
The Migration History of the Savirs

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Abstract

The history of the Chuvash people during ancient times and the early Middle Ages is still not well-known or thoroughly understood. The Bulgars were most often named as the historical ancestors of the Chuvash in research from the 18th to the 20th centuries. In the 21st century, a view is beginning to take shape that the Savirs, not the Bulgars, were the predecessors of the Chuvash. The primary sources for this view are the works of Claudius Ptolemy, Aelius Herodianus, Ammianus Marcellinus, and others. Modern archaeological excavations support these historical facts.

In this article, the author analyzes material that refutes the theory of the origins of the Savars/Savirs/Suvars in Siberia and confirms their habitation in the Caucasus. The focus of this study is the migration history of the ancestors of the Chuvash from the 2nd to the 10th centuries. The arguments laid out in the study are accompanied by explanatory illustrations.

Keywords

History; Geography; Maps; Anthropology; Caucasus; Volga Region; Savirs; Chuvash; Migration; Frontier Study



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История миграций савиров

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Аннотация

Древняя и средневековая история чувашского народа изучена весьма плохо. В исследованиях XVIII–XX вв. историческими предками чувашей называли болгар. В XXI в. начинает складываться мнение, что не болгары, а савиры были предшественниками чувашей. Первоисточниками являются труды Клавдия Птолемея, Элия Геродиана, Аммиана Марцеллина и других. Эти исторические факты подтверждаются современными археологическими раскопками. В данной статье автор анализирует материал, опровергающий теорию прихода саваров/савиров/суваров из Сибири и подтверждающий их исход из Кавказа. В центре внимания данного исследования – история миграции предков чувашей со II по X вв. Аргументы, изложенные в исследовании, сопровождаются пояснительными иллюстрациями.

Ключевые слова

история; география; карты; антропология; Кавказ; Поволжье; чувашаи; миграция; фронтирные изучения



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Introduction

One of the most reliable and scientifically grounded versions of the origin history of the Chuvash traces their ancestry back to the Savars/Savirs/Suvars. Today, there can be very little doubt that the Savars identified by Ptolemy are the Suvars of the Middle Volga. An examination of the sources and scholarly research in chronological order will further elucidate this subject.

A. A. Kunik, an adherent of the theory that the historical ancestors of the Chuvash originated in Siberia, claimed that the Chuvash are descendants of one of the groups of Old Turkic peoples who settled among the Volga Finns long before the appearance of the Tatars in this region (1878, p. 118, 120). However, N. N. Poppe considered the Chuvash to have inherited the legacy of the Bulgar language and history and was categorical in his belief that the ancient Chuvash tribes had never inhabited the environs of Lake Baikal (1971, p. 227).

Scholars who study the history of the Caucasus are of the opinion that the Savars/Savirs/Sabirs were present in the Northern Caucasian steppe and piedmont plains no later than the first centuries CE (Čečenov, 2014, p. 288). This takes into account the difference in the frontier lines of the territories occupied by tribes and peoples in Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Borders generally did not have clear courses. Moreover, the boundaries of contact were vague and changed very often.

The Migration History of the Ancestors of the Chuvash

At the beginning of the 2nd century CE, Claudius Ptolemy who referred to the Savars as *Σαύαροι*, noted that they resided in the Caucasus and were neighbors of the Aors and Pagirits (1843, p. 171). For this reason, scholars are justified in tracing the settling of the Northern Caucasus by the Savars, as well as the Barsils, back to the pre-Hunnic period. There is an opinion that this refers to the region around the Northwest Caspian Sea (Fedorov & Fedorov, 1978, p. 57). Strabo's (64/63 BCE–23/24 CE) *Geography* helps us correct this misconception. If we begin with the Northern peoples, the following picture emerges: the Sarmats, then the Scythian nomads who lived in tents, then the Aors and the Siraks, inhabited the South, as far as the Caucasian Mountains. "The Aors, in fact, live along the current of the Tanais" (1994, p. 480); the Don River, in other words. Although there was a whole century between Strabo and Ptolemy, the pattern of migration of the people from the second half of the first century BCE up to the beginning the second century CE, did not change significantly. It also presents no difficulty to deduce the geographical space inhabited by these tribes: from the Tanais River to the Riphean Mountains along the parallels, and from the lower Atil to the Caucasus Mountains, including the meridian. Thus, published sources unequivocally confirm that by the beginning of the 2nd century, the Aors occupied "the steppe along the Caspian coast, both to the East, and to the West, of the Volga"



(Artamonov, 1962, p. 65). In that case, according to Ptolemy, it appears that the Savars inhabited the Caspian coast of Dagestan.

Historian V. D. Dimitriev endorsed the opinion of Claudius Ptolemy concerning the presence in the 2nd century in the Northern Caucasus of groups of Savars and posited that the ancestors of the Chuvash appeared there in the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE (2014, p. 89).

