

IRSTI 03.91.00.

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## **BULGARS RELATIONS WITH BIZANTINE AND FRANKS DURING KRUM HAN AND OMURTAG**

The subject of the article is the relationship of Bulgarian Turks with Byzantium and Franks during the reign of the two important khans of the Danube Bulgarian Khanate Kurum Khan and his son Omurtag. After he came to the throne, Kurum Khan taking advantage of the result of the war between the Franks and the Avars, in 805 he annexed the last remaining lands of the Avar Khanate. In this way, it became a border with Byzantium and Franks. He banned the bad habits that brought the end of the Avars in his Khanate and in this way prevented their end from being the same. He proclaim the new laws in order for living together with any problem, for the people of Slavic and Turkish origin in Bulgarian Khante. By killing Nicephorus I Genikos he went even further in his relations with Byzantium and almost reached the gate of Constantinople. After his death and after a short period of turmoil ascended his son Omurtag Khan the throne. Without thinking, in order to manage his father's heritage more easily, he signed a 30-year agreement with Byzantium and tried to straighten his relations with the Franks. He started a war, when was ignored by the Franks, with whom he could not get along. After signing a peace settlement with the Franks about the border line, he made efforts for the developing of his state. He reworked the old salt mines and strengthened his country economically.

**Key words:** Turk, Bulgar, Avar, Byzantium, Franks, border, Charles the Great, Kurum, Omurtag, Nicephorus I Genikos.

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### **Болгар мемлекетінің Құрым Хан және Омуртаг Хан кезіндегі Византия және Франк елдерімен қарым-қатынасы**

Мақаланың тақырыбы Дунай Болгар мемлекетінің екі маңызды билеушілері болған Құрым хан және оның ұлы Омуртаг хан тұсындағы болгар түріктерінің Византия және франк елдерімен қарым-қатынастарына арналған. Құрым хан, таққа отырғаннан кейін франктармен аварлар арасындағы соғыс нәтижесін өз пайдасына жаратып 805 жылы авар мемлекетінен қалған соңғы жерлерді өзіне қосып алды. Осының арқасында Византиямен және франктар мемлекетімен шекаралас елге айналды. Мемлекет құрамындағы славян және түркі тектес халықтардың қиындықсыз бірлесе өмір сүруі мақсатында заңдар қабылданған болатын. Византиямен қарым-қатынасын сәтті жүргізген ол тіпті I Никифор Геникті мерт қылып Константинополь түбіне дейін жеткен еді. Құрым хан өлімінен кейін қысқа уақыт сүрген талас нәтижесінде ұлы Омуртаг хан таққа отырған болатын. Әкесінен қалған елді еркін басқару үшін, ол көп ойланбастан Византиямен 30 жылдық бейбіт келісімге қол қояды және франктармен қарым-қатынасын түзеуге тырысады. Бірақ франктармен келісімге келе алмаған ол бірден соғыс бастап кетеді. Франктармен шекара мәселесі бойынша келісім шартқа қол қойғаннан кейін мемлекетті одан әрмен дамытуға тырысты. Бұрынғы тұз өндіретін орындар қайта ашылып мемлекет экономикалық тұрғыдан күшейтілген болатын.

**Түйін сөздер:** Түркі, Болгар, Авар, Византия, Франк, шекара, Ұлы Карл, Құрым, Омуртаг, I. Никифор Геник.

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### **Отношения болгар с Византией и франками во время правления Крум хана и Омуртаг хана**

Предмет статьи отношения болгар с Византией и франками в период правления Крум-Хана и его сына Омуртага-Хана, двух наиболее важных ханов Дунайского болгарского государства. После вступления на престол, Крум-хан воспользовавшись войной между франками и аварами, в

805 году аннексировал последние оставшиеся земли Аварского ханства. Таким образом, он стал приграничным соседом с Византией и франками. Он предотвратил вредные привычки, которые привели к гибели аваров, запретив их в своем собственном государстве. Он издал законы, позволяющие людям славянского и тюркского происхождения жить вместе без каких-либо проблем. Продолжая свои отношения с Византией, он убил Никифор I Геника и почти достиг ворот Константинополя. После его смерти, после короткого периода смут, на престол вззошел его сын Омуртаг-хан. Чтобы легче было распоряжаться наследством своего отца, он не раздумывая подписал 30-летний мирный договор с Византией и попытался наладить свои отношения с франками. Когда он получил отказ от франков с которыми он не смог поладить, он начал войну. Подписав мирный договор с франками и определив границы, он приложил усилия для развития своего государства. Он восстановил старые соляные копи и укрепил свою страну экономически.

