

**By Sultan Shamsi, Iscander Ismailov**

# **Volga Bulgaria in short stories for children**

Tatarstan history and culture  
learning guide for primary grades

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With the help of this guide children will be able to learn about the most important events in the history of Volga Bulgaria and about the way of living of the ancient Bulgars, who have played an important role in the history of Tatarian nation and Tatarstan.

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*Dear Friend!*

You are starting to read a book of short stories about our own past. Tatarian nation has a rich history, and telling all of it would take hundreds of books. Unfortunately, our history was sort of kept under lock and key until recently. It was kept in secret, largely misinterpreted and wrenched.

Only the books of last years helped us to lift the veil of our history. But almost all of them are adult books. There is lack of books for curious kids who are eager to know about their ancestors` lives and brave deeds. This one is probably the first shot.

Two authors wrote it together – a writer named S. Shamsi and a historian I. Izmailov. They have set a mission to tell young readers about the remote past of ours in understandable terms. It was written in Russian on purpose, so that children of other nationalities could read it as well, because knowing each other means being closer to each other, inspires respect and strengthens friendship.

It is also necessary because there are many historical tales and false myths about our nation. At first those ideas were planted intentionally in order to underestimate the importance of Tatarian nation in the history of all mankind and in the history of Russia in particular. And, as it has been already mentioned, the authentic story was kept in secret.

This small book tells about the earliest period of our history, when remote ancestors of modern Tatars were known in the world as the Bulgars. They came down in history with this name and created two independent states – Great Bulgaria of Kubrat Khan and Volga Bulgaria that was established in the middle reaches of Volga later. The description of it is very detailed in the book, so I will not repeat it here.

Besides, authors` aim was to tell children about the most important events and parts of lives of the Bulgars. In this book kids will get acquainted with the traditions of the ancient Bulgars, learn about their beliefs, and will be present at the process of Islamisation; they will listen to the stories of merchants from distant countries in caravan-serai, witness the way Bulgar cities tried to defend themselves from bellicose neighbors – Kipchaks and Russian princes. At the end of the book you will read the story about the trip of the monk Julian from Hungary to the land of the Bulgars. He visited this place just before the attack of the Mongols.

The appearance of the Mongols and their depredations open a new page in the history of Volga Bulgaria. It demands more stories and another book. But for now let us thank the authors for their cooperative labour and half-open the door into the fascinating world of history.

Member of the Academy of Science of Tatarstan

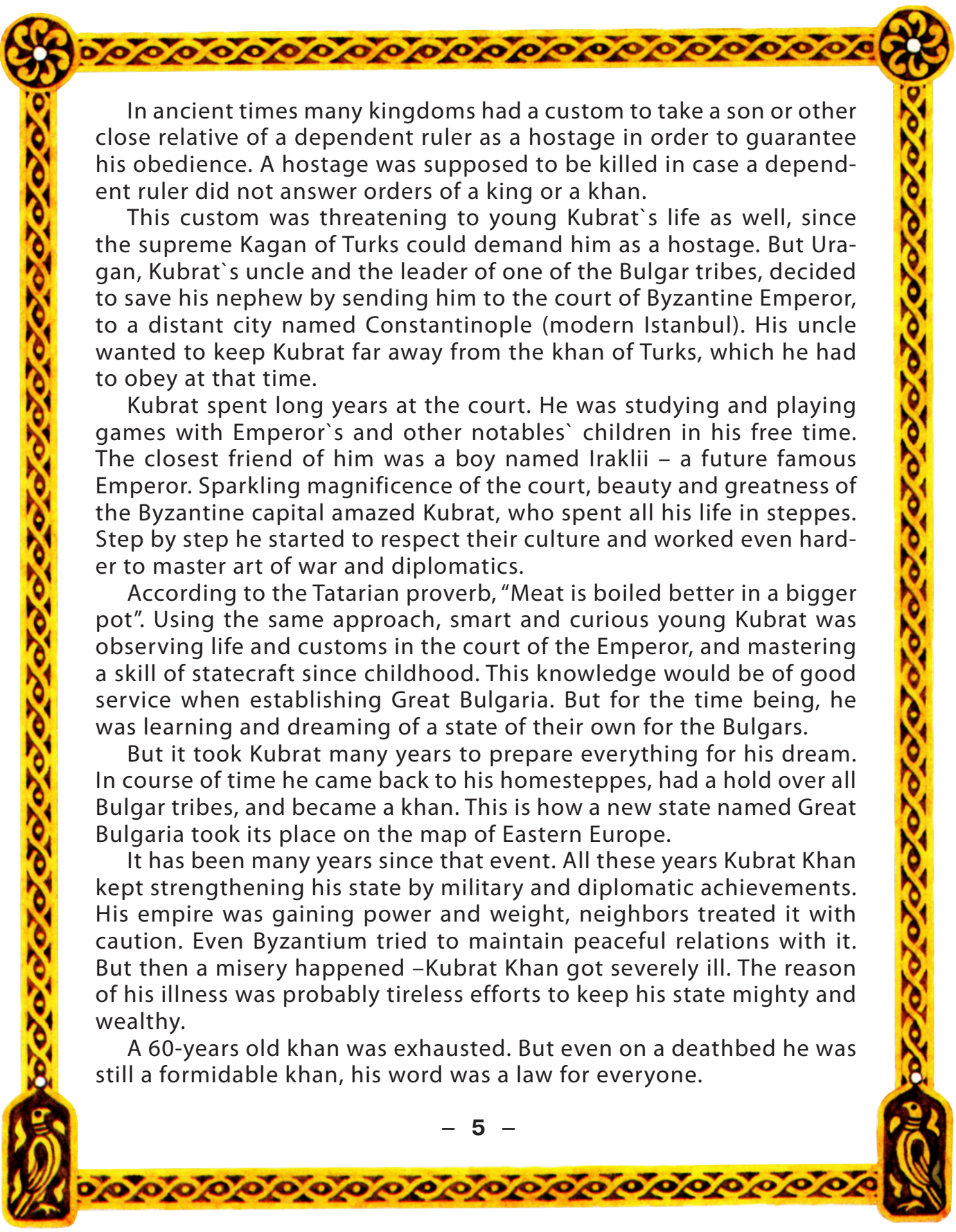
I.R. Tagirov

## THE LAST WILL OF KUBRATKHAN

Before migration to mid-Volga Region the Bulgars lived in vast steppes of North Caucasus near the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea, on the plains between rivers named Don and Kuban. They have established their first state – Great Bulgaria – here in 635 A.D. The capital of the new state became an ancient Greek city named Fanahoria. The Bulgars rebuilt it in their own way, because it was demolished more than once and fallen in disrepair. The ruins of it were removed and new houses and temples were built. Life returned to the city and its harbors began to welcome merchant ships from abroad because the capital of the state was situated on the coast of the Black Sea.



The name of the founder of Great Bulgaria was Kubrat Khan. All the Bulgar tribes were living separately before his reign. He has united them into one big tribe. But it took some time.



In ancient times many kingdoms had a custom to take a son or other close relative of a dependent ruler as a hostage in order to guarantee his obedience. A hostage was supposed to be killed in case a dependent ruler did not answer orders of a king or a khan.

This custom was threatening to young Kubrat`s life as well, since the supreme Kagan of Turks could demand him as a hostage. But Uragan, Kubrat`s uncle and the leader of one of the Bulgar tribes, decided to save his nephew by sending him to the court of Byzantine Emperor, to a distant city named Constantinople (modern Istanbul). His uncle wanted to keep Kubrat far away from the khan of Turks, which he had to obey at that time.

Kubrat spent long years at the court. He was studying and playing games with Emperor`s and other notables` children in his free time. The closest friend of him was a boy named Iraklii – a future famous Emperor. Sparkling magnificence of the court, beauty and greatness of the Byzantine capital amazed Kubrat, who spent all his life in steppes. Step by step he started to respect their culture and worked even harder to master art of war and diplomatics.

According to the Tatarian proverb, “Meat is boiled better in a bigger pot”. Using the same approach, smart and curious young Kubrat was observing life and customs in the court of the Emperor, and mastering a skill of statecraft since childhood. This knowledge would be of good service when establishing Great Bulgaria. But for the time being, he was learning and dreaming of a state of their own for the Bulgars.

But it took Kubrat many years to prepare everything for his dream. In course of time he came back to his homesteppes, had a hold over all Bulgar tribes, and became a khan. This is how a new state named Great Bulgaria took its place on the map of Eastern Europe.

It has been many years since that event. All these years Kubrat Khan kept strengthening his state by military and diplomatic achievements. His empire was gaining power and weight, neighbors treated it with caution. Even Byzantium tried to maintain peaceful relations with it. But then a misery happened –Kubrat Khan got severely ill. The reason of his illness was probably tireless efforts to keep his state mighty and wealthy.

A 60-years old khan was exhausted. But even on a deathbed he was still a formidable khan, his word was a law for everyone.

All the sons of Kubrat Khan, tribal leaders, his councilors, gathered by his bed in hope of their khan`s recovery. No, the great khan who had established an independent Bulgar state could not die!

...Kubrat Khan gave a sign with his hand for his sons to come closer to the bed. The God named Kok Tengri (Blue Sky) blessed him with happiness to have sons. Here they are, healthy and mighty, proud with their ancestry, carrying belts with lots of meritable awards. Kubrat Khan was peering at their eyes wondering what would happen to the Bulgars after his death. How would his sons behave? They were destined to rise above many others, given the right to dispose of many people`s lives, to deal with issues of either peace or war. Would they deserve their legacy?

Knitting all his strength he told them a parable about a man who gave each one of his sons a rod and commanded to break it. They did it easily. After that a man put all the rods into one bunch and asked his sons to break it again. But no one was able to break a bunch.

Finishing the story Kubrat Khan cast a meaningful glance at his sons and said:

"It is the same with you, my sons... If you live and act together, nobody can defeat you. But if you separate – your enemies will destroy you..."

Those were the last words of Kubrat Khan.

But his sons did not listen to the wise father. They were not united. And when Khazar Kaganate, the neighbor of Bulgaria which was located on the Khazar Sea (Caspian Sea), found out about it, they decided to attack Bulgaria.

After Kubrat Khan`s death Great Bulgaria broke into separate territories. One of Kubrat Khan`s sons named Asparukh, with some other intractable Bulgars, left for the Danube river to establish his own state - Danube Bulgaria which kept its name until today. Another son Kotrag went away to wander in steppes near Don. The third son Batbai obeyed Khazar Kaganate and stayed in the Kuban. Two other sons of Kubrat Khan were probably killed in action, and their followers migrated to the mid-Volga Region. Thus, the Bulgars were scattered to the four winds and the first Bulgar state stopped existing. But the Bulgars did not disappear into thin air. They established new states in other places. We will talk about it in next chapters.





## НЕМАНОВЕОИД РОДИНЕ

After Kubrat Khan`s death the first Bulgar state – Great Bulgaria – broke into separate territories. His sons did not fulfill the khan`s last wish to stay together to beat off an attack of Khazar Kaganate.

But there were some the Bulgars who did not want to live under the reign of Khazars. They had to find a new, safe place to settle. One of places like that was the mid-Volga Region. It was filled with tribes that spoke Turkic, ancient Hungarian and Finnish languages.

Although the Bulgars lost their state they still had armed forces. This is the reason they were able to have a hold over some local tribes. And they stroke up friendship with others. This is how the Bulgars managed to settle between two rivers – the Volga and the Kama – where they established a new state named Volga Bulgaria in the future. But it did not happen at one stroke. They had to get used to the climate and life conditions in their new homeland at first.

It was a wonderful land with huge territories of mixed forests. There were entire woods of nut-trees and big tousles of crab-trees. Manifold berries were also in abundance here. Many kinds of animals and wild fowl inhabited there. Rivers and lakes were full of fish. Open spaces of land were waiting to be cultivated. the Bulgars raised wheat, orzo, millet and many other grain varieties on those fields. They raised it not only for themselves, but also for selling to their neighbors.

the Bulgars ranched a lot. They kept cows, sheep and horses. Horse was something that a Bulgar was proud of. They used to say: “Horses are men`s wings”.



The Bulgars mostly ate orzo soup with meat, millet porridge, dried curd (kort) and kumis – very healthy drink made of mare`s milk. the Bulgars cooked in stoneware jugs, which they moulded out of clay with their own hands. Moulded jugs were burnt in special kilns. Sides of jugs and other crockery were patterned with pictures of travelling waves and crossing lines. Usually each tribe had its own pattern. The Bulgars also used wooden dishes. And only the richest and high-placed could afford using bronze and silver goblets, cups, bowls and plates.

At first after the migration the Bulgars lived in logged settlements with solid walls, surrounded by earthworks. They did not have cities yet. Their houses looked like partially buried yurts or timber blocking. In summer they usually put up felt yurts.



The Bulgars plied many different trades: made stoneware jugs, beat iron hooks, steel hatchets, weapons and all the necessary things for household and living. While excavation of ancient Bulgar settlements scientists find metal casting frames pretty often. It turned out that Bulgar metal-makers cast bronze jewelry for women and ouches for belts for men.



The Bulgars also liked hunt and fishery. To hunt fur-bearing animals –beavers, sabres, squirrels and other tenants of the wood - was especially profitable for them. These animals' fur was highly valued in the markets of eastern countries. In course of time the Bulgars started trading in other countries. This is how the Bulgars settled down in their new homeland.

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## ELTEBER, WARRIORS, NATION

The Bulgars did not have such a state then as, for example, the Arabs or the Greeks had at that time. Those travelers who visited the mid-Volga Region were surprised by simplicity of their nature and social system. Big tribes were united into one tribal confederation. They had a hold over other small tribes and clans. But they all did acknowledge the authority of a leader of the Bulgars, who bore a title "Elteber".

The reason for the authority of an Elteber was in old traditions and his tribesmen respect. He was very well regarded. Elteber's duty was to take care of his tribes' interests. In return they supported him, provided



Elteber with everything he needed as well as his armed force. They did not bare big taxes. The Bulgars had to pay only a sabre skin once a year from every house. When someone got married he had to give a horse for ride to Elteber. Foreign merchants also had to pay for the right to trade on the territory of the Bulgars.

Military skills were highly appreciated by the Bulgars. They preferred sabres, battleaxes, long spears, slings and arrows as weapons. Soldiers were protected by chain armor, made of little iron rings, round leather shield and a helmet, made of iron plates or thick leather. Elteber and other tribe leaders – beys – had their own armed forces. Besides, every single free man had his own weapon and was obliged to take part in defensive war to protect their homeland. Type of weapon and a military belt could always demonstrate a social status of a Bulgar. Military belt was the most interesting one –it was similar to modern shoulder straps. Military ranks were also determined from belts. Looking at their richness, the amount of hanging straps and ouches on them it was possible to say whether they belonged to a bey or to a captain, or to a sergeant, or just to a common soldier. After a warrior`s death his weapon was put to his grave with him.

The Bulgars treated weapons with great respect. They enchanted their weapons before every battle with the words: “Enter blue – escape red”. Baring sabre without killing anyone was disgraceful. Desecration of a weapon was a terrible crime, and the punishment for that was death. For example, it was strictly forbidden to ease oneself next to a weapon, etc.

Armed forces which belonged to wealthy Bulgars often fought with neighbors, especially with the ancient Hungarians and Burtas, ravaged their camping grounds and settlements, reived their cattle and took people to slavery. Elteber always had a right for a part of this capture after such raids. Because it was warriors in the first place who wished Elteber to have strong authority.





## TENGRI, GOD OF HEAVEN

Now we are going to tell you about Gods and Demons which our remote ancestors believed in. As you know, the Tatars are the followers of Islamic faith nowadays, they are Muslims. You have probably seen people heading for mosque, especially on Fridays. They go there to pray to the almighty Allah. Perhaps, you even know some prayers from your grandmothers or grandfathers.

But there was a time when our ancestors did not pray to Allah and did not read the Koran – the main Muslim book. They were pagans.

What does this word mean? Who are there pagans?

Pagans are those people who believe in many Gods and Demons and worship them. Pagan is sure that everything in the world depends on wishes of those good and evil powers. His own health, wealth of his family, abundant rainfalls, spring ice-slick, dry season, growth of high herbs, harvest and luck in the hunting field or on the battlefield – everything depends on the mood of those mysterious powers.

So, the Bulgars were pagans before accepting Islamic religion. Looking at the endless blue sky they believed that their main God named Tengri lived up there. This God was a master of the sky, he decided the fate of one person, or nation, or government. Tengri impersonated the creator of the world and the world itself at the same time. the Bulgars imagined him as a cosmic giant, who is able to do anything. They called him Tengri Khan out of deference to him. The word “khan” demonstrated his principate in the Universe.

One more thing is interesting: belief in Tengri, worship of Endless Blue Sky was a common practice for all the Turk nation. According to ancient Turks, Tengri was the one who “created blue sky above, brown

ground beneath and sons of men between them". That is exactly what ancient Turks wrote on flagstones, which they located in steppes. Some of them are preserved till the times we live in.

As you know, the Bulgars were Turks too, and they spoke one of Turkic dialects. This is why Tengri was their God.

Apart from the main God Tengri there existed smaller Gods. One of them was a good goddess Umai, who blessed people with children and protected hearth and home. She also provided the Bulgars with good harvest. Our remote ancestors thought Umai was Tengri's wife. Thus, Tengri (Sky) and Umai (Ground) were a divine couple that ruled people's destinies and all the nature.

Besides these two main Gods there were many little Godkins and Demons. They could be good ones, for example oi iace (boggard) – a little old man helping women to run their houses. Or sometimes they were evil, like a midnight bloodsucker ubyr (witch), who attacked sleeping kids, sucked their blood or sometimes even stole them. There also existed abzariace (owner of a cowhouse), albasty– evil spirit, who attacked sleeping people, suanasy (nixie), shurale (spirit of forest). The last two spirits you, kids, of course, know from poem-fairytales by Gabdula Tukai. Sometimes writers and poets choose those demons as characters for their works. Our ancestors also believed in iuha and azhdakha. Iuha was a hundred years old snake. In Tatarian fairytales it often took shape of a beautiful girl and sucked blood from men. But heat and lack of water forced it to turn back into a snake. As for azhdakha, it was a dragon, which exists in beliefs of almost every nation.

