

# The geography of the Pontic Steppe in the 9–10th century

On the perception of the geographical space in early medieval literature

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## ABSTRACT

This study intends to present the geographic perceptions of the early medieval sources describing the Eastern European steppe. The main goal is to outline the dwelling places of the Hungarians in the 9<sup>th</sup> century and the Pechenegs in the 10<sup>th</sup> century on the Pontic steppe. The sources, I examine here, embody very different points of view and come from different cultural circles. The so-called *Armenian Geography* from the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the Byzantine *De administrando imperio* with information from the late 9<sup>th</sup> and mid-10<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the Persian *Hudūd al-‘ālam* (Regions of the World) from the late 10<sup>th</sup> century. As an important addition, some important pieces of the Muslim Jayhānī tradition from the very beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The first three sources give a detailed description of Eastern Europe, presenting the peoples, countries and borders living in the vast area east of the Carpathians and north of the Black Sea. Harmonizing their mental map is a rather difficult task in several cases due to the dynamic changes in steppe conditions. *Armenian Geography* is important in understanding the hydrography and determining where the Bulgars lived. I outlined the area controlled by the Hungarians and then the Pechenegs near the Black Sea primarily on the basis of the DAI. The *Hudūd* provides additional important pieces of information for this, but it caused serious difficulties in several cases, such as the localization of different Bulghār countries or the Mirvāt. These two sources complement each other well for the two groups of Pechenegs, east and west of the Volga. The examined sources add up to a very dynamic map of the Eastern European steppe from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> century, showing the political processes in their progress.

**KEYWORDS:** 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries, geographic perceptions, Eastern European steppe, Armenian, Byzantine and Muslim sources, Hungarians, Bulgarians

Hard to imagine an accurate reconstruction of any events of the Medieval Steppe without the appropriate interpretation of the geographic description of the written sources. It is a very serious problem of the research of the Hungarian Prehistory, but in general, it is important for all researchers who are interested in the history of the Steppe. There is a problem in comparing the geographical description of the sources, which usually were written in an absolutely different cultural environment. The sources are placing different geographical, ethnic names on the theoretical map of the East European Steppe, which had an absolutely different form in the mind of the contemporary writers as it is in our imagination today. The identification of the geographical names, i.e. names of the rivers, seas, mountains or hills on the modern maps are easier as the localization of the ethnic names or the names of the countries, because the latter are less a constant phenomenon.

The area that I investigate here, covers the North Pontic area, from the Danube mouth to the Caucasian mountains. To the north it extends to Kiev, upper Don and the Middle Volga region. It was that wider area where the Hungarians lived before their conquest and where their groups left behind can be searched. The main goal of the present analysis is the interpretation of our information about dwelling places of the Hungarians and the Pechenegs in the 9–10<sup>th</sup> centuries.

We have two detailed descriptions of the Pontic Steppe from the 9–10<sup>th</sup> centuries. The first is the *De Administrando Imperio* (DAI), which is mainly a compilation of reports from Byzantine embassies, possibly information of Khazar, Pecheneg or Hungarian origin. Its information partly refers to the 9<sup>th</sup> century and partly to the 10<sup>th</sup> century, and in many cases, these can be separated.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, the interpretation of our other important source, the *Ḥudūd al-‘ālam* is perhaps also more difficult due to its transcription.<sup>2</sup> When comparing these sources, I also relied on the Armenian geography of the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, which provides many reference points with its geographical data.<sup>3</sup>

The Pontic steppe with its endless plains being divided only by large rivers has a fundamentally different geography than the authors of the examined sources could have known based on their own environment.<sup>4</sup> The author of the so-called Armenian geography imagined the vast plain from his mountainous homeland, which contains countless well-separated

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1 English edition DAI 1967. For the two phases of the editing, between 900–910 and the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, see Howard-Johnston 2000, 314. The 9<sup>th</sup> century origin of Chapter 38 has been suggested before. Kapitánffy 1999.

2 English edition Minorsky 1982.

3 English edition Hewsén 1992.

4 It is clear from Minorsky's comments that the researchers could not imagine that the hills in the steppe environment look like mountains, so they try to identify the different mountains of the sources (*Riphei*, *Bulgar*, *Khazar*; *W.n.ndr*) with the Urals or the Caucasus. For example, see Minorsky 1982, 443. This led to serious mistakes, for example, in the research of Hungarian prehistory, the identification of Montes *Riphei* with the Urals, although the descriptions clearly state that the sources of the *Tanaïs* ~ *Don* are in Montes *Riphei*, so which is definitely the same as the Central Russian Upland. As a result, scholars placed Eastern Hungarians in the Urals and *Jugria* instead of the sources of the Don.

small places (basins, valleys) with characteristic historical names dating back to ancient times. In contrast, the steppe is an endless series of many places that are not distinguished by sharp boundaries and that did not have long-known names. The editor of DAI perceived this strange other world from the ancient culture area on the far shores of the Black Sea, where stability was suggested by the dense network of cities, with their specific names unchanged since ancient times. Creating a sharp contrast with the steppe, where only the rivers have similar ancient names, although in several cases the author also encountered their newer names (for example, the Volga, with the ancient Iranian name *Rha* and the more recent Turkish *Etil*). The Persian author of *Ḥudūd* could perceive a very similar contrast, in whose own country, the Iranian highlands, the antiquity and distinctness of geographical names were also customary.

It's very noticeable that our sources write equally about countries and borders when defining the territories of different peoples. They do not differentiate between the steppe nomads (Pechenegs), the peoples of the forest belt (Mordvins), the semi-settled Khazars or the Byzantine state with a decidedly territorial character, although they may have ruled their territory in clearly different ways. In the case of the Hungarians and the Pechenegs, the DAI and the *Jayhānī*-tradition yet perceive the difference when they define their dwelling places with the rivers.

In the following, I will try to compare and interpret the accounts of three important sources from different cultural spheres, and their geographically different points of views.

## The Armenian Geography

The first text, what I investigated here, is the so-called Armenian Geography by Ananias of Širak (Ananias Širakaci), which survived in two versions. The older one was written between 591 and 636, and the revised edition was created a few years after the Arab invasion.<sup>5</sup> This chronology is contradicted by the fact that the text mentions Asparuch's escape and settlement at the mouth of the Danube in the 670's.<sup>6</sup>

Although, Armenian geography is earlier than the period under discussion and it is based mainly on ancient information, it still contains some important data related to the steppe of the period between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. It contains a detailed description of the location of the Bulgar tribes, which played an important role in the later centuries, as reflected in the DAI and the *Ḥudūd*. As the author points out, "whose names are unknown to

<sup>5</sup> Hewsen 1992, 27, 34.

<sup>6</sup> It is uncertain whether Asparuch's story was originally part of the longer version or it is a later interpolation. Paulik 2001, 35, 54, fn. 20.

Ptolemy.”<sup>7</sup> In addition to the ancient names coming from Ptolemy, contemporary geographical names also appear, which are also related to the names used by the other two sources. These are like the chronologically relevant Turkish river name Etil and the name “mountains of the Bulgars”. Although, the DAI also knows the ancient names Tanais and Maeotis.