Indeed, at the beginning of 3rd century, the Greek grammarian Aelius Herodianus wrote about the *σάπειρ/σάπειρ* tribes. At that time, the Sapirs were neighbors of the Bekhirs and the Bizers (Guilielmi, 1823, p. 51). Back in the first half of the 3rd century BCE, Apollonius of Rhodes wrote about the Sapirs/Sapeirs (*Σάπειρες*), who had “long lived” near the Bekhir and Bizer tribes (2001, p. 44, 63). The lands in question are located south of the Chorokh River.

Around 361–362 CE, the Sapirs lived on the southeastern coast of the Pontic Sea between the Bazirs and the Tibarens, according to Ammianus Marcellinus (1970, p. 26). One must recall, however, that these authors were referring to events that had occurred before their own time and had already been taken up into the annals of history.

On the basis of the information at hand, we may make assumptions about the weaponry of the Savirs. Thus, the burial grounds from the 4th–5th centuries on the Palasa-Syrt heights (30 kilometers south of Derbent) contain close combat (long and short swords and daggers) and longer-range (bows and arrows) weapons. Their design suggests Hunnic origins. The adult male population which took part in military activity in one way or another possessed a high degree of military training for the time (Saidov, 2014, p. 24–25). Independent of the ethnic origins of the population of the Palasa-Syrt heights, all these characteristics are relevant also for the Savirs, since they also lived in the region around Derbent. Moreover, they formed the major force that defended the Derbent Fortress.

In the second half of the 5th century, the Savirs settled in the Kuma River basin, along the Caspian Sea. We see the *Σάβειροι* ethnonym surfacing again frequently in Byzantine sources after the death of Attila. At the beginning of the 460s, the Savirs/Sabirs forced the Onogurs (i.e. the Bulgars) to abandon the lands they occupied and move west of Transcaucasia. Thus, the southeastern nomad territories came completely under the control of the Savirs.

After the death of Attila in 453 and the breakdown of the Hun alliance into autonomous tribes, the Savir confederation gained ascendancy. The government of the Onogurs disintegrated, and in its place there arose a new military-political amalgamation headed by the Savirs. The remainder of the Huns were included in it, as well as the Bulgars. “The separation in the Northern Caucasus of the first Hun-Bulgar alliance, headed by the Onogurs, facilitated the beginning of two processes that occurred simultaneously: the unification of the nomads of East Transcaucasia and the emergence of a new military-political union headed by the Sabirs” (Džafarov, 1985, p. 69).

In about 463, the Savirs, who lived a nomadic life in the Northern Caucasian steppe, attacked the Saragurs, Urogs, and Onogurs. In turn, the Saragurs invaded the lands of the Akatsirs. The incursion by the Sabirs/Savirs (Σαβίρων) was a response to a supposed incursion by the Avars; however, the Avars themselves were being driven out by the tribes living on the coastline (Prisc, 1829, p. 158; Dobrovits, 2011, p. 373-409). As archeological research at Palasa-Syrt has demonstrated, though, the migration of the Savirs was necessitated by pressure from the Persian military forces. As for the first mention of the Savirs, the majority of scholars rely on the data provided by Priscus. To correct the record, in Priscus's original text, the date 463 CE is not specified, but rather 461-465. The date was fixed later by someone quoting him in an offhand manner.

These events related by Priscus are also cited in a publication by G.S. Destunis. This account mentions the tribes "living on the shores of the ocean" (Priscus, 1860, p. 87). The commentaries of V. V. Latyšev too establish that "these tribes must be localized somewhere in the region of the Caucasus, for it was precisely there that the testimony of Greek and Latin authors locates the Sabirs, displaced by the Avars from their homeland" (1948, note 97).

I.E. Zabelin reconstructed the situation in almost the same way. He claimed that the events took place on the shores of the ocean, and, more specifically, in the region of the Don and Dnieper River estuary. After this, the Savirs, purportedly pressed by the Avars, left the Don lands for the Terek. Their dominion then stretched from the Don to the Cimmerian Bosphorus (1876, p. 370-371). At the same time, we must keep in mind the source—an excerpt from Priscus. The context makes it clear that the tribes vanquished by the Savirs (Saragurs, Urogs and Onogurs), meanwhile, had already settled in the Northern Caucasus. This is the first important point.

The second point is that they went to the Romans (i.e. the Byzantines) to petition for help against their offenders. If the events had taken place in Siberia, as is indicated in most scholarly literature, it would be difficult to speak of the Byzantines as protectors or patrons. The distance was too vast, and the Romans had nothing to do with tribes settled in Siberia.

Third, the text speaks unequivocally about the actions and tribes near the ocean (i.e. sea), which is not at all relevant for the Siberian forest-steppe. Judging by the sources and the historical literature, these events and peoples relate to the Northern Caucasus. At the same time, one must agree with the claim that the Savirs/Sabirs (an ethnonym that is often concealed behind the name Hun) were the predecessors of the Avars in the Northern Caucasus (Tsaroeva, 2016, p. 30), i.e., they were in the Caucasus before the Avars (until 463). Therefore, the assumption by several authors that the events described here took place in Siberia, as well as the myth of the first appearance of the Savars/Savirs in Europe around 463, have no basis in fact. At the same time, A.M. Kuznetsov, in a reply to N.M. Karamzin, was mistaken in claiming that the Ugors and Bulgars were pressed out of Asian Russia



by the Savirs, who soon moved to the Caucasus Mountains and fought there with the Romans and the Persians until 578 (Karamzin, 1998, p. 298). Uncertainty about this assertion is evident in the scholarly literature. For example, one reads: “The Savirs (Sabirs) are a nomadic people, who first lived, *probably* (italics mine. – A. S.), in Western Siberia, between the Altai and the Urals, were expelled by the Avars and then resettled in the region to the north of the Caucasus” (Filatov, 2011, p. 267).