With the course of time, all these beliefs began giving place to the new religion – Islam. It was brought to the Bulgars with numerous merchants from Central Asia and Oriental countries. Gradually, there appeared followers of new religion among the Bulgars – Muslims.

Why did the Bulgars start to convert to Islam? What was so attractive for them in the new religion? First of all, it was spread through the great part of the world then. Despite this fact Islam was a new religion at that time. Besides, Islam was a religion practiced by not only one tribe, but by many Eastern and Western countries. Believing in Allah and accepting Islam gave every person the opportunity to get a foot in a Muslim door, regardless of his language, nationality, color of skin, wealth or poverty.

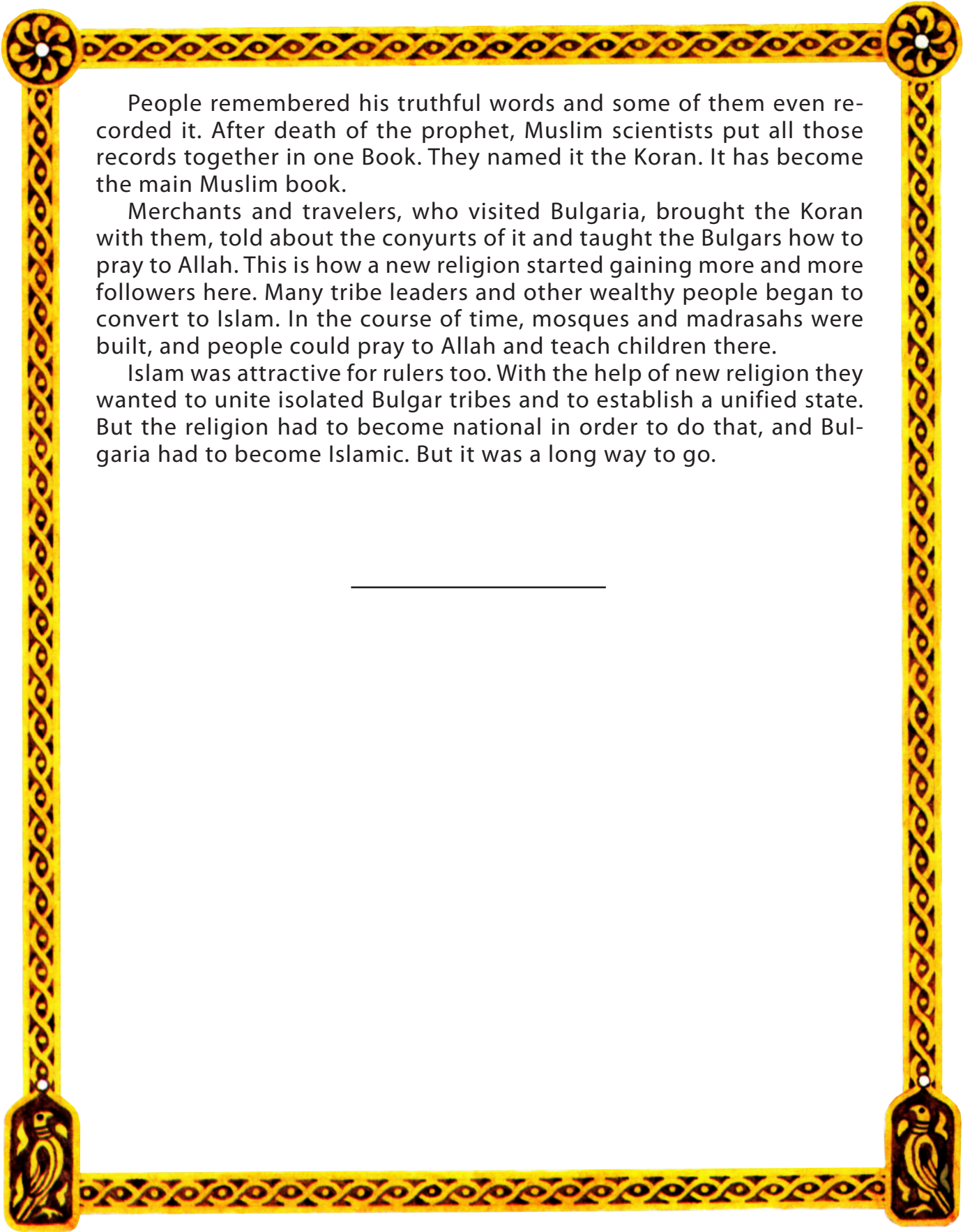


As for peasant class of people, this new religion was attractive for them because of its humaneness. Since Islam taught people how to be kind, fair, decent, honest, tolerant and respectful to each other. And there was so much unfairness in the world! Everyone wanted to be lucky and happy. Islam made people equal: a leader, a warrior, a slave – everyone became equal in front of the almighty Allah. This faith spiritualized a man, gave him hope. The founder of a new universal religion, Prophet Muhammad, appealed to people in his sermons:

- The most pleasant deed for Allah – a truthful word.
- Do good in silence.
- What you wish for yourself – wish for other person.

He also said: “Paradise is under your mothers` feet”. He encouraged people to have the utmost respect to their parents. Another advice of his was to learn, to gain knowledge: “Do not be lazy to go even to distant China for knowledge, because knowledge acquisition is the first duty of a Muslim”.

This is what Muhammad sermonized in distant Arabia.



People remembered his truthful words and some of them even recorded it. After death of the prophet, Muslim scientists put all those records together in one Book. They named it the Koran. It has become the main Muslim book.

Merchants and travelers, who visited Bulgaria, brought the Koran with them, told about the conyurts of it and taught the Bulgars how to pray to Allah. This is how a new religion started gaining more and more followers here. Many tribe leaders and other wealthy people began to convert to Islam. In the course of time, mosques and madrasahs were built, and people could pray to Allah and teach children there.

Islam was attractive for rulers too. With the help of new religion they wanted to unite isolated Bulgar tribes and to establish a unified state. But the religion had to become national in order to do that, and Bulgaria had to become Islamic. But it was a long way to go.

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## BAGDAD AMBASSADORS

Running horses to the ground for days messengers of Elteber Al-mush were spreading the great news about a big embassy coming from a distant Bagdad – the capital of Arab Caliphate. Elteber Al-mush invited all tribes to his place to participate in the feast in honor of caliph`s ambassadors` arrival. In front of great gathering of people ambassadors from Bagdad were supposed to read the letter from caliph of true believers – al-Muktadir– to Al-mush, Elteber of all the Bulgars. Their mission was also to solemnly present gifts from caliph.



For the whole century the Bulgars had been developing new territory and settling down their new homeland – the mid-Volga Region. But despite of all the achievements the Bulgars still were as if on the outskirts of cultural circle, global history and were located far away from big cities and states. Although the Itil river (Bulgar name of the Volga) gave them connection with Khazar Kaganate. A great beautiful city of Itil was situated on the shore of the sea. But Khazars were always enemies for the Bulgars, and it was better to stay away from them.

Nevertheless this kind of policy did not help the Bulgars – they still had to acknowledge the authority of Khazar Kaganate and pay them annual tribute.

The Bulgars still did not have enough power to fight Khazaria. But after recent events, such as a few military misfortunes and inner discords, the situation changed. Khazaria was running out of power, and Kagan Aaron began to demand big tributes, many hostages and warriors for his army from dependent countries, as if he knew the end was coming. And above all, he demanded the Bulgars to accept Kaganate`s religion – Judaism. For many Bulgars, who have just converted to Islam, the demand was offensive and impossible.

Besides, there was a rumor that the elder daughter of Elteber Almush had died in the capital of Khazaria. She was taken as a hostage by force. After that the Kaganate got the nerve to demand the younger daughter, which had recently got married to the leader of Asahels – one of the Bulgar tribes. Such life in dependence was becoming too burdensome. It was necessary to take urgent measures to strengthen Bulgaria.

Elteber Almush did not stand still. With military force and alliances he managed to bring the majority of the Bulgar tribes on his side: Asahel, Bersula, Suvar, Barandzhar, and others. About a year ago Almush sent his ambassadors to the capital of the Arab Caliphate– Bagdad–without telling anything to Khazar Kaganate. The head of the embassy was his counsellor Gabdulla, son of Bashtu. Of course, it was a risky plan. If the Kagan found out about it there would be a lot of trouble. But if he was fortunate, Elteber Almush could expect a lot. Blessedly, the counsellor Gabdulla not only succeeded in fulfilling this dangerous and difficult assignment, but he also organized a return visit from caliph of true believers to the land of Sakalibs – that name the Arabs gave the Bulgars at that time.

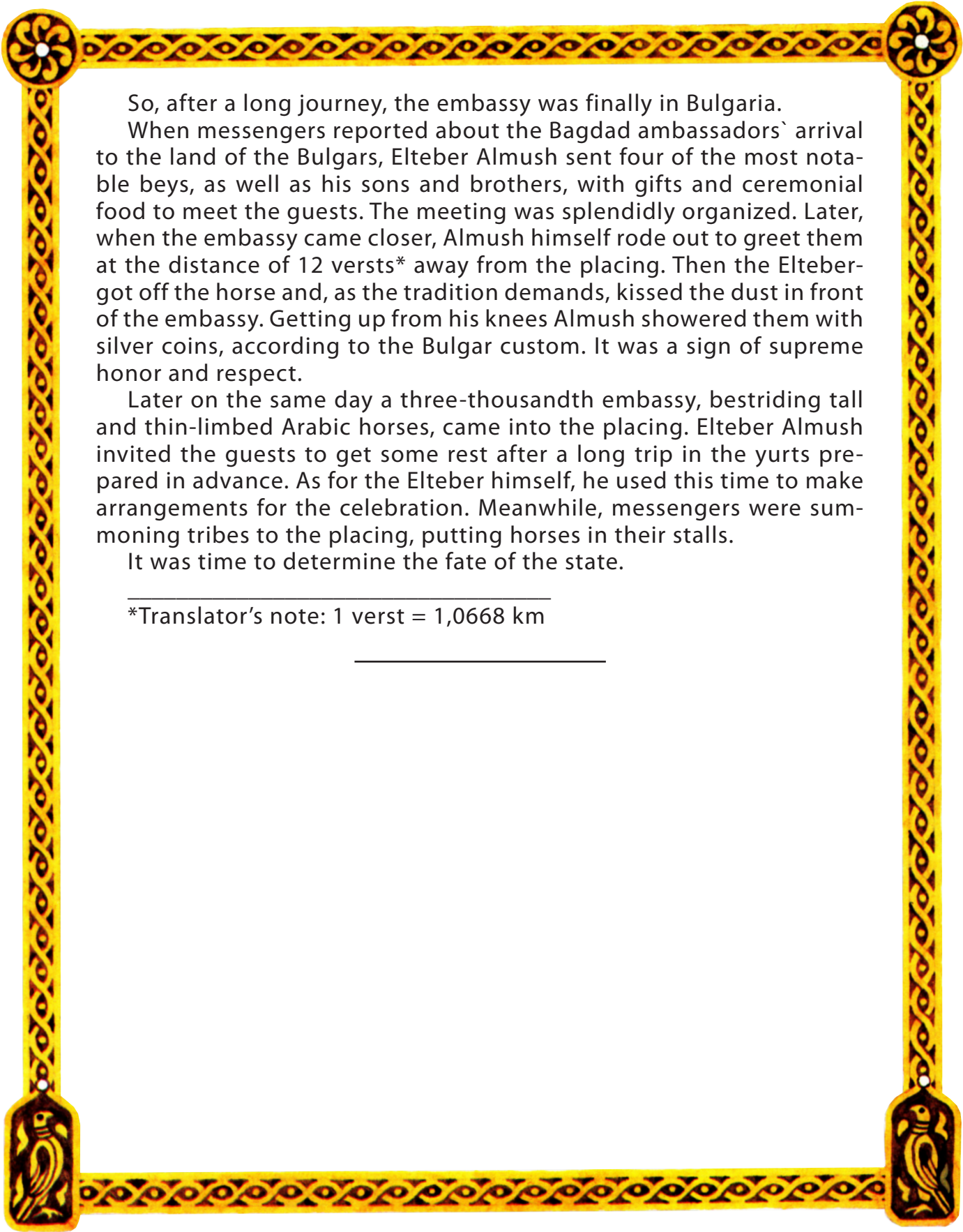
Sending embassy to distant Bagdad was a very good idea. Making contacts with the mighty Arab Caliphate could allow Elteber Almush to kill two birds with one stone. First of all, in his letter to the caliph he expressed a wish to convert Bulgaria to Islam. Almush asked for the blessing of the Caliph himself. For this purpose he asked to send him an embassy with teachers of faith and scholars to teach the Bulgars the fundamentals of the Islamic religion.

Secondly, after converting to new religion Bulgaria was sort of under the shelter of caliph and the whole Muslim world. And it was crucial for Bulgaria.

Because the Arab Caliphate and Khazaria were always intransigent enemies. It meant that Muslim Bulgaria could actually count on Caliph`s moral support in the struggle with the Khazars.

Elteber Almush could not miss the opportunity to annoy the Khazars. Definitely not. So, as a smart government leader he used it.





So, after a long journey, the embassy was finally in Bulgaria.

When messengers reported about the Bagdad ambassadors' arrival to the land of the Bulgars, Elteber Almush sent four of the most notable beys, as well as his sons and brothers, with gifts and ceremonial food to meet the guests. The meeting was splendidly organized. Later, when the embassy came closer, Almush himself rode out to greet them at the distance of 12 versts\* away from the placing. Then the Elteber got off the horse and, as the tradition demands, kissed the dust in front of the embassy. Getting up from his knees Almush showered them with silver coins, according to the Bulgar custom. It was a sign of supreme honor and respect.

Later on the same day a three-thousandth embassy, bestriding tall and thin-limbed Arabic horses, came into the placing. Elteber Almush invited the guests to get some rest after a long trip in the yurts prepared in advance. As for the Elteber himself, he used this time to make arrangements for the celebration. Meanwhile, messengers were summoning tribes to the placing, putting horses in their stalls.

It was time to determine the fate of the state.

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\*Translator's note: 1 verst = 1,0668 km

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## THE BULGARS CONVERT TO ISLAM

The Bulgars responded to the call of Elteber Almush willingly. All dressed up people came to the placing from every corner of the country. There were tribe leaders with their armed forces, elders of clans and notable people with their retinue and formidable military commanders in expensive armors, surrounded by horsemen wearing buff-coats. Some of them were wearing solid chain armors under buff-coats, their strong arms with lashes in them were resting on painted saddle horns or holding spears with bright pennants. There was a lot of bedizened and loudly speaking peasantry. They were observing Arabian far-come visitors with wonder, watching their long ornamental and embroidered with silver clothing and high turbans.

The placing of the Elteber was situated in the middle of vast grassland where many yurts, whitening in the sun, and multicolored tents were scattered. There were flying flags or horsetails on long poles jammed into the ground next to every yurt. Black household yurts were seen in back, and bonfires next to them gave out broad sheets of blue-gray smoke. Big pots were hanging under bonfires. Speedy servants were working here too. Lamb carcasses and big pieces of horsemeat for the celebration were boiled in these pots.

Yurts, shining in the sun of May, colorfulness of tents and flags, muffled rumble of motley crowd and husky sounds of trumpets, neighs of horses, screams of camels, glitter of weapons – all these components added special solemnity and festivity to the whole event. Everybody felt unusualness of the celebration and that it





was not just an ordinary festival, which are common in the land of the Bulgars. People knew there was a special reason for this meeting, which could change the fate of the Bulgar tribe dramatically.

So, the crowning moment awaited impatiently by all the audience finally came. Drums thudded, letting people know about the beginning of an event that was unprecedented for the land of the Bulgars. Drums were still thudding when Elteber Almush with his wife and their retinue came out of their thousand-man yurt. The Elteber was a tall and stout man. He left his wife and the retinue behind and marched to the middle of a huge carpet, which was spread out in front of the yurt. Then he looked over the audience with satisfaction. Several thousands of people were there, not including Arabian embassy standing aside. Presence of all leaders of big Bulgar tribes pleased him the most. Let everyone see the ambassadors of the Caliph, that arrived by his invitation.

"They are coming! They are coming!" – someone in the crowd shouted, and everyone turned their gazes to the big tent standing aside on the Elteber's yurt. A few men wearing black kaftans were coming from there. Servants behind them were carrying two black banners of sovereign of true believers and numerous parcels and coffrets full of gifts. One of servants walked a thin-limbed Arabic race horse with a silk horsecloth and an excellent high saddle, made in the East, on its back. The expensive bridle of the horse was decorated with ouches and glanced in the sun.

Coming closer to Elteber Almush the head of the embassy Susan Ar-Rassi and the secretary of the embassy Ahmet Ibn-Fadlan greeted him in the Eastern custom. Then they put the same black kaftan they were wearing on the Elteber. Highest dignitaries of the caliph were supposed to wear such kaftans. Ambassadors also put a high turban on the Elteber's head.

After that Ibn-Fadlan, who was responsible for the ceremony, removed the letter from the caliph and said with the help of a translator: "Let us start reading the letter from our master, amir al-mu'minin, may he be spared."

The Arabs standing aside repeated the last part of the phrase of Ibn-Fadlan and wished amir al-mu'minin longevity.

A breathless silence fell over the field. Ibn-Fadlan started reading the letter from distant Bagdad. It seemed like the Bulgar land itself was listening to this speech with bated breath.

The translator translated the letter word for word without cease. They had been reading for quite a long time. Only sometimes, at the sign of a skinny secretary, listeners repeated greetings in respond to the Caliph. It was a rule of the court of amir al-mu'minin.

After the whole letter was read everyone exclaimed: "Allah Akbar! Allah Akbar! Allah Akbar!" Those cries made the ground shiver. The audience livened up. People were screaming and embracing one another in excitement. Elteber Almush and the Arabs were showered with silver coins.

When the crowd calmed down and silence fell again the ambassadors started presenting gifts to Almush, his wife and family. There were fragrances, rich clothing, and weapons, decorated with emeralds. The first part of the ceremony was over.

