

THE MEANING OF THE ETNONYM BULYAR⁺

by

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The literature on the etymology of the etnonym Bulyar is to be found in Moravcsik (1958, p. 104). Since 1958, some publications have dwelt on the topic; I shall deal with them, so far as they are known to me, without observing a chronological order.

Tomaschek (1872, p. 156, 1877, p. 683), more than a hundred years ago, explained the etnonym Bulyar as "Mischling" from the Turkic verb bulga- "to mix"¹. The earlier data, as far as I can see, do not offer any substantial help concerning the explanation of the name. A new and exhaustive critical review of the material, which in some respect not always clear, can be found in Doerfer 1963-75 II, pp. 315-320, 353-354². Most recently, we read in Räsänen 1969: bulyar "Volksname, Bulgarei < bulga-r "mischend".

In the year 1927, when I had the good fortune to become acquainted with my highly esteemed colleague, V. Beševliev, I tried to give a thorough phonetical and semantical explanation of this name (Németh 1927). I found

+ First published in German: Die Bedeutung des bulgarischen Volksnamen: Studia in Honorem Veselini Beševliev, Sofia 1978, 68-71.

that phonetically the explanation is acceptable, and I agreed with it, but I translated the name as "gemischtes (Volk)", assuming, in accordance with my opinion of that time, that it was connected with the mixing of the Huns and Bulgars in the Caucasus region. At that time, however, I had also an other semantical explanation in mind, which I pointed out at the end of my paper: "Je veux observer enfin que dans l'inscription de Tonyuquq (1.22. respectivement 23 dans Radloff) on trouve également un mot dérivé du verb bulğa- pour caractériser l'état de la nation: (türk bodun' i yime) bulğanc (ol timiř), mots que Thomsen traduit³: 'Das Türkenvolk ist in Unruhe, (sagte er)...' tandis que dans Radloff, Alttürk. Inschr. Zw. F. S. 11, nous lisons: '(Das Türk-Volk ist) in Verwirrung... sagten sie' -- La ville hindoue de Lakhnauti porte également le nom turc de Bulğak-pur 'ville du désordre, de l'émeute' (von Le Coq, Türkische Namen und Titel in Indien, Mélanges Garbe 1927, p.2)".

I repeated in 1930 this possible explanation in more details in my book on the land conquering of the Hungarians (Németh 1930 pp. 95-97). There I also cited the OT expression il bulğayınğa (Müller 1910, p.78, line 35), "in die Staatsverwirrung" and added: "It is clear that an attribute which - as we see - often denotes the (political) situation of a state or a people, becomes easily an

etnonym."

In the last years, on strength of the data on the verb bulʒa- and its derivatives provided by the new OT dictionary of the Soviet Academy (DTS) and based on the knowledge gathered over more than fifty years on the OT etnonyms, I abandoned the former semantic explanation and prefer my second one, because it is not connected with a historical hypothesis but only with linguistic facts.

The DTS, this highly important epoch making work of the respective Russian and Soviet Turkology, gives the following meanings of bulʒa- "1. peremešivat', smešivat'; to mix (e.g. drugs), 2. mutit'; to stir (water), the same in figurative sense; 3. dosaždat', obižat', pečalit', omračat', vredit'; to vex, to offend, to 'sadden, to overshadow, to hurt; 4. возбуždat' nedovol'stvo, sejat' smutu; to instigate, incite disaffection, revolt".

I would like now to stress, that the meaning under No. 4 often occurs in connection with the political situation of a people and that the OT etnonyms are predominantly connected with political circumstances.

In the DTS we find in addition to the already cited data: bulʒaq "zamešatel'stvo, возбуždenie, bezpokojsstvo, smjatenie, panika" with many citations (in Gabain 1950, p.305 "Verwirrung, Aufruhr", Doerfer 1962, p.261 "Rebellion"). Dr. Zieme called my attention to the quotation



örlet-bulya- "mučit' i privodit' v zamešatel'stvo" (DTS, p. 389). I would add from the DTS phrases as el bulandı "v narode načinalis' smuty" (Kaşğ.), ötrü gama éliñiz bulanyay "togda vse vaše gosudarstvo pridet v smjatenie" (TT II), bodun bulyanuqin siyasät süzär "volnenie naroda uspokaivaet diplomatija" (QB) etc.

