epithet “mysterious” – is “a multi-tribal military elite, who under the turbulent conditions of the IVth – the Vth centuries acquired the ability to self-organize” (Lebedev, 2005, p. 134). He is echoed by N. A. Ganina: “However, in any case, we should take into account the version of O. Hofner that “Erul” / “Gerul” – not one of the Germanic tribes but the designation of a social group united by a common cult, esoteric knowledge (runes) and, as a consequence – the military community... Perhaps, the Geruli were a military elite on a primitive territorial and tribal basis: it is difficult to imagine a caste that would include all the Germanic tribes scattered over a large area. Obviously, for some tribes the Geruli were a foreign elite and thus a foreign tribe” (Ganina, 2011, pp. 14–15).

It should be noticed that the Geruls, who settled in the Azov region, as well as Achilles and his guards, went on sea raids in Asia Minor and Greece. But we would suggest paying attention to Hofner’s characterization of the Geruls as a society united by “a common cult, esoteric knowledge (runes)”. Here is the important point! It seems that the Goths were just warriors (like the Kshatrias in India), and the Geruls were none other than warring priests (Brahmans). Here we have seen who exactly among the Germanic tribes created ethnological myths about the origin and persuaded fellow tribesmen to go on a campaign in search of the legendary homeland.

And now let’s move on to the Bulgarians. About the existence of Greater Bulgaria in the Kuban is known mainly from the reports of Theophanes the Confessor and Patriarch Nicephorus. This area was once the part of the Cimmerians, the Myrmidon Achilles, the Alans and the others. And what was the ethnic picture near Greater Bulgaria? The Western Caucasus and the Azov region were a place of active ethnic contacts. Native speakers of the Indian languages, related to Sanskrit lived here. This is considered in detail by O. M Trubachev (Trubachev, 1999). It also records the presence of numerous East Iranian tribes, as well as the Abkhaz-Adyghe peoples, whose epic “Narty” is nothing more than a description of the existence of a class military union, a military order in this area. Now it is not important who borrowed from whom, but the fact that such an epic could develop only in terms of living together and close, long communication. The most important thing for us is that the idea of the existence of a class military community is reflected in the traditions of local folklore, as well as in a multilingual environment. Later, the Turks and the Ugric peoples penetrated these places.

Yu. A. Stefanov questioned the existence of the Antae (Greek Ἄνται) in this area (Stefanov, 2013, p. 146), but we have a different opinion on it. In one of our monographs,

we cited of Pliny the Elder and Pomponius Melus (middle of the 1st century B.C.) that in their time “the Ciscaucasia, between the Caspian and the Azov Seas, there lived Cisiants in the neighbourhood with the Cimmerians, the Georgians and the Amazons”. Some scholars believe that there were two peoples: the Cis and the Antae, and the latter are associated with the Slavic Antae. We do not share this point of view. Paying attention to the tradition of the ancestors to distinguish in their environment aristocracy: “royal Scythians”, “royal Sarmats”, we assume that there were just anti (Polanians) and anti-Cis (“anti royal”, or “caesar”), who lived in the area, where Tmutarakanska Rus would later appear” (Borysova, 2005, p. 116). Again – a “mysterious people”? However, there is almost nothing about the Cisyans in the literature? But S. Mishko offers to look closely at the opinion of F. Dvornik, who calls “the tribe of Antae the most significant among the Sarmats (could they be, according to the geography of residence, “Cisiantsy”? Absolutely. – O. B.). According to Dvornik, the Slavs, turned out to be dependent on those “Sarmat Antae”, appropriate their name and started to call themselves as Antae” (Mishko, 1981, p. 45). After the death of the Antae state in 602, the term “Antae” disappeared, but in the VIIth – the VIIIth centuries in the interfluvium of the Siverskyi Donets and the Don, the Saltivskaia (later – Saltovo-Mayatsk) culture appeared. It was the culture of the Sarmatian-Alanian population and they were close to the North Caucasian Alans and the Bulgars, who lived to the east.

So we, stretching the thread from the ancient Cisyants, come up to the Bulgar. And let us ask the question, whether they were not at that time also an ethnic, but social, class association, *a military order*, as well as the Geruls, the Alans, etc., before them? Here is how interesting S. V. Finník writes that the term “the Bulgarians” (he calls it an ethnonym, but, it was not yet an ethnos term (ethnonym) from our point of view), was accepted by many representatives of the nomadic tribes of Eastern Europe because it was “obviously prestigious in their environment and could well compete with the ethnos term (ethnonym) of the powerful Guns” (Finník, 2014, p. 92). Indeed, to belong to the community of military elite among the steppe peoples was very prestigious. And taking into account the nature of the Bulgarian conquest in the Balkans, we can assume that the Balkan Slavs, who are believed to have voluntarily recognized the power of Asparuh, in fact were Slavicized by Antae tribes, which allowed generally to be controlled by the super-tribal elite – the military community. (Military order). Then the problem between the Danube-Bulgarian and Khazar fierce confrontation becomes clear: if Asparuh was the leader of the military order but Khazars, who held a dominant position in the Khazar Kaganate, deprived him of dominance in Azov and Prikuban territories, then this is the reason for the confrontation. In this case, Batbayan, who lived quietly in Khazaria, was the leader of an ethnically or culturally close to the Khazars unit, which might have been little connected with the community that followed Asparuh. However, the documents do not record the presence of Bulgarian tribes in Asparuh Bulgaria, but the presence of genera is quite possible in the class organization.