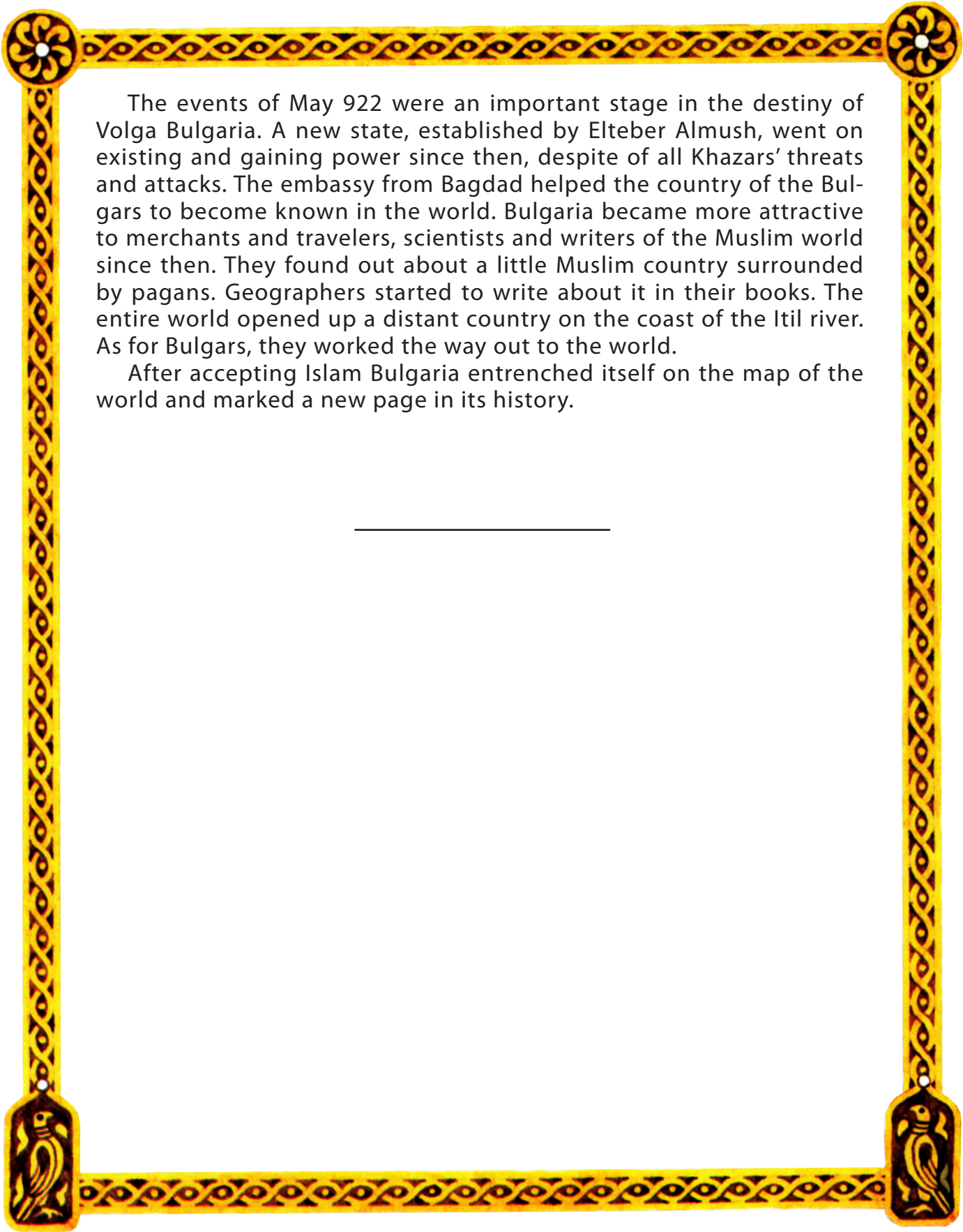
In a couple of hours Elteber Almush made a grand feast in his enormous yurt on the occasion of announcement of the letter and official conversion to Islam in his country. One of the most interesting things here is that the secretary of embassy, Ahmet Ibn-Fadlan, left detailed memoirs about visiting Bulgaria in 922. This is how he describes the seating of guests on the feast in the yurt of Elteber Almush: "Leaders of tribes sat on the right hand of the Elteber, our places were on the left hand of his. As for his sons, they sat in front of him. Elteber Almush himself took his place on the throne, covered with Byzantine samite."

Elteber Almush paid special attention to ambassadors during the feast. He raised his goblet with honey beverage and gave a toast:

"I have arranged this feast in honor of my lord, amir al-mu'minin, may he be spared!"

It was done deliberately. Because the arrival of ambassadors strengthened the Elteber's authority as a governor of the Bulgars to a great extent. Soon after that day he gathered quriltai-assembly of all the Bulgars where all the tribes acknowledged his authority. And he forced to obey those who disagreed.

Since then Elteber Almush began to encourage spreading of new religion in Bulgaria without hiding. Islam was close to the Bulgar set of mind and helped the Elteber to consolidate the unity of the state. As we have already mentioned, Islam did not accept division into tribes. The religion implied that a nation is one big family of coreligionists. It was a crucial point for Bulgaria in its struggle for independence against Khazaria.



The events of May 922 were an important stage in the destiny of Volga Bulgaria. A new state, established by Elteber Almush, went on existing and gaining power since then, despite of all Khazars' threats and attacks. The embassy from Bagdad helped the country of the Bulgars to become known in the world. Bulgaria became more attractive to merchants and travelers, scientists and writers of the Muslim world since then. They found out about a little Muslim country surrounded by pagans. Geographers started to write about it in their books. The entire world opened up a distant country on the coast of the Itil river. As for Bulgars, they worked the way out to the world.

After accepting Islam Bulgaria entrenched itself on the map of the world and marked a new page in its history.

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## IN CARAVAN-SERAI



The day came to its close. Lonely merchants and small groups of them were coming back from the market in the city of Suvar to caravan-serai to stay overnight. Caravan-serai in Suvar was located outside the inner city limitson the model of eastern cities. It looked like a small but spacious fortress. It was surrounded by walls, not too tall but solid, and there was a big yard with cattle-pens and tethers for horses and camels inside of it. There was also a deep well with a long water trough for animals in the middle of the yard. A few scraggs grew near the far wall. Two-storeyed rooms-hizhras were situated along the rest walls, and there was even a small brick bath-house with water pipe in the corner of the yard.

A warm evening followed an exhausting hot day. Some men in striped bathrobes were sitting cross-legged on a thick grey felt near one of keils. They were drinking tea. From their sweaty red faces and towels on their necks that they used to wipe their faces and chests we could draw the conclusion that they had just come out of the bath.

They all shared the same peculiarity – indefatigable passion to trade and travelling.



And that was exactly what brought them all in caravan-serai that evening. They all were from different places and regions and even from distant countries. Here sat experienced merchants from the Bulgar cities, who carried precious furs, fossil ivory, walrus tusks, fish-oil and thin leather "bulgari" famous all over the Eastern part of the world. After selling their goods some of them brought famous oriental carpets, expensive weapons, different textiles, fashionable glassware, different fragrances and attire at their home countries. Others preferred to bring tea to Bulgaria, as well as light and strong silk, iridescent in the sunlight, from a distant country Chin.

This fabric was very popular on the markets of the world from Chin to Rum\*. It was used to make up clothes for arrogant lords and beautiful ladies, to decorate castles of grand people, to put up tents for khans and tsars, to trim thrones for kings and furniture for rich people. Some merchants brought a caravan from Khoresm full of dried fruit, sabre blades, lazuli from Badakhshan and even a few history and geography books and the biography of Prophet Mohammed.

In front of them was a low table with honey, dried fruit, boiled beef scones and tea on it. Fading fire was smoking nearby. Looking at their flushed satisfied faces it was easy to guess that they were getting on well. Some of them had probably made a bargain that day, or sold something successfully, or maybe got acquainted with a powerful person. They all were experienced people, they had seen a lot and they were happy to tell about it for hours as chance offered.



"...I was so excited to meet familiar merchants in Basra", a trader from Khorasan went on telling his story. "They talked me into going to a fabulously wealthy country named Hindustan\*\*. Of course, it was a long way and a risky adventure. But I took the plunge. We bought goods and hired a ship. Our ship put out of the Arabia Gulf and set a course for Hindustan. But a terrible storm came on our way. All night long the ship was like a reed shaken by the wind, huge waves were rolling over the deck, the mast was broken and washed away. The ship was left unpiloted. The only thing we could do was to gather in the hold and pray to Allah for help and rescue." The merchant took a deep breath and made a sip of cooling tea from the teabowl.

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\*Chin – China. Rum – Byzantine Empire with the capital named Constantinople.

\*\*Hindustan – India

Apparently he was going through that awful night again. "Only in the morning, when the wind failed, we found ourselves not far from a shore. It made us feel worried because we could become an easy target for pirates and shore robbers. So it was. After a little while we were surrounded by black people in whiffs. The Arabs call them "zindzhi"\*. They forced us to cast an anchor and moor to the shore with our goods.

After that they brought us to their leader or a tsar. I am not sure how they call him. Suddenly one of our group said: "This is the end. We are in the land of cannibals. They will eat us. You will see..." The merchant grinned and wiped his hairy chest with a towel. You can imagine our terror... But there was a happy end waiting for us after all: their leader was a young man with handsome face and good temper. "Do not be afraid," he said. "Unload your goods and trade. Nobody will do you any harm." He also gave an order to help us to repair our ship. So, instead of Hindustan we were brought to the land of zindzhi," - he smiled.

"I have been to a distant country Chin twice," another merchant started his story, making himself comfortable at the table."There, for



example, you can go everywhere in the country on business, but your time is strictly limited – only in summer, in the end of summer, to be precise. A merchant can travel there without fear of being robbed. He is protected by severe legislation and lots of officers there. But they also keep watch over him. Every merchant there is obliged to have special passes to move within the country. But the most marvelous thing there is a silkworm that gleans with special slime. This slime becomes a silken thread. This worm feeds with leaves of mulberry.

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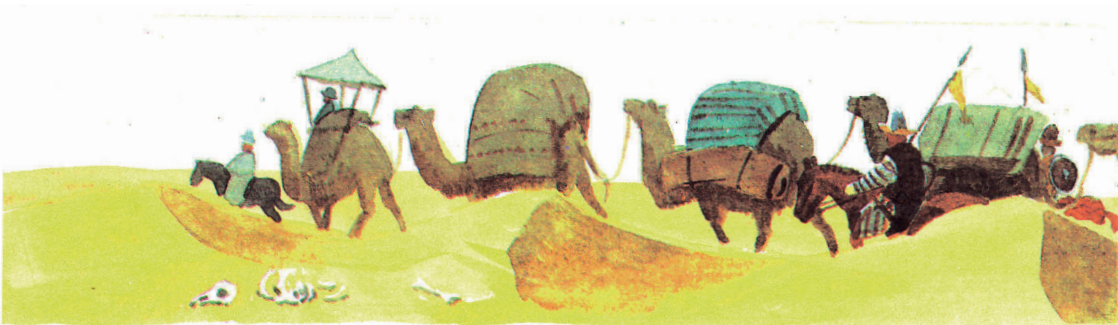
\*Zindzhi – the name given to inhabitants of Eastern Africa by the Arabs.

Inhabitants of Chin are sure that a silkworm was given to them by Gods. I have already read that a silkworm came out of a Prophet Aiba's wounds.

In ancient times production of silk was kept secret. It was prized as much as gold. Nobody knew how they raised worms, fed them, how this wonderful thread was made and how they weaved the amazing fabric out of it. At that time a silk worm was only raised in Chin. But Christian monks stole it, brought to Rum in the hollowed-out stick and started to raise worms themselves. However, this silk differs a lot from the fabric from Chin."

Meanwhile the servant of one of the merchants brought a big wooden piece of plate full of foamy kumis and a spoon with a long shank to stir and ladle this wonderful beverage. The merchants livened up and handed their teabowls over to the servant in turns. The one who was telling the story took a sip, shook his head in satisfaction and went on:

"That's a great beverage without a doubt. But in Chin people drink only tea. The one who drinks it is tireless and his mind is always clear. They say that tea tree grew from eyelids of a saint, who cut his eyelids off to prevent himself from sleeping while praying. Yes, tea beverage is a great creation of Allah. But buying silk and tea in Chin is half the battle. The most difficult part is their delivery through parching deserts. Sands spread for hundreds and hundreds of versts there, and winds roam from place to place on whim. Travelers do not see any traces of human feet, many of them lose their way. This is why they mark the road with bones of dead animals. There is no water or plants there. Burning winds blow often. Sometimes people hear screams, groans or singing in the howl of the wind.



They say those who listen too attentively to these sounds lose their minds. It's no wonder. This is why only the bravest and the most experienced people go through sands with caravans.

"You, my dear, have been twice to Chin," one of listeners noticed and shook his head.

"Yes, I have," the narrator replied.

"You can meet our traders everywhere," the host said.

"The world would have turned into dead addled water without us. This is why smart rulers value merchants," another one replied.

They kept quiet for a while. It was getting dark. The stars were lighting up in the sky.

"These stories are unbelievable," a merchant from the city of Kashan, situated in the north of Bulgaria, broke the silence, putting his empty teabowl on the felt. "But have you ever travelled to the north, to the Sea of Darkness? To get there you would have to go through the Chulman river\* to the countries Visu and Aru, and after that to the land of people named Iura\*\* and after that you would see wild people named Iadzhuzh-madzhuzh\*\*\*, as they say. They say Iskander Zulkarnain\*\*\*\* once conquered them in ancient times, banished them to the edge of the earth and built a great wall to separate them from the rest of the world. After those lands you can only see desolate regions on the coast of the Sea of Darkness. Darkness never leaves this land of mountains and snow deserts. The ground there is always frozen and covered with snow.



You can only travel there by sledge pulled by a pack of dogs. Only rich merchants come in there with many sledges full of provision, drinking, dog food and firewood.

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\*Chulman – an ancient name of Kama river

\*\*Vicu, Aru, Iura – ancient people living to the north from Bulgaria

\*\*\*Iadzhuzh-madzhuzh – mythical ancient people (Gog and Magog)

\*\*\*\*Iskander Zulkarnain – the Eastern name of well-known Greek commander Alexander the Great

Because there is no wood, or stones, or food in the land of Darkness. Of course, the main participant of such trip is a guide dog. It goes ahead of the pack and shows the way.

When merchants come there with goods, they leave all of it in a special place and then go away. But they come back in a few days to the same place and find things that they came here for next to the goods they brought. If a merchant agrees he takes the things and leaves. If not – he takes his goods and leaves. They never deceive each other and never see each other.

In that country people have the most precious furs. A fish-beast with giant fangs also lives there. Sometimes it comes out to a dry land, where hunters are waiting for it. People also say that a hairy elephant with long ivories lives there. I have seen once enormous bones of it in the brink of the river. I took its fangs.

Trips to those places are difficult and dangerous but very profitable. Sometimes you can change a set of bronze attire, one steel knife or a spear with an iron pike for an armload of fells or a few fangs.”

Meanwhile the servant lighted a bonfire again and hung a smoky pot above it. Dry firewood started to flare. The atmosphere became more cheerful, people started to discuss common themes. They did not even notice a bearded man wearing a white turban and a greenish robe approaching to them. He was carefully hanging on their words. Then he chose a moment, excused himself politely and introduced himself.

“My name is Abu Hamid al-Gharnati, I came from Andalusia\*. I am here to deal with trading and governmental issues.”

The other merchants offered him a place on the felt, and he sat cross-legged. The servant poured him kumis at the sign of the host. The guest took the teabowl with both hands, the gesture of gratitude. He made a sip and started speaking:

“I have been to many countries, I lived in Cairo, in Damascus. And now I have come here from the city of Saksin\*\*. I have already learnt and seen many things in this country. But what amazed me the most is that here, at the edge of habitable world I have found Muslims surrounded by pagans.

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\*Andalusia – a region on the south of Spain. Abu Hamid al-Gharnati visited Bulgaria in 1135-1136, 1150

\*\*Saksin – a city that was situated in lower reaches of the Volga

And in this land, strange for foreigners, they have built enormous cities, as big as those in Cairo or Damascus. But these cities are wooden unlike Cairo or Damascus. The fields are also cultivated here, and friendly connections with mighty neighbors are established."

There was a sparkle of genuine admiration glimpsed in the guest's eyes. His tanned face seemed to be made of a solid tree. Although unlike a tree it was living and mobile. The rest of the merchants recognized a clever and noble person. And they had a liking for him.

Meanwhile the guest kept telling:

"I have read books of Bulgar scientists and philosophers. I have found the major part of my knowledge in the book "History of the Bulgars" about the past of Bulgar people wrote by Yakub bin Nugman, a worthful cadī of the city of Bolgar. I am going to the West soon, to the land of Urus tribe. I have come to you wondering if any of you knows something about this land."

The merchants were happy to meet new companion. Many of them had already been to the land of Urus and tried to share their stories vying with each other.

"They are Christians."

