

## Bulgar Factories (Trading Posts) in the Kama River Area as a Factor of Adjustment to Feudalism

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### ABSTRACT

At the start of the 2<sup>nd</sup> ML AD a number of trading posts, or factories, emerged in the Cis-Ural region with participation of Bulgar handicraftsmen and merchants. They were townships populated by various ethnic groups. Several centuries later similar factories were set up by natives of the Cis-Ural region in Western Siberia. These factories have become major industrial and economic centers, where the multinational population was dominating. These factories increased the exchange of cultures among different nations. The article discusses the influence of the Bulgar merchants on trade, culture and town planning. In order to achieve this goal, the principle of historicism was used and experience of domestic and foreign scientists was generalized, allowing objectively consider the role of the Bulgar trade and craft factories and their influence on the feudal system. The results of the study consider the reasons for trading posts foundation; also analyze how the geographical area affected on the appearance of factories. Trade and craft factories were large commercial and educational centers at their height. Their decline was influenced by medieval diseases and conquest of Turkic tribes. This work may be a theoretical source for social researches in the era of feudalism.

### KEYWORDS

Trade, factories (trading posts), handicraft centers, Volga Bulgaria, Cis-Ural Region

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### Introduction

Before we proceed to the topic at hand, it is necessary to note that the very concept of trading posts or *factories* remains poorly investigated in science worldwide. At the same time, many researchers while addressing other subjects, noted the important role of these establishments in the processes of feudalization of population, the development of market relations and growth of cities as well as states (Rostovtsev, 1989).

Normally “factories” (from Portuguese *feitoria*) are defined as posts established for merchants in countries where they carried out their trade. Factories were also similar formations in remote parts of the merchants’ own countries.

The most famous factories were the Greek factories in northern Black Sea region, the medieval Scandinavian trading posts, or *viks*, Genoese trading posts of the 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries in the Black Sea region etc (Pounds, 2014; Friedman and Figg, 2013).

Thus, in the northern Black Sea region, the emergence of seven factories, namely Thessalonica, Panticapaeum, Nympheum, Phanagoria, Germonasa,

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Kepoi and Portus Sindicus on a relatively small area led to their unification as the extensive Bosporean Kingdom with the capital Panticapaeum. Scythians' and Sarmatians' interaction with these factories accelerated the process of disintegration of the former's primitive communal system. The Scythian ruling elite were tightly interlocked with the trade aristocracy of the Greek cities, assimilated the Greek way of life, Greek customs and ideas. As M.I. Rostovtsev (1989) pointed out, "after the emergence of Greek factories, the political, socio-economic and cultural life of Scythians were organically interwoven with the Greek world".

An extensive transcontinental trade route, which covered diverse lands and ethnic territories, was formed in Scandinavia by the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Along this route, merchant posts, or *viks*, appeared, which had a clear-cut manual manufacture and trade bias. By the 9<sup>th</sup> century, a "comprehensive infrastructure of trade and handicraft factories of the Baltic region and the North Sea was in place. Its interconnected elements made up the unity of the material culture of the inhabitants of trading proto-cities – from York in England to Staraya Ladoga in Rus" (Gubanov, 2003).

Handicraft and trade factories existed in Rus as well, as P.P. Tolochko (1989) noted. "They were located along the most important waterways, i.e. the Dnieper, the Volkhov, the Volga and the Desna. These factories were Ladoga, Gnezdovo, Timerevo, Sarskoye, Mikhailovskoye settlements as well as Shestovitsy and some others. The recent historical literature describes these sites as *otkrytyye trgovo-remeslennyye poseleniya* (open trade and handicraftsmen's settlements). This is probably not the most accurate designation if one takes into account that dug work, specifically walls and ditches, was erected on most of these sites (if not on all of them) at some point in their history" (Tolochko, 1989). According to this scholar, Scandinavian, western-Slavonic and Old Russian trading posts of the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries "were apparently part of a single economic system, which transcended ethnic boundaries. They were called into existence by the rapid development of trans-European trade in the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries" (Tolochko, 1989).

