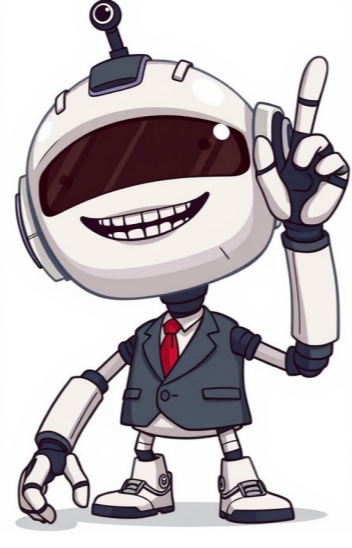


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The First Bulgarian Empire was a medieval state that existed from 681 to 1018 AD, covering a vast territory stretching from the Danube Bend to the Black Sea and from the Dnieper River to the Adriatic Sea. The Bulgars of Kubrat united various Slavic tribes under his rule and created a powerful confederation that would eventually become the First Bulgarian Empire. This period saw significant migrations to the Balkans and conflicts with neighboring powers. ===== The Slavs, an Indo-European origin group, first appeared in written records around the 5th century CE inhabiting territories north of the Danube. Over time, they expanded into the Balkans, with settlements beginning around the 570s and 580s. The Byzantine Empire's struggles against the Persian Sasanian Empire left them weakened, making it difficult to counter the Slavic invasions. The Bulgars established a strong presence in the Byzantine Empire by mounting several successful military campaigns against its territories. The exact number of Bulgars is uncertain, with estimates ranging from 10,000 to an unspecified considerable number. In 680, Khan Asparuh led a massive army and fleet against the Byzantines but was defeated at Onglos, a region in and around the Danube Delta. This battle proved pivotal in shaping the First Bulgarian Empire. The Bulgars then established alliances with local Slavic groups and began raiding across the mountains into Byzantine Thrace. The following year, Constantine IV paid the Bulgars an annual tribute to avoid further conflict. However, Khan Asparuh's successor, Tervel, continued the war against the Khazars and successfully aided Justinian II in his attempt to regain the throne in 705. Three years later, Justinian attempted to reclaim the territory he had lost but was defeated at Anchialus. Despite this setback, Tervel signed an agreement with Byzantium that defined their borders and established trade relations. The reign of Kormesiy, also known as Kormisosh, marked a significant period in Bulgarian history, characterized by relative peace with the Byzantine Empire. In contrast to his predecessors, Kormesiy's rule was marked by a prolonged period of war with the empire, which began during his reign from 737 to 754. The defeat of Kormisosh at the hands of Constantine V marked a turning point in Bulgarian history. ===== Emperor Constantine V launched a campaign against Bulgaria around 756, using both land and sea routes to attack the Bulgarian army led by Vineh. The Bulgarians were forced to surrender, with Vineh agreeing to send his children as hostages in exchange for peace. However, Constantine V was not deterred from continuing his attacks on Bulgaria. The Bulgarians, prompted by the Byzantine moves to consolidate their hold on the Slavs in Macedonia and northern Greece, as well as a response to a Byzantine raid against their country, confronted the Byzantine Empire. In 808, they raided the valley of the Struma River, defeating a Byzantine army, and in 809 captured the important city of Serdica. The pivotal era of Bulgarian history unfolded under the astute leadership of Boris I, who skillfully navigated the complex web of international politics to safeguard his realm's integrity. The Christianization of Bulgaria in 864 marked a watershed moment, as paganism was eradicated and an autocephalous Bulgarian Church was established. This bold move not only appeased the nobility's concerns but also enabled Boris I to secure vital diplomatic ties with the Papacy. As the disciples of Saints Cyril and Methodius arrived in Bulgaria, they were met with refuge and support from Boris I. The introduction of the Glagolitic script gave way to the development of the Cyrillic alphabet, which would become a cornerstone of Slavic literature. Despite the turmoil that ensued during his abdication, Boris I's successor struggled to restore the old pagan religion, only to be deposed by his father. The subsequent Council of Preslav cemented Bulgaria's position as a major power, with the Byzantine clergy being replaced by Bulgarians and the Greek language giving way to Old Church Slavonic. The conflict with Croatia proved to be a minor setback, with a brief battle in northeastern Bosnia yielding no decisive victor. A lasting peace treaty was forged, stabilizing