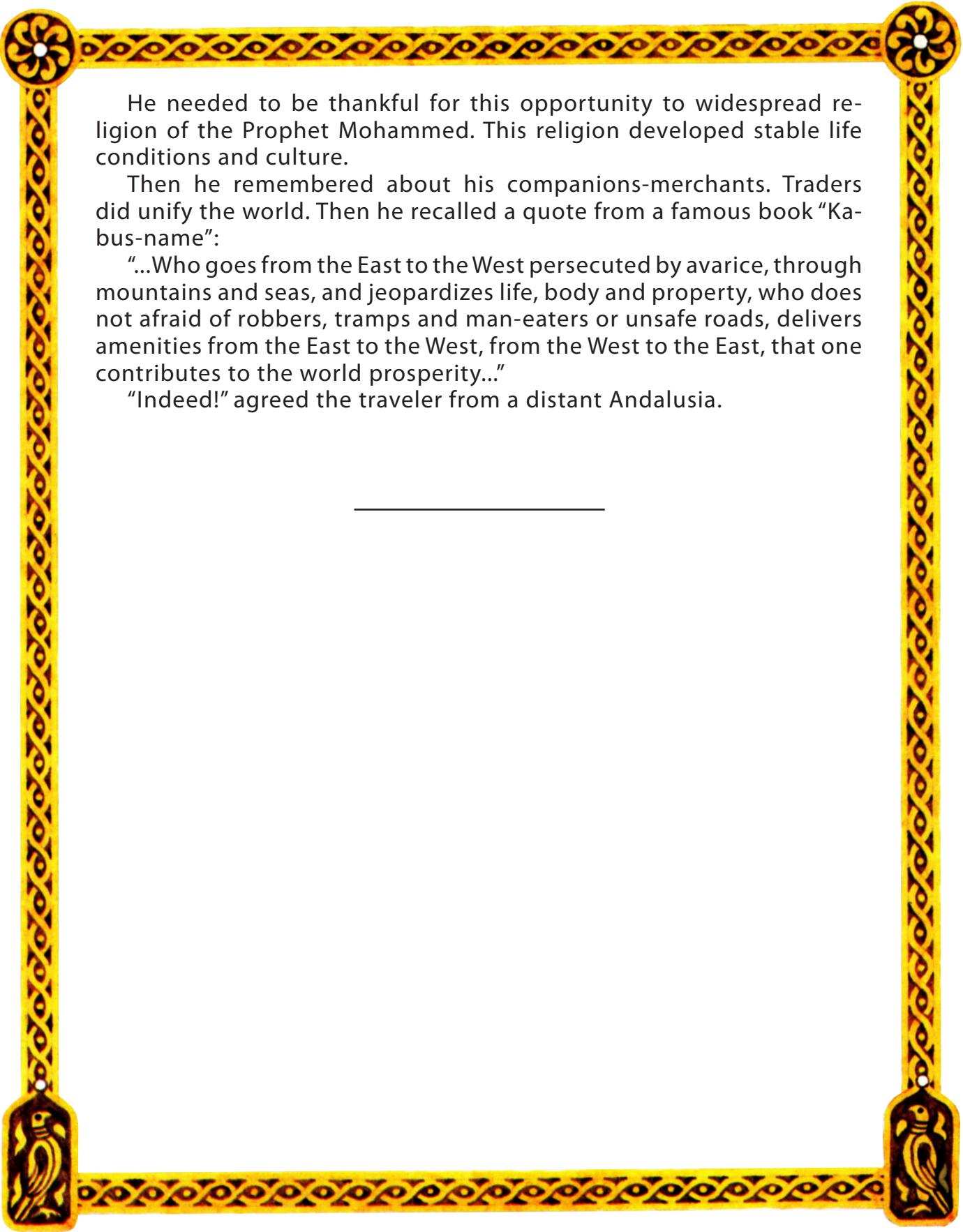
"They use squirrel fell instead of money."

"The way to this land is safe."

"Their capital is Kuiava\*. It is not very big, and you can even meet the Kipchaks and the Bulgars among them."

The appearance of a new face inspired the rest of them. They started sharing with their stories and memories again. The conversation went on till late. Bonfire was fading, sometimes it flared up but then went out again. Night sky sparkled with diamond placer of the stars. It was time to go to their hizras. New worries and cares were waiting for each one of them tomorrow.

Abu Hamid al-Gharnati has learnt many interesting things from this conversation. Before going to bed he was looking at the starry sky of this northern Muslim country for some time and was thinking about the importance of culture. He was happy to find soul mates in every corner of the Muslim world, their understanding and sympathy. Wasn't it wonderful that everywhere he went he always found caravan-serai, mosques and madrasahs, met coreligionists, and formulated one and the same prayer with them.



He needed to be thankful for this opportunity to widespread religion of the Prophet Mohammed. This religion developed stable life conditions and culture.

Then he remembered about his companions-merchants. Traders did unify the world. Then he recalled a quote from a famous book "Kabus-name":

"...Who goes from the East to the West persecuted by avarice, through mountains and seas, and jeopardizes life, body and property, who does not afraid of robbers, tramps and man-eaters or unsafe roads, delivers amenities from the East to the West, from the West to the East, that one contributes to the world prosperity.."

"Indeed!" agreed the traveler from a distant Andalusia.

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## AGGRESSIVE NEIGHBOURS

*The heat's guilty in grasses dry and dead,  
The steppes – without borders; but distant blue is  
faint.*

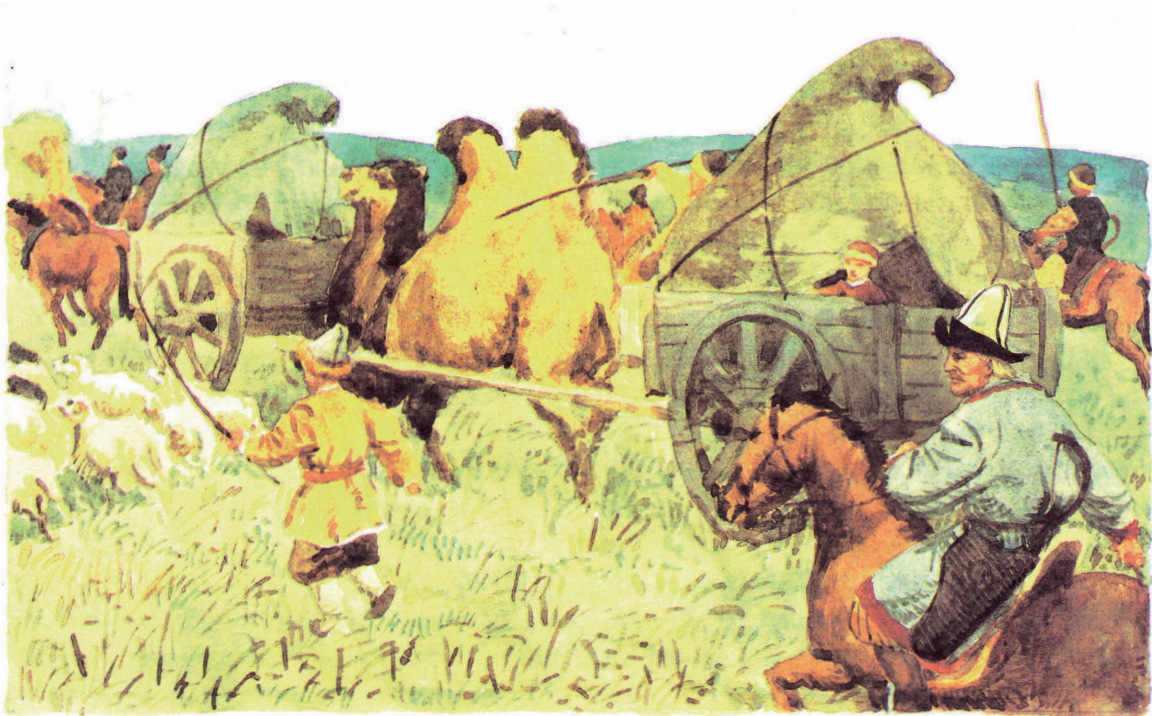
*Here is the skeleton of horse's head.  
Here is the woman from the stone again.*  
(Ivan Bunin)

In the beginning of the 11th century, the Kipchaks became a formidable neighbour of Bulgaria. The Bulgars didn't know the Kipchaks before. They lived in the steppes of the Southern Urals and were a part of a huge association of the steppe tribes – the Kimak Kaganate. But then the Kipchaks separated from them and began to go forward to the West, displacing weaker tribes and nations from the steppes. The Bulgars also fought with them and conducted peace negotiations in order to defend their independence.


It must be said that the Kipchaks became an important part of the Tatars final formation. In the course of history it turned out that the Bulgars and the Kipchaks closely communicated with each other for a few centuries, and it eventually led to their merger. In other words, when the Bulgars and the Kipchaks merged, the Tatar nation formed. But it happened later and took several centuries. And yet the Kipchaks were enemies of the Bulgars, and they were very strong and formidable.

If you will meet nation under the name “the Polovtsy” in books, then you must know that this is about the Kipchaks. The Russians called them “the Polovtsy” because of the light yellow, almost straw color of their hair (“polova” in Russian is the same for English “straw”). And the Europeans called them “the Kumans”. Thus, the “the Polovtsy” and the “the Kumans” means the Kipchaks.

So, a spate of the Kipchaks, moving in search of the best pastures to the West, displaced and absorbed the previous inhabitants of the steppes – the Guzes and the Pechenegs. Later, these steppes were called “Deshti-Kipchak”, which means the Kipchak steppe. In short, they have become the hosts of these places – the head nation. They occupied a vast space from the Urals to the Black Sea coast, Bulgaria and Hungary. They settled in the richest steppes and approached the borders of countries living a sedentary life. After the victories over the Pechenegs and the Guzes, they faced Bulgaria and Rus.



The Kipchaks led a nomadic way of life. One of the medieval writers wrote about them: “The Kumans (the Kipchaks) are the people who do not plow and sow, who have neither huts nor houses, but they only have felt yurts, where they are born, and they feed with milk, cheese and meat”. In short, the Kipchaks were the common steppe, nomadic people. They installed their round yurts on large carts and went wherever they wanted. Each large tribe occupied a certain territory.



In winter, they usually wandered in the south, where it was warmer and where the cattle could easily procure food, raking dry grass from under the snow. When it was a mix of snow and rain (such winters also could happen), and then it froze, and the earth covered with a thin layer of ice. Because of it cattle died in tens of thousands. It was a real tragedy for the steppe people, because their cattle could not procure any food.

In spring, after the birth of the rearers, the Kipchaks went back to the north. Usually they walked along the riverbeds, where there was a lot of lush grass. And in autumn, going along the same way, they descended to their winter camps, pasturing the cattle on the grass which had already grown by that time.

The main wealth of the Kipchaks was numerous herds of horses and cows, flocks of sheep and camels. But most of all they valued their low, unpretentious and hardy horses. The horse for the Kipchak was an irreplaceable helper in war and in peacetime. These horses surprised the Europeans – they said, that the Kipchak horses allowed them to move tirelessly in the daytime and at night.

The Kipchaks wandered in auls or in whole nomad camps (kuch), in which several related families lived. Such nomad camps were united in a tribe, and tribes – into tribal unions. There were headmen, their warriors and ordinary tribesmen inside of the aul. The interesting thing is that from the Russian word “koshchei” was formed from the word “kuch” (nomad camps), and it meant a nomad, a member of the nomadic tribe. The image of this rampant enemy of Russian heroes also got into fairy tales, becoming legendary “Koshchei the Immortal”. Apparently, they brought a lot of trouble to the Russian warriors.

The heads of the tribes were called khans like in all Turkic nations. The tribal associations were led by the most successful and experienced of them. They commanded troops, resolved disputes and participated in religious ceremonies. All power was concentrated in the hands of the khan.

Khans endowed each horde and the smaller nomadic tribes that were included in the horde with a piece of land, which necessarily included a wintering site (“zimnik”), a summer camp (“letnik”), and the route between them. When large associations of nomads consisting of many tribes with their khan were created, the khans chose the supreme kagan, in other words, the khan of khans, to who all obeyed. Such a state of nomads was called “kaganate”. From history we know a

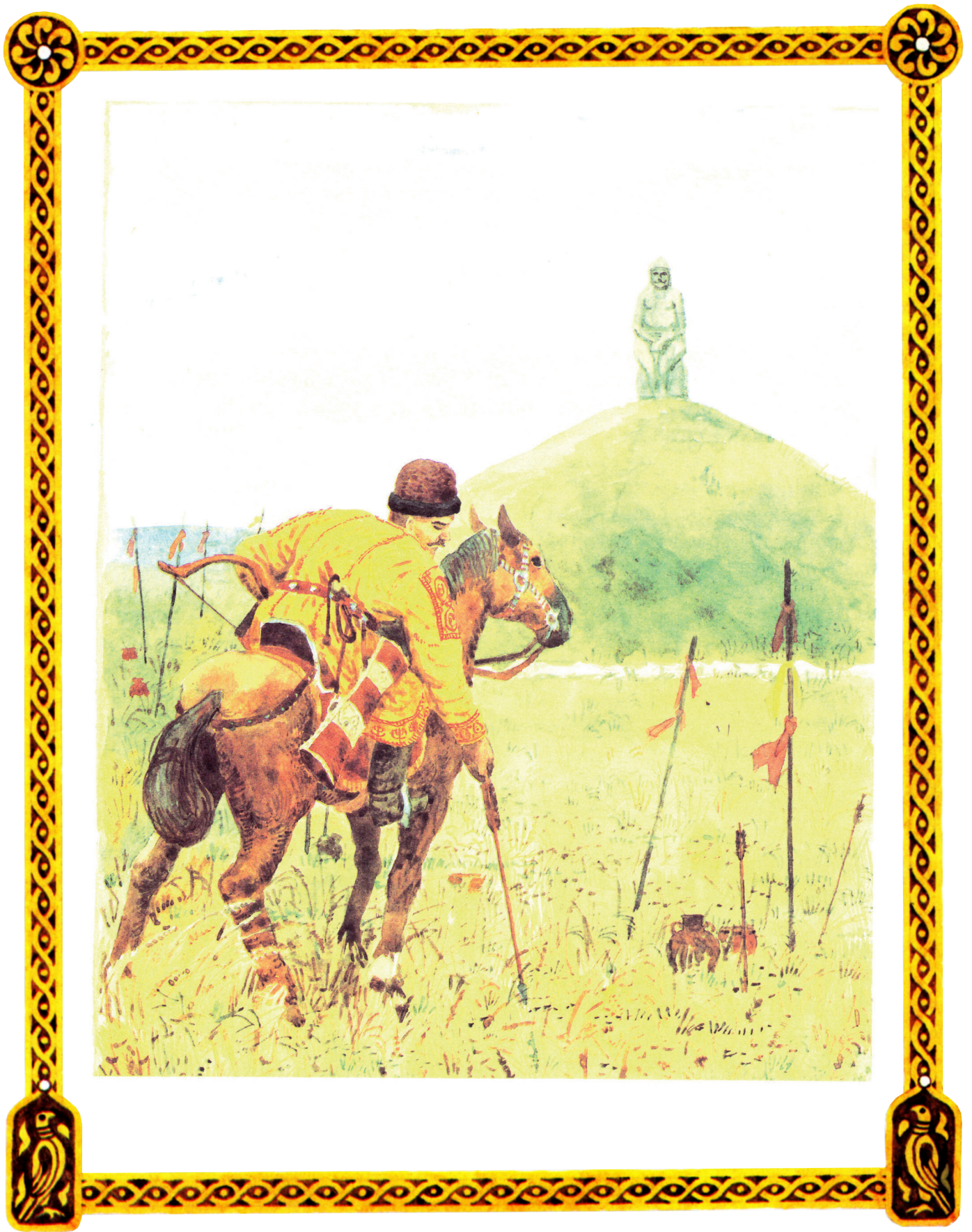
lot of kaganates – East Turkic, West Turkic, Hazar, Kimak, even Kiev in a certain period of history.

All Kipchaks were pagans. Their beliefs in many respects resembled the religion of other Turkic nations. Familiar to us gods Tengri and Umai were the most revered among all their gods. Restless nomadic life also influenced their beliefs about afterlife. It seemed to them like a huge plain, where there was a lot of lush grass, cool rivers and wandering herds of animals. Therefore, the Kipchaks put in the grave with the deceased people those things that might be useful in other world — weapon, combat belt, fell of the horse with its head, legs, tail, harness and food. Obviously, the deceased needed horses for fast moving from one world to another. The more horses – the better. “The Kipchaks are engaged in Astrology, use signals of the stars and worship them,” the scholar Abulfeda wrote. And another scholar, Abu-Dulaf, wrote about their ability to conjure with stones, that could even trigger rain. We do not know how they did it. In general, belief in the mysterious power of the stones was widespread among the Turkic nations.

Above the deceased person a mound was poured. Particularly notable great khans were buried extremely magnificently. People put in their graves precious jewelry, gold and silver vessels, weapons and armor.

The Kipchaks believed in various spirits. Each tribe had its own patron beast, who was considered to be the ancestor of this tribe. It could be a wolf, a snake, a crane, etc. Many Turkic nations regarded the master of the steppes – the wolf – as their ancestor. It is no coincidence that in ancient Turkic times a golden wolf’s head was embroidered on the banner of the blue Turks. For example, in the ancient Russian annals the Kipchak clan of Burdzhogly is called “burechevichi”, which means “sons of the wolf”.

The Kipchaks also had the tradition to put stone statues on the grave of the deceased person. These magnificent sculptures were carved as a portrait of the deceased. However, there were certain rules: they were all represented standing or sitting with a vessel, appressed to the stomach with both hands. Travelers from European countries, struck by the sight of these sculptures, wrote: “The Kumans (the Kipchaks) pour a big hill over the dead and put there a statue, which looks to the east and holds a cup in front of the navel’. The Kipchaks put these sculptures with the face to the rising sun because all the Turkic nations deified the immortal star – the sun. It gave life to everything in the world.



These stone statues served as a place of the Kipchaks' worship. The Azerbaijani poet of the 12th century, Nizami, wrote about the worship of these sculptures in verses, dedicated to his beloved wife Afak (more precisely, Ap-ak) who belonged to the Kipchak nation:

And the Kipchak tribes come here and stand,  
And in front of the idol the backs are bent.  
The horseman hesitates, keeping his horse,  
He bends and pierces an arrow amidst herbs.  
Every shepherd who drives the herds knows,  
That it's important to leave the sheep to gods.


So, the Kipchaks sacrificed an arrow from a quiver, a sheep or something else to these sculptures in the steppe.

Nomadic life, harsh living conditions made the Kipchaks hardy, skillful and unpretentious warriors and horsemen. They did archery perfectly, they had a spear, pikes, bronze maces, a battle-flail and a saber in their armament. They wore iron armor, solid mail that covered the head, neck and body and wore metal helmets on their heads. In the battle the Kipchaks tried to prostrate the enemy, showering him with a hail of arrows. Then the work was completed by the heavily armed cavalry.

