ПАЗИТЕЛИ НА БЪЛГАРЩИНАТА

The Bulgarian people's biggest contribution to the European civilisation

A story unknown to Europeans and underappreciated by the Bulgarians



Distributed for free

If you were to ask the Bulgarians which is their country's biggest contribution to mankind through the ages, many of them would indicate different historical events.

Maybe most of them would say it was the creation of the Bulgarian writing system, which is used by more than **300,000,000 people** all over the world today. Others would say it was the big discoveries made by Bulgarians, which gave a big push to the development of world science and technology:

John Atanasoff – inventor of the computer

Petar Petrov – inventor of the digital watch

Asen Yordanov – inventor and engineer of the Boeing planes, etc.

Some would say it was the activity of the Bogomils who created the foundation for many global religious schools and are considered to have been the predecessors of Protestantism.

Lately, more and more Bulgarians realise that **we have created the richest folklore in the world in terms of rhythm**. The secret of the compound metres has still not been revealed even though they were discovered by Bulgarian musicians.

All of these are true and there are many more things that can make Bulgarians feel proud to belong to this nation, but Bulgarians have one particular contribution without which no one can say how contemporary Europe would have looked like.

The Battle for Europe



painting by Alexander Alexiev - Hoffart

In 716, the Arab Caliphate (an Islamic state) took action to fulfil the will of the Prophet Muhammad and the Quran Postulates to impose Islam on the whole world and create a worldwide Islamic state. The main aim of conquest was Christian Europe, where Arabs invaded with troops through the two "doors" of the Old Continent –Gibraltar and the Bosphorus. To the west, the Arabs ruled over Spain for 8 centuries and invaded Southern France.

To the east, an enormous fleet with an army of **200,000**, lead personally by Caliph Sulayman's brother, Maslama, besieged Constantinople and its fall seemed inevitable. This started a year-long siege of Byzantium's capital. The fortress had long run out of provisions and the residents of the city under siege started to perform memorial service for their deaths while they were still alive. The tired defenders awaited in horror the last charge of the Arabs and were preparing to die as martyrs for the Faith of Christ.

In the next moment, their horror increased because they saw the well-known rows of Bulgarian mounted infantry appear behind the bare hills above Constantinople. **The relations with Bulgaria were not good** and the Byzantine people thought that the Bulgarians had come to help the Arabs destroy Constantinople.

But in the next few minutes they were pleasantly surprised. The Bulgarian mounted infantry went into full battle order and attacked the Arabs. Thousands of Arabs were slain by the ruthless Bulgarian horsemen. The defenders shouted **„Jesus Christ conquers"** as loud as they could from the walls of Constantinople.



Why had the relations between Bulgaria and Byzantium worsened?

Khan Tervel was the third ruler of the state founded in 632 by Khan Kubrat of Bulgaria. He belonged to the Dulo clan. The founder of the state, Khan Kubrat, and the second ruler, Khan Asparuh, were his grandfather and father, respectively.

Khan Tervel became Khan in 701, after his father, Khan Asparuh, died in battle with the Khazars who attacked the Bulgarian lands in what is today the South of Ukraine. Khan Tervel seems to have defeated the Khazars, because there are no more records of their attacks on Bulgaria.

In 705 AD, the Byzantine Emperor Justinian II, who had been forcefully removed from the throne by a coup several

years ago, came to Tervel for help. He had not been killed but exiled instead, to the city of Kherson on the Crimean Peninsula. Justinian II asked Khan Tervel to help him win back the throne with the help of the Bulgarian army. Tervel accepted. Bulgarian military forces entered the Byzantine capital through the sewers, captured it and placed Justinian back on the throne. The Emperor kept his promise. Khan Tervel was proclaimed **Ceasar (tsar)**. He received heaps of gold and silk clothes as reward. The Zagora region was annexed to Bulgaria, its borders being: to the east – the Black Sea coast from Cape Emine to Cape Igneada, to the south – the ridge of Strandzha, to the west – the meridian of the Tundzha river, and to the north – the ridge of Stara Planina. This was an extremely fertile territory with several important ports, supplying the large consumer centre Constantinople with food and raw materials – Nesebar, Pomorie, Debelt, Sozopol and Ahtopol.

In 708, Justinian realised he made a mistake leaving the supply of the capital in Bulgaria's hands and started a campaign to win the territory back. He captured Anchialo (Pomorie) by maritime landing. But the Bulgarian army attacked the Byzantine troops and completely annihilated them. Zagora remained within the borders of Bulgaria.

In honour of the victory, Khan (Tsar) Tervel ordered the carving of the monument relief in the rocks near the village of Madara. On this relief he is shown on horseback in a triumphant posture, piercing a lion (the symbol of Byzantium) with a spear.



painting by
Dimitar Gyudjenov

The Battle for Constantinople

Tervel in turn surrounded the Arabs. They hid in their camp and thus the attackers became the besieged. Tervel cut off their supply routes and killed every supply team that made it out of the camp. The Arabs turned out to be quite resilient – they were starving but did not give up the siege. They ate everything that could be eaten: grass, trees, leather attributes of the armaments, they tried to satiate their hunger with sand and small stones; there are even reports that they ate their excrements and the corpses of the dead. In 718, they decided to face Tervel in a decisive battle. The Khan used **the Bulgarian heavy cavalry** which literally annihilated the enemy. Even though they were **evidently** losing the battle, the Arabs were not giving up because **they had never been defeated up to that moment.**

That **sense of invincibility** made them the victim of the Bulgarians, who had to literally murder them. **33,000 Arabs** died in the massacre, 10,000 of which are claimed to have died by **an arrow in the eye.** The survivors rushed to their ships and retreated to Syria, but unfortunately for them, they were hit by a storm. More than 195,000 Arabs died and **barely 5,000** returned from the campaign.