The geographical confusion, nevertheless, persists in scholarly literature. At times one and the same author expresses contradictory views. Thus, one author writes: “The Suvars are a union of Transcaucasian tribes, living in the Northern Caucasus from the 2nd c. CE.” Yet the same author, just two lines down, claims that the Suvars (Savirs, Sabirs), who were pushed out of Western Siberia by the Avars in the second half of the 5th century, then settled southeast of the Transcaucasian part of the European steppe, and commanded the valley along the Caspian Sea and the Caucasian Mountains to Derbent (Guseinzade, 1979, p. 33). If one accepts this claim, it follows that in the 2nd century, the Savirs lived in the Caucasus, and in the 5th century, the Avars forced them out of Siberia, into the Caucasus, which is clearly absurd. Due to the above-mentioned historical-geographical context, it is impossible to agree with opinions such as: “At the beginning of the 6th century, the Sabirs, as part of a group of other nomadic tribes, arrived from the Caucasian steppe” (Zimony, 2014, p. 258).

The Derbent and Daryal gorges served as primary military and trade routes. Thus, the Savirs at the beginning of the 6th century began to control the eastern and central regions of the Northern Caucasus. They occupied those and other strategic gateways. For this reason, scholars have called the very beginning of the 6th century the period of Savir hegemony. Moreover, some scholars even specify a date—506 CE (Róna-Tas, 1999, p. 212).

Together with the Khazars, the Savirs “made up one and the same military-political union headed, however, by the Savirs, as in the first half of the 6th century in the majority of the historical chronicles it was their name that was invoked to signify barbarians living to the north of Derbent” (Artamonov, 1962, p. 127).

In the 6th century, the Sassanids also built a series of fortresses in the Caucasus region. They were supposed to keep the “Northern barbarians” in fear (Hun-Savirs, Bersils, Khazars, Alans, etc.) Kavad I (488–531) built a rammed earth wall between Shirvan and the Daryal gorge with a series of forts along it. After his son, Khosrow I Anushirvan (531–579), erected the famous Derbent wall (this time from large cubic stone blocks) and several fortresses. The wall was built in response to the obvious threat from the nomadic “Huns,” who lived in the North: they had destroyed the economy and life in the regions of the Sassanids bordering Armenia and Caucasian Albania. The Sassanids settled these border lands with immigrants, who considered themselves much freer people than their neighbors to the south (Stepanov, 2010, p. 15).

In his descriptions of the tribes who peopled the regions of the Caucasian Mountain range in 550–552, Procopius spoke of the Huns, the so-called Sabirs (Σάβειροι), and several other Hun tribes. They lived east of the Zygii, who made their home in the northern part of the Pontic coast (1905, p. 291–292; 1905a, p. 497, 538).

Zacharias Rhetor indicated the distribution of the tribes by location in the year 555. He listed them from south to north: Armenia with the Aran, the Sisgan, then the Bazgun, whose lands stretched to the Caspian gates and sea. The Huns also lived there. Then the Avnagurs, followed by the Agars and the Sabirs. All of them were within the boundaries of the Dadu (2011, p. 595). Further to the North, the Bulgars were located, as well as the Alans, the Kurtargars, the Avars, the Khasars, and so forth. In other words, the Bulgars were situated north of the Savirs.

In the middle of the 6th century, the Savirs commanded the North Caspian passage, which Armenian historians call Chora, and where, in 568–569, Derbent was established. “Meanwhile the Turki crossed the Volga and invaded the Northern Caucasian lands... Soon after this, advanced detachments of Turki reached the shores of the Black Sea in the region of the Kuban estuary” (Vernadskij, 2000, p. 198). In 571, separate advanced detachments of Turks reached the boundaries of the Northern Caucasus.

The year 572 marked the beginning of deep discord between Persia and Byzantium over the Caucasian question. Having discovered that the Huns had sent an embassy to Justin II, Khosrow I grew uneasy. In fact, the Basileus paid the Persians an annual tribute in gold so that the invading tribes would not trouble either of the states. Now Justin dissolved the peace, saying that he was ashamed to pay a tribute to the Persians: “Due to this, that very great war of the Persians and the Romans took place” (Theophan, 1980, p. 30, 54). As I. S. Čičurov supposed, by “invading tribes” about whom Theophanes did not speak directly, one should understand, above all, Caucasian Huns, primarily Hun-Savirs (1980, p. 89). Indeed, at this time the Huns, whom we should understand to be Savirs, commanded Derbent and were the eastern neighbors of the Alans. The Savirs also troubled the Byzantines by undertaking bold campaigns into their provinces in Asia Minor.