the border between Bulgaria and Croatia along the Drina River. Boris I's diplomatic prowess played a crucial role in preventing territorial losses, even amidst natural disasters and military defeats. As Christianity gained traction, Boris I converted to the faith in 864, assuming the title of Knyaz. He skillfully manipulated the power struggle between the Papacy and the Ecumenical Patriarchate to assert Bulgarian independence, while sponsoring the creation of literature in Old Bulgarian. His unyielding stance against opposition led to the crushing of a nobility revolt and the overthrow of his own son Vladimir. The Council of Preslav marked a significant turning point, with Bulgaria emerging as a major force in Eastern and Southeast Europe. Under the leadership of Simeon I, Bulgaria would go on to experience an unprecedented cultural renaissance, earning the nickname "Golden Age of Bulgarian Culture." During the reign of Emperor Simeon I, Bulgaria experienced a remarkable surge in cultural development. This era is often referred to as the "Golden Age" of Bulgarian culture. The term itself was coined by Spiridon Palauzov in the mid-19th century. It's a period marked by significant advancements in literature, art, architecture, and liturgical reforms. The capital city, Preslav, was constructed with Byzantine flair, rivaling the grandeur of Constantinople. Among its notable structures were the stunning Round Church, also known as the Golden Church, and the majestic imperial palace. At this time, Preslavian pottery flourished, emulating the finest Byzantine models. It's believed that Emperor Simeon I gathered a circle of prominent literary figures around him, including some who might have been his own writing companions. Among the works attributed to him are Zlatostruy (Golden Stream) and two collections of Svatoslavian poetry. The primary genres of the time included Christian oratory, eulogies, lives of saints, anthems, and poetry. The introduction of the Cyrillic alphabet during this era had a profound impact on Bulgarian culture. Developed by Clement of Ohrid and Naum of Preslav, it was declared the official alphabet in 893. The Slavic language also gained recognition as an official tongue that year. As a result, the new alphabet spread to other Slavic nations and states. In addition to these cultural achievements, Emperor Simeon I faced significant challenges from neighboring powers. The Byzantine-Bulgarian war of 894-896 resulted from the Byzantine emperor Leo VI's decision to relocate the Bulgarian market from Constantinople to Thessaloniki. This move increased expenses for Bulgarian merchants and sparked tensions between the two empires. Following a series of battles, Simeon I secured an alliance with the Pechenegs and eventually defeated the Magyars in 896. He negotiated the release of Byzantine prisoners in exchange for Bulgarians held captive earlier that year. The Battle of Boulgarophyon was another decisive victory for Bulgaria, resulting in the annihilation of the Byzantine army. The war concluded with a peace treaty, which lasted until Leo VI's death in 912. Under its terms, Byzantium paid an annual tribute to Bulgaria and ceded territory between the Black Sea and Strandzha. Simeon I often disregarded this agreement, however, invading Byzantine lands on multiple occasions, including the conquest of Thessaloniki in 904. This tumultuous period in Bulgarian history reflects Emperor Simeon's complex legacy - a leader who championed cultural development while navigating the complexities of international relations. His "Golden Age" continues to inspire and captivate scholars to this day. The Slavic tribes had a significant impact on the region, with Leo VI being forced to make concessions to dissuade them from capturing the city. The treaty of 904 ceded all Slavic-inhabited lands in modern southern Macedonia and southern Albania to the Bulgarian Empire. ===== The Bulgarians' military initiative was led by Simeon I, who aimed to conquer not only Constantinople but also the rest of the Byzantine Empire. This goal drove the series of conflicts known as the Bulgarian-Serbian Wars of 917-924. ----- The conflict between Bulgaria and Serbia intensified after the Battle of Achelous in 917, where the Bulgarians annihilated the Byzantine army. The victory led to a series of military campaigns by both