In Chapter 10, the Geography presents Sarmatia, from the river Vistula to the Rhipaeae Mountains [Ripa Lerinn] in the east, from which the River Tanais [Don] flows southward into the Maeotis Bay [Sea of Azov]. The latter is connected to the Pontic Sea and the Tyras River [Dniester], which separates Sarmatia and Dacia in the south. The Tauric or Chersonese Peninsula lies between Lake Byce [Biwkean Lčin], the Maeotis Bay and the Pontus and the Carcinitis River or Gulf.<sup>8</sup> This description uses ancient names based on Ptolemy. In Chapter 18, the Geography lists the Ripaeae Mountains, the Tanais River and the Maeotis Gulf, and the Pontus Euxinus in the west, as the borders of Sarmatia, but extends it to the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea. It mentions in Sarmatia the Ceraunian and Hippic Mountains, from which five rivers flow into the Maeotis Sea.<sup>9</sup> One is a branch of the Tanais River, which flows from the Hippic Mountains into the Maeotis Gulf. The two branches of the Rha River flow from the north, unite near the Hippic Mountains, and turn eastward opposite the eastern part of the Ceraunian Mountains. It then mentions two other rivers which flow from the north, uniting to form a seventy-branched river, which the Turks call Etil, and which flow into the Caspian Sea.<sup>10</sup> It is clear that the Etil is identical with the Rha, which flows into the Caspian Sea in many branches, but the author didn’t realize this. Although, the author does not call the Don Etil, but he seems to consider the Upper Tanais a branch of the Rha (Volga) river, and for this reason he calls the river flowing into the Maeotis only a branch of the Tanais. This is very similar to the opinion of later Muslim authors, such as Ḥudūd’s.

The eastern extremity of the Rhipaeae mountains, as the source of the Tanais river, clearly coincides with the eastern part of the Central Russian Upland, which stretches south-east between the Don and Donets rivers, in the direction the Tsimlyansk reservoir near the Khazar fortress, Sarkel.<sup>11</sup> While the Ceraunian Mountains may be located on the western bank of the Volga River, the Hippic (Bulgarian) Mountains, from which the Tanais flows along with other rivers, may be closer to the Maeotis. It can be identified with the Donets Ridge, which extend southeast from Poltava, where Kuvrat’s tomb was discovered,<sup>12</sup> to the lower

7 Hewsen 1992, 55.

8 Hewsen 1992, 48.

9 Hewsen 1992, 55. The Ceraunian Mountains: ‘thundering mountains’ Hewsen 1992, 109, fn. 9. The Hippic Mountains: ‘horse mountain’ Hewsen 1992, 109, fn. 10, 12.

10 Hewsen 1992, 55. The newer version also knows the name Etil but does not mention Rha. Hewsen 1992, 55A.

11 Central Russian Upland, large upland area of the Russian Plain, in the central part of European Russia. It stretches in a north–south direction from the Oka River to the Donets River and the Donets Ridge.

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Central-Russian-Upland> Download date 16/10/2025

12 Werner 1984.

reaches of the Don. The Hippiic Mountains in Chapter 18 are clearly identical to the Bulgars [Bulxark'] Mountains in Chapter 10, as both linked Kubrat's son Asparuk's escape from the Khazars to them.<sup>13</sup> This mountain, called Ππικιά by Ptolemy, is located near the lower Don on the map of al-Khwarizmi – who revised Ptolemy's Geography around 825 – but is mistakenly located south of it, and not north of it ('FYKA).<sup>14</sup> This Hippiic or Bulgarian Mountains may appear in Ḥudūd as the W.n.nd.r Mountains, north of Mirvāt, and in the south, near the Lower Don as the Khazarian Mountains. Hippiia montes also appears on Waldseemüller's map in 1507, but between the Don and the Volga. This map places the Riphei montes in the Donets Ridge area.<sup>15</sup>

The Geography places Turks and Bulgars north of the Crimean Bosphorus, named after rivers, there are Kup'i Bulgars,<sup>16</sup> Duč'i Bulgars,<sup>17</sup> Ołxontor Bulgars,<sup>18</sup> and Č'dar Bulgars.<sup>19</sup> The identification of these river names is debatable, but it is clear that they can be placed north of the Don and the Maeotis.<sup>20</sup> This is a decisive conclusion regarding the reconstruction of the following centuries of steppe history.<sup>21</sup> It is a problem whether this localization of the Bulgarian tribes reflects the situation before or after the Bulgarian migration. The Geography mentions the escape of Asparuch, who appears in Thrace in 678/679, according to Theophanes. The Greek author describes the location of old Great Bulgaria, which stretched from Maeotid Lake towards the Kouphis River. The Kouphis flows into the Pontic Sea near Nekropyła and flows from the confluence of the Tanais and the Atel, which is above Meotid Lake. The Maeotid Lake is located on the northern, that is the far side of the Euxine Sea. The huge river Atel flows into the Maeotid Lake. The chieftain of the Bulgars and the Kotragoi,

13 Hewsens 1992, 55, 48.

14 Mžík 1926, for the map, see Eckmann 1929, 95.

15 Waldseemüller 1507.

16 According to Hewsens 1992, 109, fn. 11: this is the *Kuphis* (*Kup'is*), or Kuban/\*Vardanes. As Theophanes writes, there are many tribes on the eastern side of Lake *Maeotis*, and from the lake towards the *Kuphis* River [so to the west] is Old Great Bulgaria. Coming from above *Maeotis* [from the north!], the river *Kuphis* flows into the far end of the Pontic Sea near *Nekropyła*. The latter is the Perekop Bay, between Cherson and the Dnieper-mouth. *Historia Syntomos/Breviarium* 35, Mango 1990, 87–89. The DAI mentions in the same area river *Kouphis* the *Bogou*. Chapter 42, DAI 1967, 184–185. So, the river *Kuphis* may be the same as the Bug, although its localization is inaccurate in Theophanes.

17 Hewsens 1992, 55, fn. 20: the Bulgars of the Dnieper.

18 Hewsens 1992, 55, fn. 21: thinks of a variant of the name Onogur, but it is clearly identical with Onogundur.

19 Hewsens 1992, 22: Hewson connects it with Č'undar, a Khazar city around the Terek River. The identification of the river *Kuphis* with the Bug excludes it.

20 The name Č'dar may derive from the name of the river Ajdar, and the name Ołxontor may also refer to the name of a river, rather than the name of Onogundur, as is commonly assumed. In this case, we can think of the Oskol river. The main rivers of Kuvrat's Bulgaria can be the Don and the Donets, the Dnieper and the Bug. Perhaps its legacy is the archaeological culture of Verchne Saltovo, located in the Central Russian Upland near the Donets River. The Donets, as well as the Ajdar and the Oskol, also flow from the Central Russian Upland.

21 For the localization of Theophanes' Megale Bulgaria in the Don–Dnieper region instead of the Kuban–Caucasus, see Róna-Tas 2001.

Krobatos, died in the time of Constans II (641–668) leaving five sons. The eldest, Batbaian remained until this day in his ancestral land, under Khazar rule. The second son, Kotragos moved on the other shore of river Tanais. The third son, Asparouch, crossed the rivers Danapris and Danastris, settled in the Oglos.<sup>22</sup> This report outlines a very similar situation to Geography. The Bulgars may have lived mainly north of the Maeotis, between the Tanais (Don) and the Kuphis (Bug), but there may have been some groups on the eastern side of the Maeotis, near the Tanais.

