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We Are Not Tatars! The Invention of a Bulġar Identity

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A funny thing happened to me during a visit to Kazan in June 1998. I was there to participate in a conference devoted to the sources for the history of the Golden Horde, which clearly marked me as a specialist in Tatar history. During the conference, I was approached by a number of local residents—not scholars participating in the conference—who began to tell me, an unsuspecting visitor, about the unknown history of the Bulġars of the Volga region. First of all, they told me that they considered themselves Bulġars, not Tatars. The elderly gentleman who spent the most time stalking me and then conversing with me told me that he was, in fact, a member of the Dulo clan, a statement which I considered remarkable and to which I will return below.

The most tantalizing detail which they shared with me was that there was a body of sources for Bulġar history that had been preserved through the 20th century but which was subsequently suppressed by the KGB. According to these gentlemen, this body of source materials had resurfaced recently and was published privately. These materials include the three-volume publication of materials known collectively as *Ĵa^cfar tarixi* (or “History of Ĵa^cfar”) by Baxŝi Iman (1680), of which I was able to buy one copy.¹ Other published materials that remain unavailable to me include a work entitled *Ŗan kizⁱ destanⁱ*. These materials, which claim to be authentic historical sources for the 9th–17th/18th centuries, are viewed as the all-important suppressed historical heritage of the Bulġar people, who according to some are mislabeled today as “Kazan Tatars”, “Volga Tatars”, or simply “Tatars”.

This body of source material raises certain important issues which I would like to briefly raise, including: Who are the Kazan Tatars? Who were the Bulġars? What Bulġar identity has existed in the Volga region in the past? Is the publication of this collection of sources an important landmark in the study of the history of the Volga Bulġarians and their descendants, or is it an elaborate forgery? What is the relationship between the modern Kazan Tatar identity and the modern Bulġar identity? To honor Professor András Róna-Tas I would like to outline a preliminary set of answers to these questions.

¹ Iman (1993–1997). See also Nurutdinov (1993, 1995) and Ŗnirel'man (1998).

1. Who are the Kazan Tatars?

As I have outlined elsewhere, the history of the Kazan Tatars, a modern Muslim Turkic people of the Middle Volga region, is usually seen in terms of a complex and sometimes contradictory chain of identities: Volga Bulğar, Muslim, Tatar, and Kazan Tatar. The first link in this chain of peoples to whom the Kazan Tatars believe they are related is the *Volga Bulğars*, a medieval Turkic people. The evidence of the Volga Bulğarian funerary inscriptions shows, however, that their language was more closely related to the modern Chuvash language rather than the modern Kazan Tatar language.²

The second link in this chain is *Islam*. The Volga Bulğars had clearly converted to the Islamic religion by circa 922 C.E., as we know from the travelogue of Ibn Faḍlān. While all Kazan Tatars are Muslims with the exception of the Kräšen Tatars (Tatars who were forcibly Christianized following the Russian conquest of the xanate of Kazan in 1552), the modern Chuvash show no evidence of ever having been Muslims. Today Kazan Tatars consider that they have an unbroken tradition as Muslims going back to the 10th century.

The next link in this chain is the historical use of the ethnonym *Tatar*. Although the ethnonym *Tatar* occurs in the Old Turkic inscriptions (deciphered only at the end of the 19th century), usually Kazan Tatars associate the early use of this name with the state known as the "Golden Horde",³ whose population was known in the sources for the 13th–14th centuries as both Mongols and Tatars.⁴ In the 15th–16th centuries this name was also associated with the xanate of Kazan and the other states of the Later Golden Horde.⁵ The final link in this chain of identities is the modern *Kazan Tatars*, who define their past in terms of this chain of identities in the past and who live in territories associated with Volga Bulğaria, the Golden Horde, and the xanate of Kazan.

In an article published in 1990 I proposed that this well known chain of identities was canonized as the national historical tradition or national myth of the Kazan Tatars in the 19th century by Šihabäddin Märjani (1818–1889), the father of Kazan Tatar national history.⁶ I argued that since Märjani was the first to present this chain of identities to a Tatar audience in their own language as the well formulated theory of a modern Kazan Tatar territorial nation, he must be considered the father of the modern national identity of the Kazan Tatars. Since the appearance in Tatarstan of a Russian translation of my original article on this subject, there has been a veritable explosion of interest among Tatar scholars in Märjani as

² On the Volga Bulğarian language and its relationship with Chuvash see Róna-Tas-Fodor (1973); Róna-Tas (1978, 1982); Hakimzjanov (1978); Muhametšin-Hakimzjanov (1987); and Erdal (1993). On the end of this language as a result of the Black Death see Schamiloglu (1991a, 1994).

³ Even the name "Golden Horde" is problematic. See Schamiloglu (2001b) and (?b: Introduction).

⁴ On the Golden Horde see Schamiloglu (1984, 1992, 1993a, 1993b, ?a, ?b, ?c, ?d).

⁵ On the xanate of Kazan see Pelenski (1974).

