

THE HISTORY OF THE CHUVASH PEOPLE IN ETHNOGRAPHIC FACTS

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Abstract: The paper is devoted to the spirited discussion on the vexed question of the historical ancestors of the Chuvash people. Some researchers consider the ancestors of modern Chuvash as Bulgars, others as Savirs (Suvars). The aim of the presented study is to demonstrate the substrate parallels of modern Chuvash with the Savirs (Suvars) in lieu of the ethnographic facts. The author uses a comparative-historical methodology to prove that the main historical and ethnographic references of the Chuvash are traced back to the traditions of the Caucasian peoples. The Savirs worshiped the deity of lightning *Quar*. In 922 those who disagreed with the religious reforms of the first ruler (emir) of Volga Bulgaria Almush Elteber moved to the right bank of the Volga River. From this time, the rise of the ethnic self-identity of the Suvars intensifies.

Keywords: history, ethnography, the Chuvash, the Savirs / Suvars, the Bulgars.

1. INTRODUCTION

The relevance of the topic lies in the very debatable history of the Chuvash ancestors. Still, the theory of ancient Chuvash outcome from Central Asia is dominating. This theory is mostly supported by the indirect linguistic arguments, however, it lacks of direct historical, ethnographic and ethno-toponymical sources. There is also confusion with other quasi-scientific tribes (Cheshi, Sibir, Dingling). The paper analyzes the available ethnographic facts in a comparatively historical perspective.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sources and publications reflecting the real history of the Chuvash ancestors of the II - XVIII centuries were selected as the main material of the research. According to available publications the historical ancestors of the Chuvash are known as *the Savirs/Sabirs/Suvars*. Although the thesis remains open, it contains enough ground for scientific research. The problem is that there are two rival schools of thought on the origin of the Chuvash people: Bulgarian and Suvar. Up to date, the first one has unquestionably dominated, but recently the second acquired more reliable vindications [Bulatov, Dimitriev 1962: 226-236; Kakhovsky 1972: 200-217; Taimasov 2001: 7-33; Mukhamadiev 2011: 80, 86; Salmin 2014; 2015]. To verify the veracity of a particular version arguments in the form of a system of facts are required. Therefore, the author offers the analysis of the Sabir version with the reliance on ethnographic facts.

3. RESULTS

The author considers the year of 922 as the beginning of the formation of the ancestors of the Chuvash as a populus and the fourth acquisition of their prospective homeland. The first settlement of the Chuvash ancestors of was located in the Khazar Khaganate, centered in the town of Varachan. The second one should be considered the

Volga River basin (Povolzhye and, in particular, Pricheremshanhye) and the northern territories of the Ulyanovsk region. The centers for this settlement were medieval city of Suvar and fortress Bilyar (895-922). The third settlement is the hillfort of Tigashi on the Bula River on the right bank of the Volga River (after 922). And the fourth is the capital (from 1236) of Veda Suar (Shupashkar, Cheboksary).

4. DISCUSSION

Famously, by the middle of the VI century the Sabirs have become the most powerful and numerous tribe in the Caucasus. They captured the entire northern Albania (Shirvan and Aran) and entrenched in the Derbend-Kabala zone. They stayed in this area for more than 100 years. According to Sara Ashurbeyli, at this time the Savirs turned to sedentary life, assimilating with the indigenous population of the country [Ashurbeyli 1983: 62]. According to Ibn Khordadbeh, outside the al-Baba there were lands of lords of Suvars, Laks, Alans, Muskuts, Sarirs; and the city of Samandar [Ibn Khordadbeh 1986: 110]. The time range of the story of Ibn Khordadbeh about the Suars should be attributed to the VIII - first half of the IX centuries. The phonetic form of the ethnonym *Suvars* clearly speaks of the Arabic pronunciation of the name of the tribe. The context allows placing them between the cities of Derbent and Atil. The city of Samandar was a part of Khazaria and it was populated by the Savirs [Al-Istakhri 1901: 49].