Tervel, the Bulgarian Khan, ended the Arab invasion in Europe. **It was never resumed again.**



painting by Vasil Goranov

What would have happened to Europe, if Tervel had not intervened?



It is not certain what the fate of the Old Continent would have been if the Bulgarian ruler had not intervened, but it definitely would not have been the best. Let us not forget that the Arabs remained in Spain for **800 years.**

At that time, Europe was sparsely populated and European countries did not have large armies. Their troops were between **3,000 and 6,000 people**, mostly consisting of farmers. It is ridiculous to think that they would have been able to stop **200,000 Arabs**. They were also much weaker physically. They were shorter and with very low immunity. Even the Europeans themselves admit that only after the discovery of America, after they started importing corn, potatoes, tomatoes and other crops, the European peoples started improving physically. This, however, happened as late as the 16th century and despite that, centuries later, after the Bulgarians could not stop the Turks, they reached **the walls of Vienna**. Europe recognised the deed of Bulgaria and Tervel. After his death, he was canonised as saint of both **the Eastern** and **Western Church**. This was an honour given only to the patrons of Europe after that – **the Saints Cyril and Methodius**. In Western Europe, over **60 plays** were written for the „noble and just Bulgarianruler",proclaimedtohavebeen**the saviour of Europe**.

They called him Saint Tribellius

Why did Tervel intervene in the war?



Miniature from Chronicle of John Skilitsa (XI century)

This is still a mystery to historians. Why did Tervel interfere in what seemed to be an Arab-Byzantine war for the observer? It is unlikely that the Arabs' global aims were known.

One possible explanation for this mystery is that Tervel was **a Christian**. There are really no data for him having been christened, but indirect evidence hints that he was a Christian.

Firstly, his grandfather and father (the Khans Kubrat and Asparuh) were Christians. It is unlikely that they did not christen their grandson (and son, respectively). Secondly, there is a stamp of Tervel where he is depicted with Christian insignia and the words "Holy Mother, save Caesar Tervel". Thirdly, he could not have been proclaimed Caesar if he were not a Christian – this is a title reserved for Christian rulers. Also, he would not have been canonised as saint if he were not a Christian.

So, Khan Tervel probably took action against the Caliphate out of **Christian solidarity**. As cunning as the Byzantine may have been, they were still Christians.

There is statesman's wisdom in that, too. Even today, in the minds of most people, Byzantines symbolise cunning, treachery and dirty tricks. But by 716 Bulgarians had known them for almost 4 centuries. They knew what to expect from them – both good (because there are some good things) and bad. The Arabs and the Caliphate were unknown, foreign, scary to them. It is better to have neighbours that you know, rather than ones you do not.



Other peoples for the battle



The Arabs themselves mentioned the defeat from the Bulgarians in their annals. In this case, the saying "Fear makes the wolf look bigger than he is" is fully valid. Their memories of the battle were so horrifying that the stories they tell have been very exaggerated. They described the Bulgarians as giants and assured that **one Bulgarian could handle ten Arabs** in a melee attack.

Bulgarians really were a few centimetres taller than them and they had proven to be good warriors many times. But the relation 10:1 is a little exaggerated.

Many European sources also mention the victory of the Bulgarians against the Arabs. In the early Middle Ages in Western Europe (England, France, Italy) there was a big interest in the Bulgarian military success against the invaders, because these countries themselves were in danger of attack. The aim was to demonstrate that **the Arabs were not invincible**.

The Battle of Poitiers

The other European ruler who was titled the saviour of Europe was Charles Martel. In 732 at Poitiers there was another battle that history exaggerated. Charles Martel defeated the Arabs and they were stopped for good. **The battle consisted mostly of Arab attacks and determined Frankish defence.** The key moment during the battle was **the death** of Abder Rahman, the leader – after his death the Arabs just retreated. The Franks expected new attacks the next day, so they held the defensive positions tightly, but no attack came. No attack but they still did not dare move, fearing it might be an ambush. After sending some scouts and realising that there is no trace of the Arabs, **a day after the battle**, they understood that they had won the biggest victory in their history.

The Battle of Poitiers in 732 is **insignificant** compared to the scope of Khan Tervel's victory in 718. The two occasions **can not be compared** – at Poitiers, **8,000 people** fought on the side of the Arabs (1,000 Arabs and 7,000 Berbers) led by Abder Rahman (Emir in Spain, called "The Just" for some unknown reason) against **6,000 Franks**, commanded by Charles (the future Martel).



painting by Charles de Steuben



1,300 Years

2018 – the year of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU – marks the 1,300th anniversary of Khan Tervel's victory over the Arabs and the saving of Europe against their invasion.

That is why the patriotic society called "Keepers of the Bulgarian National Spirit" are organising various events, some of which in cooperation with other similar organisations for popularising the deed of the great Bulgarian ruler and the commemoration of the anniversary.

The main points of the campaign, which will take place in 2017 and 2018, are as follows:

1. Printing of educational leaflets (like the one you are holding right now) in circulation of several hundred thousand and their distribution for free in all towns and villages in Bulgaria.
2. Shooting a documentary about Khan Tervel in English and broadcasting it on Bulgarian and foreign TV stations and social networks.
3. Building of a monument of Khan Tervel – the Saviour of Europe – in the Region of Sofia Airport.
4. Initiation of celebrations commemorating the anniversary and the celebration of 3 September as the Day of Khan Tervel. On this day, the Orthodox Church celebrates the Day of Tribellius Theoktist (Khan Tervel).

text: Prof. Bojidar Dimitrov
adaptation: Hristo Iv. Dimitrov

Sofia • 2017 • “Guardians of Bulgarianness” Association
• paziteli.bg@gmail.com •