⁶ See Schamiloglu (1990, 1991b).

the first national historian of the Tatars. Indeed, it would be difficult to find an earlier example of such a national historian elsewhere in the Turkic world.⁷

In other words, we may now explain the identity of the Kazan Tatars as a modern construct, just as would be the case with every other modern national identity today in Europe, Asia, Africa, or the Americas. As with any other such construct, it has many elements that require a leap of faith to resolve contradictions. As with any other such construct, it develops over time, as we can see from the construction of the idea of a Kazan Tatar territorial nation to the formalization of a Tatar nationality with its own Tatar ASSR within the structure of the USSR to the attempts to reconceptualize the role of Tatarstan within the Russian Federation today. Finally, as with any other such construct, it is inevitably contested.

2. Who were the Bulgars?

The origin of various Bulgarian states is connected with the state of Kubrat (*Qobrat/Qubrat*), which existed in the Kuban river/Pontic steppe region in the first half of the 7th century.⁸ The descendants of Kubrat split into several groups: those who migrated to the Volga-Kama confluence to found a Volga Bulgarian state subject to the Khazar state, another group which remained in the North Caucasus (possibly representing ancestors of the modern Balgars of the North Caucasus), and those who migrated to the Balkans in the 7th century. This last group established the Danubian Bulgarian state in confederation with local Slavic tribes under Asparux Khan (r. 681–ca. 700). The Danubian Bulgars have left few traces of their original Turkic language and culture as they rapidly Slavified.⁹

Many fundamental aspects of early Danubian Bulgarian history (as well as the early Danubian Bulgarian language!) are known only from much later accounts. While scholars believe that the ruling clan of the Danubian Bulgars was the *Dulo* clan, in fact, the *Dulo* clan is known only from the famous Bulgarian “List of Princes”. According to Beševliev’s reconstruction of this list:¹⁰

1. *Avitohol* lived 300 years, his clan is *Dulo*, his year [i.e., year of the beginning of his reign] is *dilom tvirem*.
2. *Irnik* lived 150 years, his clan is *Dulo*, his year is *dilom tvirem*.
3. *Gostun*, the vice-ruler, this one [ruled] 2 years, his clan is *Ermi*, his year is *dohs tvirem*.
4. *Kurt* reigned 60 years, his clan is *Dulo*, his year is *šegor večem*.

⁷ For references on Mārjani and other historians of this period see Schamiloglu (2001a) and my paper “The Concept of Nation and the (Re)conceptualization of Identities in Central Asia (19th–21st Centuries)” (forthcoming in the proceedings of the conference on Central Asia held at the University of California-Berkeley, April 2001).

⁸ See most recently Róna-Tas (2000).

⁹ Beševliev (1981) and Golden (1992: 244–253).

¹⁰ Beševliev (1981: 482). I have substituted *šegor* for *segor* (sic) in lines 4–5 which is presumably the result of a typographic error.

5. *Bezmer*, 3 years and whose clan is Dulo, his year is *šegor večem*.
6. These 5 princes ruled on the other side of the Danube for 515 years with shaved heads. And then came *Ispcrih*, the prince, to this side of the Danube. And it is so until now.
7. *Esperih*, the prince, 61 years, his clan is Dulo, his year is *vereni alem*.
8. *Tervel*, 21 years, his clan is Dulo, his year is *teku čitem*.
9. ... 28 years, his clan is Dulo, his year is *dvan šehstem*.
10. *Sevar*, 15 years, his clan is Dulo, his year is *toh altom*.
11. *Kormisoš*, 17 years, his clan is Vokil, his year is *šegor tvirim*. This prince changed the Dulo clan, that is *Vihtun*.
12. *Vineh*, 7 years, his clan is Ukil, their [i.e., of the both of them] year is *šegor alem*.
13. *Telets*, 3 years, his clan is Ugain, his year *somor altem*. And this [was] because of another.
14. *Umor*, 40 days, his clan is Ukil, his [year] is *dilom tutom*.

It is believed that this list is based on earlier Bulgarian sources and dates perhaps from the 13th–14th centuries, but it is preserved only in copies from the 15th–16th centuries or later.¹¹ Since this “List of Princes” clearly includes data that is of a semi-legendary nature, its accuracy regarding people and events of the better part of a millenium earlier is inevitably open to criticism. On the other hand, the Bulgar Turkic words in the list (*dilom tvirem*, *dohs tvirem*, *šegor večem*, *vereni alem*, *teku čitem*, *dvan šehstem*, *toh altom*, *šegor tvirim*, *šegor alem*, *somor altem*, *dilom tutom*) are consistent with what is known from other sources concerning medieval Bulgar Turkic.¹² This would suggest that there could indeed be a 7th–8th century or later source that could have served as the basis for the later source.

As far as I am aware we have no other basis in the earlier contemporary sources for claiming that the ruling clan of Danubian Bulgaria was known as the *Dulo*. The insightful analysis of Pritsak aside,¹³ it is difficult to offer a comprehensive picture of the ruling Dulo clan beyond the names of its rulers. Gyula Németh offers the opinion that *Dulo* corresponds to the Hungarian title *gyula* on both historical and linguistic grounds because of the close contacts between the early Hungarians and the Bulgars.¹⁴ Otherwise we have precious little historical basis for discussing in detail popular claims linking the *Dulo* clan of Danubian Bulgaria with the names of other prominent tribes and tribal confederations known from ancient and medieval Inner Asian history.

