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Ethnic Perceptions, Shaping of Identities and the Emerging of Statehood – the Case of Bulgar Tribes in 5th – 7th Century

(Abstract)

The present article aims to carry an overview how the Bulgar/Protobulgarian tribes seemingly kept changing in the 5th – 7th c. or at least they did in the eyes of the contemporary writers and chroniclers. The text follows the main sources and comments on their information, comparing evidence and drawing conclusions. The first period reviewed is the one immediately after the collapse of Atilla's state and then the 6th c., when Bulgar troops became well-known as enemies and mercenaries of the big empires of the time – Byzantium, the Steppe empire and Sassanian Iran. It is considered that the Bulgar own political organization kept developing, culminating in the establishment of Old Great Bulgaria. The text contain many references to well-known sources, but also to not so popular or even ones that have not been commented at all in the Bulgarian historical tradition as the poem by pre-Islamic poet Al-Asha. Cases like the “Bookolobras affair” from the late 6th c. have been reviewed and connected to early Bulgarian history. The general conclusion is that the Bulgar ethnonym had ethnic but also strong political dimension from its very first appearance until the founding of Danube Bulgaria and the changing political situation, also brought

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significant ethnic changes, described by key scholars as “Second Bulgarian ethnogenesis”.

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