As we can see, in the second half of the 6th century, the Savirs settled in the district of the Kuma River along the Caspian Sea. The Byzantine Empire used the Avar tribes against them. At this time, these tribes invaded the steppe of the Western Caspian, and penetrated further, into the Northern Black Sea coastal area.

The multiple records about the Savirs in the 2nd through the 6th centuries across a substantial area of the Caucasus (the Northeast and the South) is evidence of their large numbers and their high degree of mobility.

Drawing on the *Armenian Geography* of the 7th century, I. G. Semenov significantly expanded the existing notions about the areas occupied by the Savirs.



On a current map of the Western Caspian Depression, the region inhabited by the Savirs should be indicated on the territory extending from the lower course of the Terek River to the lower reaches of the Volga. At the same time, it takes into consideration the level of the Caspian Sea and changes in the hydrogeographic map of this zone of the Caspian Depression in the 6th and 7th centuries (2012, p. 36).

In 657–659, the Western Turkic Khaganate unraveled. At the same time, in the northeastern piedmont of Dagestan, the Suvar state was formed, based on early feudal relationships. Its capital was Varachan. Through force of habit, Armenian sources continued to call it the Kingdom of the Huns, and Arabic chroniclers called it the Dzhidan. (Fig. 1)

When characterizing the reign of Prince Aluanka Varaz-Trdat, Movses Kalankatuatsi recalled the magnificent city of Varachan, capital of the Savirs. A log from the sacred oak of the Hun-Savirs, who were devotees of the divinity *Kuar*, was taken there. Messengers of Alp-Ilituer, the Grand Prince of the Hun-Savirs, invited the Bishop of Israel to be their teacher and establish a throne in the city of Varachan (1984, p. 124–128). In 684, the wish of the Hun-Savirs was granted.

Douglas Dunlop and A. V. Togan believed Varachan to be located between Baku and Darband. A. V. Togan considered the word *Varachan* to contain the root *var*. Peter Golden (1980, p. 244) shared this view. Naturally, *var*, in the word *Varachan* coincides with the Chuvash word *var*, meaning “ravine.” Archeological sources that mention the eonym enabled the identification of the city of Varachan with the ancient settlement of Shah-Senker (Chuvash. *Senker* ‘blue’), located 36 km. north of Derbent (Gadžiev, 2001, p. 168). The city of Varachan continued to exist until 737. After it was destroyed by the Arabs, Semender became the capital city of the “land of the Huns” (Gmyrja, 1995, p. 138).

By the end of the 7th century, the Kingdom of the Huns was a completely autonomous state with its own political center. It had governing bodies, spiritual and secular aristocracies, and an army of thousands of soldiers. During these years, entire peoples and tribes in the Caucasus disappeared due to incursions by the nomadic Turkuts and the Byzantine-Iranian warriors. The Kingdom of the Huns, however, was able to withstand the assaults and maintain its integrity.

In 723, the Arabian commander al-Dzharrakh invaded the territory of Vabandara, i.e., Varachan. At that time there were 40,000 houses in the city (Al-Kufi, 1981, p. 20).

According to Al-Baladhuri, the Arab commander Mervan entered the Savir possessions of Khamzin in 737. The inhabitants, however, refused to sign a peace treaty with Mervan. The castle was taken after a month-long siege; the fortress was burned and destroyed. A forced agreement presupposed the delivery to the Bab of 500 youths and maidens altogether, as well as 30,000 measures of grain annually (Baladzori, 1927, p. 18). Other sources, as well, wrote about the capture of Khamzin by the Arabs. Al-Kufi, for example, said that the defenders of the fortress did battle with the Arab army: “Marvan and the commander of the fortress fought in heated

battle, and the Muslims lost many dead” (1981, p. 55). Armenian sources wrote that Mervan, with support from the Armenian prince Ashot, undertook a campaign to the lands of the Huns. He took the city of Varachan and returned victorious, having seized enormous bounty (Vardan, 1861, p. 96; Gevond, 1862, p. 81–82). Of course, “Dagestan Huns,” in this case, refers to the Savirs, for by this time the Huns did not represent a single ethos, nor a military-political union. Through force of habit, the Savirs who were part of the confederation until the death of Attila, were still called Huns. It may be supposed that the capital of the Hun-Savirs ceased to exist after 737 (Gmyrja, 2012, p. 4). The Savirs did indeed leave these places; however, they went not to the Northern Volga region, as several historians suggest (Kaxovskij, 1972, p. 215), but to the interfluvial lower reaches of the Volga and the Don, where, together with the Alans, the Khazars, and the Magyars, they formed the Saltovo-Majaki archeological culture, which existed in the 8th–9th centuries (Figure 2).