As Professor Róna-Tas would say, it is dangerous to build a hypothesis on top of another hypothesis. Given the semi-legendary character of the data contained in this “List of Princes” concerning the Dulo ruling clan in Danubian Bulgaria and the lack of corroborating sources,

¹¹ Pritsak (1955: 15). See also the comments of Róna-Tas (1982: 148–151).

¹² Pritsak (1955: 12–25).

¹³ Pritsak (1955: 39–41).

¹⁴ Gyula Németh (1940/1986: 265–270, especially 269 and note, 321) considers that *Dulo* corresponds to the Hungarian title *gyula*. On this period see also Halasi-Kun (1943).

it would be premature to conclude on the basis of this one source alone that the Dulo clan was also the ruling clan in Volga Bulğaria, nor is there information from any other contemporary source corroborating this.

3. What Bulğar identity has existed in the Volga region in the past?

It is difficult to trace the existence of a separate Volga Bulğarian people following the conquest and integration of the Volga Bulğarian state into the Golden Horde. The arrival of Kipchak-speaking populations, population transfers under Mongol rule, and finally the Black Death led to a profound transformation in the ethnic and linguistic character of the Middle Volga region by the late 14th century. It would be difficult to even attempt to describe who the Volga Bulğarians might have been after this point in time.

Nonetheless, the name *Bulğar* continued to have a special place in the history of the peoples of the Middle Volga region. Let us consider, for example, the classic analysis of the most important modern Tatar historical works offered by Mirkasim Usmanov.¹⁵ In this work he treats the *Ĵamīʿ üt-tāvarix* of Qadīr ʿAlī Ĵālayīr (1602), the anonymous *Dāftār-i Ćingiznamā* (end 17th century), the *Tāvarix-i bulğariya* of Xisamāddin b. Šārāfāddin Bulğari-Muslimi, and the *Tāvarix-i bulğariya* of TaĴāddin Yalčīqul. From just this list alone we see that histories of Bulğaria figure prominently in Tatar literature of the past half millenium, and one of these authors even identifies himself as a “Bulğar”.¹⁶

The first of these works, the *Tāvarix-i bulğariya* of Xisamāddin b. Šārāfāddin Bulğari-Muslimi, which was recently republished in Kazan,¹⁷ was not known to scholarship until it was described by I. N. Berezin in 1846.¹⁸ It is considered by some to belong to the 16th century, while others from MārĴani to Usmanov consider it to be a much later work or criticize it strongly.¹⁹ I must add my strong endorsement of the latter view. Not only is the rendering of basic facts relating to the time of Chinggis Khan and even the time of Tamerlane confused, the source explicitly refers to Nadir Šāh Afšar, who was born in 1688 and rose to be the ruler of Iran from 1736 until his death in 1747.²⁰ Therefore this must be considered a work from the second half of the 18th century or even the 19th century, though certainly some parts of it could be based on earlier sources. The second of these works, the *Tāvarix-i bulğariya* or the *Tarixnamā-i bulğar*, written by TaĴāddin Yalčīqul in 1220/1805 and recently published in a new edition in Ufa,²¹ is characterized by Usmanov as naïve and

¹⁵ Usmanov (1979).

¹⁶ In fact, hundreds of earlier Tatar authors had used the pen name *Bulğari* in earlier centuries, and Usmanov considers that this usage reflected an awareness of their origin or homeland (Usmanov 1979: 139–140).

¹⁷ Möslimi (1999). This work was originally published in Arabic script in Kazan in 1876, 1887, 1892, and 1902. This edition in Cyrillic transcription and modern Tatar translation is based upon the 1902 edition.

¹⁸ Berezin (1846: 37–39).

¹⁹ Usmanov (1979: 135–136) and Möslimi (1999: 5).

²⁰ Möslimi (1999: 35–36).

²¹ Galjautdinov (1998). This is the second revised edition of a work originally published in 1990.

not very convincing.²² I must add my strong endorsement of his view concerning this work as well.

How do we explain the persistence of the name “Bulğar” in such pre-modern sources? We know that traditional forms of pre-modern identity included identity based upon religion, locality, and tribe (where applicable). Thus one’s traditional pre-modern identity might have been as a Muslim, Christian, or Jew, as a native of Kazan, Samarqand, or Türkistan, or as a Ĵalayır, Qongrat, or Nayman, to name just a few examples. (Knowledge of one’s tribal affiliation was lost among Kazan Tatars by the modern period.) How the histories of the Bulğars written in the Middle Volga region in the pre-modern period fit within this framework and what connection it has to the earlier historical Volga Bulğarian state, if any, is an important question. I would suggest that the Bulğarian histories of this period cannot represent a modern Bulğarian national identity, since the concept of “territorial nation” was not known yet in the Russian Empire at this time. Instead, one must consider whether such works advocate a religious or a regional identity, as is to be expected.