Thus, as I.B. Gubanov (2003) observed, the handicraft and trade settlements, factories or *viks* are "rather a stadial than an ethnic phenomenon, which relates to explosive development of handicraft technologies and trade routes. Most of these routes ended at the Rhine in the west and at the Volga-Baltic Waterway and the Abbasid Caliphate in the east, the latter being the source of silver dirhems in exchange for slaves and furs" (Podosenova, 2005).

Trade factories were economic and industrial centers of the ancient states. A number of modern cities such as Kiev and Venice originally were small settlements, before they become trade factories that stimulated their development and growth (Pounds, 2014; Friedman and Figg, 2013).

Trade factories were based in geographically advantageous locations: near great rivers that flow into the sea, near forests where furs were hunted, which were an expensive and valuable resource (Rostovtsev, 1989; Tolochko, 1989).

"Soon after the establishment of the first factories in the Baltic," G.S. Lebedev (2005) wrote, "the flow of values and funds in the eastern part of the European continent, along the Volga route, began. The Arabian silver coins traveled from the Near East and Central Asia across the North Caucasus along

the Volga, reaching the Ob Ugrians in the far north... An eastern branch of the trans-European system of trade ties took shape”.

One of the leading roles in this process was played by Volga Bulgaria, and the Great Volga trade route with its numerous branches showed its topmost form at the peak of its prosperity. It is thanks to Bulgars that the extensive Volga Region was included in the medieval trade system. Volga Bulgaria turned into a civilizing factor on a regional level. The factories of the Volga region and the Cis-Ural region, which belonged to Volga Bulgars, played an important role in this process (Halim et al., 2013).

### **Aim of the Study**

Consider the influence of Bulgar merchants on the economic and cultural spheres of ancient settlements in the Kama River Area.

### **Research questions**

How did the Bulgar handicraft and trade factories come to be in the Kama region?

### **Method**

The methodological and theoretical basis of the study consist of a set of principles developed in the field of historical science. Namely, principles of historicism, objectivism, dialectical unity of the historical and logical, as well as comparative-historical and historical-analytical methods.

In order to achieve this goal, a set of methods was also used: systematic analysis, dialectical method of cognition and structural-functional analysis of the historical facts. In addition, the article provides a synthesis of scientific works of scientists studied on the data of the subject under consideration.

### **Data, Analysis, and Results**

The city of Bolghar was the hub of Bulgar trade. It was the main connecting link between Rus and the East in the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries, a sort of the eastern “gate” to Rus (Shpakovsky and Nicolle, 2013). It had direct contacts with Central Asia and the Arab world. Overland caravan tracks reached the city and researchers have described them as the northern branch of the Silk Road. These routes led not only from Central Asia but also from the southern Rus lands. It was in Bolghar that the journey of Scandinavian and northern Russian merchants, who travelled to the east, finished although some of them are reported to have reached the Caspian Sea and even Baghdad.

However, Bolghar was not the only trade post in the mid-Volga region. The 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries saw Izmerskoye, Semenovskoye, Starokuibyshevskoye and other settlements transform into advanced trading posts (Northrup et al., 2015). Besides the above-mentioned settlements, the Bulgars’ factories were also located in parts of the Mari-inhabited Volga region the medieval monuments of which abound in objects of Bulgar manufacture. The Bulgar factories were also at the Ob estuary, in the area of Nizhny Novgorod, which emerged in 1221 on the spot of an earlier Bulgar settlement, account in *Russian History*. Kazan was one of the early trading posts of Bulgars on the Volga. It emerged not later than the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century at the intersection of the Great Volga route and the Northern fur route. According to A.M. Belavin, “as early as by the start of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, practically the whole of the Kama region, with the exception of the Middle Vyatka basin, became part of Volga Bulgaria, a sort of its Finno-Ugric periphery” (Belavin, 2002). It is



there, in the Upper Kama region, that at approximately 200 locations numerous artifacts from Volga Bulgaria, including Volga Bulgarian coins and early ceramics of Saltovo-Mayaki culture, were found. On these lands the Bulgars founded not only the trading posts but also real cities which were the supporting points for tax collection from the local population and control over merchants on the North fur route (Northrup et al., 2015).