The named rivers and mountains provide the orientation framework of the description, in which the steppe peoples are placed. The significance of the geography lies in the detailed information on the early location of the Bulgar tribes, which matches well with Theophanes' data and helps to understand the descriptions of DAI and Ḥudūd. Based on these, we can localize the core area of Kuvrat's realm, the Hippic mountains or mountains of the Bulgars, north of the Maeotis, between the Don and the Dnieper, where the DAI places the Black Bulgars and the Ḥudūd places the Inner Bulghārs. It reflects a fundamental change that the older version, which writes about the Khazar attack on the Bulgars, mentions the khakan as the king of the Sabeiroi (Sabeiroi') at the Etil River, while the newer version mentions him as the lord of the Khazars, the king of the north.<sup>23</sup> The Geography clearly shows the way the Volga and the Don are identified, which is also typical of later sources. Therefore, it well reflects the significant changes in the history of the steppe, the migration of the Bulgars and the formation of the Khazar state, which shaped the situation of the steppe between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. This information can be compared with data provided by the other two sources.

## The De Administrando Imperio

In the presented Chapters (37, 38, 40, 42) at least two time periods are mixed. The text, compiled around 948/952, describes the geopolitical situation of the northern and eastern coast of the Black Sea from the mouth of the Danube to Khazaria in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. Sometimes it refers to the development of the current situation, mentioning the former homeland of the Pechenegs, the migration of the Hungarians and the conquest of their present-day residences.<sup>24</sup>

22 Mango–Scott 1997, 497–498. Theophanes had finished his work in 815. Mango 1990, 11. He has a contemporary source, Trajan the patrician, who composed his History around 720. Treadgold 2011, 593, 606, 618–620.

23 Hewsen 1992, 57, 57A.

24 On the two chronological layers see Howard-Johnston 2000, 314, Bollók–B. Szabó 2022, 95–99.

In Chapter 37, the DAI describes the former homeland of the Pechenegs at the rivers Atil and Geich, which share borders with the Khazars [Mazars] and the Uzes. Describing the current situation, it places their four clans beyond the Dnieper River, east and north, towards Uzia and Khazaria, and Alania and Kherson. The other four clans are located on this side of the Dnieper River. The journey to Patzinakia is five days from Uzia and Khazaria, six days from Alania, ten days from Mordia, one day from Russia, four days from Turkey, half a day from Bulgaria, it is very close to Kherson, and even closer to the Bosphorus.<sup>25</sup> In Chapter 38, it describes the old abodes of Turks near Khazaria, in Lebedia, where the rivers Chidmas and Chingilous flow. A part of them settled to the west, in Atelkouzou, where the Pechenegs live today. This place is named after the local rivers: Barouch, Koubou, Troullos, Broutos, Sere-tos.<sup>26</sup> But in Chapter 40, it is said that the former place of the Turks, where the Pechenegs now live, is called Etel and Kouzou from the rivers that flow there.<sup>27</sup> In Chapter 42, it presents Patzinakia, on the northern shore of the Black Sea, as a 60-day journey from the Lower-Danube to Sarkel, the city of the Khazars. It lists the Dniester and the Dnieper as the largest rivers here, but the Syngoul, Hybyl, Almatai, Kouphis the Bogou are also mentioned. It writes that the Russians are sailing down the river from the Upper Dnieper to the Romans. Patzinakia owns all the lands between Russia, Bosphorus and Kherson. After the Dnieper mouth, the large Nekropylla Bay is mentioned next to Adara. After these are listed the Kherson, the Bosphorus, and the mouth of Lake Maeotic, on the north side of which flows the river Dnieper, by which the Russians reach black Bulgaria, Khazaria, and Syria. The ancients enclosed the regions from the Cherson to the Bosphorus with ditches between Maeotis and Nekropylla Gulf, near the Dnieper River. There are two roads through which the Pechenegs pass to Cherson and the Bosphorus. It mentions some rivers flowing into the Maeotis on the east side, the Tanais flowing down from Sarkel, the Charakoul, the Bal, the Bourlik, the Chadir, and many others. At the mouth of Bourlik, the Maeotis joins the Pontus, and there is the Bosphorus and the city called Tamatarcha.<sup>28</sup>

An important note is that a Pecheneg group that remained in the old country united with the arriving Uzes and live among them to this day.<sup>29</sup>

The DAI describes the north coast of the Black Sea, draws the same picture as we can see today. It mentions the main rivers from the mouth of the Danube to the Khazar city of Sarkel, the Dniester and the Dnieper, and many others, as well as the large Nekropylla Bay after the mouth of the Dnieper (seen from the Danube). The description goes around the Crimean Peninsula, because it mentions Cherson and the Bosphorus before, but the lake Maeotis only after them.

25 Chapter 37, DAI 1967, 166–169.

26 Chapter 38, DAI 1967, 170–175.

27 Chapter 40, DAI 1967, 176–177.

28 Chapter 42, DAI 1967, 182–187.

29 Chapter 37, DAI 1967, 168–169.

The description never leaves its interpreting frame, it is presenting the Pontic steppe per the well-known maritime coast and the river-mouths. The localization of more distant peoples (Uzia, Mordia or Russia), is much less accurate. It uses the well-known river names Dniester and Dnieper, but surprisingly, when writing about the Pechenegs, it mentions the other (Pecheneg and Hungarian?) names of these rivers, *Barouch* and *Troullos* (in reverse order!). There are no traces, that the author or compiler would have known of the identity of the name variants. It is clearly betraying the lack of mutual interpretation of its sources that the river Bug appear as *Koubou* west from the *Barouch* (Dnieper), and the on very similar *Kouzou* (*Atelkouzou*) name also, then later also as *Kouphis* and *Bogou* in the same place.<sup>30</sup> Very similar for this the case of river *Atil*, which is mentioned in Chapter 37. as the boundary of Pechenegs and Khazars, and later in Chapter 38. and 40. where *Atel* ~ *Etel* is the river of the dwelling place of the Turks, later the Pechenegs. The use of different sources is evident from the reverse order of the rivers in Chapters 37, 38, 40 and 42.

## The Ḥudūd al-‘ālam

The so called Ḥudūd al-‘ālam, The Regions of the world, what was compiled in 372/982 and transcribed in 656/1258. As Minorsky warned, the scribe, who transcribed it almost three centuries later, not only had individual wording peculiarities, but he knew complications in reproducing the often already obsolete toponymy.<sup>31</sup> This obsolescence causes much more difficulties after more than a thousand years. The following countries are located in the examined area: the Ghūz country is bordered by the desert and Transoxiana to the east, the desert and the Khazarian Sea to the south, and the Ātil River to the west and north. The Turkish Pechenegs [Bajanāk] are bordered by the Ghūz to the east, Burtās and Barādhās to south, the Majgharī and the Rūs to west, the river Rūthā to north. The Majgharī is bordered by a mountain to the east, the Christian W.n.nd.r to the south, and Rūs to the west and north. It mentions their king, Jula and about 20,000 of his men. It also mentions that in winter they stay at a river on the border of Rūs.<sup>32</sup> The Ṣaqlāb (Slav) country is bordered by the Inner Bulghārs and the Rūs to the east, the Gurz sea and the Rūm to the south, the Uninhabited Lands to the west and north. The Rūs is bordered by the mountains of the Pechenegs to the east, the river Rūtā to the south, the Ṣaqlābs to the west, the Uninhabited Lands to the north.

30 The DAI manuscript reads *Kouphis ho Bogou*, Moravcsik supplemented this with the word *kai* 'and'. Róna-Tas warns that in several cases the same rivers have two names in the text of the DAI (*Trullos* ~ *Danastris*, *Varuh* ~ *Danapris*), so according to him *Kouphis ho Bogou* could be two names of the Southern Bug. Róna-Tas 2001, 74, fn. 30.