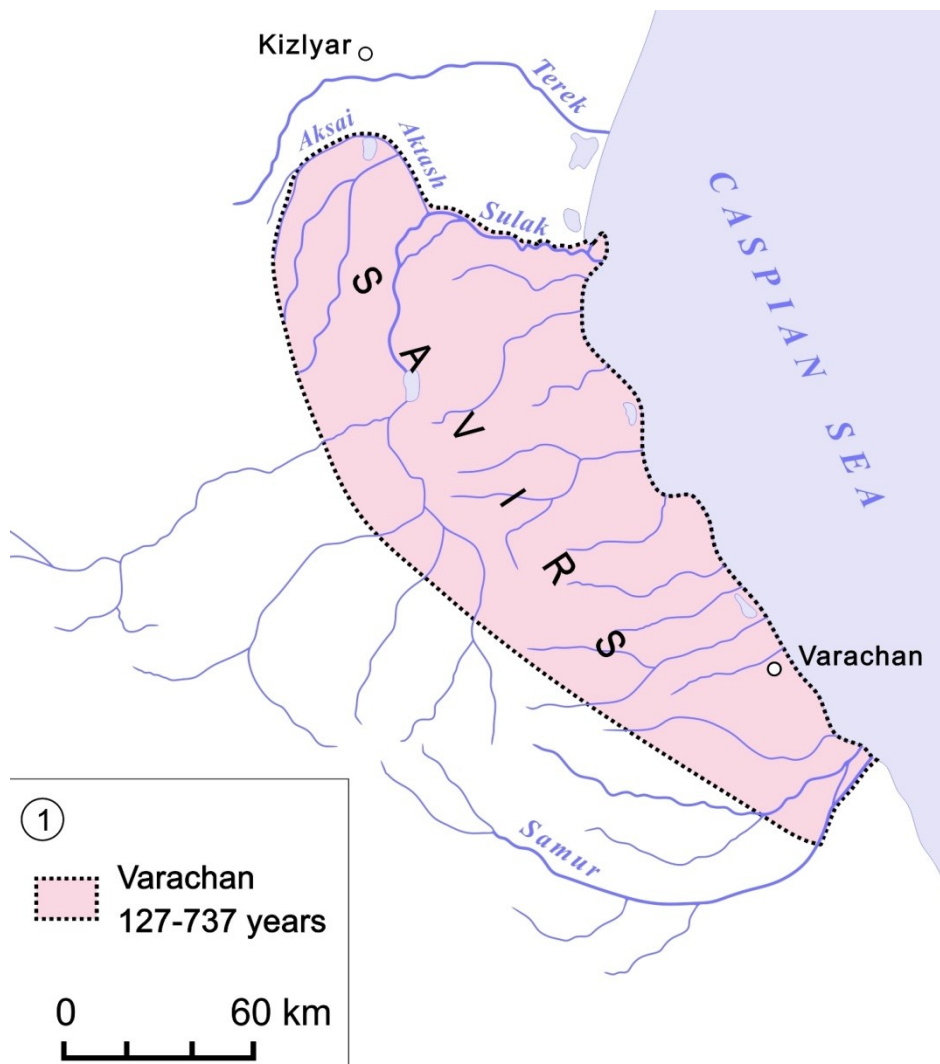


Figure 1. The Savirs' state with Varachan as its capital.

As we see, the Kingdom of the Huns was the first to absorb the blow of the Arab forces. This considerably weakened the Arabs, of course, which the Khazars used to their advantage. After the events of 737, Atil, the Khazar capital, was established in the Volga delta. For that reason, scholars believe that the inclusion of the lands of the Huns (i.e., the Savirs) in the sphere of influence of the Khazar state occurred within the framework of the Arab-Khazar war for the Caucasus (Gmyrja, 1995, p. 75).

In the second half of the 8th century, the military-political situation changed in favor of Khazaria. The Khazars made both the Suvars and the Bulgars pay tribute to them. The land of the Suvars becomes a Khazar federation. However, in the middle of the 8th century, Derbent was in the hands of the Arabs; the Khazars were unable to reconcile themselves to this. They made several (unsuccessful) attempts to breach the fortress walls. The Caliph gave an order to the leader of Derbent, Ezid, to restore the old fortifications. Several fortresses destroyed earlier were restored and reoccupied, Suvari fortress, among them. In addition, Ezid placed one thousand watchmen on the borders, most strategically in the Suvari fortress. Thus, contingents of soldiers were present in all the fortifications around Derbent, and the city was protected from the Khazars (Muxammed-Avabi, 1898, p. 83–84). As we can see, the Suvari fortress, originally indubitably constructed by the Suvars, was built nearby the city of Derbent long before the 8th century.



Figure 2. Suvars are part of the peoples of the Saltovo-Mayak culture

In the second half of the 9th century, Ibn Khordadbeh located the Suvar kingdom on the North side of the Baba mountain range (Koh-i-Baba) (1986, p. 110). Thus, the Savars/Savirs/Suvars inhabited the Northern Caucasus and the coast of the Caspian Sea for at least seven centuries (2nd–9th centuries). Of these, for just over two centuries (from the death of Attila until they became part of the Khazar kingdom, in 453–650 CE) they played a dominant role in Eastern Transcaucasia. During the period, they were sometimes on the side of Persia, sometimes on the side of Byzantium. (Indeed, the Alans did precisely the same. At times they led a nomadic existence, and at other times a settled existence.) In the Caucasus, they had their own state, with Varachan as the capital. In all cases they preserved their integrity, fortified their tribal union, earned money through military ventures, traded their wealth with their temporary allies. The sources, by force of habit, continued to call the land of the Savirs, with its capital Varachan, the “Land of the Huns.” As has been correctly noted, due to its level of social-economic development, the Land of the Huns (i.e., the Savirs) was “on the way to forming a state of the early feudal type” (Gmyrja, 2007, p. 111).