Likely suggestive are the data from the newest and best dictionary of the only surviving Bulgar-Turkic language, the Chuvash (Sirotkin 1961): pälxav (< bulyaq) "bunt, mjatež; volnenie, tregova", pälxavär "perepoloh, sumatoha, tregoga; (archaic) vosstanie", pälxavlä "mjatežnyj, smutnyj", pälxavšä "buntar', mjatežnik", pälxan- "stanovit'sja mutnym, mutit'sja; buntovat'; volnovat'sja, bezpokoit'sja" (fact. pälxantar-), pälxanu "smuta, bunt; volnenie, tregoga, sumatoha", pälxanullä "smutnyj, mjatežnyj, mjatežno; trevožnyj, trevožno", pälxar "bolgarin, bolgarskij", pälxarla "po bolgarskij; bolgarskij"; pälxat- "mutit' (židkost'); vorožit' (napr. vešči)", in figurative sense: "sejat' smutu, podstrekat', priživat' k buntu".

These are surprising and archaic data on the explanation of an archaic ethnonym and likely peculiar are the occurrences in the OT inscriptions already cited further in Ibn Muhanna bulyaq, Kumyk bulgavur (!) "smuta, smjatenie, neurjadica", Alt, Verbickij (1884) pilgaq, Khakass pilgax, pulgax "sumahota smjatenie, vozmuščenje,

trevoga" etc. (see Egorov 1964, p.147, Joki 1952).

The ethonym Bulgar pertains here too. We do not know what the meaning of bulgar was as an appellative; it does not occur as such. The verb bulga- has the following meaning in a political context: "to cause a state of disorder" (and not "to resist") and the nomen verbale with -r: bulgar "Aufwühler, Aufwiegler, Revolutionär", Bulgar is thus: "das Volk der Revolutionäre, das Volk von Leuten, die gegen die Herrschaft zum Aufruhr reizen".

The name is a symbol of the love of freedom of the Bulgarian people. This is not an empty phraseology. The word race has been often discredited, but the people have their character.

I have dealt with the double category "loyal-rebel" in the Turkic etnonyms in 1930 (pp. 38-39). To this pertains Bulgar on the one hand, and, on the other, the etnonyms Avšar "der sich ergibt", Šah-seven "der den Shach lieb hat" and most likely Uyğur "folgend, sich anpassend".

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The new literature on the name offers nothing of essential importance. Pelliot's opinion can be found in Pelliot 1949, p.228, with a meticulous analysis of the carefully collected data. He writes: "...Ne serait-il pas possible, que Bulgar fut en réalité une forme à

suffixe -ǵar du verbe bul- qui signifie "trouver", et par suite, au point de vue sémantique, un synonyme de Tapar ~ Tabar dont il a été question plus haut (p. 183)? Sans pouvoir en administrer la preuve formelle, c'est à cette solution que j'incline actuellement".

The Pelliot's hypothesis is subtly conceived, but semantically very weak (and morphologically not very successful).

A very good short summary of the earlier investigations can be found in Vasmer's Russian etymological dictionary (Vasmer I, p. 102).

For various reasons it is to be very important to me what J. B. Rudnickij writes (1962)⁴: (bolhárin) "The name is generally considered as a Tk. borrowing in Sl., the ultimate source being OTk. bulgar half-breed, one of mixed race", cf. bulǵamak "to mix"; according to Pelliot, Oeuvres posthumes 2 (Paris 1950), 228-229, the name orig. meant "rebell, troubler" [on loc. cit. Pelliot says nothing similar, this is my hypothesis layed in 1927.]; in his Origins of Russia (87) G. Vernadsky derives the name from the Alanic: "in Ossetic bylgaeron "means shore, bank (of a river)"; also "edge (of a bluff, or a hill)". On this basis the name "Bulgar" might be interpreted as "Shore people". The name seems to be of the same type as that of the Slavic tribe Pomonare ("Sea

Shore" tribe). It should be noted that in Byzantine sources the area of the Origin of Great Bulgaria is defined as stretching from Maeotis (i.e. Sea of Azov) to the "Kouphis (i.e. Kuban) River" [a not very convincing hypothesis]; inconceivable are attempts to derive the name from G. Balger "fighter", Dečev ZONF 2, 198-199, or from the name of the Volga River respectively".

See also the new etymological dictionary of the Bulgarian language: Bălgarski étimologičen rečnik, p. 99.

Notes

- ¹ On a collation of data, connections and etymology of this verb see in Joki 1952, pp. 88, 109. I would add the data of Abušqa (Ed. by Á. Vámbéry, p. 37), Tarama Sözlüğü: bulgalak, Derleme Sözlüğü: bul- etc.
- ² I do not see Boodberg, HJAS I, p. 291 cited.
- ³ ZDMG NF, III, p. 165, Samlede Afhandlinger III, p. 507; see most recently Beševliev 1970.
- ⁴ L. Kiss was kind to call my attention to this work. I have to offer my thanks to him also for some other data.