The primary sources referred the Savirs not only to as the Huns, but also as the Khazars. Thus, Moses Kalankatuatsi in chapter 43 of *The History of the Country of Aluank* reports that Alp' Ilit'uer, the general and great prince of the Huns, sent two nobles of his country, Itgin and Chata-khazra, following Saint Israel with the request to appoint him the spiritual leader of the Hun country. The 45th chapter, entitled *The Response to the Letter of the Huns*, however, tells that Eliasr, the Catholicos of the Aluank country, and Prince Varaz Trdat denied the ambassadors, because they did not want to acclaim Israel the spiritual leader of the Khazars. It is clearly the explicit substitution of the concepts of 'Huns' and 'Khazars'. But in fact, the text refers to the Sabirs, whose prince at that time (684) was Alp' Ilit'uer; they believed in the power of their deity of lightning *Quar*. The Savirs were called the Huns because at that time the ethnonym of the Hun was mainly related to the Savirs. The Huns and the Savirs were also confused with the Khazars, because the Sabirs at the very same time were already a part of the Khazar Khaganate. An Arab source noted in 724, that the 300,000-strong Khaqan's army consisted of 'Khazars and other tribes of mulhid (atheists)' [al-Kūfī 1981: 22]. Certainly, the notion of 'other tribes of atheists' were mostly referred to the Savirs. Türks knowingly called the Khazars *Sabirs*. Today researchers agree that the ethnonyms of *savirs / sabirs* and *khazars / khazaran* found in the sources serve as 'a weighty argument in favor of the affinity of these peoples' [Kalinina 2015: 40].

By all means the Sabirs are differing from the Huns, Avars, Turks, Akatsirs, Khazars and even Bulgars. Among other things, it is impossible to agree with the assertion that the Savirs, along with the Utigurs and Kutrigurs, constituted the Proto-Bulgarian population. In particular, Alexei Komar, speaking of Boarix, made a very curious remark. 'Neither the Huns, nor the Avars, nor the Turks had a tradition of ruling the tribes by women. At the same time, sources report of the Boarix, the ruler of the Savirs, who received power after her husband's death' [Komar 2008: 196]. Of course, even the Sarmatians had women-leaders. However, his remark that the Savirs represented a completely independent tribe is true.

Also, a comment was made that the local (autochthonous) population of Northeastern Dagestan (the ancestors of the modern inhabitants of the Kayakent, Karabudakhkent, Kumtorkalinsky, Buinaksky and partially Kaytak districts) is often mistakenly 'hiding' under the name of 'Hunno-Savirs'. And after the expulsion of the Khazars from Dagestan by the Arabs, Suvar-Zhidan also included the territory of the Tersko-Sulak interfluvium with the city of Samandar. Thus, one agrees with the opinion that the 'Hunnic-Savirs' is a collective ethnonym [Fedorov-Guseinov 2000: 155–156]. This rightful vision is very important. Therefore, the ethnic heirs of the Sabirs should be considered not only Suvaric-Chuvash peoples, but also residents of the above-mentioned districts of Dagestan, including the Shah-Senker settlement. Nowadays, Kumyks, Avars and Dargins live in these areas.

The mutual relations of the Hunnic-Savirs and Turkic peoples in the Caucasus were complicated. Researchers believe that with the arrival of the Turkic tribes the significant part of the Hunnic-Savirs was forced to move up to the mountains, where they formed a conglomerate (such as medieval state of Sarir) with the local highland population. The Hunnic-Savirs called this mountainous country *Tavyak* ('Mountain side'). The name Dagestan is a close copy traced to the toponym of *Tavyak*. The name *Tavyak* is also a calque for the Chuvash *tav aik(ki)*, denotative for the 'slope' or the 'root of the mountain'. Mass migration of a part of the Huns (i.e., 'Huns referred to as Savirs') to the mountains is confirmed by archaeological materials. Excavations on the territory of the Balkaria highlands have revealed many burials with objective traces of the Hunnic type.