L. B. Gmyrja reports the approximate geographic location of the places of habitation of the Caspian Huns, which also helps us narrow down the area inhabited by the Hun-Savirs.

These

were plains, which extend for 300 km., delimited by the course of the Aksai and the Samur rivers. These rivers delineate a strip of land with a breadth varying between ten and thirty kilometers, extending from the coast of the Caspian Sea and the advance line of the Caucasian Mountain range. The southern part of Dagestan in the Caspian region (from the city of Makhachkala to the Samur River delta) includes a maritime depression stretching for 160 kilometers, with narrow strips in three areas, formed by the close proximity of the seacoast to the mountain range near Makhachkala (width of 3.5–4 km.), Izberbasha (4–5 km.), and Derbent (3.5 km) (Ibidem, p. 112).

Toponyms that have been preserved to this day testify to the great number and mobility of the Savirs in the Caucasus, in North Ossetia and Digoria, for example: *Savir-kom* “Savir Ravine”; the *Savir-don* “Savir River”; *Savar-tizon-khokh* “Savir Mountain”.

The year 895, in the southern Russian steppe, was pivotal, due to the aggression of the Pechenegs. The destruction of numerous settlements forced the population to search for fresh places for habitation with suitable natural conditions. A displacement of the peoples of Saltovo–Mayaki culture took place. The Pechenegs advanced further to the West and forced the Hungarians from their accustomed territories onto the northern coast of the Black Sea. In 896, the attack of the Pechenegs forced the Hungarians to leave for the Carpathians (Zimonyi, 2014, p. 157–159). The turmoil among the population of the Northern Caucasus was advantageous to Byzantium. Letters of the Byzantine emperor addressed to the Pechenegs bear witness to the fact that the Byzantine state maintained permanent diplomatic

contact with the Pechenegs, sending envoys and imperial gifts. Precisely at that time (almost simultaneously with the Magyars), the Suvars set course for the North, moving further up, until they reached the southern boundaries of Volga Bulgaria at the end of the 9th century. From this time forward, the elite of the Volga Bulgars began to control both the Barsils and the Savirs (Komar, 2010, p. 193).

The city of Suvar on the Volga was originally the capital of the Suvar tribe (Figure 3). Coins and written documents allow us to confirm that it was independent of the city of Bulgar and subject to the Khazar king at the beginning of the 10th century. Subsequently, in the epoch between Nasr and Talib, a unification of these two cities took place under the influence of the sons of Ahmed, who, in 941–992, minted coins in both Suvar, and Bulgar (coins of Nasr ben-Ahmed-Suvar, Talib ben-Ahmed, and Mumin ben-Ahmed). The final loss of independence of the city of Suvar took place in 976. In this year, Mumin minted coins in both cities.