**Ключевые слова:** Тюрк, Болгар, Авар, Византия, Франки, границы, Карл Великий, Крум, Омуртаг, Никифор I Геник.

## Introduction

No one doubts anymore that the Bulgarians have Turkish origin. The most important and still did not determined question is, that where the Bulgarians lived long ago, to which Turkish tribe they belonged, and when they came to the Sea of Azov (Kurat, 1972: 108). The phrase “Bulgarian” could not be explained in any language other than Turkish, and it means to meddle, to get involved and to be confused (Kafesoğlu, 1982: 92). In 149-127 BC Bulgarians were in the north of the Caucasus, and according to the results of the archaeological researches in Tatarstan, their lineage dates back to the Usuns in Central Asia (Kurat, 1972: 108). According to some historians, the Bulgarians are descendants of the Ting-Lings, which is mentioned in Chinese sources. These Ting-Lings are Onogurs the ancestors of the Bulgarians (Kurat, 1979: 782).

Onogurs later settled in Western Siberia and spread till the Volga area. In the II-III. centuries the Onogurs mixed with the Great Hun crew and participated with them in the “Great Exodus”. During the Great Hun Empire which is founded by Attila, the Bulgarians settled in the north of the Black Sea (Kurat, 1972: 109).

With the death of Attila in 453, the Hun State was dissolved and the Bulgars came to the stage of history again under the leadership of Attila’s younger son İrnek and in the 7th century established a state in the north of the Black Sea, from the Caucasus to the Danube (Karatay, 2010: 2). Bulgarians are divided into two groups and one of them Utigurs had a state in the area of Kuban and Kutrigurs in the west among the Bessarabia and the branches of the Danube. Perhaps this division into two result from the division of Oghuz tribes into “right” and “left” arm in the past (Köprülü, 1939: 5).

The Kutrigur Bulgars, who settled on the Dnepr and Danube rivers, occasionally attacked the neigh-

bor Byzantium. In order to avoid the aggressive attitudes of his new neighbors, who settled near the Empire, Byzantium either provoked them against each other or put them into service in his army, protecting his borders from the attacks of the Germanic crews (Ziemann, 2009: 21). Byzantium carried out both of its policies against the Bulgarians successfully. It is understood from the sources that in 482, Emperor Zenon took some of the Kutrigur Bulgars into his service (Kurat, 1972: 109).

Bulgars, as a result of the political changes in the VI century, came under the rule of the Göktürk Khanate, which was established in 552 (Kafesoğlu, 1982: 96). The end of the Göktürk Khanate gave the Bulgars, as the Uyghurs and Kyrgyz, the chance to establish their own state. At this time Kubrat, son of Organa (Orhan), who was at the head of the Kutrigurs, declared himself khan and established the Old Great Bulgaria (Akıncı, 2019: 34). After the death of Kubrat Khan, with the pressure of the Khazar Khanate the state was divided among the sons. One of Kubrat Khan’s sons, Asparuh (Espereh), went to the Danube, crossed into the Balkans and founded the First Bulgarian Empire (679) (Kafesoğlu, 1982: 102). Hereby, it came to the stage of history a Bulgarian state, which is founded by a Turks and as a result of Slavic pressure in time changed its language and religion becoming Christianised.

## Materials and methods

The bibliography of this article is works written in Turkish, Russian, German and English. The article, was written as a result of the analysis of these works. The available literature has been scientifically researched and written as a result of analysis and synthesis. The famous historian A.N. Kurat gave extensive information about the Turkish origins of the Bulgarians in his book (Kurat, 1972). Fuat Köprülü, explained in his article (Köprülü, 1939) the reasons

why Oghuz Turks were divided into two groups as inside and outside, right and left. İbrahim Kafesoğlu (Kafesoğlu, 1998: 102) explained in detail the history of the First Bulgarian Empire in his book. John V.A. Fine Jr. analyzed widely the years of dominance and activities of Kurum Han and Omurtag Han in his book (Fine Jr.).