The events of 922 pushed to raise the self-consciousness of a single tribe, although later the differences between the northern and southern groups were still strong. These peculiar properties in the form of two cultural main dialects of forest and steppe Chuvash peoples have survived in a rudimentary form to this day. However, they did not in the least prevent the formation of a single ethnos. Vasily V. Bartold argued that the modern Chuvash obviously could not originate from the inhabitants of the cities on the Volga River, but only from those parts of the population of Bulgaria that always lived in the forests and were little affected by the Muslim urban culture [Bartold 1968: 520]. However, it should be clarified that the Suvars were engaged in farming and breeding cattle; they continued to adhere to the traditional rites and beliefs of their ancestors: some until the Golden Horde invasion, some until the adoption of Orthodoxy, and some - to this day. The year of 922 should be considered the beginning of the formation of the ancestors of the Chuvash as a populus and the fourth acquisition of their prospective homeland. The first settlement of the Chuvash ancestors was located in the Khazar Khaganate, centered in the town of Varachan. The second one should be considered the Volga River basin (Povolzhye and, in particular, Pricheremshanhye) and the northern territories of the Ulyanovsk region. The centers for this settlement were medieval city of Suvar and fortress Bilyar (895-922). The third settlement is the hillfort of Tigashi on the Bula River on the right bank of the Volga (after 922). The fourth is the capital (from 1236) of Veda Suar (Shupashkar, Cheboksary). The period from 922 to 1469 is the time of the formation of the Chuvash people and the establishment of their self-identity. At the same time, one agrees once again with the opinion that the Savars/Savirs/Suvars formed the basis for the further appearance of modern the Chuvash people [Baskakov 2008: 107]. V.D. Dimitriev rightly believed that until the X century the Suvars were tribes; the ancient Chuvash national identity was formed in the XII century [Dimitriev 2014: 107]. Considering the events of the forest-steppe Volga region of the XIII – XV centuries, archaeologist Y.A. Zelenev believes that it was the time of the formation of the Chuvash ethnos [Zelenev 2013: 42]. According to N.I. Egorov, the modern Chuvash ethnic identity eventually

formed during the Kazan Khanate period (1438–1552) on the basis of the *chavash* ethnonym [Egorov 2012: 39]. What motives drove the nation in its centuries-old and complex history is also a complicated matter. After all, ‘the drift of ethnicity resembles a chain of situational reactions rather than linear evolution, and its direction does not copy the zigzags of political history: the rise of ethnicity often arises in political turmoil, and the recession falls on the phase of social prosperity’ [Golovnev 2009: 120]. It seems like a paradox, but one thing is clear: people, tribes and nations are alive until they lose their ethnic identity.

As of 555, the immediate neighbors of the Savirs were the Avgars, Burgars, Kurtargars, Avars, Khazars, Dirmars, etc. They all lived ‘in tents, survived with meat of livestock and fish, wild animals and weapons’, as witnessed by the coeval [Zacharias 2011: 595]. Hunting and fishing for the purpose of obtaining food, a war to protect and take possession of new lands were the daily activities of all nomads. The Savirs and their ancestors were no exception in this regard. According to Zacharias, in the year of 555 the Sabirs had weapons, traded on wild animals and ate meat of livestock and fish, and so did their neighbors (Burgars, Alans, Kurtargars, Avars, Khazars, etc.). The squirrels and beavers were the custom to the geo zone of Volga Bulgaria, so inhabitants traded animal skins [Ibn Sa'id 2009: 32]. At the beginning of the XVI century Moscovia received fox fur and squirrel skins from Siberia. ‘And those who are more noble than all others are from Chuvashia (Schuwaji), which is not far from Kazan’ [von Herberstein 1988: 129].

The residents of the city of Suvar in the Volga Bulgaria possessed a lot of sowing areas; therefore, they had more than enough of bread products [Al-Maqdisi 1994: 289]. Mankind used quite developed agricultural implements in the X century. The transition to plowing required a large number of iron products (socks, plows knives, axes). This contributed to an even greater development of metallurgy. The wooden plow of primitive construction with metal cutting parts (*saban*) used by the Chuvash until the middle of the XX century dates back to the cultivation methods of the X century. Its metal parts (plowshares *tyoren* and cutters *shart*) can now be seen in museums. This type of equipment must have been formed on the Middle Volga, since it is adapted for heavy soils. Most likely, the *saban* existed in the region even before the arrival of the Bulgars and Suvars [Smirnov 1951: 17, 84–85]. Bread, meat and millet were the main products for everyday consumption among the inhabitants of the Volga Bulgaria; same products were used by four kings to greet the embassy arrived from Baghdad [ibn Fadlan 2016: 32]. The millet and oats were the main crops in the XI–XII centuries for the Chuvash ancestors in Pricheremshanye [Gazimzyanov, Nabiullin 2011: 22]. In the XVIII century they were mostly planting rye, oats and farro. Flax and hemp were cultivated exactly as much as needed. Buckwheat was not a success, and little of wheat was sown [Lepekhin 1771: 144].