The trade routes of Eastern Europe and western Asia, which were destroyed during the Migration Period began to be restored by the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 1<sup>st</sup> ML AD. The Cis-Ural region with its staple natural resource, namely fur animals, was the interest of merchants. The ethno-cultural situation played an important role in the development of economic ties of the Cis-Ural region. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 1<sup>st</sup>-early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD the Middle Ural region, the Southern Urals and part of western Siberia constituted a uniform Ugric territory within which the interaction of the population was considerably facilitated by the similarity of ideologies, cultures and languages (Belavin, 2002). The geography of locations of oriental coins suggests the presence of a Steppe trade route, bypassing the early Volga Bulgarians and going through the lands of Cis-Ural Ugrians. Ugrians of the southern Urals played a significant role in the restoration of trade links of the Cis-Ural region. Even before the establishment of Volga Bulgaria in the Middle Volga region, they occupied and controlled for a long time the Steppe trade route leading from Central Asia to the northern Urals and Siberia. However, starting from the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the transit trade fell under the control of Volga Bulgarians for several centuries. The Kama Trade Route (both river and overland), which was an integral part of the Great Volga Route, enabled commerce with the Cis-Ural region (Belavin, 2002).

Volga Bulgaria's control over essential trade in the Kama region was carried out by Bulgars' handicraft and trade trading posts. An analysis of archeological data allows us to identify a few settlements of the Cis-Ural region which obviously played an important role in the system of Bulgar transit trade. They include Anyushkar on the Inva river, Gorodishchenskoye settlement on the Usolka river, Solomatovskoye settlement on the Usva river, Idnakar on the Cheptsa river and the Rozhdestvenskoye archeological complex on the Obva river.

These settlements, in which Bulgars were part of the population, were a sort of core network for trade with the north and Siberia. They were places of transfer in the transit trade and played a role as places of collection, storage and preparation of furs for export to Volga Bulgaria (most scholars believe that trade in furs was the main function of the Kama trade route). Thus, the materials unearthed on the Rozhdestvenskoye site include the bones of such fur animals as beaver, squirrel, otter, fox and wolverine (Northrup et al., 2015). Especially numerous are the bones of beavers. It was not only the warm, thick fur keeping the body warm for which beavers were valued but also castoreum, the product of the castor sacs of beavers, which was widely used medicinally and in the ointment and perfume trade in the Middle Ages.

One more type of product was made for export to Bulgaria in those locations. Researchers discovered traces of large facilities linked to the production of copper, bronze and brass. Ingots of non-ferrous metals were mentioned in the lists of items of Bulgar trade as raw materials for jewelers' and bronze-casting crafts. No important mines existed in the Middle Volga

region in the medieval epoch, in contrast to the Upper Kama region; only poor mines of the Volga's right bank in the area of Bolghar were developed (Gunko, 2008). In addition, on the Gorodishchenskoye site and in the settlement of Rassoly located a few kilometers away from it, traces of salt extraction of the 10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries were found. Salt is not only a valuable condiment but was used for tanning and is mentioned among the Bulgar goods transported along the Kama and Volga trade routes.

Among the Bulgar handicraft and trade factories in the Kama region three are the most interesting ones: the Rozhdestvenskoye settlement, Idnakar and Anyushkar. In 1331, Arab historian and geographer Chihab al-Umari mentioned the 'qasaba' of the small town Akikul (Avakol, Afkula) situated 20 days of journey from Bulgar to the north, i.e. within the boundaries of the land of Chulman (Chulyman). It can be compared with the Rozhdestvenskoye settlement (Belavin, 2002), which, in contrast to other Bulgar factories in the Kama region established on the territories of Finn-Ugric towns, had the structure and layout typical of Bulgar towns. The toponym "Afkula" can be understood as coming from the Turkic (via Persian) *afu*, *ashu* (a turn) and *Kula*, *Kala* (tower, fortress), hence meaning "the fortress at the turn". The name reflects the nature of the trade of Bulgars, who brought their merchandise to this place, which was then resold by local merchants. Al-Umari reported that "the merchants of our countries do not get farther than the city of Bolghar; the Bulgar merchants travel to Chulyman, while the Chulyman merchants reach the Yugor [peninsula] in the far north" (Tizengauzen, 1884).