Let us examine one small section of Xisamäddin b. Šaräfäddin Bulğari-Muslimi’s work *Tävarix-i bulğariya*, the history of the conversion of the Volga Bulğars to Islam. According to this source, in the year A.H. 9/630 C.E. the Prophet Muhammad sent ʿAbd ar-Rahman b. Zubayr, Zubayr ibn Ĵaʿda, and Talha ibn ʿUthman to Bulğar to teach them about Islam. According to this work, at this time the Volga Bulğarian ruler was Aydar Xan and his vezir was Baraĵ.²³ This section of the source is obviously problematic in many ways: the Islamic Caliphate had just barely begun its expansion beyond the Arabian peninsula during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad, the Bulğars had probably not yet migrated to the Volga-Kama confluence during the lifetimes of the Prophet Muhammad and Kubrat, and so on. This same basic information (with slight differences in the names) is repeated by Yalčıquł as well.²⁴ In view of such information, I would argue that Xisamäddin b. Šaräfäddin Bulğari-Muslimi’s work is in part an attempt to write—or fabricate or repeat the fabrication of—a Muslim history of the peoples of the Volga region going back to the conversion to Islam during the time of the Volga Bulğarian state.

More recently, Allen Frank has argued, basing himself on such histories of the Bulğars, that there was a Bulğar *communal* identity in recent centuries, which he has compared with the modern Kazan Tatar identity I have discussed above.²⁵ As I have noted elsewhere, however, Frank confuses various earlier forms of pre-national communal identity with the construction of a modern ideology for a territorial nation.²⁶ These two cannot be the same thing. Whether a Volga Bulğarian communal identity ever existed in the 16th–19th centuries is a topic which requires further exploration. I am not convinced that one ever did, and it appears that attempts by individual intellectuals in the 18th–19th centuries to advocate linkages with a Muslim past represent discontinuity with the past rather than continuity.

²² Usmanov (1979: 158).

²³ Möslimi (1999: 25–27).

²⁴ Galjautdinov (1998: 210–215 text/ 184–188 transcription/ 162–164 Russian).

²⁵ See Frank (1996: 113–127) and Frank (1998: 9–11).

²⁶ Schamiloglu (2001a).

4. Authentic histories or elaborate forgery?

The next major question I would like to turn to in this essay is whether the publication of the collection of materials known as *Ĵa^cfar tarixi* is an important landmark in the study of the Volga Bulgarians and their descendants, or whether it is an elaborate forgery intended to bolster the claims of modern advocates of Bulgar nationalism. I will argue that this work is clearly an elaborate forgery, perhaps continuing in the tradition of earlier fabrications of histories of the Bulgars.²⁷

The forgery of documents, historical sources, and other artifacts is a universal phenomenon.²⁸ In the pre-modern period the forgery of documents could serve to bolster legal claims, while in more recent times the forgery of valuable works of art has become all too well known. As I have noted above, it is likely that 18th–19th century “Bulgarian” histories were attempting to forge links with an Islamic past. In the 20th century, however, the fabrication of historical sources (including archeological sources) serves a different purpose: it is usually intended to bolster modern claims to ancient historical linkages by advocates of one modern nation or another.²⁹ Therefore this phenomenon is usually a product of the rise of modern national ideologies, a modern process whose beginning is often linked with the period of the French Revolution. Many sources have been fabricated by advocates of one territorial nation or another in Europe. Some even become incorporated into the national myth of that country’s history, as is the case with a famous source for the history of Ireland. Many sources fabricated by advocates of one territorial nation or another become so embedded in that country’s national myths that it becomes difficult to determine what the real history was.³⁰ Another very interesting example is offered by Šora Nogmov’s *History of the Adygey People*. It has been shown that this work, written in the period before the rise of national ideologies in the Caucasus, relied heavily upon Karamzin’s historical writings to fabricate a local historical tradition for his own people in the North Caucasus.³¹

Most recently there has been international controversy over a work by Jacob d’Ancona published under the title *The City of Light*.³² This work claims to be the record of the voyage to China of the Jewish merchant Jacob, a native of the northern Italian city of Ancona. Jacob is supposed to have left Venice in April 1270, traveled to Zaitun (modern Quanzhou, Fujian province), and returned to Venice in May 1273, thus predating the voyage of Marco Polo by four years. According to the translator, this work is written in vernacular Italian with many words in Hebrew. Unfortunately, the owner of this unique manuscript will not allow the translator to show the manuscript to them or even to reveal the name of the owner. Thus, as a result of the sensational character of this work, the problematic nature of the historical

²⁷ See also the works by Omeljan Pritsak and Damir Isxakov cited in Šnirel’man (1998: 158, n. 34) and the polemic in Nurutdinov (1993: 40–54).

²⁸ See most recently Rendell (1994) and Šnirel’man (1998).

²⁹ See the volume entitled *The Invention of Tradition*, especially the two important essays by E. Hobsbawm (1983a, 1983b); and the works cited in Šnirel’man (1998).

³⁰ See for example Trevor-Roper (1983: 16–17).

³¹ Boeck (1998).