The bellicose Kipchaks reached the borders of Ancient Rus in 1055. Around this time or even earlier they collided with the Bulgars. At first, they formed an alliance with the Russians, but after some time the real war began. In 1061 the Kipchak commander Iskal defeated the army of Prince Vsevolod Iaroslavich. However, it wasn't really big defeat. The real disruption for Russians occurred in 1068. The coming Kipchaks defeated three princes of Kiev. Russian princes, accustomed to easy victories over the Pechenegs, were in panic. Invasion of the Kipchaks' flying units went one by one. Bulgaria and Rus made every effort to contain the onslaught of the bellicose nomads.

In addition, at this time there was a furious struggle between the princes in Ancient Rus. Vladimir Monomakh turned out to be the cleverest among all – he had brought the Kipchaks to his side and made them his allies. After that, many princes relied on the Kipchaks in the race for power.

The great era of military campaigns gave birth to great khans and heroes. Which of the Kipchak khans of the 11th century are often mentioned in the annals?



Perhaps, they are Boniak and Tugry Khan (in Russian annals he is Tugorkan). When he was very young, Boniak became famous for his brilliant victory in the march on the Balkans. At that time, in 1095, Boniak won confidence among the other khans and went on a campaign with his friend and brother Tugry Khan. They helped the Byzantine emperor Alexius Comnenus to repel the invasion of the Pecheneg nomads. In the battle under the walls of the Byzantine capital, Constantinople, the Kipchak horsemen met their old enemies again. Skills and experience of Boniak and Tugry Khan helped the Kipchaks win. All Pechenegs died in battle or were captured. The feud between the Kipchaks and the Pechenegs was also explained by the fact that the Pechenegs had converted to Islam.

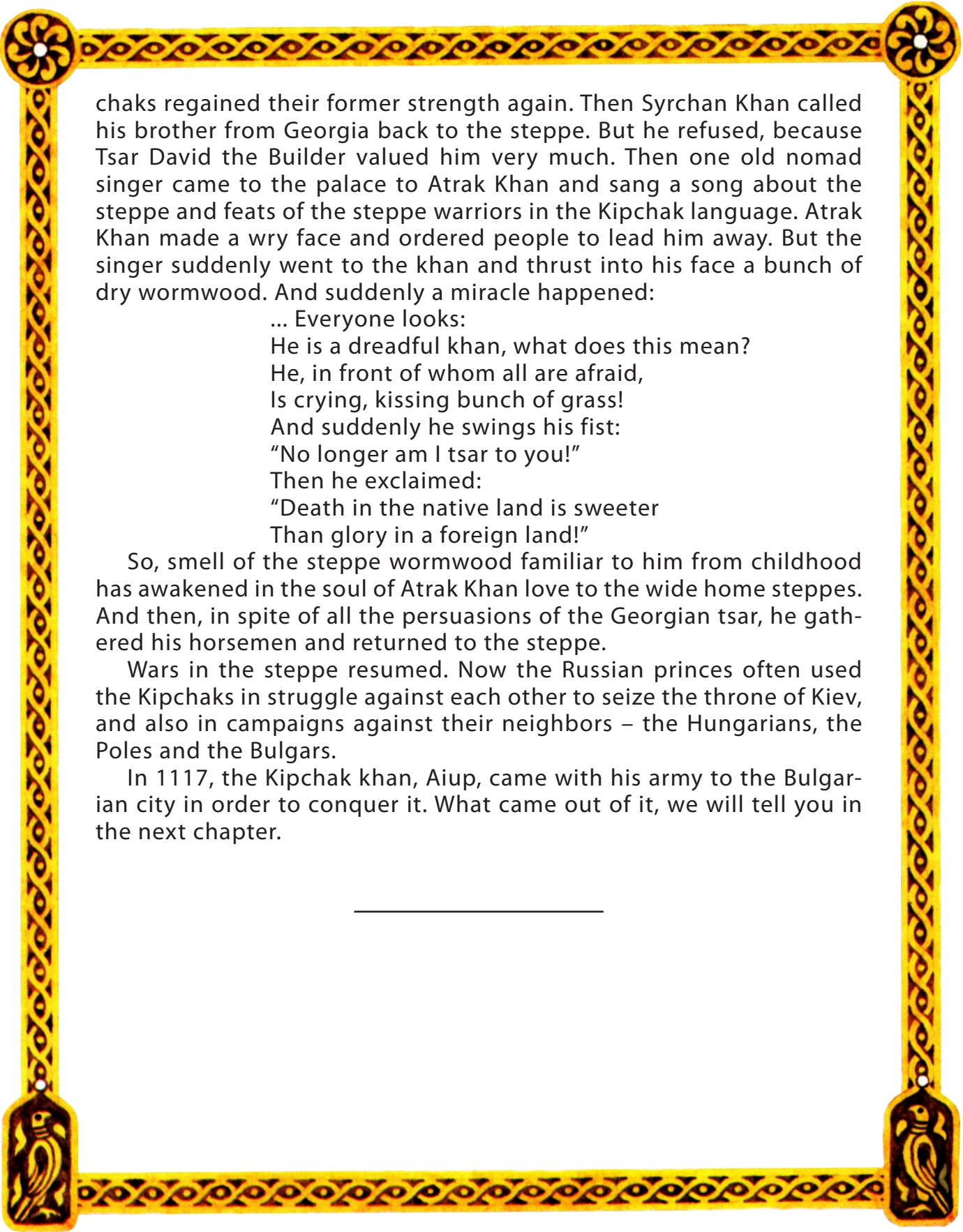
Back in the steppe, Boniak and Tugry Khan launched real war against Ancient Rus. They approached the walls of Kiev and Pereiaslavl several times. Tugry Khan was killed in one of these fights near Pereiaslavl. Later, the name of this formidable opponent of Rus went down in the epics as Tugarin Zmeevich, the arch-enemy of the epic heroes.

But over time the onslaught of the Kipchaks began to weaken. They settled in the new steppes, the places of their nomad territory were established. Earlier they suddenly appeared in large cities and villages and then vanished into thin air in the boundless steppes after a raid. Now the places where they spent summers and winters were known. Therefore, the enemies could easily find and unexpectedly attack them.

That was what Vladimir Monomakh did. He defeated the Kipchaks of Dnieper having collected the united squads of Russian princes. Some of them died, and others, for example, Aiup Khan, concluded peace with the Russians. Only irreconcilable Boniak Khan continued to fight with Rus. In Russian fairy tales he is depicted as a ruthless and mighty giant.

After the death of mighty Shara Khan (Sara Khan), which was called Sharukan in the annals, his sons Syrchan and Atrak moved off to the steppes of the North Caucasus. After some time Atrak Khan enlisted the Georgian Tsar David the Builder military forces with twenty thousand soldiers. It was Atrak Khan who helped the Georgians in the battle with the formidable Seljuks to defend the independence of their country.

In one of the ancient chronicles a beautiful legend about Atrak Khan was preserved. After the death of Prince Vladimir Monomakh the Kip-



chaks regained their former strength again. Then Syrchan Khan called his brother from Georgia back to the steppe. But he refused, because Tsar David the Builder valued him very much. Then one old nomad singer came to the palace to Atrak Khan and sang a song about the steppe and feats of the steppe warriors in the Kipchak language. Atrak Khan made a wry face and ordered people to lead him away. But the singer suddenly went to the khan and thrust into his face a bunch of dry wormwood. And suddenly a miracle happened:

... Everyone looks:

He is a dreadful khan, what does this mean?

He, in front of whom all are afraid,

Is crying, kissing bunch of grass!

And suddenly he swings his fist:

“No longer am I tsar to you!”

Then he exclaimed:

“Death in the native land is sweeter

Than glory in a foreign land!”

So, smell of the steppe wormwood familiar to him from childhood has awakened in the soul of Atrak Khan love to the wide home steppes. And then, in spite of all the persuasions of the Georgian tsar, he gathered his horsemen and returned to the steppe.

Wars in the steppe resumed. Now the Russian princes often used the Kipchaks in struggle against each other to seize the throne of Kiev, and also in campaigns against their neighbors – the Hungarians, the Poles and the Bulgars.

In 1117, the Kipchak khan, Aiup, came with his army to the Bulgarian city in order to conquer it. What came out of it, we will tell you in the next chapter.

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## THE DEATH OF AIUP KHAN

Aiup Khan came out of his tent and, hardly responding to the greetings of the beys and noblemen, who waited for him, began to look angrily at the outlying city. He slept badly today, and in the morning he got up broken. The weather deteriorated at night and his aging bones ached. In addition, it was drizzling. A cold north wind tore black clouds in the sky.

The Bulgarian city in front of him was whitening through the transparent veil of drizzling rain with its blooming gardens and peaks of minarets. Its oak walls seemed unattackable. Only charry houses and ordinary citizens' buildings, which had been destroyed by his soldiers, were blackening in front of the walls.

The flying squadrons of the Kipchaks appeared on the city outskirts three days ago. They set wooden houses and sheds on fire in the ensuing battle, and a sharp wind blew fire on the thatched roofs, and the panic began among citizens. The Kipchaks would have broken into the city, if the courageous resistance of the soldiers and ordinary citizens did not stop them. Without fear, they rushed to the soldiers of Aiup Khan and restrained their onslaught until the guard raised the bridge in front of the gate. The Kipchaks had to retreat.


The fire has died down. Ruins were blackening on the place of gardens and houses, and chars smoldered here and there.

Aiup Khan was mad at advance detachments. Instead of breaking into the city immediately, they began to plunder the suburbs. Time was lost. The city recovered itself now and took up arms. Aiup Khan did not know that the city remained almost without troops. Recently, the Bulgars received a message from one trusted source that

the young prince Iurii, the son of Vladimir Monomakh, was preparing to march to them. Therefore, the Bulgars decided to keep the main forces closer to the border.



Aiup Khan looked at his camp. The Kipchaks had already arranged their tents around the camp and had made bonfires. After installing the defensive screen, they were preparing for the battle, eating at the fires, leading the horses to the watering place. But they still had not enough people in comparison to the inhabitants of the city! But Aiup Khan was not deceived by the greatness of the city. He deeply despised the inhabitants



of cities and often saw how proud and dressed in beautiful clothes citizens paid tribute to the Kipchaks. It happened many times in the Balkans and in Rus. And only recently the united forces of the Russian princes under the command of Prince Vladimir Monomakh defeated the Kipchaks of the Dnieper. Aiup Khan had already formed an alliance with Vladimir Monomakh and settled his daughter for Vladimir's son, Iurii. By this he saved his horde.

And now, in 1117, Aiup Khan was a full-fledged ally of Prince Iurii, with whom he prepared this campaign. But quarrels with brothers, other sons of Vladimir Monomakh, prevented Aiup's son-in-law from going to campaign. So Aiup Khan was left alone. But it did not stop him. He decided to suddenly attack the Bulgars and to take their rich city with a raid. And this time he approached the city from the other side to ensure his success.

This victory would have given Aiup Khan the opportunity to strengthen his power in the steppe and enhanced the might of his horde among the Kipchaks. Khan wanted a quick victory and decided not to hesitate. Turning to his warriors, he harshly said:

"Prepare the troops! One more effort and we will feast in the palace of the city owner. And the backs of our horses and camels will bend from the plunderage."

His beys and chiefs hurried to their detachments. The drums hammered, pipes and horns buzzed, bunchuks and spears with flags rose above their heads. The camp was alarmed. The soldiers left bonfires and began to put on armor quickly, saddle their horses and gather in groups. The city assault seemed inevitable...

However, the Bulgars locked in the city did not let the grass grow under their feet. They were looking for a way out of a difficult situation. They knew very well that the greedy Kipchaks would not go away just like that, but they would certainly try to seize the city and plunder its wealth. If they would succeed, the inhabitants' fate was evident.

The whole night before that the council spent on a meeting, deciding how to fight against the Kipchaks. If there were enough forces in the city, such a question would not arise. But the main forces were on long-range lines. Did the messenger, sent to call for help, manage to escape the encircled city? If he did, then would the Bulgarian detachments manage to reach the city before the beginning of the Kipchak assault? These were the questions that tormented the council members.

Someone suggested paying off with a big tribute. But suddenly the host of the city himself controverted:

"If we give away for free at least once, then there will never be rest for us from the raids of greedy nomads. We must immediately show them that we will resist by hook or by crook: saber, cunning or something else but we will protect ourselves."

Only by the morning they decided to kindly agree with AiupKhan's demands to inflict an unexpected blow to him later.

... Everything was ready in the camp of the Kipchaks. The troops waited for AiupKhan's order to start assailing the city. Aiup Khan looked around his troops once again. He managed to assemble several thousand horsemen from distant Don nomadic territories, which escaped the devastating blows thanks to his union and family ties with Vladimir Monomakh. But his enemies SharyKhan, Boniak and Suger were harmed. To strengthen his influence among the Kipchak hordes, Aiup Khan desperately needed this victory over the Bulgars proud of their wealth and scholarship. "Bookworms!" he whispered maliciously, looking at the whitening minarets of mosques one more time.

In the middle of the night, exhausted by insomnia, he left the tent. Listening to silence, he suddenly heard a wolf howling. Then the howl repeated, and Aiup Khan guessed that it was not a wolf, but a human.



This was one of the soldiers of the security outer ring and he pushed luck, asking the ancestor-patron of the Kipchaks, Wolf, to respond. Apparently, he wanted to know if the assault, which the soldiers had already guessed about, would be successful for him. Fortunately, Wolf, the owner of the steppe, their ancestor-patron, did not remain indifferent to the appeal of the young warrior.

At first one and then two other wolves answered with howling. "They are with us, they feel prey", Aiup Khan rejoiced. It was a good sign and it brought hope for a successful outcome of the campaign to Aiup Khan.

Indeed, when everything was ready for the assault, Aiup Khan and all the Kipchaks were surprised to see how the unapproachable gates of the city opened and horsemen appeared from there. But judge by their behaviour, it seemed that their intentions were peaceful. They were notable people of the city and imams of mosques, accompanied by several soldiers. They were going to hold negotiations with Kipchaks.



Aiup Khan triumphed. His stern face suddenly began to shine. If he understood them correctly, they were going to pay off. It was an absolute success. So, without losing a single warrior, he would call the shots.



"So, well..." he thought gloatingly, "You will pay me arm and a leg!"

The peace treaty was concluded. And in the evening of the same day, the citizens brought plenty of delicious viands and jugs with drinks to the camp of the Kipchaks. The khan, his military commanders and soldiers accepted these gifts with pleasure. The triumphal feast began.

Only a few hours later, feeling that he cannot breathe, Aiup Khan realized that he had lost the battle. The cunning Bulgars treated the Kipchaks with poisoned drinks in order to buy some time until their main forces would come. The next day Aiup Khan and many of his military leaders died in terrible agony. There was a rumor among the army that large forces of the Bulgars were approaching to the city. And the Kipchaks ran away to the steppe.



This is how the campaign of Aiup Khan found its ignominious end in the land of the Bulgars.

...After this incident, the Kipchaks almost stopped their marches on the Bulgars because they were too busy with their internal disputes and campaigns against Ancient Rus. Only Prince Iurii Dolgorukii bore malice against the Bulgars for killing his father-in-law and for the failure of the joint campaign, which they prepared together. Not only did he attack Bulgaria, but he also transmitted his hatred to the 'basurmans', as they called the Bulgars, to his son Andrei.

Over time, the Kipchaks began to carry on peaceful trade with the Bulgars and to work for the emirs of Bulgaria. Many of them convert-

ed to Islam and stayed in the Bulgarian cities and villages. Particularly strong ties were established among the Bulgars and the Kipchaks of the Lower Volga. Their main city, Saksin, became the center of trade, where many Turkic-speaking tribes lived peacefully.



These ties and the nighness of blood played an extremely important role in their future destiny.

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## MARCH ON THE GREAT CITY

*Why do not you come to us with the angels  
if you are one of the righteous.  
(the Koran, surah 15. Al-Hidzhr)*

1

During its tercentenary history, Bulgaria had a particularly close relationship with its neighbor and rival – Rus. Most of all there were peaceful, good-neighborly relations. Both sides benefited from trade and other ties. For example, some trade agreements between Bulgaria and Rus are well-known. We also know how the Bulgars sent a large flotilla of ships with grain to Suzdal during the famine of 1024 and 1229 in Ancient Rus and thereby saved the Volga region from starvation. With Grand Prince Iurii Dolgorukii at the helm (died in 1157), when the intensified construction of cities had begun in Vladimir-Suzdal land, Rus invited builders, among whom the Bulgarian architects were. The Bulgars participated even in the construction of Christian churches.

Despite this, the relations between Bulgaria and Ancient Rus were not always trouble-free. The situation began to change when the sons of Iurii Dolgorukii, Vsevolod the Big Nest and Andrei Bogoliubskii, began to rule in the cities of Suzdal and Vladimir. At this time the idea of struggle between Christianity and Muslims began to spread in the Volga region. In other words, the crusades against the “infidels” started to appear. And Bulgaria was the closest Muslim country to Rus. Consequently, it became the land which the Russian princes often marched on.

The campaign of Russian princes under the leadership of Andrei Bogoliubskii in 1164 stood out from other marches, as it inflicted consid-

erable damage to Bulgaria. The annals tell us about four Bulgarian cities that were captured by the Russians. After that, Andrei Bogoliubskii returned home for a short time and, apparently not satisfied with the plunder, repeated the campaign and captured another city called Briakhimov-on-Kama. In honor of this rapacious campaign the Holy Virgin Church was even built in the city of Vladimir. And on August 1 of the same year, 1164, a new church feast day of the Holy Savior was established. The Holy Savior was believed to save Prince Andrei and the citizens of Vladimir from external enemies – the Bulgars.

Meanwhile, it was the implacable passion for robbery and constant wars that caused the death of Prince Andrei Bogoliubskii. Only in the last ten years of his reign from 1164 to 1174 there were two huge campaigns to Kiev, two ones to Bulgars, and two ones to Novgorod. Let alone the small “expeditions” to the east and south. Of course, all this required a lot of money and soldiers. And the prey, apparently, did not always reimburse the losses of the war. And, finally, people got tired of it, so they conspired and killed the Prince in 1174 in his castle in Bogoliubovo. We can assume that the Prince’s wife from Bulgaria could take part in this conspiracy, because she wanted to revenge him for the plunder of her homeland, Bulgaria.