### Results and discussion

At the beginning of the IX. century, there were radical changes in the political history of the Bulgarians, the wars between the tribes stopped and began the period of rapid rise and expansion of the Empire (Zlatarski, 1983: 125). The First Bulgarian Empire, which Asparuh established in the southern region of Dobruja, despite the opposition of Byzantium, began to transform into a large and powerful Slavic state that ruled in the central and eastern Balkans (Aydin, 2002: 118). After the adoption of Orthodox Christianity by Boris Khan in 864 (Yalçın, 2009: 556) and the configuration of the Slavic literary language and culture, the First Bulgarian Empire became in the Balkans and in the Orthodox world the rival number one of Byzantium (Feher, 1984: 53). The clashes of the Bulgarians were no longer limited to Byzantium, but were directed towards their northern neighbors. They were not content themselves with defending, but turned into an aggressive occupant community. The warrior leader Kurum Khan became the head of the First Bulgarian Empire. Kurum Han, who ascended the throne in 802 or 803, became the founder of a new and famous dynasty in history (Zlatarski, 1983: 125).

At the beginning of the IX. century, there was the Avar Khaganate between the Frankish and Bulgarian borders, and it seemed impossible to build a direct relationship between the two. As a result of the Avar's close interest in the affairs of Lombardy and Bavaria, which were considered to be the Frankish domains, Charles the Great (Charlemagne) decided to solve the Avar issue completely. In 791, Charles the Great started a campaign against the Avars (Karatay, Gökdağ, 2006: 91). After nine years of war, Charles the Great, who defeated the Avars, extended his borders to the Raba River (Curta, 2019: 102). After this event, Charles the Great was crowned as Emperor in 800 (Eginhard and the Monk of St Gall, 1922: 172). The Bulgarians, who were affected by the Avar-Frank war, immediately took the credit for themselves. The thing is that after the collapse of The First Bulgarian Empire, some of the Bulgarians took refuge in Pannonia and became subject to the Avar Khaganate (Kafesoğlu, 1982: 96). The Panno-

nian Bulgars used the weakening of the Avars for uniting with their relatives Bulgars in the Balkans to oppose the Avars (Karatay, Serkan, 2017: 285). In 803, Avars were attacked from the west by Charles the Great and from the east by the Bulgarian Khan Kurum (Walther, 2002: 302). The war resulted in the complete destruction of the Avar Khaganate. Its lands were divided among the Franks and Bulgarians. The land from the Tisa River to the Sava River became the border line between the Franks and the Bulgarians (Fine, 1991: 94). The Slavs living here were defined as the property of Krum Khan, and they began economically and politically concern to the state (Stoyanov, 2003: 14). Until 805, Krum Khan cleared its lands from the Avars (Karatay, Serkan, 2017: 285).

After defeating the Avars, Krum Khan tried to find out how the state came to such end, instead of taking more land from them. For that purpose, Kurum Khan asked some questions to the Avar captives: "Why did you trust so much in your own leader that the result of your Empire was so disastrous?" The answer of the Avars was so: "The number of mutual accusations has increased, brave and prudent people have disappeared. Later, tortfeasors and thieves began to break the law, drunkenness and bribery spread" (Nikolov, 2018: 85). It seems that alcohol, pleasure and ease brought the end of the state. Thereupon, Krum Khan held a meeting and banned alcohol (Karatay, Serkan, 2017: 285). Having completely defeated the Avars, Krum to avoid the same end rearranged his politics. In 806, Krum Khan, who made a meeting according to the old Turkish traditions, announced that he was enacting new laws. According to these laws, the Khan will strengthen the state, increase the number of the army, and develop a sense of mutual aid among its citizens, regardless of religion or ethnicity (Fine, 1991: 103).