In this context, we can explain the term “Bulgarians” – in the “Scythian-Sarmatian Dictionary” V. I. Abayeva has the word “bala – ‘military force’”, it is possible that it is close to the semantics of the Bulgarian name – bl(gare). On the other hand, the “Nomenclature of Bulgarian Princes” there is lists the Bulgarian rulers who belonged to different clans (See: Stefanov, 2013, p. 146), which fully corresponds with the election of leadership in caste organizations, otherwise it is difficult to explain such change of dynasties.

There is another problem – the language of the Bulgarians who came to the Balkans with Asparuh. It could be any spoken language which the military elite used. Researchers cite many

facts about the presence of the East Iranian substrate (features) in modern Bulgarian. In this region, the influence of different languages on the language of the military community could take place. In particular, it could be the Slavs-Imenkivtsi language, who, leaving their places of residence, could influence well on the language situation in the region. And the language of Imenkivtsi, according to V. V. Napol'skykh, was a different version of the development of the Slavic languages than, so to speak, classical (Report: Napol'skykh, 2006). The fact is that the language in the military community plays mainly its main function – communicative, so it is always chosen a more convenient language in the region, which is spoken by the majority of the population, with whom you need to contact at least to get food without problems.

It is worth referring to the parallels in the grammar, syntax and morphology of the Adyghe language and the languages of the Balkan Language Union, which are cited by I. Karasiov (Karasev, 2010). And the similarity of Adyghe grammar with Bulgarian one raises the question: whether the Balkan future Language Union did not begin to form in the Ciscaucasia? Assuming there is such a variant so then it becomes clearer the difference in grammar between the ancient Bulgarian (Church Slavonic) language, based on the dialect of the city of Thessaloniki in the ninth century, and modern Bulgarian, which was based on other dialects. At that time, the power of Bulgarian state did not extend over Thessaloniki, and there could be a close, but not Antae, but Sklavian dialect (Stefanov, 2013, p. 147). And D. G. Polivanny notes that a number of ancient toponyms in Bulgaria nowadays belong to the Slavic language group: “Ongol – “ugol” (angle, corner), Plyska, Varna, Serdets, Tyrnovo, etc.; the names of the ancient Bulgarian aristocracy were predominantly Slavic: Slavna, Voin, Zvinitsa, Vladimir, Malomir, etc. (Polyvannyi, 2000, p. 21). So, as we can see, if we take the view that the Bulgarians who came to the Balkans with Khan Asparuh were not an ethnic but a class union, it is quite easy to explain still confusing problems of the language history.

It should be mentioned the fact that later after the departure of the Bulgars from PriAzov and PriKuban and setting of Khazar's influence there emerged communities in this region. They might rather be called not ethnic but social-class, the so-called wanderers (brodniky), later – the Cossacks. The latter were already at an early stage a class-military union, in which the ethnic dominant was expressed rather sluggishly. Many researchers of the Zaporozhian Cossacks directly use the term “Order” according to the Zaporozhian Sich and interpret the Ukrainian Cossacks as medieval knights. And in general, the Cossack freemen, who flourished so brightly in the Middle Ages in eastern Ukraine. It was nothing more than the last outbreak of the ancient military estates of the communities, whose members called each other “brothers”.

By the way, we can assume that the term “Cossack”, which for a long time meant a representative of the Zaporozhian military order, with the emergence of the Ukrainian Cossack War Order, began to transform into an ethnonym gradually, because in Taras Shevchenko's works there is no ethnos term (ethnonym) “Ukrainian” (a man Ukrainets) or “Ukrainian” (a woman Ukrainka) in spite of this all his works are imbued with the name “Ukraine”. And what does he have? “the Cossack” (a man Cossak), “Cossack” (a woman Cossachka). This was the ethnos term (ethnonym) of the Ukrainians in New Time, although it was not destined to mature into a full-name of the people, the nation because of the destructive policy of the Russian Empire against Ukraine and its people, into which B. Khmelnytskyi involved Ukraine so carelessly. But the Bulgarians were more fortunate – the estate and social term “Bulgarians” in the new lands in the Balkans survived and matured into a full-fledged ethnos term (ethnonym) “Bulgarians”.

**The Conclusions.** Thus, we have reason to believe that the ancient Bulgarians, some of whom came out in the second half of the VIIIth century with Khan Asparuh on a campaign in the Balkans and founded there the First Bulgarian Kingdom, were not an ethnic but a social union, a military community, it could be used the term “military order”. The tradition of creating such military orders was appropriated for the Indo-Aryan tribes and their descendants from ancient times and could be traced back to the end of the Middle Ages in the community of the Ukrainian Cossacks. Destruction of Zaporozhian Sich by Russian authorities in the XVIIIth century interrupted this ancient tradition forever.

**Acknowledgements.** The author expresses sincere gratitude to her colleague Tetiana Odyntsova, a senior lecturer at Luhansk National Agrarian University, for her help in translating the text.

**The Funding.** The author received no financial support for the publication of this article.

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*The article was received November 22, 2020.  
Article recommended for publishing 24/11/2021.*