And after many years of disturbance and mutual strife in the city of Vladimir, another son of Iurii Dolgorukii started to reign. People called him Prince Vsevolod the Big Nest because he had a lot of children. And the war flared up again...

## 2

The cavalry was slowly moving along the wide plain with shallow ravines on the green carpet of the rising grasses. The horsemen were dressed in loose canvas shirts, and their armor tinkled in leather bags, which were tied to the saddles. Conical helmets and armor of the forward detachment glistened in the midday sun. The soldiers reclined their shields and squeezed in hands the long shafts with the guidons on the tips. A swarm of multicolored banners was fluttering in the wind over each detachment.

Detachments climbed the hills and waded across shallow rivers without effort.

A group of horsemen led by the commander in a red silk shirt and a white woolen cape rode in the center of the column. The command-

er was about thirty-five years old. By his imperious look and proud posture anyone could recognize a prince. He was surrounded by well-armed soldiers on swift-footed horses, who were ready to come to rescue at any moment. They were riding serenely, talking loudly and joking, hoping for the advance detachments. Their servants rode a little further away. The prince's gonfanon, a military banner wrapped in a canvas, was carried next to him. His thoughtful face looked calm and this calmness was transferred to his soldiers.

And indeed, Vsevolod, the Grand Prince of Vladimir, had something to be sure of. In spring he learned that there had been a conflict in Bulgaria. Their khan died, and struggle for power began between the brother and the son of the deceased as it often happened in such cases. Prince Vsevolod decided to use this circumstance. Without waiting for the summer, he started to convene all Russian princes under his banner.



His own regiments began to gather first, from the distant Beloozero, Galich, Suzdal, Rostov and Vladimir. Closer to May the young prince and Vsevolod's nephew Iziaslav arrived at the head of his squads. He envied the glory of his brother Vladimir, who reigned in the South Pereiaslavl, which was famous for his struggle with the Kipchaks. Iziaslav hoped to show what he was capable of in the battle with the Bulgars. Mstislav, the son of the Prince of Smolensk, also brought his troop. A little later four sons of Gleb, the Prince of Ryazan, also came with the army.

And after them Vladimir, the Prince of Murom, brought his regiment. He owed Vsevolod his reign and served him faithfully and loyally.

Vsevolod sent his ambassadors to Sviatoslav, the Grand Prince of Kiev, and ordered to tell him the following words:

“Let us unleash war with all strength of our warrior-host against the Bulgars, my brothers, and punish the kuffars.”

To be honest, the Prince of Kiev was in a difficult situation. Only recently he received a message that Konchak Khan gathered a large army of the Kipchaks near the Dnieper rapids, preparing to fight against the Kiev region in retaliation for the previous raids of Russian princes. Despite this, he did not dare evade participation in the “holy” campaign against the Bulgars. He sent his eldest son Vladimir with his squad for this war.

So many troops gathered here that it could only be compared with the army of the glorious prince Vladimir Monomakh, who fought successfully with the Kipchaks. And this army moved to conquer a whole country. The first blow had to be inflicted on its capital, the Great City. And the seizure of it should start the complete submission of the Bulgars to Holy Rus.

...The messenger disturbed the well-ordered flow of Prince Vsevolod’s thoughts. He listened to the nervous speech of the excited soldier. It turned out that the guard regiment of his nephew Iziaslav walking in front of the army noticed the cavalry of the Bulgars. With a powerful movement of his hand Prince Vsevolod stopped the regiments and ordered to prepare for the battle. He knew that the Bulgars were not only enterprising traders, but also experienced and brave warriors.

### 3

No matter how hard Prince Vsevolod tried to stay confident, the campaign did not begin as fine as he had hoped. Therefore, he was feeling blue. It turned out that he was out in the calculations. In the beginning everything rolled as it should. The fleet landed horse regiments on the opposite shore and departed to an island in the middle of the Volga. The regiment from Beloozero was left to guard it. The rest of the army moved to the nearest city of the Bulgars, Tukhchin. Prince needed it as a base for further military operations. As Prince Vsevolod knew, the secured rearwards in a war were meat and drink to army.

The city of Tukhchin was located on both shores of a narrow river.

And its fortress was on a high promontory at the bend of the river. From the outdoor side the city was covered by a massive tower, built of oak logs. As soon as the advance detachments of the cavalry broke into the suburbs, Prince Vsevolod realized that the Bulgars had already prepared for the siege. The city was empty, and all the citizens gathered in the citadel-fortress. And it was full of the Bulgars ready to defend it.

To be honest, Prince Vsevolod did not expect such impudence from a small Bulgarian city. He expected to capture it on the fly. But they did not even think about giving up. And it stirred the prince to fury. He ordered his army to begin the assault of the fortress immediately.



The first onslaught did not bring much success. The Bulgars fought desperately, and losses among Russians were considerable. But they repeated the assault after they regrouped the regiments, and failed again. Seeing this, Vsevolod threw the soldiers on the walls again and again. Two days passed in the continuous battles at the fortress. And every time the fury of the attackers broke up on the unshakable firmness of the defenders. Losses of the Russian side were growing. The princes who dreamed of an easy victory and numerous plunder began to grumble. And Prince Vsevolod could not help but listen to their words. What if someone would return his regiments back home? What then? Vsevolod realized one thing: stuck near Tukhchin, he could ruin the whole campaign. The most important thing was the capital. Tukhchin could be taken later, when the Great City would fall. They would not last long.

On the third day, Prince Vsevolod gave the order to stop the siege of Tukhchin, and the army moved to Biliar leaving burned suburbs and fresh graves of the dead behind. The capture of the Great City – Biliar – had to recompense expenses of this short-term failure.

Meanwhile, things took a dangerous turn in the camp of the Bulgars. After the death of the Bulgarian ruler, the race for power between his son and his brother divided the country into two camps. Some beys acknowledged a right to the throne of an elderly, experienced in state affairs Hajimuradbey, brother of the deceased khan. Others, especially the metropolitan noble people led by vizier Hasan, were in favour of the young Davletiar, the beloved son of the khan. After a short struggle Hajimurad bey had to leave the capital, and there were persistent rumors that he gathered forces to give battle by talking over the leaders of the tribes and breeds – the beys. And in the capital there were a lot of his supporters too, which kept silent yet.

Judging by the truth, the rise of the young Davletiar to power would be a violation of the ancient tradition of succession to the throne. According to the tradition, Hajimuradbey had to inthroned as a legitimate heritor. Davletiar could get the right to the Bulgarian throne only in case of Hajimurad's refusal or death. However, it so happened that after the funeral of the khan, vizier Hasan presented to the members of the council a will, in which khan really named Davletiar as his heir.

The question was: Did the deceased khan have the right to violate the ancient custom? Was it possible? What could be the result of such a disregard for the tradition? And, in general, why was the will made in secret? Was it a deception?

That's how conflict began in the capital, and people divided into two camps. There were several skirmishes. It was clear that if this dispute would not be stopped as soon as possible, it could turn into a great bloodshed. This is what wise Hajimurad bey was afraid of. He saw, that the supporters of vizier Hassan were in power in the capital at the moment, and this had to be taken into account. As for the young Davletiar, it wasn't his fault – he just, probably, had succumbed to the flattery of the vizier because he was too young. Moreover, it seemed that he did not fully understand what a violation of the ancient custom might lead to.

Considering all this facts, Hajimurad bey decided to leave the capital for some time, although he understood that some people would take it as a defeat. But he knew that a temporary concession did not mean defeat.

His time will come and dangerous bargain with the devil will turn out badly for the vizier.

5

...A group of several richly dressed horsemen, accompanied by a small detachment of guards, came to the gate of the manor, surrounded by a high wall. Deep water-filled ditch in front of the time-stained oak walls, not fully raised bridge in front of the massive gates, and two spacious, octagonal towers with sloping roofs made it clear to everyone that there was a strong host here. In fact, it was not even a manor, but a well-fortified fortress, in which, in case of danger or in troubled times, you could hide out.



The head of the guard in the helmet appeared on the left tower. He threw an appraising look at the important guests on good horses, one of whom was in a snow-white turban, another in expensive armor, and two others – in rich, fur-trimmed clothes. He asked loudly:

“Who’s going? Where from?”

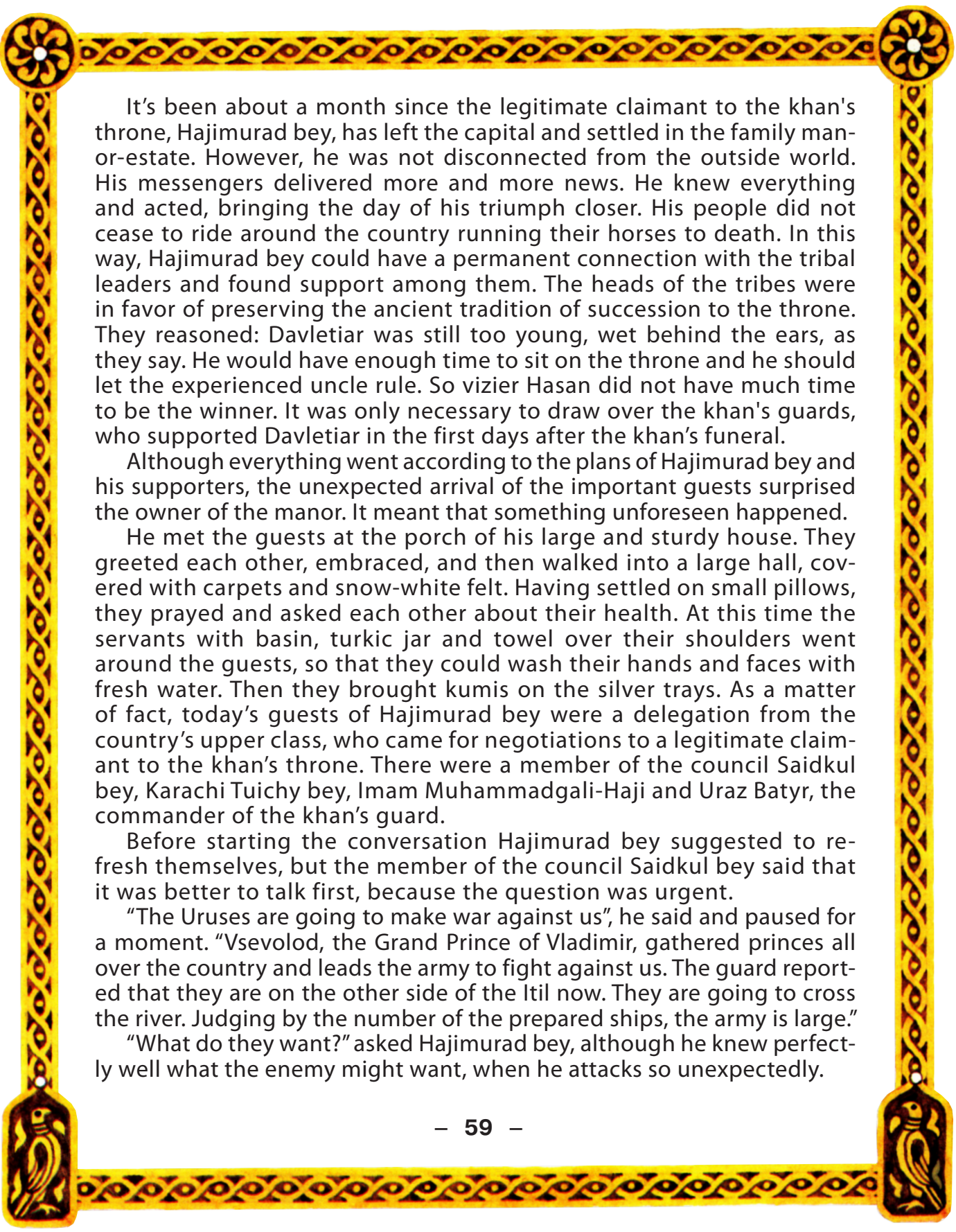
“Open the gate, guests from the capital came!” the horseman in armor shouted to him.

“Who are you? How to report?” again asked the guard, seeking a clear answer. He knew his stuff.

The warrior frowned and glanced at one of the richly dressed guests, who shouted to the guard:

“Report to your master, respectable Hajimurad bey, that Karachi Tutchy bey with companions came.”

The head of the guard disappeared immediately, and the travelers heard somebody’s voices and footsteps behind the wall. After a while the raised bridge in front of the gate sank with a creak, and the guests entered the fortress.



It's been about a month since the legitimate claimant to the khan's throne, Hajimurad bey, has left the capital and settled in the family manor-estate. However, he was not disconnected from the outside world. His messengers delivered more and more news. He knew everything and acted, bringing the day of his triumph closer. His people did not cease to ride around the country running their horses to death. In this way, Hajimurad bey could have a permanent connection with the tribal leaders and found support among them. The heads of the tribes were in favor of preserving the ancient tradition of succession to the throne. They reasoned: Davletiar was still too young, wet behind the ears, as they say. He would have enough time to sit on the throne and he should let the experienced uncle rule. So vizier Hasan did not have much time to be the winner. It was only necessary to draw over the khan's guards, who supported Davletiar in the first days after the khan's funeral.

Although everything went according to the plans of Hajimurad bey and his supporters, the unexpected arrival of the important guests surprised the owner of the manor. It meant that something unforeseen happened.

He met the guests at the porch of his large and sturdy house. They greeted each other, embraced, and then walked into a large hall, covered with carpets and snow-white felt. Having settled on small pillows, they prayed and asked each other about their health. At this time the servants with basin, turkic jar and towel over their shoulders went around the guests, so that they could wash their hands and faces with fresh water. Then they brought kumis on the silver trays. As a matter of fact, today's guests of Hajimurad bey were a delegation from the country's upper class, who came for negotiations to a legitimate claimant to the khan's throne. There were a member of the council Saidkul bey, Karachi Tuichy bey, Imam Muhammadgali-Haji and Uraz Batyr, the commander of the khan's guard.

Before starting the conversation Hajimurad bey suggested to refresh themselves, but the member of the council Saidkul bey said that it was better to talk first, because the question was urgent.

"The Uruses are going to make war against us", he said and paused for a moment. "Vsevolod, the Grand Prince of Vladimir, gathered princes all over the country and leads the army to fight against us. The guard reported that they are on the other side of the Itil now. They are going to cross the river. Judging by the number of the prepared ships, the army is large."

"What do they want?" asked Hajimurad bey, although he knew perfectly well what the enemy might want, when he attacks so unexpectedly.



"We know what they want! To rob us!" the commander Uraz Batyr got angry.

"Not only that", Saidkul bey continued, "According to the number of troops and the scope of preparations, they want to occupy the capital and put us under control completely."

"Allah, save us from the rage of these wicked people", imam Muhammadgali-Haji prayed, lifting the palms to his face.

"What's happening in the capital?" Hajimurad bey asked. He had no news from there for four days.

"It was calm until now", Tuichy bey joined the conversation.

"When they received news about the Uruses campaign, everything started to move. Vizier Hasan is nervous, Davletiar is not himself. They are in great confusion. We met secretly yesterday and came to a decision that you, the respectable Hajimurad bey, need to return to the capital urgently and take control over the situation. So we are here to ask you about it on behalf of the whole nation. We must save the country."

"What about the khan's guard?" the host of the manor asked again.

"Guards stand with you, dear bey", the centurion Urazbatyr replied, "Tumenbashi Utiash sent me to tell you that. And he asked to excuse himself that he could not come. He is too busy."

"Yes, that's true", Karachi Tuichy bey confirmed his words, "When the country is in danger, it is necessary to consolidate."

The most important words were said. Everyone stared at Hajimurad bey, waiting for an answer. However, he did not hurry. He was flattered because at the time of great danger these people came to him with the plea to lead the fight against the enemy. But there was still resentment in his soul that they did not support him at once. They gave this snake vizier a chance to seize the power. But in comparison with such a big problem his own insult seemed to him very insignificant and became irrelevant.

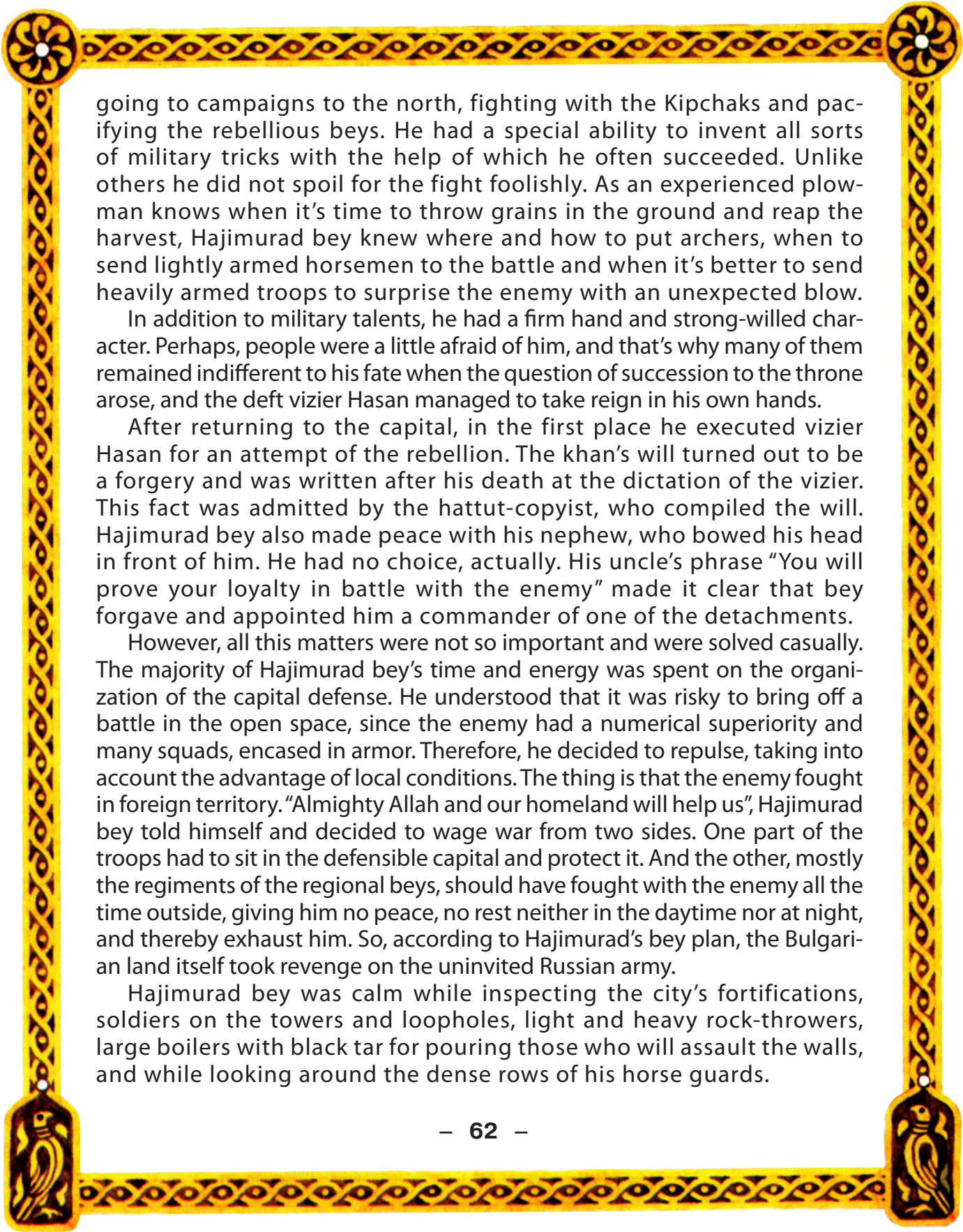
"Well, all right", he sighed, having thought about everything, and after a pause he added: "What should we do with a vizier?"