After Krum Khan destroyed the Avar Khanate, he had become common borders with the Franks. Then, Krum Khan attacked in 808 Byzantine lands along the Struma River (Fine, 1991: 95) and in 809 annexed the Sardika (Sofia) Castle, the lands of the upper Struma (Usturma) and Mesta rivers to his lands (Zlatarski, 1925: 369). The Byzantine Emperor Nicephorus I. Genikos, who was disturbed by this situation, was very angry and implied that the army commanders did not do all that they might have defended the town. Thereupon, the army commanders changed sides and fled to Krum Khan (Fine, 1991: 95). In 811, Nicephorus I. Genikos, trying to avenge Sardika (Sofia), led a massive campaign to Bulgaria, attacked the capital Pliska and massacred the people (Vernadski, 1996: 170). Krum Khan

who has heard about this situation abandoned the capital. He held out offers of peace to Nicephorus I Genikos, but the emperor who was celebrated his victory rejected this offer (Zlatarski, 1983: 129). Subsequently, Krum Khan entrapped the absent Byzantine army and killed all of them, including the emperor (Vernadski, 1996: 170). Krum Khan made a goblet from the head of Nicephorus I. Genikos and drank from it with the Slavic princes (Wolf, 1949: 168 -169). After that, Krum Khan was seen in the eyes of the Slavs as the “Conqueror of the Byzantine Emperor” (Zlatarski, 1925: 369).

After Nicephorus I. Genikos was killed, his son Staurakios, who was seriously wounded in the war, also died. Michael I Rangabe the husband of Nicephorus’s daughter was a new ruler. Realizing that there was no one between him and Constantinople (Istanbul), Krum Khan kept attacking the Byzantine lands continually. The Byzantine side instead of coming to an agreement with him, plotted an assassination for Krum Khan, who was approaching Constantinople (Istanbul). In 814 Krum assembled a huge army and launched a new campaign that was aimed at Constantinople (Istanbul) but he died on the way (Karliychev, Morison, 1939: 266).

After the death of Krum Khan, there was a turmoil in the country for a short time. Using Krum Khan’s young and inexperienced son Omurtag, the Boyars took control of the administration. The leader of these Boyars was Tsog, whose name was mentioned in Byzantine sources as “The Cruel Follower of the Christians”. Tsog began to follow Christians, as well as the Bulgarian nobility who embraced the Christianity (Vernadski, 1996: 171). In 814, after a short period of turmoil, Omurtag started to rule the state inherited from his father (Fine, 1991: 106).

After his father, Omurtag Khan needed peace to manage the state, and in 816, a thirty-year peace was signed between Omurtag and Byzantine Emperor Leo V, which was planned to be renewed every ten years (Kafesoğlu, 1982: 205).

Both sides swore that they would stick to the peace treaty, even though it seemed too exaggerated to Byzantium. What’s interesting was that each side swore also by other’s custom. The peace treaty was considered very advantageous for the Bulgarians. Since the Bulgarians needed peace during this period, the peace treaty was considered very advantageous for them. The army was almost all beat up, and the capital Pliska was still in trouble after destroying by Emperor Nicephorus I. The Byzantine and Bulgarian Empery remained loyal to this peace treaty for a long time (thirty years). In fact, in 823 when Constantinople (Istanbul) was held by the rebel

Thomas the Slav, Omurtag sent his army to Byzantium to the aid of Michael II (Fine, 1991: 106).

Omurtag signed a thirty-year peace treaty with Byzantium at the beginning of his reign and remained loyal to it until the end of his life. Using the aggressive policy of the Franks, he united the Northwest Bulgarians and succeeded to concuss the Slavs. The period of Omurtag was very efficient in terms of culture and architecture (Aydın, 2002: 120).

Both Omurtag Khan and his son Melemir Khan benefited from the thirty-year peace treaty which was signed with Byzantium (Hupchick, 2002: 39). In Malamir’s inscriptions from 836, we find a reference to this peace treaty: “My father Omurtag Khan, made a thirty-year peace and lived well with them (Greeks). I also, lived well with them in the beginning, but the Greeks devastated our lands” (Beshevliev, 1992: 136).