³² Jacob d’Ancona (1998, 2000).

information contained in it, and the lack of opportunity for scholars to examine the original manuscript of this work, many have expressed skepticism over the authenticity of this work.³³ Of course, this only reminds us of the controversy that still surrounds the authenticity of the account of Marco Polo!³⁴

The “mysterious” disappearance of “ancient” historical works also goes hand in hand with the fabrication of historical sources. There has been a long controversy over whether the *Slovo o polku igoreve* “The Tale of Igor’s Campaign”, whose unique manuscript disappeared in the fire of Moscow in 1812, was written close in time to the events of 1187 depicted in this tale, much later in time during the medieval period, or in the 19th century as a modern scholarly fabrication.³⁵ Nurutdinov, in his introduction to the publication of *Ĵāfar tarixī*, also refers to the mysterious disappearance in the 1920s of the manuscript of the *Qissa-i Yusuf* of Muhammad Ğali to support their claim to the authenticity of lost materials on which this *Ĵāfar tarixī* is based (the dating of this work to the Volga Bulgarian period is also problematic in my view).³⁶

Ĵāfar tarixī clearly attempts to incorporate references to travelers known from other historical sources. For example, Chapter 8 of *Ğazi Baraĵ Tarixī*, entitled “The arrival of the great embassy”, includes information about the arrival from the Caliph of the embassy of Aĥmad Ibn Faġlān (ca. 922).³⁷ Chapter 18 of this work, “Bulġar and the reign of Kolīn and Anbal”, includes information about the arrival of Abū Ĥamīd al-Ġarnaṭī (1153).³⁸ This overlap with known historical sources has been used as an argument to defend the authenticity of *Ĵāfar tarixī*.

Ĵāfar tarixī also includes data from other problematic sources. Chapter 3, “The period of the Bulgarian *baltavar*” mentions the Dulo, otherwise known only from the Danubian Bulgarian “List of Princes”. *Ĵāfar tarixī* also makes use of certain problematic historical figures known from earlier “Bulġarian” histories such as Muslimi’s *Tāvarix-i bulġariya*. For example, the name *Baraĵ* is found in earlier “Bulġarian” sources and in later genealogies (*šāġārā*), while in *Ĵāfar tarixī* this is the name of an important figure, Ğazi Baraĵ. At the same time Usmanov considers the occurrence of the unusual name Baraĵ in the *Tāvarix-i bulġariya* to be unique in medieval Tatar literature.³⁹

The material in *Ĵāfar tarixī* introduces a variety of other historical problems, including anachronisms, that are too numerous to survey here. How do we explain the unusually early occurrence of ethnonyms such as “Tatar”, “Kuman”, and others in Bulġarian history of the

³³ See for example Spence (1997).

³⁴ See Wood (1996).

³⁵ On this huge field see Cooper (1978); Zimin (1992); Droblenkova *et al.* (1991); and most recently Mjakišev-Fedosova (2000).

³⁶ See the introduction to *Ĵāfar tarixī*. Appendix I offers an English translation of the introduction and Appendix II an outline of the contents of volume one of *Ĵāfar tarixī*.

³⁷ Translations of this work include Togan (1939); Kovalevskij (1939, 1956); Blake-Frye (1949); Czeglédy (1951); and Canard (1958).

³⁸ Translations of this work include Ferrand (1925); Bol’šakov-Mongajt (1971); Dubler (1953); and Ducatez (1985).

³⁹ See Möslimi (1999: 25–27) where Baraĵ is Aydar’s vezir; and Usmanov (1979: 174–178).

7th–10th centuries as presented in this work? Were the earliest chronicles mentioned here written in Arabic, Persian, or Turkic? Since there was no Islamic Turkic literature in the 7th–10th centuries, the other medieval “Bulğar” sources included here are also unusually early chronologically from the perspective of the rest of Muslim Turkic literature.⁴⁰

One may also ask how likely is it that the “original” translator of this work as described in the introduction, presumably a layman, would be able to automatically convert all the Hicri dates of pre-modern Islamic texts into the Gregorian calendar while translating into Russian? Needless to say, one Hicri year often corresponds to two separate Gregorian years, and this aspect of the conversion of dates is not reflected in this work.

A reliance on existing source materials also presents various philological traps for the author of this corpus. For example, Chapter 3, “The period of the Bulğarian *baltavar*” and Chapter 4, “The reign of the Black Bulğarian *beks*”, present the form *baltavar* as representing an official Bulğarian title. While the defective form *baltavar* is known from the sources, more recently Turkologists consider that this title is properly reconstructed **él tábär* > Bulğarian *yiltever*.⁴¹ A source claiming to be an internal Bulğarian source would presumably have given the correct form. While some scholars believe that *Bulğar* and *Bilär* in the sources refer to one and the same city (based on the fact that *Bilär* is the Middle Bulğarian form of *Bulğar*),⁴² in Chapter 18 “Bulğar” and “Bulyar” are mentioned as separate cities. One could also compile a long list of supposedly Bulğarian names occurring in this source and ask why the classic Bulğarian linguistic features known as rhotacism (*z* > *r*) and lambdacism (*š* > *l*) are not present in these names. This is not to even mention the folk etymologies scattered throughout the text.