"When the dragon becomes too fat, it does not fit in the lake anymore. He will have to lose some weight..." Saidkul bey answered, "His days are numbered".

The hardest part of the conversation was over. The host of the manor clapped his hands and servants began to bring food and drink to the important. During the meal they could discuss the issues of Hajimurad bey's return to the capital and the organization of repulse the enemy's army.

6

The brother of the deceased khan, Hajimurad bey, received the prefix "haji" to his name, when he was young and fought the Andrei Bogoliubskii regiments under the walls of the city of Briakhimov. This prefix meant "warrior-winner". And later he distinguished himself in action and showed courage more than once,



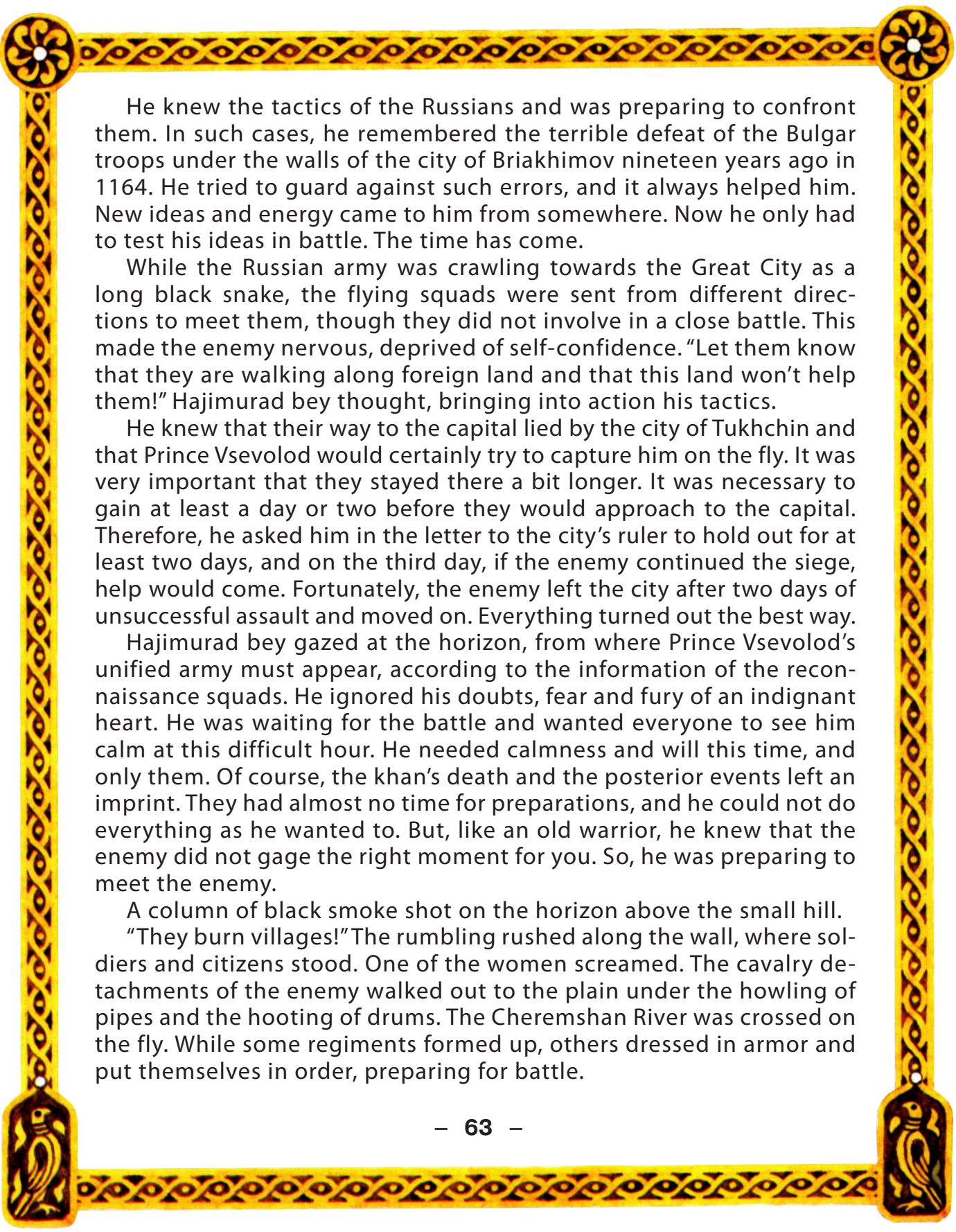
going to campaigns to the north, fighting with the Kipchaks and pacifying the rebellious beys. He had a special ability to invent all sorts of military tricks with the help of which he often succeeded. Unlike others he did not spoil for the fight foolishly. As an experienced plowman knows when it's time to throw grains in the ground and reap the harvest, Hajimurad bey knew where and how to put archers, when to send lightly armed horsemen to the battle and when it's better to send heavily armed troops to surprise the enemy with an unexpected blow.

In addition to military talents, he had a firm hand and strong-willed character. Perhaps, people were a little afraid of him, and that's why many of them remained indifferent to his fate when the question of succession to the throne arose, and the deft vizier Hasan managed to take reign in his own hands.

After returning to the capital, in the first place he executed vizier Hasan for an attempt of the rebellion. The khan's will turned out to be a forgery and was written after his death at the dictation of the vizier. This fact was admitted by the hattut-copyist, who compiled the will. Hajimurad bey also made peace with his nephew, who bowed his head in front of him. He had no choice, actually. His uncle's phrase "You will prove your loyalty in battle with the enemy" made it clear that bey forgave and appointed him a commander of one of the detachments.

However, all this matters were not so important and were solved casually. The majority of Hajimurad bey's time and energy was spent on the organization of the capital defense. He understood that it was risky to bring off a battle in the open space, since the enemy had a numerical superiority and many squads, encased in armor. Therefore, he decided to repulse, taking into account the advantage of local conditions. The thing is that the enemy fought in foreign territory. "Almighty Allah and our homeland will help us", Hajimurad bey told himself and decided to wage war from two sides. One part of the troops had to sit in the defensible capital and protect it. And the other, mostly the regiments of the regional beys, should have fought with the enemy all the time outside, giving him no peace, no rest neither in the daytime nor at night, and thereby exhaust him. So, according to Hajimurad's bey plan, the Bulgarian land itself took revenge on the uninvited Russian army.

Hajimurad bey was calm while inspecting the city's fortifications, soldiers on the towers and loopholes, light and heavy rock-throwers, large boilers with black tar for pouring those who will assault the walls, and while looking around the dense rows of his horse guards.



He knew the tactics of the Russians and was preparing to confront them. In such cases, he remembered the terrible defeat of the Bulgar troops under the walls of the city of Briakhimov nineteen years ago in 1164. He tried to guard against such errors, and it always helped him. New ideas and energy came to him from somewhere. Now he only had to test his ideas in battle. The time has come.

While the Russian army was crawling towards the Great City as a long black snake, the flying squads were sent from different directions to meet them, though they did not involve in a close battle. This made the enemy nervous, deprived of self-confidence. "Let them know that they are walking along foreign land and that this land won't help them!" Hajimurad bey thought, bringing into action his tactics.

He knew that their way to the capital lied by the city of Tukhchin and that Prince Vsevolod would certainly try to capture him on the fly. It was very important that they stayed there a bit longer. It was necessary to gain at least a day or two before they would approach to the capital. Therefore, he asked him in the letter to the city's ruler to hold out for at least two days, and on the third day, if the enemy continued the siege, help would come. Fortunately, the enemy left the city after two days of unsuccessful assault and moved on. Everything turned out the best way.

Hajimurad bey gazed at the horizon, from where Prince Vsevolod's unified army must appear, according to the information of the reconnaissance squads. He ignored his doubts, fear and fury of an indignant heart. He was waiting for the battle and wanted everyone to see him calm at this difficult hour. He needed calmness and will this time, and only them. Of course, the khan's death and the posterior events left an imprint. They had almost no time for preparations, and he could not do everything as he wanted to. But, like an old warrior, he knew that the enemy did not gage the right moment for you. So, he was preparing to meet the enemy.

A column of black smoke shot on the horizon above the small hill.

"They burn villages!" The rumbling rushed along the wall, where soldiers and citizens stood. One of the women screamed. The cavalry detachments of the enemy walked out to the plain under the howling of pipes and the hooting of drums. The Cheremshan River was crossed on the fly. While some regiments formed up, others dressed in armor and put themselves in order, preparing for battle.

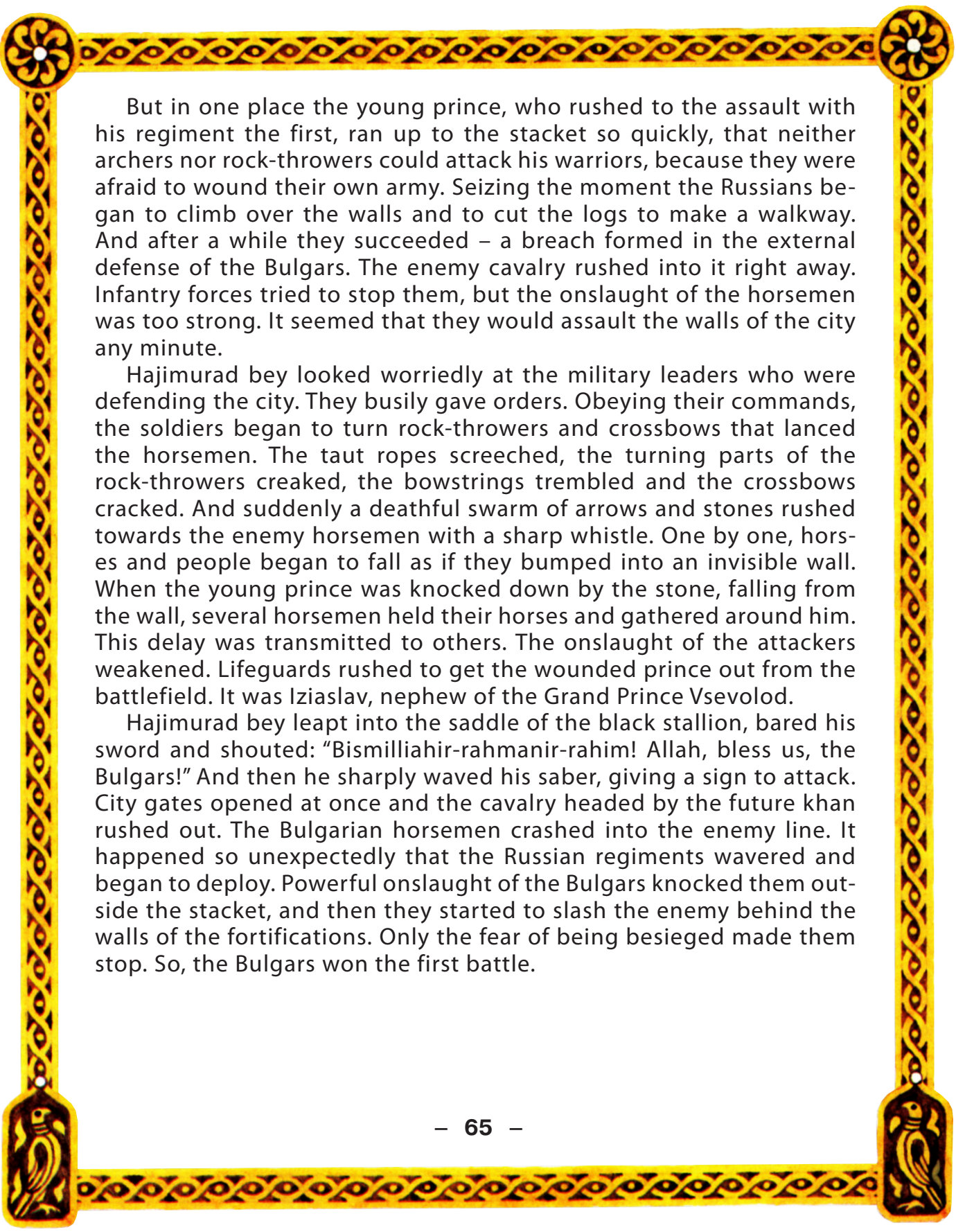
The army gradually scattered in different directions, like the fingers of a hand that wanted to grab the capital by the throat.

Hajimurad bey's heart shrank painfully. He had never thought that the beginning of his reign would be so troublesome. So, that was his fate and there was nothing to be done. Maybe it would come to an end soon. That's why he had not given consent to hold a ceremony of raising himself on a white felt – khan initiation ceremony. After all, he did not know how this war would end, and he did not want to be the khan who lost the war.

Suddenly drums hammered menacingly and trumpets howled in the camp of the enemy. One horse regiment broke out from their ranks right away, breaking a straight line of regiments. They rushed to the place where Hajimurad bey stood with his retinue. The young prince was the leader of that regiment; he obviously wanted to distinguish himself. A bit later the rest of the regiments also began to move. The Russians rushed to assault.

When Hajimurad bey clearly understood that Prince Vsevolod was heading to the capital, he immediately ordered to put the log stacket in open spaces between the houses in the suburbs. Thus, the defenders of the city created an additional line of defense, which was supposed to hide dismount warriors and archers. And the houses which went outside this line and blocked the view were burned without hesitation. Hajimurad bey's war ruse was that in this situation the enemy was under double fire when approaching to the stacket: there were archers, who kept the enemy at a distance, and rock-throwers installed on city walls. And the enemy blew his chances to attack, because his arrows did not reach the city walls.





But in one place the young prince, who rushed to the assault with his regiment the first, ran up to the sacket so quickly, that neither archers nor rock-throwers could attack his warriors, because they were afraid to wound their own army. Seizing the moment the Russians began to climb over the walls and to cut the logs to make a walkway. And after a while they succeeded – a breach formed in the external defense of the Bulgars. The enemy cavalry rushed into it right away. Infantry forces tried to stop them, but the onslaught of the horsemen was too strong. It seemed that they would assault the walls of the city any minute.

Hajimurad bey looked worriedly at the military leaders who were defending the city. They busily gave orders. Obeying their commands, the soldiers began to turn rock-throwers and crossbows that lanced the horsemen. The taut ropes screeched, the turning parts of the rock-throwers creaked, the bowstrings trembled and the crossbows cracked. And suddenly a deathful swarm of arrows and stones rushed towards the enemy horsemen with a sharp whistle. One by one, horses and people began to fall as if they bumped into an invisible wall. When the young prince was knocked down by the stone, falling from the wall, several horsemen held their horses and gathered around him. This delay was transmitted to others. The onslaught of the attackers weakened. Lifeguards rushed to get the wounded prince out from the battlefield. It was Iziaslav, nephew of the Grand Prince Vsevolod.