31 Minorsky 1982, XI, Introductory.

32 Minorsky 1982, 101.

Küyāba (Kübāba, etc) is the town [land?] of the Rūs lying nearest to the Islamic lands.<sup>33</sup> The Inner Bulghārs are bordered by the Mirvāt to the east, the Gurz Sea to the south, the Ṣaqlābs to the west, and the Rūs mountain to the north. It mentions that the Inner Bulghārs are at war with all the Rūs. The Mirvāt country is bordered by some mountains and the Khazarian Pechenegs to the east, the Khazarian Pechenegs and the Gurz Sea to the south, the Gurz Sea and the Inner Bulghārs to the west, and the Inner Bulghārs and the W.n.nd.r mountains to the north. The area of the Khazarian Pechenegs is bordered by the mountain of the Khazars to the east, the Alāns to the south, the Gurz Sea to the west, and the Mirvāt to the north. It also says that they formerly were part of the Turkish Pechenegs, they conquered their current country and settled down in it. They wander here, on the grazing grounds of the Khazar mountains. The Alāns (al-Lan) is bordered by the Sarīr to the east and south, the Rūm to the west, and the Gurz Sea and the Khazarian Pechenegs to the north.<sup>34</sup> The Khazar lands are bordered by the wall between the mountains and the sea, and the [Khazar] Sea and some parts of the river Ātil to the east, the Sarīr to the south, a mountain to the west, and the B.rādhās and N.nd.r (\*W.n.nd.r) to the north.<sup>35</sup> The Burtās is bordered by the Ghūz to the east and south, the river Ātil to the west, the Pechenegs to the north. Their hordes are \*Barchūla (B.hḏwla), Ishkil (Ashgil?), and B.lkār.<sup>36</sup> It is clear that the description of Burtās here was mixed with the Bulghār. In another place, Bulghār is mentioned as a town of a small province on the banks of the Ātil river, and Suvār, a town near Bulghār.<sup>37</sup> The B.rādhās is bordered by the river Ātil to the east, the Khazars to the South, the W.n.nd.r to the west, and the Turkish Pechenegs to the north. It mentions that they follow the creed of the Ghūz and obey the Khazars. The W.n.nd.r country is bordered by the B.rādhās to the east, the Khazars to the south, a mountain to the west, and the Majgharī to the north.<sup>38</sup>

The Persian geographer gives a geographically coherent description of Eastern Europe in the cited Chapters. Although, the relative location of the presented countries is quite easy to follow, a significant shortcoming is that the names of the rivers, which mostly make the description of the DAI easy to understand, are incomplete. The Ḥudūd mentions the Khazar Sea in Chapter 42 (the country of Rūm) and the Gurz Sea off the coast of Thrace.<sup>39</sup> It is clear that these are the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea. The Khazar Sea is mentioned south of the Ghūz, but in its place, east of the Khazars, only one sea is mentioned in the text, without a name. The Gurz Sea is located between the Rūm (Chapter 43), the Inner Bulghārs (Chapter 43), the Khazarian Pechenegs (Chapter 47) and the Alāns, thus confirming its identity with the Black Sea.

33 Minorsky 1982, 159.

34 Minorsky 1982, 160.

35 Minorsky 1982, 161.

36 Minorsky 1982, 162.

37 Minorsky 1982, 163.

38 Minorsky 1982, 162.

39 Minorsky 1982, 156.

The Ḥudūd mentions only two rivers by name in the northern Pontic steppe. It places the *Rūtā* to the north of the Turkish Pechenegs and south from the Rūs. The identification of name *Rūtā* is problematic. Zimonyi argued that the mountain between the lands of the Pechenegs, the Hungarians and the Russians, which is the source of this river, can only be the Eastern Carpathians. In accordance with the incorrect geographical understanding of the Persian author, he placed this mountain near the Middle Volga, confusing his description.<sup>40</sup> However, these same mountains appear on the eastern border of Rūs, as the mountains of the Pechenegs. The confusion disappears if we also take into account the Eastern Hungarians, since the mountain range between the Eastern Hungarians, Turkish Pechenegs and Russians can be identified with the Central Russian Upland. There is the source of the river *Oka*, which Minorsky identified with *Rūtā* in the form *\*Ūqā*.<sup>41</sup> Regardless to Minorsky's uncertain identification, the river *Oka* also corresponds to other information in the Ḥudūd. It flows south of Rūs, and it is also possible that the territory of the Turkish Pechenegs reached the confluence of the *Oka* and *Volga*, which in reality is located north of the Caspian steppe, as written in the Ḥudūd. The definite mention of the Turkish Pechenegs and not the Khazar Pechenegs here, clearly refers to the *Volga* region.

The Ḥudūd places the *Ātil* river west and north of the Ghūz, west of the *Burṭās*, east of the *B.rādhās*, and east of the Khazars. The river west of the *Burṭās* may be the *Don*, although the text has confused the *Burṭās* with the *Bulghār*, which it correctly places on the banks of the *Ātil* (*Volga*) river. However, the river between the Ghūz and the Khazars can clearly be identified with the *Volga*. The author seems to identify the Lower *Volga* with the *Don*, as other Muslim authors did. At the same time, he mentions a river, maybe the *Don*, that flows east from the territory of *Ṣaqlāb* to the border of Rūs (the border of *Urtāb*, *Ṣ.lāb*, and *Kūyāfa*), then south into the territory of the Khazar Pechenegs, and merges with the *Ātil*.<sup>42</sup> It correspond well to the sources that assume the confluence of the *Don* and the *Volga*.

The mental map of *Hudud* consists of well-fitting pieces, with only a few errors to be discovered. The text mentions only one mountain to the east of the *Majgharī*, but in Chapter 20 mentions them as the western neighbours of the Turkish Pechenegs. The description of the *Burṭās* clearly refers to the *Volga* Bulgarians, but it is strange that it lists the Turkic Pechenegs as their neighbours to the north. In the case of *Burṭās*, which lies further south, it is easier to imagine a wrong north orientation instead of the correct northeast. The location east of the *Ātil* River matches the position of the real *Burṭās*, insofar as this river is identical with the *Don*.

The Rūs Mountains, located north of Inner *Bulghārs*, can be identified with the Central Russian Highland. The *W.n.nd.r* mountains north of the Khazars can be found near *Poltava*, where *Kuvrat* was buried, today called *Donets Hills*. It reaches the Lower *Don* in the south-

40 Zimonyi 2015, 266.

41 Minorsky 1982, 217.

42 Chapter 44, Minorsky 1982, 75.

east direction and may also be referred to by the *Ḥudūd* as the Khazar Mountains. The mentioned grazing grounds of the Khazar mountains, used by the nomadic Pechenegs, also indicate a hilly area, not high mountains. The term ‘grazing’ refers to the name of the Hippic ‘horse’ mountain as a suitable place for horse breeding.

## Patzinakia and the Khazar Pechenegs

There is no doubt that the DAI’s Patzinakia and the country of the Khazar Pechenegs in the *Ḥudūd* are the same, the Byzantine compilation and the Persian geography mention the same events, the conquest of their new homeland and their descent from the Turkish Pechenegs. The Pechenegs mentioned by DAI who remained in their old homeland among the Uzes are clearly identical to the Turkish Pechenegs of *Ḥudūd*.<sup>43</sup>

According to DAI 37, Patzinakia is divided into two parts, separated by the Dnieper River into a western and an eastern part. In Chapter 38, he describes the location of the Pechenegs with the rivers Barouch, Koubou, Troullos and Seretos, i.e. the Turkish (Pecheneg) name variants in the case of Dnieper, Bug and Dniester. Chapter 42 mentions the Dniester and the Dnieper as the main rivers of Patzinakia. The river Don is not mentioned, but he defined the Khazar fortress Sarkel, located on the Don, as the eastern border of Patzinakia.<sup>44</sup> The use of different names may refer to different sources behind these parts.