To conclude, after a brief review of many of the fundamental problems present in this text, it seems to be beyond any reasonable doubt that this work is a fabricated historical document of the 20th century, an “invention of tradition”. A complete refutation of this would require a commentary as long as the original work itself, but I cannot imagine that any historian or Turkologist will want to invest the time needed to write such a work. What I have found intriguing, however, is the parallel between the earlier “Bulğarian” sources of the 18th–19th centuries and this work of the 20th century.

5. Modern Kazan Tatar identity vs. modern Bulğar identity

Although there were proposals to use the word *Bulğar* following the construction of a new Kazan Tatar national identity, this was never developed fully as an alternative ideology in pre-Soviet times. For example, even a disciple of Mārjani such as Rizaäddin Faxräddin used the terms “Bulğar Turk” and “Kazan Turk” in some of his writings.⁴³ I believe this reflected the “Tatar” versus “Türk” controversy which existed at that time from Ismail Gaspıralı’s idea

⁴⁰ Compare the usual chronology for Muslim Turkic literature in Bombaci (in press).

⁴¹ Róna-Tas (1982: 166–167); and Golden (1992: 254).

⁴² Zimonyi (1990: 37–39)

⁴³ See Fäxreddinev (1993: 20–22).

of a greater pan-Turkic identity. Certainly the labels “Bulgar Turk” and “Kazan Turk” would later fail as an official “Tatar” or “Kazan Tatar” nationality came to be officially sanctioned and institutionalized within the USSR.

In the Soviet period, Kazan Tatars also experienced vilification for their connection through the Golden Horde with the Mongols and the so-called “Tatar Yoke” which—in the interpretation of Russian national history which became adopted as the official interpretation of Soviet history—blamed Mongols (and therefore Kazan Tatars, too) for all of the supposed ills that Russia suffered during this period in its history. While it is beyond the scope of this essay to review these twists and turns of 20th century history, I might simply point out that it has everything to do with ideology and nothing to do with the professional study of medieval history. What I believe is relevant for our purposes here, however, is that for some Kazan Tatars, their identity simply became too controversial during the Soviet period.

My own guess is that the decision taken within the USSR to demonize Mongols and Tatars within the official version of Soviet history—following in part negative interpretations of the “Tatar Yoke” in Russian national history—led to a degree of reaction against this Tatar identity, a kind of stigmatization of national identity. There was a real incentive in the Soviet period to deny Tatar identity and to offer instead a more appealing alternative: “We are not Tatars, we are Bulgars” (which also carries the subtext “We are not Mongols, we are Bulgars”). It was small but vocal fringe elements which advocated a Bulgar identity in the late Soviet period.⁴⁴ Even today some groups work actively to petition national and international organizations to change the official name of this modern ethnic group from “Kazan Tatar” to “Bulgar”.⁴⁵

Why was *Ĵāfar tarixi* written? I think the answer is clear: to create a historical basis for claiming that the Kazan Tatars of today—whose identity is the result of a modern construct authored by Šihabāddin Mārjani—should call themselves “Bulgars” and not “Tatars”. This is consistent with the ideology and goals of modern Bulgarists. The earlier attempts to fabricate a “Bulgarian” past were connected with Islamic legitimacy, not nationalism. It was only in the late 19th century, at the time of the emergence of new categories of national identities among the Muslim Turks of the Russian Empire, that “Bulgar Turk” could even be thought of as an alternative to “Kazan Tatar”, but that idea had very little currency in its own time. It seems to me that in the 20th century—in reaction to the vilification of a Tatar identity in

⁴⁴ For a relatively subtle example of an advocacy of a Bulgar identity see Karimullin (1988: especially 118–119). See also Musina (2001: 517).

⁴⁵ On April 7, 2000 the Tatar-Bashkir Service of Radio Liberty (www.rferl.org) reported that the president of the Bolgar National Congress (BNC) in Tatarstan, Gusman Halilov, had appealed to the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation on April 6, 2000 requesting the annulment of the decree issued by Vladimir Lenin on the establishment of the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. According to Halilov, it is the position of BNC that Lenin had no reason to call the republic “Tatar” because this name does not reflect the Bolgar roots of the people living there. Halilov disagreed with scholars who called the ancient Bolgar people who moved to the Danube area “Bulgarians” and the Bulgars who moved to the Volga River region “Bulgars”. According to Halilov, “We are one people, we are Bulgars.” Halilov had also appealed to the European Court of Human Rights (Strasbourg) to complain that the governments of Russia and Tatarstan refuse to issue him a passport with his nationality listed as “Bolgar” instead of “Tatar”. The court reportedly notified Halilov that his case was being considered.

Soviet times—the idea of a “Bulġar” identity gained new momentum. This differs from the attempts of “Bulġarian” histories of the 18th–19th centuries to create linkages with an Islamic past. Rather, it contests the name of the modern territorial nation known as “Tatar” since the 19th century, advocating instead “Bulġar” as the true name of this nation. Of course, such a “Bulġar” ideology is no less a construct, only it is a construct of the 20th century. For this reason modern claims of “Bulġar” identity—and the surprising claim of descent from the Dulo clan—must all be considered modern inventions of tradition.