Agathias of Myrina wrote about temporary camps arranged by the Savirs. ‘About five hundred of Savirs (*Σαβείρων*) were placed on some elevated point. The hedges of such temporary fortifications were not very tall, so that one could see the face of the rider standing behind the fence. The camp was a fence of stakes, inside of which were ‘huts built from stakes and skins’ [Agathias 1828: 180]. Such fortifications were erected very quickly and consisted of huts on skeletons. This episode refers to the events of 554 in Lazika (Western Georgia). Hunnic-Savirs dwellings had a wattle (braided) frame. They were covered with animal skins or thick felt, and in long-term buildings they were riddled with reeds or smeared with clay. In the literature they are usually called differently: a tent, a pandal or a Turkic house [Gmyrya 1980: 9]. In the west of the Caucasus archeologists find dwellings on the walls of which are fingerprints of wattle smeared with clay. It turns out that the inhabitants erected light wicker structures and coated them with clay. Local

materials and climatic conditions contributed to this type of construction. The same buildings could be seen in the XIX century in Western Georgia, Abkhazia and Adygea [Fedorov 1983: 66]. In the Hunnic-Savir town of Varachan (the Shah-Senker settlement) the fortifications were a wooden palisade. Similar designs were widely used in Volga Bulgaria from the XX century. At the site of the ancient settlement of Shah-Senker there are fragments of daubing wattle. There were dwellings 'with wattle or raw walls' [Hajiyev 1995: 33]. Such dwellings later became common among on the artefacts of the Salto-Mayak culture. In the buildings of the town of Hulash also the walls 'were made in the form of a frame support made of a fence covered with clay' [Kakhovsky, Smirnov 1972: 21].

In 555 the Syrian source documents the usage of tents among the Savirs [Zacharias 2011: 595].

In the early X century, the Suvars had fortifications in the form of a circular fortress on the territory of the modern southern regions of the Chuvash Republic. The Suvars had the traditions of the structure of such fortifications already during their Caucasian period. They are very similar to Avar *hrings* with circular fortifications. The houses and outbuildings in the town of Hulash were erected in very close proximity to each other. This settlement is the reminiscent of the southern settlements, in particular Sarkel. It is assumed that in Hulash people settled around the house of the elders [Kakhovsky, Smirnov 1972: 10–11].

According to the Priscus records, which dates back to the end of the first half of the V century, at the house of Attila 'the benches were placed by the walls of the room' [Priscus 1860: 67]. A similar arrangement of long benches from the floorboards along the entire wall is typical for the southern Chuvash. They began to be replaced by the ready-made furniture only by the end of the XX century.

The Suvars entered into a close relationship with the world around. Common traditions were developed in culture, especially in clothing. Noteworthy, for example, is the appearance of the 'elongated buttons-pins with cubes at the ends and a loop in the middle for sewing to the clothes' [Fedorov 1972: 37]. This tradition is also traced to the archaeological artefacts of the Volga Bulgaria. The materials of the Palac-syrtsky burial mound of IV-V centuries belonging to the Western Caspian nomads contain rich collections of temporal pendants and breast decoration sets for women occupying a sufficiently high level in the tribal hierarchy [Gmyrya 2014: 37–38]. All of them resonate with the Chuvash festive clothes represented by *surpan sakki*, *khalkha sakki*, and *shulkeme*.

In the Volga region the Chuvash clothes and ornaments carry on the Caucasian traditions. However, the influence of the East Finnic and Turkic cultures makes an effect. Thus, the breast decoration pieces made of leather with a buckle and sewn or suspended coins (the prototypes of modern Chuvash ornaments of the *surpan sakki* and *shulkeme*) are similar to the pectorals of the Erzya and the Mari peoples. The ornaments of woolen harnesses with brushes inserted into the copper tubes (Chuvash *khure*) are close to the Mari tubular splint decorations. As for the *khushpu* and *masmak* – leather hats, decorated with coins, *surpan* head towels and *tevet* bandages, they have no analogues with the Mari and Mordvins and are entirely Chuvash, dating back to the Volga-Bulgarian period.