Islamic, pre-Mongolian Bulgar cemeteries located on the above three sites were investigated. They testify to the fact that descendants from Volga Bulgaria lived there, notably merchants, handicraftsmen and members of their families (Belavin, 2002). These burial grounds are identical to the Muslim cemeteries of Volga Bulgaria, and observe the qiblah, i.e. the direction of the Muslim daily ritual prayer. This is probably due to accurate instrumental measurements, which written sources suggest. The latter speak of the frequent visits of astronomers, who measured time, from Bulgaria to the "qasaba of Afkula". When mentioning Afkula, al-Umari brings up the account of Hasan Errumi (ar-Rumi) about an Islamic astronomer's journey to Afkula with a view to establishing the time for prayer (Tizengauzen, 1884).

Factories were noted for a higher, "city-like" type of material culture and economic life. Representatives of the indigenous population borrowed specific elements of everyday life, which contributed to the development of the culture of sustenance. In particular, the emergence in the 11<sup>th</sup> century of clay pads for round-bottom hollowware to be placed on flat surfaces testifies to the appearance of furniture, namely, tables and shelves, in the dwellings of this area. Furnaces started to be used instead of hearths for house-warming, preparing food and production needs. If one looks at the emergence of new types of crockery, the culinary variety expanded. Oil lamps came into use for lighting houses. They were of both Bulgar and local manufacture, the latter being hand-molded (Tolochko, 1989). The high level of life is confirmed by the grave goods on the Rozhdestvenskoye pagan burial ground. There are practically no burial places without grave goods there, and many graves hold ornaments made of silver and even of gold, valuable imported goods of oriental, Bulgar and partially Old Russian origin.



In order to attain their aims in the Kama region, Bulgars needed to interact with the local elite. In one of the graves of Rozhdestveskoye burial ground, a rare dirhem of the time of Mumin ben Ahmed was found, minted in 370 AH (970-971 AD). These coins are very scant, being minted for political ends rather than for circulation in Volga Bulgaria. They were a symbol of definitive unification of Bulgaria, the symbol of triumph of one government and one faith. They were apparently used to reward specially trusted and important persons on the territory of Bulgaria and in the Bulgar enclaves beyond the main state territory (Tolochko, 1989). This coin could have been a gift to one representative of the local top brass. The discovery of such ethnically significant regalia as temple rings with a little duck charm and other precious ornaments testify to the presence there of Bulgar aristocracy. It is quite plausible to assume that in order to cement relations with the local elite, inhabitants of the Kama region married Bulgar “princesses”.

We may state with certainty that the appearance of Bulgar trading posts in the Kama region and involvement of the local population in trans-European trade enhanced the establishment of feudalism on this territory.

The Bulgar factories in the Kama region were large centers of handicrafts. Potters' and metallurgical furnaces of Bulgar type were discovered on the sites and convincing evidence was collected which suggests the existence of various, including urban, handicrafts in their territories. Merchants' stock and other traces of intense trade activity were found, which clearly differentiate these settlements from other, mostly agrarian ones.