APPENDIX I: Introduction to the Publication of *Ĵa^cfar tarixi*⁴⁶

Ĵa^cfar tarixi “History of Ĵa^cfar” is the only known collection of Old Bulġarian chronicles to have survived. And as with many other Bulġarian sources, *Ĵa^cfar tarixi* has a complex and tragic history.

The collection was written in 1680 for the leader of the Bulġarian independence movement, Seyyid Ĵa^cfar, by Iman, who was secretary of his chancellery in the eastern part of Bulġaria—Bashqortostan. Evidently Seyyid planned to use this work for patriotic propaganda.

Baxŝi Iman—who, judging by his name was a Bashqort Bulġar—accomplished his goal brilliantly, including such works as: *Ġazi Baraĵ tarixi* “History of Ġazi Baraĵ” (1229–1246) written by Ġazi Baraĵ. “The Righteous Path, or the Pious Deeds of the Bulġarian Ŝeyxs” (1483) written by Muhammad Amin. *Qazan tarixi* “History of Kazan” (1551) written by Muhammadyar Bu-Yurġan. *Ŝeyx Ġali kitabi* “Book of Ŝeyx Ġali” (1605) written by Iŝ Muhammad, and other works.

The work clearly played a certain role: in 1681 Seyyid Ĵa^cfar succeeded in leading in Bulġaria a revolt for independence with the goal of establishing an independent Bulġarian state. But following his defeat at the hands of the Tsar’s forces led by Menzelinskij in 1683, he disappeared deep into the heart of Bashqortostan, where he was seized by treacherous feudal lords and was handed over to the Russian rulers. We have no further knowledge of this outstanding Bulġarian figure...

We do not know the fate of Baxŝi Iman or the original of his wonderful collection. But we know how even popular books disappear. Thus, from the 16th century to the 20th century there has come down only one copy of the work *Qissa-i Yusuf* of Muhammad Ġali, and that mysteriously disappeared in the 1920s.

As for *Ĵa^cfar tarixi*, the unique copy of this collection that is known to us was written in the 19th century in “Bulġar Tŭrki”, appeared in the Kazakstani city Petropavlovsk (known in Bulġarian as *Qizil Yar*) in the beginning of the 20th century. How did that happen?

For a long time Qizil Yar was one of the centers of Bulġarian culture. In the 19th century a large group of Bulġars who had maintained ties with Kazakstan since time immemorial moved there. In addition many Bulġarian deportees traveled through the sadly famous Siberian highway which passed through Qizil Yar on their way to resettlement and exile.

⁴⁶ F. G.-X. Nurutdinov, “Neskol’ko slov o svode” (Iman 1993: 5–6).

And during the time of the civil war all the forces of the Bulgarian national movement opposed to the Bolsheviks (including Ğayaz Isxaki⁴⁷ and others) escaped through Qizil Yar. It cannot be excluded that one of them left the invaluable copy of the collection known as *Ğa'far tarixi* for safekeeping in Qizil Yar. We do not know in whose possession this work remained for safekeeping, but in 1939 the editor's uncle Ibrahim Moxammed-Karimoviĉ Nigmatullin (1916–1941) translated its text into Russian in several notebooks. My mother, Rašida Karimovna Nurutdinova, sister of I. M.-K. Nigmatullin, explained the reason for this to me. According to her account, at the end of the 1930s there was a complete destruction of Bulgarian books and manuscripts in the national Bulĝaro-Arabic script. Thanks to the preservation of the collection known as *Ğa'far tarixi*, the poem of Mikail known as *Šan kizi dastani* (865–882), and the epic poem *Baraĝ dastani* (16th century), I. M.-K. Nigmatullin recorded the texts of these writing in the Russian language. And just in time, too. Somebody informed on him and he was summoned to the NKVD. At that time, the minimum sentence for possession of “old alphabet” writings (*foliant*) was 10 years in Stalin's camps. But they let uncle go. This indicates that the copy of *Ğa'far tarixi* was found and destroyed by the Chekists. The texts in the Russian alphabet were not subject to destruction, and the agents of the NKVD, who were following their instructions “strictly word for word”, did not seize the notebooks in the Russian language. Thanks for even this, as they say...

In 1941, on the eve of the Great Patriotic War, I. M.-K. Nigmatullin was serving in the Baltic region, in the border town of Lida, and died soon after the outbreak of war.

My unforgettable grandmother Latifa, not believing the news of the death of her son, carefully kept all of his books and notebooks. In 1966, when I was preparing to enter the university, she opened a small cupboard for the first time and passed on to me what was left from uncle. In 14 or 15 notebooks written in a fine handwriting were the texts of the aforementioned Bulgarian works recorded in Russian.

Since that time, during each visit to grandmother I wrote down large extracts from uncle's notebooks... In 1976 Latifa-abi passed away. According to her wishes, I took uncle's archive with me to Kazan.

At the beginning of the 1980s I wrote a letter to the Academy of Sciences of the USSR in which I requested financial help to publish extracts from *Ğa'far tarixi*, but I received a scornful reply. I then decided to write and publish, even if just a summary, extracts of all three sources, for which purpose I took the notebooks and some of my notes to my father's dacha. I wrote the summary. But soon all of my uncle's notebooks and some of my notes were stolen from the dacha. Only some of my notes which were left at home were preserved. These include half of the extracts from the text of the collection, and the greater part of the extracts of the texts of *Šan kizi* and *Baraĝ dastani*.