sides, with Bulgaria eventually annexing Serbia at the end of 924. ----- However, the Bulgarian advance was checked by the Croats, who defeated a Bulgarian army in 926. This halted Simeon's ambitions to expand his empire further westward. ----- The Byzantine invasion of Bulgaria in 917 was led by Leo Phokas, accompanied by Romanos Lakapenos and the navy. Despite their numerical superiority, they were decisively defeated at the Battle of Achelous on August 20, 917. The Bulgarian Empire, under the leadership of Simeon I, continued its expansion into Byzantine Thrace in 922, capturing key towns and fortresses, including Adrianople and Bizye. The empire's dominance over the Balkans was further solidified with the defeat of another Byzantine army at Constantinople. However, the capital city itself remained out of reach due to the lack of naval power. Simeon I attempted to negotiate a joint assault on Constantinople with the Fatimids but was thwarted by the Byzantines. He then launched a campaign against Serbia, defeating its ruler Zaharija and annexing the country as a Bulgarian province. The Bulgarians' strategy shifted towards conquering the Serbs, forcing them to pay homage to Simeon's son Caslav. The empire expanded its border to Croatia, which at that time had reached its peak and posed a threat to Bulgaria. Simeon I's ultimate goal was to defeat the Byzantine Empire and conquer Constantinople. He overran the eastern and central Balkans, occupied Serbia, and attacked Croatia. However, his troops were defeated by King Tomislav in the Battle of the Bosnian Highlands. Despite this setback, Simeon negotiated a peace treaty with the Byzantines, securing diplomatic recognition for the Bulgarian Empire and a marriage between his granddaughter Maria and the Byzantine Emperor Romanos I Lakapenos. The relations between Bulgaria and the Byzantine Empire deteriorated significantly following the demise of Peter's wife in the mid-960s. Emperor Nikephoros II Phokas, having triumphed over the Arabs, refused to pay the annual tribute to Bulgaria in 966 due to their alliance with the Magyars. This prompted a demonstration of force at the Bulgarian border. Nikephoros II eventually dispatched Sviatoslav I of the Rus' prince, to orchestrate a Rus' attack against Bulgaria from the north. Sviatoslav swiftly assembled a vast army and defeated the Bulgarians on the Danube, winning control over 80 Bulgarian fortresses in 968. The Byzantines encouraged the Rus' ruler's actions, resulting in the defeat of the Bulgarian forces and the occupation of northern and northeastern Bulgaria for two consecutive years. The Battle of Sliustra took place in the spring of 968 near Sliustra, Romania, pitting the armies of Bulgaria against Kievan Rus'. This conflict culminated in a decisive Rus' victory. The news of their triumph led to Peter I abdicating as emperor. Sviatoslav's invasion of Bulgaria was met with significant resistance but ultimately ended in defeat for the Bulgarian forces. In an effort to secure his ally's support, Nikephoros II arranged the marriage between his underage sons and two Bulgarian princesses. This move also included sending two of Peter's sons as negotiators and hostages. Sviatoslav returned to Bulgaria in 969 with a large army, backed by allied Pecheneg and Magyar contingents. Despite initial setbacks, he eventually overcame the city walls and placed Boris II under his control. Boris continued to govern but served as Sviatoslav's vassal, allowing him to maintain a semblance of authority. Sviatoslav appears to have successfully enlisted Bulgarian support for his anti-Byzantine endeavors. He was cautious in his approach, refusing to pillage the countryside or plunder cities that surrendered peacefully. This strategy backfired as it allowed Sviatoslav to establish a new and powerful nation at the Empire's northern border. A Rus' army with a large contingent of Bulgarians, Pechenegs, and Magyars crossed into Byzantium in early 970. They stormed Philippopolis and inflicted massive casualties on its inhabitants. Skleros led an army against the advancing Rus', employing a feigned retreat to lure away the Pechenegs and ambush the main Rus' force. The Byzantines failed to capitalize on this victory or pursue the remnants of the Rus' army, as Bardas Phokas rose in revolt in Asia Minor. In the aftermath of Phokas' rebellion being