Because of the treaty, Omurtag Khan was relieved for many years due to the Byzantine border. It seemed, Byzantine-Bulgarian relations had improved, albeit for 30 years. However, relations between Franks and Bulgars had still remained unsolved. During the Omurtag period, the Bulgars began to pay more attention to the western border. There was continuous trouble with the Franks in the western border.

After the fall of the Avar Khaganate, the Slavs on the Timok River, had been allied to the Bulgars, but the Croats in the west to the Franks. None of the Slav groups were satisfied with Omurtag Khan’s “policy of following the Christians” and tried to break their relation with the Bulgars (Curta, 2019: 96).

In 819, Croatian count Ljudevit setted against to the Frank empire. Later Timok Slavs allied themselves with Ljudevit. Apparently there was established a new Croatian-Slavic community. After several years the Franks subdued Ljudevit, ending his secession. In 823, both Croatia and the Slavs were under the Franks (Fine, 1991: 107).

At this time, the Bulgars, who claimed that the Slavs belonged to them, objected to the situation. Between 824 and 826, Omurtag Khan sent Bulgarian embassies to the Frankish emperor’s palace. Though there was no relationship between them and the Bulgarian embassies who attended the meeting, surprised Emperor Louis the Pious (Curta, 2019: 96).

Omurtag Khan offered to the emperor a peace treaty with his embassies on the definition of the borderlines between the two states along the Danube and Tisa rivers. But Emperor Louis the Pious professed to have heard a rumour that the Khan had died, and sent to the Eastern frontier to find out more

about it (Runciman, 1930: 83). For this reason, it didn't seem they the Emperor would be signing the peace treaty. Long conversations between Omurtag and Frank Emperor Louis the Pious did not give any results. The Franks hedged and Omurtag Khan sent an army against them and punished them (Stepanov, 2016: 201). The Franks who were floating along the Danube and Drava had been repulsed (Vernadski, 1996: 172). He expelled the local Slavic chiefs and installed Bulgar governors (Fine, 1991: 107).

After that, in 830-831 they signed a peace treaty, which terms did not reach us (Nikolov, 2018: 90). Omurtag Khan took the Danube-Sava-Drava basin as a result of his war with the Frankish emperor and thereby rerunning the salt mines in the Maros River valley won it for his empire (Kafesoğlu, 1998: 205). He controlled the trade routes passing through Sofia, Nish, Belgrade and Eastern Hungary, which were captured during the reign of his father Krum Khan and made Byzantium and Franks come to terms with him (Aydın, 2002: 120). On the other hand, Omurtag Khan mended the city of Pliska, which was devastated during the reign of Nicephoros I. Genikos, and laid the foundations of the city of Preslav, which would become the new capital (Akıncı, 2019: 45).

## Conclusion

After Krum Khan ceased to exist of the Avar Khanate, it became a border neighbor with Byzantium and Franks. Krum Khan, who claimed the lands of the Avars, drew conclusions from the events and produced new laws in order not to suffer the same

fate. Thanks to the laws, Krum Khan strengthened the state and ensured the coexistence of Slavic and Turkish elements.

After claiming the lands of the Avars, Krum Khan no longer defended himself against Byzantium as before, but turned into an aggressive neighbor. The conflict with Emperor Nicephoros I. Genikos was ended with plundering of the capital Pliska and the murder of its inhabitants, but it did not deter him. He entrapped the Emperor and destroyed him with his army. Then without giving up he went to Constantinople (Istanbul). However, as a result of his sudden death, his expedition was left unfinished.

After his death, there was turmoil among the Bulgarians, albeit for a short time, but his son Omurtag Khan became the head of the state. Omurtag Khan, who needed peace after his father, acted wisely and signed a thirty-year peace with Byzantium. After normalizing his relations with Byzantium, Omurtag Khan headed towards the western border – towards the Franks. When he realized that had been neglected by the Franks about the definition of the border lines, the war broke out between the two empires.

Towards the IX. century, relation between Franks and Bulgars were in trouble and have undergone some changes. Such that Charles the Great (Charlemagne) ignored the Bulgarians after defeating the Avars; his son Louis the Pious dismissed the Bulgar ambassador without giving any answer. The grandsons of Charles the Great (Charlemagne), on the contrary, gave importance to their relations with the Bulgarians and lived well with them.

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