Owing to the active trade and migration of the representatives of Bulgar handicrafts to the Cis-Ural lands, there was a borrowing of technologies. This contributed to the technical advancement of the inhabitants of the Cis-Ural region, as was the case, for instance, of jewelers', blacksmiths' and glassmakers' and some other trades. It is with the participation of Bulgar handicraftsmen that an original jeweler's trade started to emerge in the region. The produce of local jewelers has a number of characteristic distinctions from its Bulgar and Old Russian counterparts. However, its technological peculiarities lean towards the Bulgar jewelry. Therefore, all the items of jewelry based on precious metals that were found in the Perm Territory were long considered to be Bulgar imports. However, the range of these items and their decorative design were oriented to the local market. In Volga Bulgaria such artifacts are rare or absent altogether; the Kama craftsmen's ornaments bear traces that are only endemic to his territory. Some remnants of workshops unearthed on the sites can be interpreted as those belonging to jewelers. On a number of burial grounds, specifically the Redikarsky, Plesinsky and Rozhdestvensky ones, some graves of males were explored. Among the funerary gifts found in them specialist jewelers' tools were identified, including hammers, furnaces, crucible tongs, tin snips and others. Analysis suggests that jewelry items of one type, for example temple rings with pear-shaped pendants were made according to totally different manufacturing schemes. This suggests simultaneous functioning of several different jewelry centers in the Perm Territory (Podosenova, 2005).

The produce of local jewelers was the staple import of such decorations to the Trans-Urals and western Siberia in the 11<sup>th</sup>-12 centuries. The inhabitants of the land of Visu-Chulman, which became equal trading partners with Bulgars in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, established their own trading posts in the Trans-

Urals, of which al-Umari provided evidence (Tizengauzen, 1884). Such factories included the town on the Ob River called Sherkaly, which, according to researchers, exemplifies stable economic and ethnic connections between the Cis-Ural region and the Cis-Ob region. The samples from Sherkaly site and the Peregrebnoye site include Bulgar silver objects, including signet rings and headbands which were decorated with nielloed plaited patterns. Other items testifying to trading ties between the inhabitants of the Cis-Ural lands of Visu and Chulman and of Volga Bulgaria included metal weights, pans of coin scales and iron locks. The finds also include Bulgar ceramics, in particular oil and grease lamps.

The name of Sherkaly (Sharkaly) is roughly translated as “fortress of accord” or “fortress for negotiations” from the Turkic languages, where “shart” or “shert” means *contract, vow, accord or terms*, whereas “Kala” means a *fortress*. In this case there is a certain coincidence between the name of town and that of the trading post of Bulgars in the Cis-Ural region, namely the *qasaba* of Afkul, i.e. the “fortress at the turn”. Bulgar merchants travelled to Afkul and from there went back to Bulgaria. However, some of them as well as the “merchants of Chulyman” carried their goods as far as to the Trans-Urals. It was there, at the trading posts like Sherkala that they “accorded” the trading of their merchandise for Trans-Ural furs, walrus tusks, stag horns and other merchandise. These factories were considerably smaller than the Bulgarian factories in the Cis-Ural region, and their layout was typical of small towns located in woody areas. This differentiated them from substantially larger and better planned Cis-Ural factory townships.

### Discussion and Conclusion

Therefore, the Bulgar trading posts in the Kama region were similar to other Bulgar factories located on the important waterways and all had the features of an early feudal town. The inhabitants of these settlements were mostly engaged in long-distance trade and the professions associated with the latter (Tolochko, 1989). Archeologists examining the trade and handicraft factories at the Upper Volga, the Dnieper, and Volkhov rivers found materials of both Slavonic and other ethnic origins (Tolochko, 1989). Ethnically mixed character of the trade centers was reflected in written accounts (Sehoknecht, 1977; Stenberger, 1977). Moreover, trade and handicraft factories of Bulgars in the Kama region also showed ethnically diverse population. Thus, the Rozhdestvenskoye site has evidence of local Finn-Ugric population, descendants from Volga Bulgaria as well as from Cheptsa, Vym, the Volga region, Rus; an analysis of ceramics suggests presence of ethnically diverse “neighborhoods” as was typical of many medieval towns. For example, a metallurgy workshop investigated in 2008 showed a substantial quantity of Bulgar tableware of the *Juketau* type, which indicates the origin of the ancient metalworker who lived and worked here.