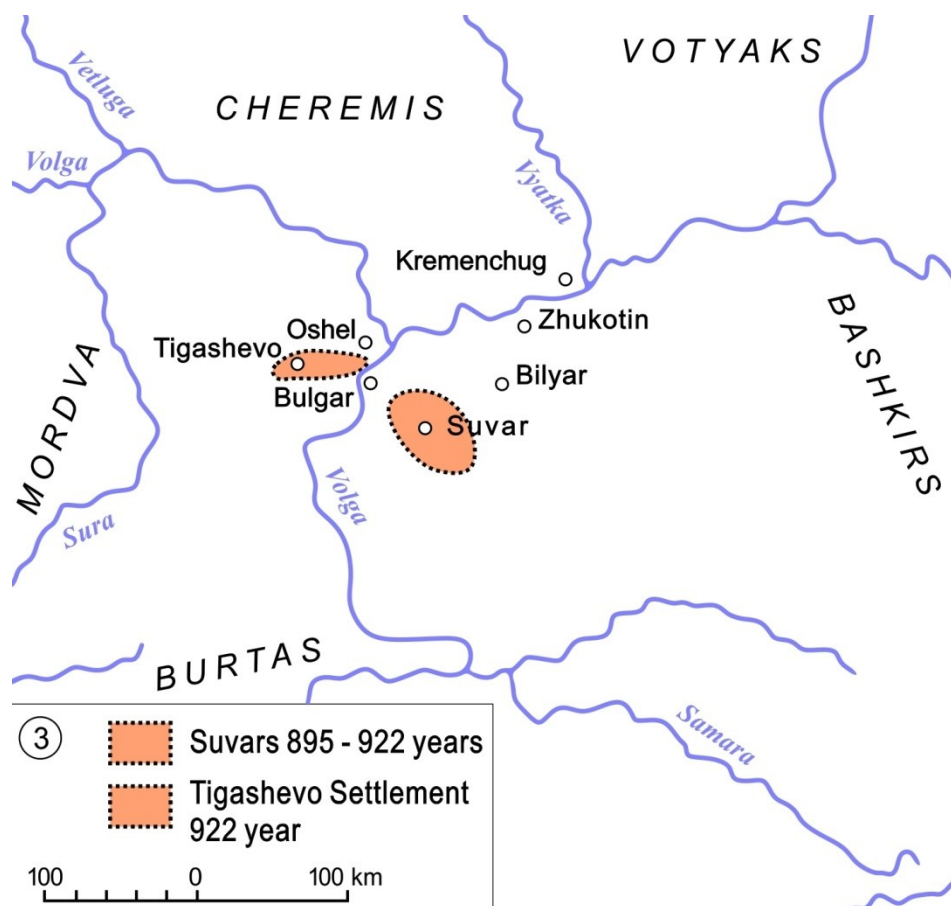


Figure 3. The Suvars' places of settlement from 895 to 922 CE.

Of course, the stone city of Suvar on the Volga was established no earlier than the middle of the 13th century. Therefore, al-Garnati (Ibn Said), in 1135–1136, wrote simply “residents of Suvar” (1971, p. 27), i.e., residents of the land of Suvar. In any

case, the city of Suvar that arose on the left bank “in the epoch of the Golden Horde... no longer played any economic or political role” (Egorov, 1985, p. 96).

According to the report of an anonymous Persian-language author from the end of the 10th century, Sūvar was a city located not far from the city of *Bulghār* (Minorsky, 1970, p. 163). Ibn Said al-Magribi (=al-Garnati, 13th century) noted that the city of Savdā (Suvar) was situated on the same latitude as *Bulgār* (2009, p. 31–32). The precise location of the city of Suvar was determined through the efforts of Šigabudtin Mardžani and G. N. Axmarov. This location was four kilometers to the west of the city of Kuznechikha along the Utkā River. A. P. Smirnov’s systematic excavations followed. “The ancient settlement of a rectangular formation was situated four kilometers to the west of Kuznechikha and at 0.5 km to the southeast of Danilovka, on the plains, on the left bank of the Utkā River” (1941, p. 137–138). To be more precise, the ancient Suvar settlement was situated on the present location of Tatarsky Gorodok in the Spassk district. Trading quarters were also adjacent to the settlement (Tatgorodsk, Pokrovsk, and Kuznečixinsk) (Rudenko, 2015, p. 284–287). By present-day reference points, the lands of the Suvars are defined mainly as the rather small southwestern part of the Spassk district of the Republic of Tatarstan, and the entire Staromainsk district of the Ulyanovsk area. Consequently, the greeting of the Arab mission occurred on the lands of the Suvars. This witnesses to the fact that by the time Ahmad Ibn Fadlan arrived, the Suvars lived in a compact area in the southern part of the Bulgarian Volga, and didn’t mix with the Bulgars and other tribes.

One may accept the assertion that Volga Bulgaria was formed as a result of the unification under a single authority of the autonomous ethnopolitical territories. For that reason, it is important to determine and specify the location of the Suvar tribes as part of Volga Bulgaria. The diary of Ahmad Ibn Fadlan serves as a reliable source for this claim. In the south of Volga Bulgaria, Ibn Fadlan consistently enumerated the rivers encountered during their caravan: Irkhiz (Irgiz), Bachag (Mocha), Samur (Samara), Kinal (Kinel), Suh (Sok), and Kiundzhiuliu (Kundurča). At this last river, the Arab mission met the Bashkirs. After Kundurča there was the Dzharamsan River (Bolshoi Cheremshan), where the Suvars also lived. The encounter with the Arab embassy occurred at a distance of a day and night from the headquarters of the king. Here, the representatives of Almush stayed for four days, expecting the arrival of all the princes of Volga Bulgaria for meetings with the guests (Kovalevskij, 1956, p. 131). The princes introduced the four main tribes of the land—the Bulgars, Suvars, Eskels, and Barsuls.

“In addition, he (Almush) wanted [tribes] to move to a different place, and sent for the people, called the Suvaz, commanding them to move with them. [They] refused him” (Ibn-Fadlan, 1956, p. 139). In other words, the king of Volga Bulgaria interacted with the Suvars through a messenger. This points to the political and territorial independence of the Suvars from the Bulgars.

Soon, also in the year 922, most of the Suvars who were at odds with the political system (primarily on religious grounds) of the Almuş, with Vyrax as its leader, resettled on the right bank of the Volga, moving to the lands of the modern-day Chuvash, south of the Chuvash Republic and north of the Ulyanovsk region. The final territorial separation of the Suvars from the state of Volga Bulgaria took place. The stratigraphical data from the ancient Tigashevsk settlement allows us to determine that toward the first half of the 10th century a new sanctuary appeared on the location of the old settlement (Figure 3).