Researchers of the history of the Chuvash ethnic structure paid much attention to the social term of *turhan*. P.K. Kokovtsev, A.P. Novoseltsev, V.I. Abaev and A.V. Dybo considered it to be Iranian borrowing (Sogdian *trχ'n*). The term was designated to the concepts of 'judge', 'interpreter', 'title'. [Dybo 2006: 772]. Then this word passed into the Khazar, Turkic and Russian languages. Apparently, it joined the name of its own (such as

the title of Pasha in Turkey). The term also denoted a privileged class in Khazaria. It still exists as an anthroponym in the name of villages, parishes and streets, denotes a privileged class, names of deities and spirits, different place-names and sanctuaries. There were 15 settlements with this name in the Kazan province. Of these, one village was Tatar, one Cheremisa, and the rest were Chuvash. Therefore, it is believed that the social category of the Tarkhans mainly consisted of Chuvash [Artemyev 1866: LXXIV]. In addition, they also existed in Simbirsk province. In the contemporary Chuvash Republic *Turhan* settlements are located in Batyrevsky, Krasnochetaysky, Shumerlinsky, Tsivilsky, Morgaushsky and other districts. R.G. Kuzeev noted that toponyms with the *tarkhan* element are distributed almost throughout the entire territory to the west of the Altai and Central Asia. 'The links between these formations could take place in the North Caucasus and the Azov Sea region, where ethnonymic parallels were formed and later transferred to the Danube and Volga regions' [Kuzeev 2010: 323]. Indeed, Movses Kalankatuatsi in *The History of the Country of Aluank* also mentions that the Hunnic-Sabirs in the VII century had a title of *tarkhan* [Kalankatuatsi 1984: 132].

Ibn Fadlan recorded the form of greeting and giving respect of the inhabitants of the Volga Bulgaria. So, 'when they see the passing king, they all take off their hats and put them under their armpits. They put them back on only when the king passes. They do the same when they have a conversation with him' [Ibn Fadlan 1956: 136–137]. Similar behavior was widespread among the Chuvash: in many ritual situations, they usually held a cap under the armpit. This was done, for example, when referring to the *Kiremet* in the rite of *chukhleme*, and also on family prayers. As a rule, the hat is laid under the left armpit. The tradition extends both to the prayer standing, and to the prayer in kneeling position. It is desirable for the prayer to get a new hat at least temporarily. Naturally, we are talking only about men. Women in special cases are also allowed to pray, holding a hat of their husbands under the arms. If another person prays for the owner of the house where the action takes place, then he is obliged to have an owner's hat under the armpit. In the right hand the clergyman holds the objects of the sacrifice (bread, cheese, meat). If the people present are given pieces of sacrificial food in their hands prior to praying, they also repeat the gestures of the worshiper: under the left armpit men are put on hats, right palms with the received pieces are stretched slightly forward [Salmin 2016: 559–560].

Of undoubted value are the scenes of the official reception on the occasion of the visit of the Byzantine embassy to Attila, the leader of the Huns (448); and the Arab Mission to Almush, the ruler of Volga Bulgaria (922). And of particular interest is the comparative study of the ceremony of both feasts. The first version was described by Priscus of Panium and the second by Ibn Fadlan. Both wrote what they saw themselves and there is no reason not to believe the witnesses. Moreover, the text of Priscus is more detailed than the story of Ibn Fadlan. Here are some details. Priscus: 'When everyone was seated in order, the cupbearer went to Attila and gave him a cup of wine. Attila took it and welcomed the one who was the first in row. The one to whom the honor was greeted stood up; he was not allowed to sit down before Attila returned the cup to the cupbearer, having drunk wine, or having tasted it. When he sat down, those present honored him in the same way: they took cups and tasted wine, having greeted him. By every guest there was one butler, who was to enter the line upon the entry of Attila's cupbearer. By giving the same honor to the second guest and the guests following, Attila also welcomed us on a par with the others, in the order of sitting on the benches. After everyone was given the honor of this greeting, the butlers came out. By the side of Attila's table there were other tables set for three, four or more guests, so that everyone could take the food from the dish without leaving the row of seats. The first to enter was Attila's servant carrying a dish filled with

meat. Other servants behind him were to put meals and bread on the tables serving all the guests' [Priscus 1860: 67–68]. Ibn Fadlan: 'The kings [sat] on his right side, and he invited us to sit on his left, while his sons sat in front of him, and he alone [sat] on a throne covered with Byzantine brocade. He ordered a table [with food] to be brought, and it was served to him. There was only fried meat on it. So, he started: he took a knife, cut off a piece and ate it, then did it again and again. Then he cut off a piece and gave it to Sawsan the ambassador. When he received it, he was brought a small table and set before him. Such is the rule that no one stretches his hand to eat until the king gives him a piece. And immediately, as soon as the guest receives the piece, the table is already brought to him. Then he gave me [the slice of meat], and a table was brought to me too. Then he cut off another one and handed it to the king who was to his right, and he was brought a table, then handed it to the second king, and he was brought a table ..., then handed to the fourth king, and a table was brought to him, then handed to his sons, and the tables were brought to them, and so [this continued] until each of those who were in front of him were brought a table; we all ate from our personal tables without being a partners on the table with someone else, and besides each one of us no one took anything from the table' [Ibn-Fadlan 1956: 132]. With the exception of the subtle aspects (the ascetic plainness of Attila, the elegant splendor of Almysh, etc.), both feasts were held in the same scenario. In other words, in the palace of Almysh they repeated what the Huns had five centuries earlier.