put down, Emperor Tzimiskes personally led his army into Bulgaria, capturing the capital Preslav and taking the Bulgarian tsar Boris II captive. The Rus', who were confined to the fortress of Dorostolon, eventually conceded defeat after a three-month siege and a series of battles before the city walls. Although the ceremony in 971 had been intended as a symbolic termination of the Bulgarian empire, the Byzantines struggled to assert control over Bulgaria's western provinces. A noble family known as the Kometopouloi, comprising four brothers - David, Moses, Aron, and Samuel - emerged as leaders in these provinces. Their movement was initially seen as a 'revolt' by the Byzantine emperor but seemed to regard itself as a regency for Boris II. However, this did not deter them from raiding neighboring territories under Byzantine rule. The Byzantines attempted to compromise their leadership by allowing Boris II and his brother Roman to escape from captivity at the court. Boris II was mistaken for a notable due to his attire and was shot in the chest by border guards. Roman managed to identify himself, but Samuel, who had co-ruled with Roman as the commander of the army and de facto ruler, continued to wage war against the Byzantines under Emperor Basil II. Despite suffering some major defeats, including the Battle of Spercheios, where he barely escaped captivity, Samuel's rule was characterized by constant warfare against the Byzantines. In his early years, Samuel had inflicted several significant defeats on the Byzantines and launched campaigns into their territory. He conquered parts of Serbia and led raids against Croatia and Hungary. However, from 1001 onwards, he mainly focused on defending Bulgaria against the superior Byzantine armies. Samuel of Bulgaria's campaign against the Byzantines ultimately ended in defeat as he failed to secure the city of Skopje. The Bulgarian army was ambushed by Basil II's forces, who took advantage of the high waters of the Vardar river to launch a surprise attack. The Battle of Kleidion proved to be a pivotal moment in the war, with Nikephoros Xiphias' clever tactics allowing the Byzantines to capture and blind many Bulgarian soldiers. Samuel himself escaped but died shortly after from a heart attack, reportedly caused by the sight of his defeated troops. Despite their efforts to resist, the Bulgarians were ultimately unable to withstand the Byzantine advances. The nobility eventually surrendered, and Bulgaria was annexed by the Byzantine Empire in 1018. While the Bulgarian aristocracy retained some privileges, many of its leaders were transferred to Asia Minor, depriving them of their natural influence. The Serbs and Croats were forced to acknowledge the supremacy of the Byzantine Emperor, and the empire's borders were restored to their former glory. The Balkan peninsula was once again under Byzantine control, stretching from the Danube to the Peloponnese and from the Adriatic Sea to the Black Sea. The Bulgarian Patriarchate was reduced to an archbishopric, but it retained its sees and enjoyed a privileged autonomy. Bulgaria remained under Byzantine rule until 1185, despite several attempts to restore its independence. The Bulgarian state emerged as a distinct entity, but its roots date back to the interactions between Slavs and Thracian population prior to its establishment. By 681, the population increased, and the settlements became more dense, leading to cultural assimilation among the Slavic tribes. The integration of Bulgars, Slavs, and romanized Thracians occurred over time, with many Bulgars adopting the Old Bulgarian language, while the ruling caste's Bulgar language gradually declined. The Christianization of Bulgaria under Boris I played a significant role in shaping the nation's identity. The establishment of Old Bulgarian as the state language and church tongue, along with the creation of the Cyrillic script, facilitated the development of a shared Slavic culture. This process also led to the decline of the old Bulgar aristocracy, whose privileges were diminished by the new Christian doctrine. The incorporation of Christianity into Bulgarian society resulted in a unified cultural identity among Bulgarians, who began to perceive themselves as a single Slavic nationality with distinct ethnic characteristics.

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