Belgian historian Henri Pirenne (1937) identified intercontinental and interregional transit trade and merchants in particular as the defining factor in the emergence of cities. According to the historian’s “trade” theory, cities evolved primarily around merchant posts. However, many medievalists criticized the scholar’s assumption. The main problem lies in the fact that the overriding majority of well-known trading posts did not evolve into cities and ceased to exist at an early stage. According to P.P. Tolochko (1989), the factories were “not a stage in the life of an eastern Slavonic town, but one of



the ways of its formation. In fact, this way was a dead-end track because it was conditioned chiefly by factors of external socio-economic development. Stabilization of state structures and definition of borders took place in the late 10<sup>th</sup>-early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries. This ineluctably led to breaking of ties and formation of new economic regions. The invasion of the Slavonic part of the Baltic region by Germanic feudal lords, restriction of trade in Scandinavian countries, the decline of the Khazar Khaganate and the prominence of Kievan Rus made further functioning of the interregional economic structure, based primarily on private entrepreneurship, impossible” (Tolochko, 1989).

The Bulgar factories in the Kama region were in a somewhat different position. The Kama trade route was situated slightly off the transcontinental trade system and connected the territories that were located beyond state formations. It was based on its own emerging feudal system and rapid development of local handicrafts. The period when the economic underpinning of European trading posts disappeared was noted for the establishment and thriving of the Kama region’s factories. They probably had every condition for transforming into cities. Taking into consideration that contemporaries literally described Afkula as a “town”, it was already on its way to becoming a city.

However, in the late 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries, the activities of most Cis-Ural settlements diminished. Afkula was the only town the existence of which was mentioned as late as the last third of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The plague epidemic hit the regions of the Middle Volga River and the north-east of Europe three times, notably in 1346-1350, 1352 and 1363. The Cis-Ural region was ravaged by Tokhtamysh’s and Tamerlane’s invasions in 1391 and 1395 respectively. Indirect references to these campaigns are contained in written sources. Thus, Sharaf ad-Din Ali Yazdi, when describing Tamerlane’s campaign of 1395, reported that Tamerlane’s victorious troops set out from this side of the river and reached that place. They plundered everything. That place is not far from the Land of Darkness.” According to European written sources and the analysis of glacial sediments in Greenland and Scandinavia, climatic cooling occurred in the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was preceded by the Little Climatic Optimum, which was over by 1300-1310 (Friedman and Figg, 2013). Russian chronicles also mentioned multiple adverse weather conditions (droughts, cold snaps, storms etc) which occurred in the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, the changed economic conditions were even more significant for the perishing of cities. Volga Bulgaria became part of the Golden Horde, losing its sovereignty. The merchants’ objectives changed and new trade routes appeared. Western Siberia became the main location for procuring furs (Belavin, 2009).

All this caused the exodus of population from the Cis-Ural region and the decrease in inhabited localities. According to G. S. Lebedev (2005), over 140 settlements existed in the Upper Kama region in the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries, of which only 49 were in evidence in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The scant numbers of the remaining population could not pass down to the following generations all the cultural heritage of the medieval time and this heritage was lost.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

Trade was the main occupation of the Volga Bulgars, in connection with which they had founded trading posts, which became industrial and economic centers. Factories were based on economically and geographically



advantageous locations, mainly in the mouths of rivers, and because of factors influencing fast availability to other countries of eastern and southern Europe and Asia. Security played a key role, so factories were built far from aggressive tribes, often protection over factories was attributed to the State. These factors have led to increased growth of factories and formation of cities, where a well-developed trade and culture, and multinational population were.

Most of the Bulgar factories have declined due to the following reasons:

- three plague epidemics in 1346-1350, 1352 and 1363;
- aggression of Turkic tribes led by Tokhtamysh and Timur;
- annexation and incorporation of the territories to the Golden Horde, which has led to the displacement of shopping centers in other cities.

Thus, in the article we have analyzed the formation, development and decline of the Bulgar factories. The results of this paper may serve as a theoretical source for further researches in the history of trade, social status, and occupation of Asian territories in the Middle Ages.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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