Cultural traces of feasts described by Priscus and Ibn Fadlan are evidently seen in the Chuvash ritual ceremonial meals *chukleme* and *al valli* [Salmin 2016: 79–87]. The guests are seated at the table in the front corner, where the preliminary part of the action is carried out. In the ritual of *chukleme* women also take a certain part. The host's wife, for example, repeats the same actions and words as her husband. As the rite progresses, she gets seated at the table after her husband. Right after this the butlers serve the beer in a large wooden vessel; and serve buckets in an amount of up to 9 pieces. Each of the participants must necessarily have ritual food and drink served by the owner of the house. They are the official admission to the rite in general and to joint dinner table space in particular. Such a share received straight hands-to-hands is called *al-valli* (lit. 'for the hand' or 'get in hand'). The seated participants along with all others are facing the door. At the wedding the prayer begins with serving the bread and beer; the latter should come from an untapped barrel. The host or his wife gives out a piece of buttered bread to everyone. The processes itself as well as the resulting piece of bread are equally called *al-valli*. Everyone stands up, looks toward the slightly open door and holds a ritual 'sandwich' in right hand. The candle is being lighted up. At first, participants turn to *Tura* and *Puleh*, then to other deities. The prayers are asking deities for the wellbeing of a new couple, expressing desire to have a yard full of lambs and a full bench of children. They also ask *Tura* for the opportunity to visit each other again. After joint praying and eating pieces of buttered bread the marriage contract is actually concluded.

As of the V century this ceremony was common to all three tribes. The fact that the Suvars of the Volga Bulgaria, mentioned by the Khazar king Joseph along with the Bulgars, are the Savirs who lived in the North Caucasus is beyond any doubt [Petrukhin, Rayevsky 2004: 230]. Peter Golden has also written about the ethnic succession of the Suars of the Volga Bulgaria with the Savirs. He explicitly states that the North Caucasian Suvars 'should certainly be connected' to the Suvar / Suwaz that Ibn Fadlan observed on the Volga River region [Golden 2011: 146–147]. The thesis that 'the Suvar / Suwaz ... gave their name and were the main component in the composition of the Chuvash people' is acknowledged in scientific literature [Krasnov 1974: 113]. Ethnic succession is also recognized as following: Savirs → Suvars → Chuvash. There is a version that Khazars are descendants of

Sabir / Savirs [Budanova 2000: 395], and this version is not unreasonable. According to another opinion, 'the Khazars stood at the head of the reorganized union of the Savirs' [Iskhakov, Izmailov 2001: 53].

There is much in common in the traditional rituals of the peoples of the Caucasus and the Chuvash. For example, there are the same ceremonial performances among the peoples of the Caucasus and the Chuvash in the rites such as 'For the eclipse of the sun and the moon' and 'Passage under the rainbow'.

Rain calling rituals, as a rule, are held near the water. The authors of the studies point to the semantics of the choice of the locus. Thus, the Hinukh people (Dagestan) were slaughtering the sacrificial ram so that the animal's blood merged with the water body [Rizakhanova 2003: 80]. The Chuvash for the same purpose conducted a similar rite at a spring or a river [Salmin 2016: 28]. The rite participants turned to the spirits of their ancestors with a request to send moisture to the ground: the designated members went to the cemetery and poured some graves, believing that the dead do not give rain. Then the otherworldly relatives appeared to their children in a dream and complained: 'While I was attending the sowing, my house was flooded with water'. As a rule, the rite participants poured water on the graves of the dead with an unkind profile (drunkards, hanged, drowned men, etc.). The object of watering also turned out to be mounds of sorcerers. The rumor has it that they have a hole through which the sorcerers come out. It must be that the origins of such a rite lead to the Caucasus. So, the custom of the nomads of the Caspian Dagestan to douse the tomb of the famous man traced back to the VII century. During the dry weather days, they carried out a coffin with bones and asked for rain. But the rite with the use of the relics of somewhat outstanding people, apparently, had even deeper traditions among the population of the Caspian Sea. Researchers believe that this rite is local. In an earlier version the corpse of the 'strange' man should be buried in the ground [Gmyrya 2009: 58-62]. According to the sources, residents of Balanjar while in drought season dug up the bones of the Arab commander Salman ibn Rabiah and exposed them to the open sky. 'The immersion of the dead man's bones into water was practiced until recently with a magical purpose among the Swans, Karachays, Abkhazians, Cherkess and Russians of the North Caucasus' [Genko 1941: 101].