DAI gives the distance of Patzinakia from its neighbours in days. The distance from Khazaria and Uzia is the same (five-day long journey) and only one day shorter than from Alania in the North Caucasus. Mordia (Mordvins) was a ten day’s journey from Patzinakia. The equal distance from Khazaria and Uzia can only be explained by the fact that the eastern border of Patzinakia reached the Volga north of Khazaria, since the Uzes lived east of the Volga. This is supported by the *Ḥudūd*, which states that the country of *Mirvāt* (Mordvins) is adjacent to the Khazar Pechenegs to the east and south. Sarkel, as the point of contact with Khazaria in the DAI, is similar to the mountain of the Khazars in the *Ḥudūd*, which may be identical with the Donets Hills. These hills used to be called the Hippic or Bulgarian Mountains next to the Don, from where Kubrat’s son Asparuch fled from the Khazars.

The neighbourhood of the Alans, mentioned in both sources, can be imagined if we assume that the Pechenegs occupied the eastern coast of Maeotis (Sea of Azov). The western extent of Patzinakia can be outlined up to the mouth of the Danube (half a day from Bulgaria along the Danube), and its four-day distance from Turkia (the Carpathians) may refer

<sup>43</sup> Chapter 37, DAI 1967, 168–169.

<sup>44</sup> According to the 10<sup>th</sup>-century letter of the Khazar ruler Joseph, Kazaria extended westward to the Crimean cities and Sarkel. Zimonyi 2015, 190.

to the same area. The border of Patzinakia certainly closely reached the Crimean Peninsula (Kherson is very close) (around modern Sevastopol) The phrase “to Bosporus [the Kerch strait] closer still” can only be explained if the Pecheneg territory included the eastern shore of the Maeotis (Sea of Azov). The western border of the Khazar Pechenegs at the Gurz (Black Sea in *Ḥudūd*) does not contradict the description of DAI, their common borders with the Alans confirms this. But in the description of *Ḥudūd*, there is no trace that the Pechenegs country extended to the Dnieper River or the Danube, as DAI writes. The *Ḥudūd* mentions the *Mirvāt* and the Inner *Bulghārs* here.

The *Balḥī* tradition from the 10<sup>th</sup> century also describes the distances starting from the Khazar and Volga Bulgarian capitals. The distance of *Burṭās* from *Ātil* is two-thirds (twenty days) of the journey between *Ātil* and *Bulḡār* (Volga Bulgarians), and *Burṭās* is only ten days from the Pechenegs (*Baḡanāk*).<sup>45</sup> The ten-day journey from *Burṭās* to *Baḡanāk* is the same as that mentioned by DAI between *Mordia* and *Patzinakia*. Based on these, the *Mordvins* (*Burṭās*, *Mordia*) could be located farther to the southwest of their present-day residences. The one-month journey from *Ātil* to *Baḡanāk* is many times longer than the five days reported by DAI. It is possible that the two sources calculated the length of the journey differently (on foot or by horse, etc.), but the six-fold difference is striking. It is possible that DAI calculates the distance from the western borders of the Khazars around *Sarkel* and not from *Ātil*. It gives a distance of about one month from *Ātil*, the Khazars to *Bulḡār*, which matches the location of the Volga Bulgars. However, while the distance between *Bulḡār* and *Kiev* (*Kūyāba*) is around twenty stations, there are only ten stations between *Bulḡār* and the border of *Rūm*. It is very strange that the journey is so short, and in this direction the Pechenegs should also have been mentioned. It is possible that the proximity of the Black or Inner *Bulghārs* to Byzantium explains this contradiction. The ten-day journey from *Baḡanāk* to Inner *Baḡgirt* (Pannonian Hungarians) is more than twice as long as DAI claims. Is it also possible that this is the consequence of the intermediate location of the Inner *Bulghārs*, somewhere near the Lower Dnieper? Or is it possible that, contrary to the description of the DAI, the Muslim itinerary counts the route towards *Belgrade*?

## The Turks and the *Majgharī*

In Chapter 37, the DAI mentions the *Mazars* (*Μαζάρους*) people together with the *Uzes* (*Οὔζους*) as neighbours of the Pechenegs when the Pechenegs lived between the Volga (*Ατήλ*) and the Ural/Jaik (*Γεήχ*) rivers. Although previous research identified the *Mazars* with the

45 Zimonyi 2015, 194.

Hungarians, Moravcsik corrected this name to Khazars (Χαζάρους) in his critical edition.<sup>46</sup> In other places, the DAI called the Hungarians as Savarts (Σάβαρτοι) and Turks (Τούρκοι), but the name Mazar may come from another source (Pecheneg), which is not surprising, since the editors of the DAI did not coordinate their information.<sup>47</sup> The alliance of the Uzes and Khazars mentioned after this does not exclude the earlier listing of another neighbour of the Pechenegs. As the *Ḥudūd* proves, the Turkish Pechenegs, from whom the Khazar Pechenegs are descended, were not neighbours of the Khazars, as they were neighbours of the Burtās and Barādhas to the south, in the direction of Khazaria. In addition, the Majgharī were their neighbours to the west, from where Levedi's Magyars may have come.

In Chapter 40 the names *Etel* and *Kouzou* can be read in the DAI as the rivers of the places where the Turks lived before the Pechenegs. These names also appear in Chapter 38 when he describes the migration of the Turks from Lebedia to *Atelkouzou*. The name *Atel* is known from other sources as the name of the Volga and the Don.<sup>48</sup> In the case of the Don, this name may refer to the lower section, around Sarkel, which contemporaries believed to be a branch of the Volga ~ *Atil* River.<sup>49</sup> In addition, the name *Kouzou* corresponds to *Koubou* and can be identified with the river Bug.<sup>50</sup> The places called *Atelkouzou*, where the Turks (Hungarians) lived before the Pechenegs, could be located in the area between the Don and the Bug. The use of different Iranian and Turkish names in the sources explains that the compiler did not recognize the identity of these rivers.

In another place of Chapter 38, the DAI defines the residences of the Hungarians next to the rivers *Barouch* (Dnieper), *Koubou* (Bug), *Troullos* (Dniester), *Broutos* (Prut), *Seretos* (Seret). This region lies west of the Dnieper to the mouth of the Danube, away from the *Atil* ~ *Atel* ~ *Etel* (Don) River. It seems that the Hungarians moved further west before 895.

The migrations of the Hungarians are also well reflected in contemporary Muslim sources. The Muslim literary Jayhānī-tradition (early 10<sup>th</sup> century) places the pre-conquest Hungarians between two rivers.<sup>51</sup> The 11<sup>th</sup> century transcriber, Gardizī called them as the *Atil* and the *Dūnā*.<sup>52</sup> The description of al-Marwazī (c. 1100) and 'Awfī places the Hungarians on the shores of the Rūm Sea, two rivers are named *Rūnā* and *Atil*, and *W.fā* and *Atil* (and some

46 see DAI 1967, 166.

47 see Bollók–B. Szabó 2022, 163–164.

48 Although Turkic-speaking peoples may have named many rivers *Atil*, we only have reliable data for these two rivers.

49 Al-Mas'ūdī, see Zimonyi 2015, 270–271.

50 In addition to the similarity of the name form, the order in which the *Koubou* River is mentioned, between the Dnieper (Βαρούχ) and the Dniester (Τροῦλλος), also suggests its identity with the Bug River. The *Kouphis* and the *Bogou* rivers in Chapter 42 are also mentioned between the Dnieper (Δάναπρις) and the Dniester (Δάναστρις). DAI 1967, 184–185. Due to different sources in the DAI Chapters, it uses both Iranian and Turkish name variants of these rivers, but does not identify them. See fn. 27.