⁴⁷ The Tatar writer and political activist Ğayaz Isxaki (1878–1954) is listed as a Bulĝar. Isxaki was a founder of modern Tatar literature and wrote dozens of books and novels in modern Tatar, including a work predicting the end of Tatar culture in 200 years if there were no reforms. Isxaki was written out of histories of Tatar literature in Soviet times because of his political activities in emigration as a Tatar nationalist and as an advocate of an Idel-Ural (Volga-Ural) political confederation.

Having preserved after such great efforts a part of the text of the collection known as *Ĵa^ofar tarixi* in extracts written in Russian by I. M.-K. Nigmatullin, it is offered to the attention of the reader. In this version [by I. M.-K. Nigmatullin] the dates are given new style. The reader will find in it a wealth of information about the past of the Bulgars, their ancestors and neighbors, and I hope it will reflect well upon our chroniclers and I. M.-K. Nigmatullin, who saved these essays for their descendants.

APPENDIX II: Summary of the Collection Known as *Ĵa^ofar tarixi*⁴⁸

1. Ĵazi Baraĵ, *Ĵazi Baraĵ Tarixi* ("History of Ĵazi Baraĵ") (1229–1246)
 - Chapter 1: The ancient history of the Bulgars [p. 7]
 - Chapter 2: Idel during the reign of the Xon kings [p. 13]
 - Chapter 3: The period of the Bulgarian *baltavar* [p. 14]
 - Chapter 4: The reign of the Black Bulgarian *beks* [p. 21]
 - Chapter 5: The city Bulgar becomes the capital of Bulgar [p. 34]
 - Chapter 6: The reign of Bat-Ugir [p. 43]
 - Chapter 7: The beginning of the reign of Almiš [p. 48]
 - Chapter 8: The arrival of the great embassy [p. 57]
 - Chapter 9: The death of Končina and his descendants [p. 62]
 - Chapter 10: The departure of the great embassy [p. 65]
 - Chapter 11: The Xoris way and the attacks on it [p. 70]
 - Chapter 12: On the death of Almiš Ĵa^ofar and the reign of his sons [p. 73]
 - Chapter 13: The reign of qan Muhammad [p. 82]
 - Chapter 14: The time of Talib Mumin [p. 95]
 - Chapter 15: The reign of Timar [p. 102]
 - Chapter 16: The reigns of Masgut, Ibrahim, Baluk and Azgar [p. 107]
 - Chapter 17: The war between Axad and Adam and the reign of Adam [p. 113]
 - Chapter 18: Bulgar and the reign of Kolin and Anbal [p. 121]
 - Chapter 19: The reign of Otyak [p. 131]
 - Chapter 20: Bulgar under the reign of °Abdullah Čelbir [p. 135]
 - Chapter 21: The last campaign of Čelbir and the reign of Mir-Ĵazi [p. 163]
 - Chapter 22: The first reign of Altinbek [p. 166]
 - Chapter 23: The reign of Ĵazi-Baraĵ [p. 168]
 - Chapter 24: The second reign of Altinbek [p. 170]
 - Chapter 25: Ĵazi-Baraĵ becomes emir of Bulgar again [p. 175]
2. Ĵazi-Baba, *The Biography of Ĵazi-Baraĵ* (1262) [p. 186]
3. Muhammad Amin, "The Righteous Path, or the Pious Deeds of the Bulgarian Šeyxs" (1483) [p. 189]

⁴⁸ Iman (1993).

4. Muhammadyar Bu-Yurġan, *Bu-Yurġan kitabı (Qazan tarixi)* "The Book of Bu-Yurġan (History of Kazan)" (1551)

- Chapter 1: Relations between Bulġar and Kipchak during the weakening of the Tatar xans [p. 201]
- Chapter 2: Time of Asan [p. 210]
- Chapter 3: War of the 3 heroes [p. 226]
- Chapter 4: The decline of the Azanoviĉi [p. 231]
- Chapter 5: Bulġar during the reign of Yabik-Muhammad and °Abdūlmumin [p. 237]
- Chapter 6: The reign of Seyyid-Emir Sain-Yusuf [p. 248]
- Chapter 7: The death of qan Yusuf and the ascent of Kul Ašraf [p. 265]
- Chapter 8: The beginning of the reign of Kul Ašraf [p. 269]
- Chapter 9: The rebellion of Mamet [p. 274]
- Chapter 10: The Ismaildanov war and the rebellion of Safa Giray [p. 277]
- Chapter 11: How Suyumbika served xan Qul Ašraf [p. 283]

5. İš Muhammad, *Šeyx Ğali kitabı* "The Book of Šeyx Ğali" (1605)

- Chapter 1: How the Alats almost gave Kazan to the infidels [p. 296]
- Chapter 2: How the army of Alaša destroyed Kazan [p. 299]
- Chapter 3: The hunting war [p. 302]
- Chapter 4: How the reign of Šeyx Ğali began and ended [p. 305]

6. Extracts from a variety of sources (dates as late as 1708 mentioned)

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