The traditional Cherkess family could not dispose of the harvested bread until they performed a special prayer of the *hama umuho*. The nearest relatives were invited to this rite. And only after the feast the new bread could be utilized for eating, selling or lending [Chursin 1913: 57]. Similar ceremonies took place among the Abkhaz and other Caucasian peoples. Also, a similar clan feast on the occasion of the beginning of the use of a new crop was common among the Chuvash; it was called *chukleme* [Salmin 2016: 79-87].

Most sources say that weddings are held in the *simek* ('Semik') day. 'Whoever wished, got married in simek', 'And in simek weddings were noisy' - found in the records of the XIX-XX centuries. 'All' or 'most of them' - such statements about weddings in *simek* occur in a large amount of author's materials. Some consultants emphasize that all the Chuvash (meaning adherents of grandfather traditions) must have weddings in *simek*. There are also some clarifications on that: after the completion of sowing at that time of youth dances of *Văyă*; on the *simek* day; a day or two before the *simek* or the day after; or more abstractly - in the summertime [Salmin 2016: 142-143].

After the Mongolian campaign on the Volga Bulgaria the smoldering ruins of about 200 ancient settlements left in the southeastern part of Chuvashia. All this territory turned into a Wild Field used by the Nogai Horde for nomadic activities. The surviving population moved partially to the Kazan province, and also to the northern regions of Chuvashia. As a result of the Mongol-Tatar genocide of XIII - early XV centuries only one-

fifth of the Chuvash ancestors survived [Dimitriev 1994: 27]. A terrible harm to the Suvar-Chuvash peoples, as well as to the entire population of the Volga region, was inflicted by the Black Plague pandemics of 1340-1350. These years brought depopulation, the collapse of power, anarchy and the decline of a common culture. The statement of Uli Schamiloglu about the end of the Volga-Bulgarian language during the years of the Black Plague [Schamiloglu 2001: 18-19] also holds true for the Suvar-Chuvash peoples.

It is well-known that traditional culture in the broad sense stores the vocabulary, etiquette and mentality of the ethnos, as well as information on the dwellings, food, clothing, religion and rituals. All these primordial elements of culture can now be found in living existence only within the environment of unbaptized or rather unchristened, and to this day still not Islamized Chuvash people (residing mainly in the Cheremshan River valley). The study of their everyday life promises the most rewarding scientific and practical results.

5. CONCLUSION

Famously, by the middle of the VI century the Savirs have become the most powerful and numerous tribes in the Caucasus. They captured the entire northern Albania (Shirvan and Aran) and entrenched in the Derbend-Kabala zone. At this time the Sabirs turned to a sedentary life, assimilating with the indigenous population of the country. By all means the Sabirs are differing from the Huns, Avars, Turks, Akatsirs, Khazars and even Bulgars. The mutual relations of the Hunnic-Savirs and Turkic peoples in the Caucasus were complicated. Researchers believe that with the arrival of the Turkic tribes the significant part of the Hunnic-Savirs was forced to move up to the mountains, where they formed a conglomerate (such as medieval state of Sarir) with the local highland population. The Hunnic-Savirs called this mountainous country Tavyak ('Mountain side'). The name Dag-i-stan is a close copy traced to the toponymal of Tavyak. The name Tavyak is also a calque for the Chuvash *tav aik(ki)*, denotative for the 'slope' or the 'root of the mountain'. Mass migration of a part of the Huns (i.e., 'Huns referred to as Savirs') to the mountains is confirmed by archaeological materials. Excavations on the territory of the Balkaria highlands have revealed many burials with objective traces of the Hunnic type. The period from 922 to 1469 is the time of the formation of the Chuvash people and the establishment of their self-identity. At the same time, one agrees once again with the opinion that the Savirs / Savirs / Suvars formed the basis for the further appearance of modern Chuvash people.

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