51 Jayhānī composed the first version of his original work before 903. Zimonyi 2015, 15. See also Göckenjan–Zimonyi 2001.

52 Zimonyi 2015, 41.

later transcriber similarly).<sup>53</sup> Gardīzī claims that the Hungarians see the N.n.dr people on the other bank of the river, which is on the left. Gardīzī mentioned these rivers in reverse order, so he could be referring to the *Dūnā* River here, which is the one on the left when viewed from the south.<sup>54</sup> It seems clear that these people are the same as the Danube Bulgarians, who could have been neighbours of the Hungarians at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The larger river, the Atil, which flows on the right side of the Hungarians, towards the *Ṣaqlābs*, and then into the Khazar region, as Gardīzī writes, can easily be identified with the Don River.<sup>55</sup> It is very striking that the Dnieper is completely omitted, which, as the main shipping route for the Russians to Muslim countries, must have been well known in the Muslim world. Anyways, just as the Dnieper divided the Pechenegs into two groups in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, it may have been important for the Hungarians in the 9<sup>th</sup> century as well.

The authors of Jayhānī tradition (Ibn Rusta, Gardīzī, Al-Bakrī and Abū'l-Fidā') claim that the first border of the Magyars (*m.ḥf.rīyya*) was between the Pechenegs and the *'sk.l* belonging to the Bulgars.<sup>56</sup> It matches the account of Ibn Hordādbēh (846), who located the *al-j.f.r* (al-majghar) people after the Kimāk and Ġuzz people, before the Baġānāk people.<sup>57</sup> These localizations correspond to the middle Volga region, although the Jayhānī tradition mentions that one of their borders extends to the country of Rūm.<sup>58</sup> It seems that although the description presented the Hungarians before the conquest, it also confused them with the Volga Hungarians.

It is strange that the Jayhānī tradition does not mention the Hungarians when presenting the Pechenegs country, but the Slavs as the western neighbours of the Pechenegs. The other neighbours of the Pechenegs are the Khazars to the southwest, the Uzes to the east, and the Kipchaks to the north.<sup>59</sup> It seems that the Turkic Pechenegs mentioned by Ḥudūd were still living in the same place as all other Pechenegs in Jayhānī's time. But the Turkic Pechenegs also lived in the 10<sup>th</sup> century on the western side of the Volga, because the Bulghārs on the left and the Burtās (mixed with the Bulghārs) on the right were also neighbours of the Pechenegs.<sup>60</sup>

The Ḥudūd mentions the Majgharī and the Rūs as western neighbours of the Turkish Pechenegs. Just as the Jayhānī tradition reports the winter residences of the Hungarians on the two rivers mentioned earlier, so the Ḥudūd also mentions the winter residences of the Majgharī, on the banks of a river that separates them from the Rūs. As the source states the

53 Zimonyi 2015, 51, 53.

54 Zimonyi 2015, 202, 239.

55 Zimonyi 2015, 294.

56 Zimonyi 2015, 77.

57 Zimonyi 2015, 17.

58 Zimonyi 2015, 202. And the eastern border at the Caucasus, but that was originally part of the description of the Khazars. Zimonyi 2015, 45, 363.

59 Zimonyi 2015, 67.

60 Minorsky 1982, 437.

Rūs locates west and north from Majgharī, so this river can hardly be placed in the Pontic region. According to the Ḥudūd, this is, the Rūtā River, flows from the direction of the Turkish Pechenegs, then flows between the Majgharī and the Rūs, then enters the border of the Rūs and flows to the Ṣaqlāb, seems to have been formed by the identification of the Oka and the Dnieper, the upper reaches of which lie quite closely together around the Central Russian Uplands.<sup>61</sup> The Ḥudūd also mentions another river, probably the Don, flowing east from the territory of Ṣaqlāb to the border of the Rūs (the border of Urtāb, Ṣ.lāb, and Kūyāfa), then south into the territory of the Khazar Pechenegs.<sup>62</sup> So, these Majgharī can be sought between the Oka and the Don.

It is suggested that friar Julian discovered the Eastern Hungarians in the Oka valley in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The letter about the second journey of friar Julian writes about the peoples who fled from the Mongols, and mentions them in the order of Rutheni, Hungari, and Bulgari.<sup>63</sup> The neighbourhood of the Hungarians, Mordvins and Russians may be indicated by the route of the four Dominican monks from Ryazan to the eastern Hungarians in 1237 close to the Mordvins.<sup>64</sup> Monks returning from the Eastern Hungarians travelled on a river through the country of the Mordvins.<sup>65</sup> The Mongols of the time knew the location of the Hungarians near the Russians, similar to Ḥudūd, on the west side of the Volga.<sup>66</sup> The Eastern Hungarians lived near the Mordvins even in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when a monk from Verona discovered them not far from the sources of the Don.<sup>67</sup>

It is possible that the Eastern Hungarians lived in this area not only after the Mongol era, but also in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. At the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, at the time of Jayhānī, the Hungarians mentioned in the middle Volga area could be the same as the Hungarians who remained in *Lebedia*. Their Pecheneg neighbourhood also appears in DAI Chapter 37, where they are referred to as *Mazars*.<sup>68</sup> The question is whether *Lebedia* is on the Upper Don or further east, behind the Volga. So Majgharī can be localized near the Oka and the Upper Don.<sup>69</sup>

61 Minorsky 1982, 76. Minorsky identified it with the Oka. Minorsky 1982, 437. The name may also refer to the Dnieper. Zimonyi 2015, 267.

62 Chapter 44, Minorsky 1982, 75. The Balḥī tradition recognizes three Rūs groups: \**Kūyāba* ~ Kiev, *S.lāwīya* ~ Sloveni, Novgorod and \**Arthā* ~ Erz'a, the latter being the Mordvin area under Rūs rule south of the river Oka and east from the Don. The name *Urtāb* may be identical with the name \**Arthā* ~ Erz'a. Minorsky 1982, 434.

63 Julianus "in finibus Ruscie" met with the Rutheni, Hungari and Bulgari who fleeing from the Tartars. *Epistola de vita Tartarorum* (Julianus) 2, Dörrie 1956, 174.

64 "...declinaverunt ad civitatem Risennie (Ryazan), si viam haberent ut in magnam Ungariam vel ad Morducanos..." *Epistola de vita Tartarorum* (Julianus) 5, Dörrie 1956, 180. For the problem see Vékony 1977.

65 "transivit in fluvio regnum Morduanorum quindecim diebus". Dörrie 1956, 160.

66 In the Secret History of the Mongols, the peoples appear in this order: Kipchaks, Bashkirs, Russians (two unknown peoples) and Hungarians. Chapters 262, 270, Pelliot 1949, 108, 111.

67 "Extat adhuc non longe ab ortu Tanais altera Hungaria..." Piccolomini 1571, 388. "ultra Tanaim non procul a fontibus eius in Asiatica Scythica". Piccolomini 1584, 324.

68 see DAI 1967, 166.