Conclusions

An analysis of the original sources and published research on the subject allows one to follow the history and geography of migration of historical ancestors of the Chuvash: the Savars/Savirs/Sapirs/Sabirs/Suvars (Figure 4).

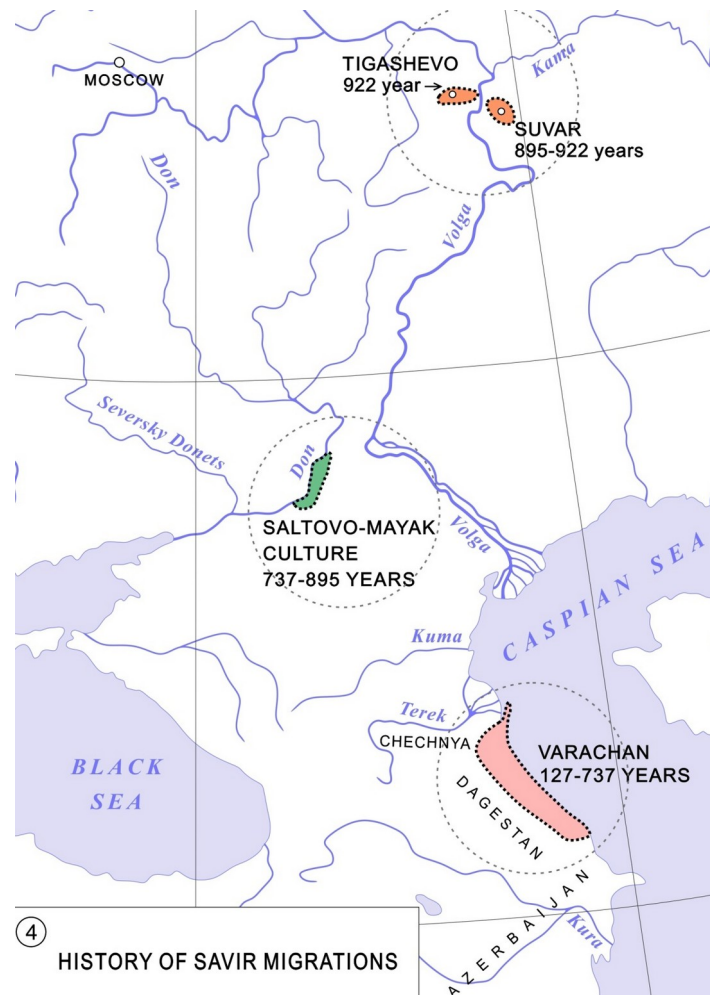


Figure 4. The areas inhabited by the Savirs/Suvars in 127-922 CE.

According to Ptolemy, the first reliable acknowledgment of their presence dates approximately to the year 127, in the Northwest Caspian region. In the 3rd century BCE and in the 3rd century CE, Apollonius of Rhodes and Aelius Herodianus located them in the valley of the Chorokh River, near the tribes of the Bekhirs and Bizers. In the 4th century, according to Ammianus Marcellinus, the Sapirs were based on the Southeast coast of the Pontic Sea. In the 4th–5th centuries, according to modern archeological excavations, they lived on the Palasa-Syrt heights (30 km to the south of Derbent). In the second half of the 5th century, the Savirs settled in the basin of the Kuma River along the Caspian Sea. After the death of Attila, in 453 CE, they formed and led a new military-political union, which included, in addition to the Savirs/Sabirs themselves, the Bulgars and the eastern wing of the Huns. From the beginning of the 6th century, the Savirs began to control the eastern and central areas of the Northern Caucasus. From this time, the Khazars entered into the military-political union headed by the Savirs. In the year 571, isolated advanced detachments of Asiatic Turks reached the boundaries of the Northern Caucasus. The presence of the Savirs in the 2nd–6th centuries in a large area of the Caucasus (the Northeast and South) attests to their great numbers and high degree of mobility. According to the *Armenian Geography* of Movses Khorenatsi and the research of I.G. Semenov, the area of habitation of the Savirs included the territory from the lower course of the Terek River to the lower reaches of the Volga. In the years 657–659, as a result of the disintegration of the Western Turkic Khaganate, the Suvar state was formed in the northeastern foothills of Dagestan, with Varachan as its capital. After the destruction of Suvar by the Arabians in 737, the city of Semender temporarily became the capital of the land of the Hun-Savirs. In the second half of the 8th century, the military-political situation changed in favor of the Khazars. The Khazars imposed a tribute on both the Suvars and the Bulgars. The year 895 was pivotal in the fate of the Suvars, due to the aggression of the Pechenegs. The Suvars turned to the North and, at the very end of the 9th century, they reached the southern fringes of Volga Bulgaria. Here they founded their capital city Suvar. In 922, however, because of a conflict with the Bulgar prince Almush, largely on religious grounds, they left for the right bank of the Volga. Archeological excavations allow us to confirm that the Suvars settled on the site of the old Tigashevsk settlement, and established their sanctuary there. The pseudo-theory of the origins of the Savirs in Siberia is also refuted in this work.

As we see, migrations, involving numerous changes of location, permitted the Savirs to preserve their ethnic identity.

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