69 The first identification of the Majgharī with the Eastern Hungarians, Sudár 2019, 98–99.

## Kuvrat's Bulgaria, Black Bulgars, Inner Bulghārs and W.n.nd.r

In the northern Pontic steppe, the *Ḥudūd* mentions the Inner Bulghārs, the W.n.nd.r, a Christian tribe, and the W.n.nd.r mountains.<sup>70</sup>

The W.n.nd.r, a Christian tribe, lived south of the Majgharī, seems clearly identifiable with the Danube Bulgars. But the *Ḥudūd* mentions the Majgharī country south and east of Rūs, without mentioning the common borders of the Hungarians and the Pechenegs, as expected in the above case. The neighbourhood of Majgharī and W.n.nd.r could be explained if we placed the Magyars in the Carpathian basin, where they lived when the *Ḥudūd* was written. In this case, the location of Russia is partially wrong in the *Ḥudūd*, because the correct location is east and north of Majgharī. The location of Majgharī Country (Chapter 22) east and south from the Rūs, without doubt, can be searched somewhere east from Kiev and south from Novgorod, in the area of Upper Don and the Middle Volga. If we take into account the Hungarians who remained in the east, somewhere in the middle of the Volga, then we have to take a closer look at the W.n.nd.r Christian tribe. The Christian religion and the name Onogundur refer to the Danube Bulgarians. The use of the name W.n.nd.r for the Danubian Bulgars is completely contemporary, as other sources attest, but the Volga Bulgarians were never called Onogundur.<sup>71</sup> The author of the *Ḥudūd* or the 13<sup>th</sup> century transcriber may have confused the two Bulgar groups.

The Russian neighbourhood of Inner Bulghārs in Chapter 45 corresponds to the well-known situation of the Volga Bulghārs. But the location of the Gurz Sea on the southern border contradicts what we know about the Volga Bulgarians. It can be assumed that the description of the *Ḥudūd* from the very extensive area of the Inner Bulghārs is a literary memory of the migration of the Bulgars from the Black (Gurz) Sea to the area of the Middle Volga. In the 10<sup>th</sup> century, when the *Ḥudūd* was written, the northern coast of the Black Sea was under the rule of the Pechenegs, so neither the land of the Bulghārs nor the Mirvāts could reach the coastal areas.

70 The Balhī-tradition, al-Iṣṭahārī and Ibn Hauqal know the names Great Bulghār, Inner and Outer Bulghār. Minorsky 1982, 438–440. As I see it, the name Great Bulghār referring to their large number, as well as their common border with Rūm refers to the Danube Bulgars. The Outer Bulghār, as a small city/country and the trading centre of the northern countries (al-Iṣṭahārī) is the same as what is written in *Ḥudūd* Chapter 51 about the Volga Bulgars. The Inner Bulghār can be found somewhere between the other two.

71 *Olxontor Blkar* (Ananias Širakac'ī, 7<sup>th</sup> century), *Vlëndur Bulgar* (Movsēs Xorenac'ī, the last third of the 8<sup>th</sup> century), *Οὐννογοὺνδοῦροι* (Nikephoros, the beginnings of the 9<sup>th</sup> century), *Uluğundur* (LĜNDR, Ibn Kalbī, 820), *Wulundur* (WLNDR, al-Mas'ūdī, mid 10<sup>th</sup> century), *Vununtur* (V.N.N.T.R. in the letter of Khazar king Joseph, the second half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century), *Wunundur* (WNNDR *Ḥudūd* al-'Ālam, 982), *N.nd.r* (Gardīzī, around 1050). Golden 2011, 137, 145.

Minorsky claims that since the Inner Bulghār belongs to the Iṣṭah̄rī < Balkhī tradition, which does not know the W.n.nd.r, their adjacency may be the author of the Ḥudūd's own conjecture.<sup>72</sup> But the Ḥudūd mentions W.n.nd.r as the name of the mountains to the north of the country of Mirvāt, which was the northwestern neighbour of the Khazar Pechenegs and the southeast-ern neighbour of Inner Bulghārs. It seems to be identical to those mountains that pass through the land of the Khazar Pechenegs and then separate the Inner Bulghārs from Rus to the border of Ṣaqlāb and can be easily identified with the Donets Ridge, which starts from the lower Don and separates the Dnieper valley from the upper Don region.<sup>73</sup> In this hilly region lies the tomb of Kuvrat, the lord of the Onogundur Bulgars, which was discovered near present-day Poltava.<sup>74</sup>

This Bulgar group can be found on the northwestern coast of the Gurz (Black) Sea, some-where around the Dnieper River. The DAI places Black Bulgaria here, in the Dnieper–Don region, but research excludes this location, citing the Pecheneg presence here, and places it in the 10<sup>th</sup>-century Kuban Plain.<sup>75</sup> However, according to the DAI, Russians sailing on the Dnieper River reached Black Bulgaria before Khazaria, so it must be located west of Khazaria. On the other hand, the Kuban lowland, as the site of Kuvrat's former empire, seems out of the question,<sup>76</sup> as I proved it before.<sup>77</sup> Although, it has also arisen, the name black Bulgaria may have been an archaism,<sup>78</sup> the Chapter 12 of DAI expressively presents the black Bulgaria as a country which is able to attack the Khazars, same as Uzes and Alans,<sup>79</sup> so it refers to a contemporary situation. According to Polgár the adjective black "...could indicate the Social status of the Bulgars who lived under Khazar rule."<sup>80</sup> However, in the Dnieper–Don region, we cannot count on Khazar rule in this period. The Inner Bulghārs, whose territory, according to the Ḥudūd, reached the Pontus, paid tributes to the Danube Bulgars, not to the Khazars.<sup>81</sup> As Polgár also mentions, black was the colour of the north, and the subjugated black Bulgarians lived north-northeast of the Danube Bulgarians, thus their identification with the Inner Bulghārs seems possible. It is possible that the area west of the Dnieper River was inhabited not only by Hungarians, later Pechenegs in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, but this area may have been under their authority, following the 8<sup>th</sup> century Danube Bulgar rule of this area.

72 Minorsky 1982, 466.

73 Chapter 5, Minorsky 1982, 67.

74 Werner 1984.

75 Polgár 2014, 202.

76 On the relationship between the names Hypanis - Kuphis - Bug - Kuban: Róna-Tas 2001, 74, fn. 29., 75. see also Mango 1990, 87–89.

77 Bulgars may have lived north of the Maeotis, between the Tanais (Don), Danapris (Dnieper), and Kuphis (Bug).

78 Polgár 2014, 199.

79 DAI 1967, Chapter 10, 11, 12, 61–65.

80 Polgár 2014, 202.

81 Al-Iṣṭah̄rī writes: "They (Great Bulghār) border from the north on the Rūm; their numbers are great and their might is reported to be such that they have imposed the kharāj on those of the Rūm and Inner Bulghār who live near to their country." Minorsky 1982, 438-439.

## Mordia and the Mirvāt

The *Ḥudūd*, like the *DAI*, places the country of the Pecheneg next to the Black Sea, but claims this as the western border. The long northern coast of the Black Sea is divided into two parts here, the western one belonged to the Inner Bulghārs, and the eastern one belonged to the Mirvāt region. This would mean that the Pechenegs lived between the Sarkel area and the Gurz Sea (here the Sea of Azov), mainly only around the mouth of the Don, and perhaps south of it, in the direction of the Caucasus. This strongly contradicts the situation in the late 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the Hungarians lived next the Black Sea, between the Don and the Danube, and that the Pechenegs settled in the place of the Hungarians after their battles.

The *Ḥudūd* inserts a country, unknown from elsewhere, Mirvāt, south and east of the Inner Bulghārs, north and west of the Khazarian Pechenegs, north and east of the Gurz [Black] Sea, and south from the W.n.nd.r mountains (Donets Hills or Ridge). In picture of the *Ḥudūd*, the territory of Mirvāt occupies a huge area from the Donets Hills/Ridge to the Black Sea, obliquely closing the steppe. This strange situation is not at all certain to be real. It can be rightly assumed, as already warned by Minorsky, that the 13<sup>th</sup> century transcriber misinterpreted the already outdated geography.

The *DAI* mentions a similarly named area, Mordia, somewhere north of the (Khazar) Pechenegs (Patzinakia). Although Mordia is listed here between Alania and Russia, it is clear that Alania cannot be considered a neighbour of Mordia, because Patzinakia reached Kher-son, the Khazars, and Alania in a southerly direction. The *DAI* begins his list in the east from Uzia and its western neighbour, Khazaria, and then further south, towards Alania. After this, he jumps north again to Mordia, which is ten days' journey from Patzinakia, much farther than the former at a distance of five or six days.<sup>82</sup>

There may be a literary background behind this phenomenon. The author of the *Ḥudūd*, drawing on Muslim literary traditions, may have mixed chronological and geographical layers, as his sources often did. Muslim authors used the earlier works in a very similar way to the Byzantine chroniclers, mixing the situation of their own time with the earlier ones. Various versions of the name Mirvāt are known from Muslim sources.

Al-Masʿūdī in first half of 10<sup>th</sup> century writes that to the north are the “Danubah River and the Malāwah [...] At one time, along this river lay the settlements of the Nāmġin, and the Murāwa belonging to the Saqāliba, but now many of the Burgār [Danube Bulgars] have settled there, when they became Christians.”<sup>83</sup> According to Gardīzī (11<sup>th</sup> century) “...above the N.nd.r’s there is a large mountain on the bank of the river, and the river comes along the

82 Chapter 37, *DAI* 1967, 166–169.

83 Zimonyi 2015, 296.

side of this mountain. Behind the mountains there are people from among the Christians. They are called M.rwāt [M.rdāt]. There is a distance of ten days between them and the N.nd.r. They are large people.” In the two extant manuscripts, this mountain is located *below* N.nd.r’s, corrected *above* by Barthold.<sup>84</sup> In this case, M.rwāt could be located south of N.nd.r’s, which corresponds to the description of Ḥudūd. The mountain behind which the river comes may be the Central Russian Upland (the W.n.nd.r mountains) and the Don coming behind it, seen from the Dnieper region’s black Bulgaria.

Gardīzī’s name version M.rdāt<sup>85</sup> in the Oxford manuscript corresponds to DAI’s name Mordia and may explain the misidentification of Mirvāt. The two very similarly written forms Mirvāt and M.rdāt can be easily confused.<sup>86</sup> Muslim sources do not know the name Mordvin,<sup>87</sup> so it is possible that the author of the Ḥudūd encountered this name in his source and localized it based on information found in Muslim literature about the Moravians. The mistake was made easier by the fact that both the names W.n.nd.r and Bulghār were known in the steppe, so he places M.rdāt in the neighbourhood of the (eastern) W.n.nd.r and Inner (Black) Bulghārs. Today, the Mordvins live to the northeast (behind) the Don, but Ḥudūd, for the above reasons, places them much further southwest, closer to the Don, next to the Khazar Pechenegs and the Gurz Sea.

Minorsky hypothesized that although the relative position of the Majgharī–W.n.nd.r–Mirvāt Triassic was preserved in the Ḥudūd, it wrongly localized them to the middle Volga region.<sup>88</sup> But the north–south order of Majgharī, W.n.nd.r, Mirvāt does not correspond to the Central European situation. The North Moravians are located north of the Hungarians and the Danube Bulgars, the South Moravians are located south of the Hungarians, and north of the Danube Bulgars, none of them matching the description of Ḥudūd.<sup>89</sup>

The true Mordvins are listed in the Ḥudūd as B.rādhās ~ Burtās,<sup>90</sup> south from the Turkish Pechenegs and north from the Khazars and the Ghūz. The ten-day journey between the Burtās and the Pechenegs in the Balḥī-tradition is the same as the distance between the Mordia (Mordvins) and the Pechenegs in the DAI.<sup>91</sup> According to Minorsky, Arabic sources may reflect the name of the leading clan of the Mordvins.<sup>92</sup> The location of the Burtās west and north of the land of the Ghūz, east of the Ātil River, and south of the Pechenegs appears to be a mixture of the (Volga) Bulghārs and the B.rādhās. The latter were the southern neighbours of the Turkish Pechenegs. It is strange while the Ḥudūd states before that the

84 Zimonyi 2015, 291.

85 Minorsky 1982, 441.

86 Zimonyi 2015, 297., see Sudár 2019, 86.

87 Minorsky 1982, 425–426.

88 Minorsky 1982, 466.

89 For the Moravians, see Zimonyi 2015, 290–302.

90 Ibn Rusta, Gardīzī, al-Bakrī and al-Masʿūdī also mentioned the name Burtās. Minorsky 1982, 462–463. As a Finno-Ugric-speaking people see Zimonyi 2015, 190.

91 Zimonyi 2015, 196.

92 Minorsky 1982, 464.

Ātil flowing between the Turkish Pechenegs and the Burtās,<sup>93</sup> claims later the Ātil river as the western boundary of Burtās, and places the Pechenegs on the northern border. Besides this, it locates the B.rādhās, which is a name version of same people, west from the Ātil river.<sup>94</sup> It is possible that the mixing the Burtās with the (Volga) Bulghārs explains their wrong localization east from the Ātil (Volga).

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<sup>93</sup> Minorsky 1982, 75.

<sup>94</sup> Minorsky 1982, 162.

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## KIVONAT

**A fekete-tengeri sztyeppevidék földrajza a 9–10. században**

A tanulmány arra tesz kísérletet, hogy bemutassa a kelet-európai sztyeppeövezetet leíró koraközépkori források földrajzi adatait. Fő célja bemutatni a magyarok 9. századi és a besenyők 10. századi lakóhelyét a pontuszi sztyeppén. Az itt vizsgált források nagyon különböző szempontból indulnak és különböző kultúrkörből származnak: az úgynevezett *Örmény Földrajz* a 7. századból, a bizánci *De administrando imperio* a kései 9. és középső 10. századból származó adatokkal, és a perzsa *Ḥudūd al-‘ālam* (A világ régiói) a kései 10. századból; és mint fotos adalék, a Jayhāni-hagyományból fontos elemek a 10. század legelejéről. Az első három forrás részletes leírást ad Kelet-Európáról, bemutatva a Kárpátoktól keletre és a Fekete-tengertől északra levő hatalmas térségeken található népeket, országokat és határokat. Az ő mentális térképüket néhány esetben igen bonyolult feladat egybehangolni a sztyepei körülmények dinamikus változása miatt. Az *Örmény Földrajz* a vízrajz megértéséhez fontos és annak meghatározásához, hol éltek a bolgárok. A magyarok, majd a besenyők által ellenőrzött térséget a Fekete-tenger mellett elsősorban a DAI alapján körvonalazom. A *Ḥudūd* további járulékos információkat ad erről, de többször komoly nehézségeket is okoz, mint pl. a különböző Bulghār országok vagy a Mirvāt lokalizálásánál. A vizsgált források együtt a kelet-európai sztyeppe igen dinamikus térképét adják ki, folyamatukban mutatva a politikai változásokat.

**KULCSSZAVAK:** 9–10. század, földrajzi adatok, kelet-európai sztyeppe, örmény, bizánci és muszlim források, magyarok, bolgárok