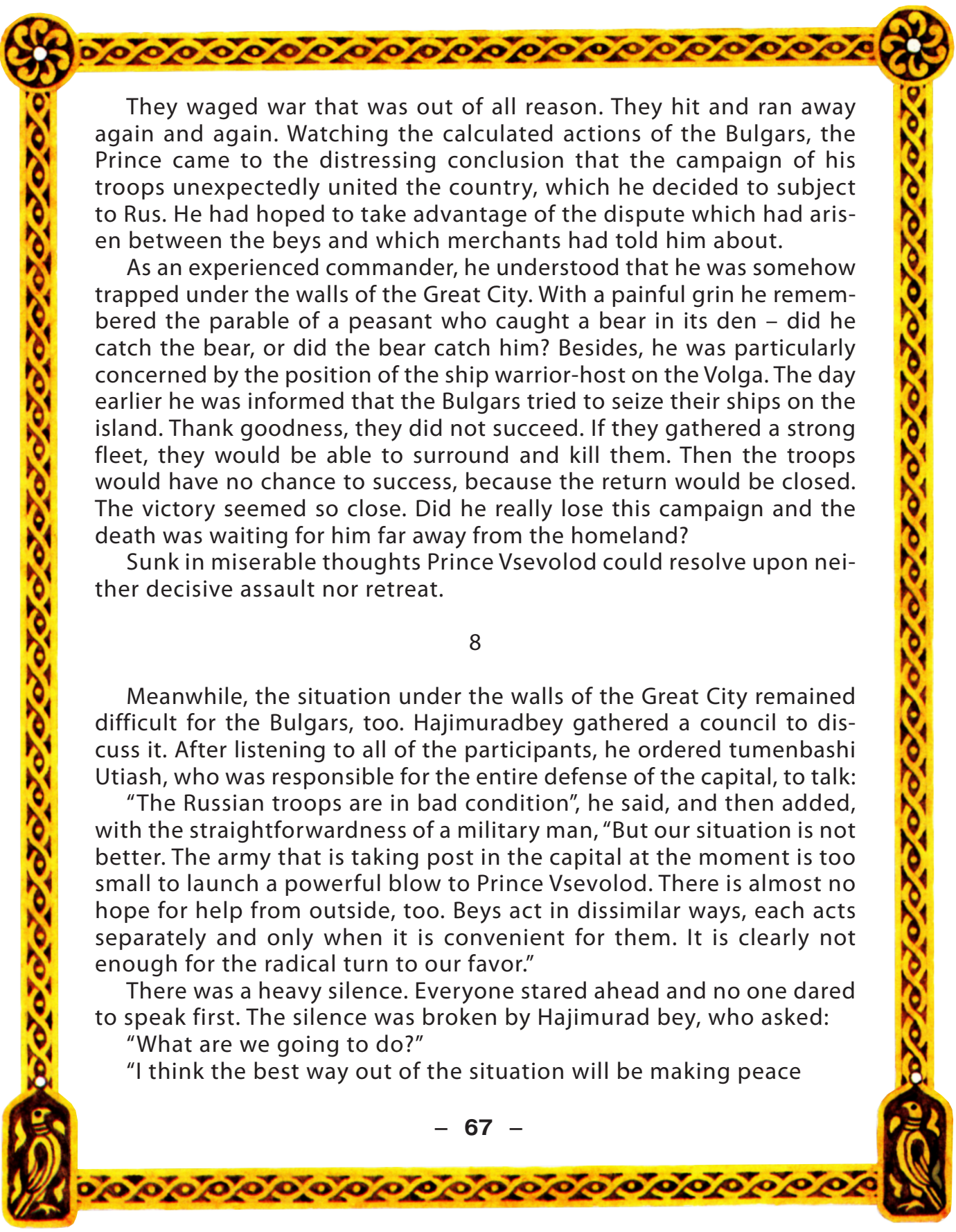
Hajimurad bey leapt into the saddle of the black stallion, bared his sword and shouted: “Bismilliahir-rahmanir-rahim! Allah, bless us, the Bulgars!” And then he sharply waved his saber, giving a sign to attack. City gates opened at once and the cavalry headed by the future khan rushed out. The Bulgarian horsemen crashed into the enemy line. It happened so unexpectedly that the Russian regiments wavered and began to deploy. Powerful onslaught of the Bulgars knocked them outside the sacket, and then they started to slash the enemy behind the walls of the fortifications. Only the fear of being besieged made them stop. So, the Bulgars won the first battle.



7

The Grand Prince Vsevolod was sitting in a tent, taking his head in hands. Tears flowed from his eyes against his will. His beloved nephew Iziaslav did not come to life for two days already. There was no hope of his recovery. It's been a week since he was injured in the first unsuccessful assault. The prince could not forgive himself that he had not recognized the war ruse of the Bulgars and had sent his young and ardent nephew to assault in the first line. But at the same time he proudly thought that only Iziaslav's fierce desire to distinguish himself allowed him to break through this damned sacket. It was this breach that helped his soldiers to get closer to the walls of the city and assault them. But the last week did not lent eclat to them. Each time his regiments were caught by a hail of rocks, spears, arrows and molten resin, and they retreated covering the approaches of the walls with the dead and wounded.

Time passed and the news was unpromising. Most of all the prince worried about the active actions of the Bulgarian beys who attacked unexpectedly and kept his army in constant fear and tension. They suddenly appeared from different directions and almost always came as a surprise to his soldiers and inflicted staggering blows. While his princes were preparing to give a battle, the Bulgars' trail went cold.



They waged war that was out of all reason. They hit and ran away again and again. Watching the calculated actions of the Bulgars, the Prince came to the distressing conclusion that the campaign of his troops unexpectedly united the country, which he decided to subject to Rus. He had hoped to take advantage of the dispute which had arisen between the beys and which merchants had told him about.

As an experienced commander, he understood that he was somehow trapped under the walls of the Great City. With a painful grin he remembered the parable of a peasant who caught a bear in its den – did he catch the bear, or did the bear catch him? Besides, he was particularly concerned by the position of the ship warrior-host on the Volga. The day earlier he was informed that the Bulgars tried to seize their ships on the island. Thank goodness, they did not succeed. If they gathered a strong fleet, they would be able to surround and kill them. Then the troops would have no chance to success, because the return would be closed. The victory seemed so close. Did he really lose this campaign and the death was waiting for him far away from the homeland?

Sunk in miserable thoughts Prince Vsevolod could resolve upon neither decisive assault nor retreat.

8

Meanwhile, the situation under the walls of the Great City remained difficult for the Bulgars, too. Hajimuradbey gathered a council to discuss it. After listening to all of the participants, he ordered tumenbashi Utiaş, who was responsible for the entire defense of the capital, to talk:

“The Russian troops are in bad condition”, he said, and then added, with the straightforwardness of a military man, “But our situation is not better. The army that is taking post in the capital at the moment is too small to launch a powerful blow to Prince Vsevolod. There is almost no hope for help from outside, too. Beys act in dissimilar ways, each acts separately and only when it is convenient for them. It is clearly not enough for the radical turn to our favor.”

There was a heavy silence. Everyone stared ahead and no one dared to speak first. The silence was broken by Hajimurad bey, who asked:

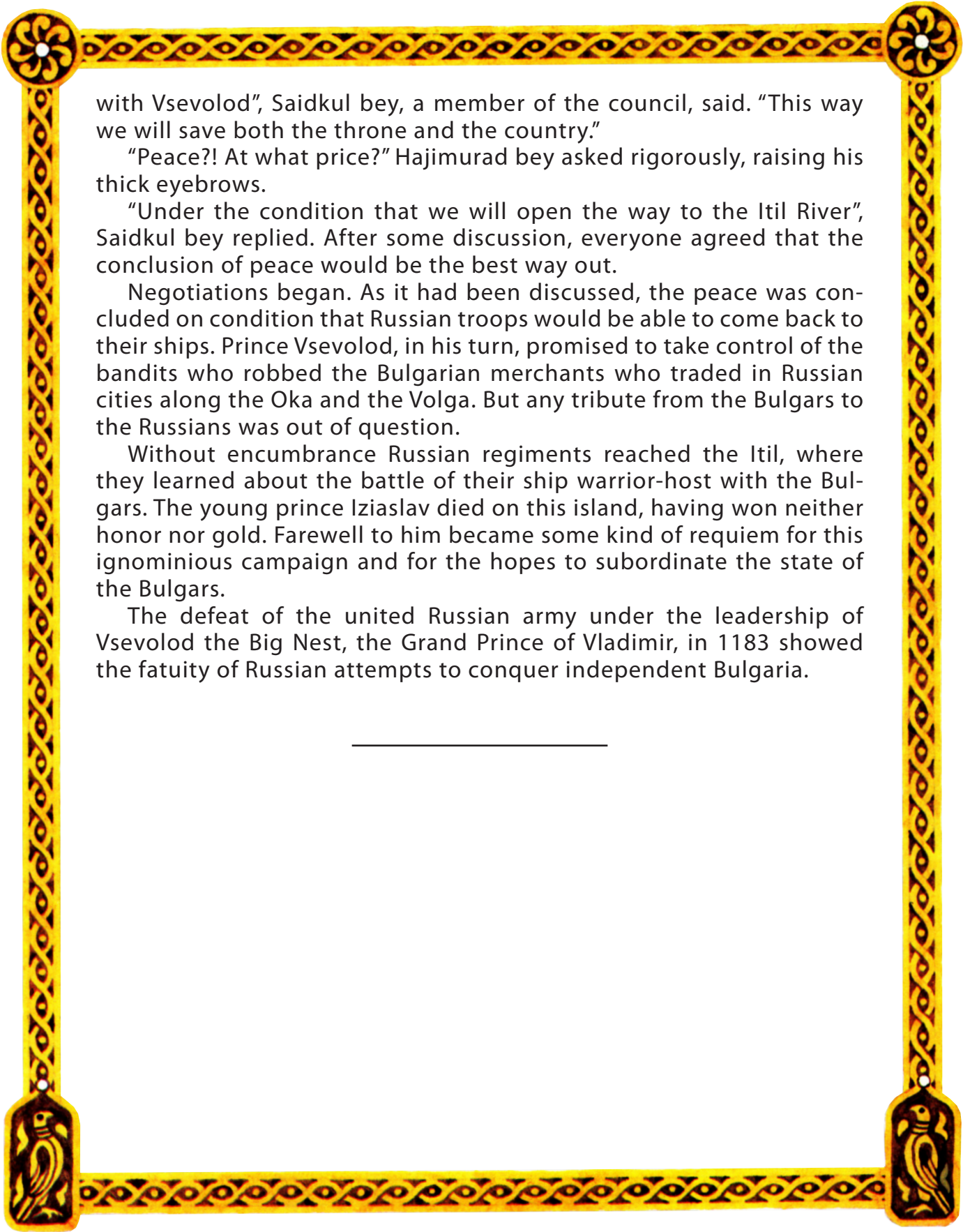
“What are we going to do?”

“I think the best way out of the situation will be making peace





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with Vsevolod”, Saidkul bey, a member of the council, said. “This way we will save both the throne and the country.”

“Peace?! At what price?” Hajimurad bey asked rigorously, raising his thick eyebrows.

“Under the condition that we will open the way to the Itil River”, Saidkul bey replied. After some discussion, everyone agreed that the conclusion of peace would be the best way out.

Negotiations began. As it had been discussed, the peace was concluded on condition that Russian troops would be able to come back to their ships. Prince Vsevolod, in his turn, promised to take control of the bandits who robbed the Bulgarian merchants who traded in Russian cities along the Oka and the Volga. But any tribute from the Bulgars to the Russians was out of question.

Without encumbrance Russian regiments reached the Itil, where they learned about the battle of their ship warrior-host with the Bulgars. The young prince Iziaslav died on this island, having won neither honor nor gold. Farewell to him became some kind of requiem for this ignominious campaign and for the hopes to subordinate the state of the Bulgars.

The defeat of the united Russian army under the leadership of Vsevolod the Big Nest, the Grand Prince of Vladimir, in 1183 showed the fatuity of Russian attempts to conquer independent Bulgaria.

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## A WANDERER FROM HUNGARY

*Fear goes ahead of my army,  
and the sabers just finish the job.  
(Words ascribed to Genghis Khan)*

The middle Volga and the Southern Urals were the homelands of many nations who migrated to other lands later. The Hungarians were one of such nations. They left that region in the distant 9th century. At that time they moved to the banks of the Danube and created their own state – Hungarian kingdom. But they saved their legends and fables about their first homeland for a long time. The Bulgars also moved there because they were dissatisfied with the ruling emirs. So, one group of migrants arrived in Hungary in the middle of the 10th century. The Hungarian king gave them land on the Danube and a castle, around which the city of Pest was established. (As you know, the capital of Hungary, Budapest, was formed from the junction of two cities – Buda and Pest.) Later, the Bulgarian military detachments served faithfully and loyally in their royal guard.

But over time the Hungarians happened to forget about their original homeland. And one incident helped them remember it again. At the beginning of the 13th century, the monks of a Hungarian monastery, found a strange record looking through some old manuscripts in the library. The record referred to the first leader of the Hungarians, Arpad, and his move to the Danube from the shores of the distant Itil (the Volga). At other times these notes would have interested neither the king nor the bishop, but in 1230 everything was different.

The rumors about the campaign of the Mongolian army in 1223 through the Caucasus in the Black Sea region, and about the terrible

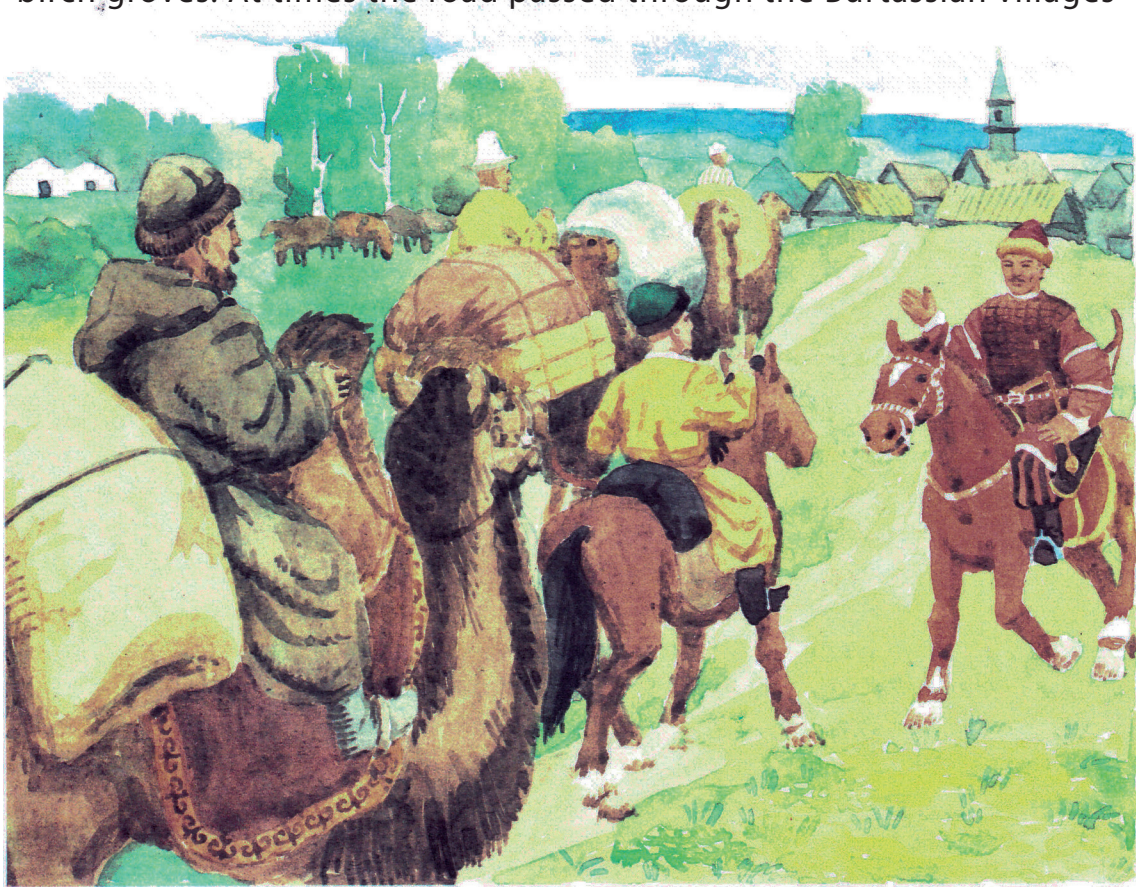
debellation of the Kypchaks and the Russian squads in the Battle of the River Kalka were still fresh in memory of the European peoples.

There were many dreadful rumors about these conquerors that came to Europe. But the Hungarian king and the Pope wished to know everything for sure. Who were these Mongols? What was their nature? Where did they come from? What their troops were like, and, the most important, who was their enemy?

And due to this fact they remembered about their ancient homeland on the Itil river – the Great Hungary. Their distant relatives would probably want to help their brethren in the fight against the Mongols who coming from nowhere. After all, in the found papers the Hungarians are described as a powerful nation.

So, the wandering monks were sent to the land of Eastern Europe to find the answer. One of such monks was Julian. As a former soldier and an educated man, he was very suitable for this campaign.

...A train of camels was slowly moving by flowering gardens and birch groves. At times the road passed through the Burtassian villages



with wooden houses, in which there were mosques with minarets. The herds of cows and sheep were grazing in the meadows, and several yurts could be seen around. Sometimes they met on their way some lone horseman armed with a bow, arrows, a dagger and a sap with a long handle. Monk Julian was dozing on the back of the camel. He was tired of loading the luggage and serving the master. He hired out as a servant to an imam and his wife to get into the land of the Bulgars, and now he was with them and was glad to have the opportunity to have some rest. He experienced a lot during this trip. And he did not know how much work and dangers awaited him ahead.

He was told that in just a few hours they would rest in a comfortable caravan-serai in the land of the Bulgars. They would drink strong odorous tea. The Muslims were the experts in it. It was a wonderful drink. But at the moment he was meditating on the back of a camel. People say that this Burtases live in wooden houses in winter and in felt yurts in summer. They also say that they are good gunsmiths and are famous for their coats from red fox fur. It turned out, that these coats are highly valued in the East.

Julian brings to mind his past journey yet again. He does not make any notes on the way – it is dangerous because it can cause suspicions. That's why he often remembers the cities and lands he has seen in order not to forget anything.

At first, he and the three fellow traveler monks left from Hungary to the capital of Byzantium, the city of Constantinople. It was easier there to get on a ship that was going to the banks of the Taman. And, indeed, they managed to do it quite quickly. But they had to stay in the port city of Tamatarkha\* for almost two months waiting for fellow travelers in a difficult and dangerous journey to the northern lands.

And, finally, fortunes looked up to them. They got to absolutely wild country Alania\*\*, after thirteen days of walking through a waterless desert.

They were very surprised by the fact that in this country each settlement had its own leader and was completely in dependent. All the men there were armed all the time; they did not leave their weapon even working in the field. Murder was not a sin there, and it surprised the travelers, too.

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\*Tamatarkha – the city on the coast of the Black Sea

\*\*Alania – the country of ancient Ossetians

Maybe, that's why they have a custom to punish for killing with death. There was no one who felt safe in this country.

Julian recalled that time with a heavy heart. The monks traveled from one Alanian settlement to another. Winter was coming and caravans stopped walking because they were afraid of the invasion of the Mongolian flying squadrons. The monks ran out of money and were reduced to penury. They even wanted to sell two of their brothers to slavery just to survive and to continue their journey. However, they did not sell them, but sent them back to Hungary with a detailed letter.

They were saved from starvation by chance: the monk who stayed with Julian – Gerard – turned out to be a real handyman. While they were waiting for fellow travelers to continue the journey and to find remnants of their ancestral homeland of Great Hungary, Gerard opened a real shop. It turned out that he could do a lot of different things: to make wooden spoons and crocks, to repair shoes and much more. It saved them from hunger and made it possible to survive winter in the Alan's the country.

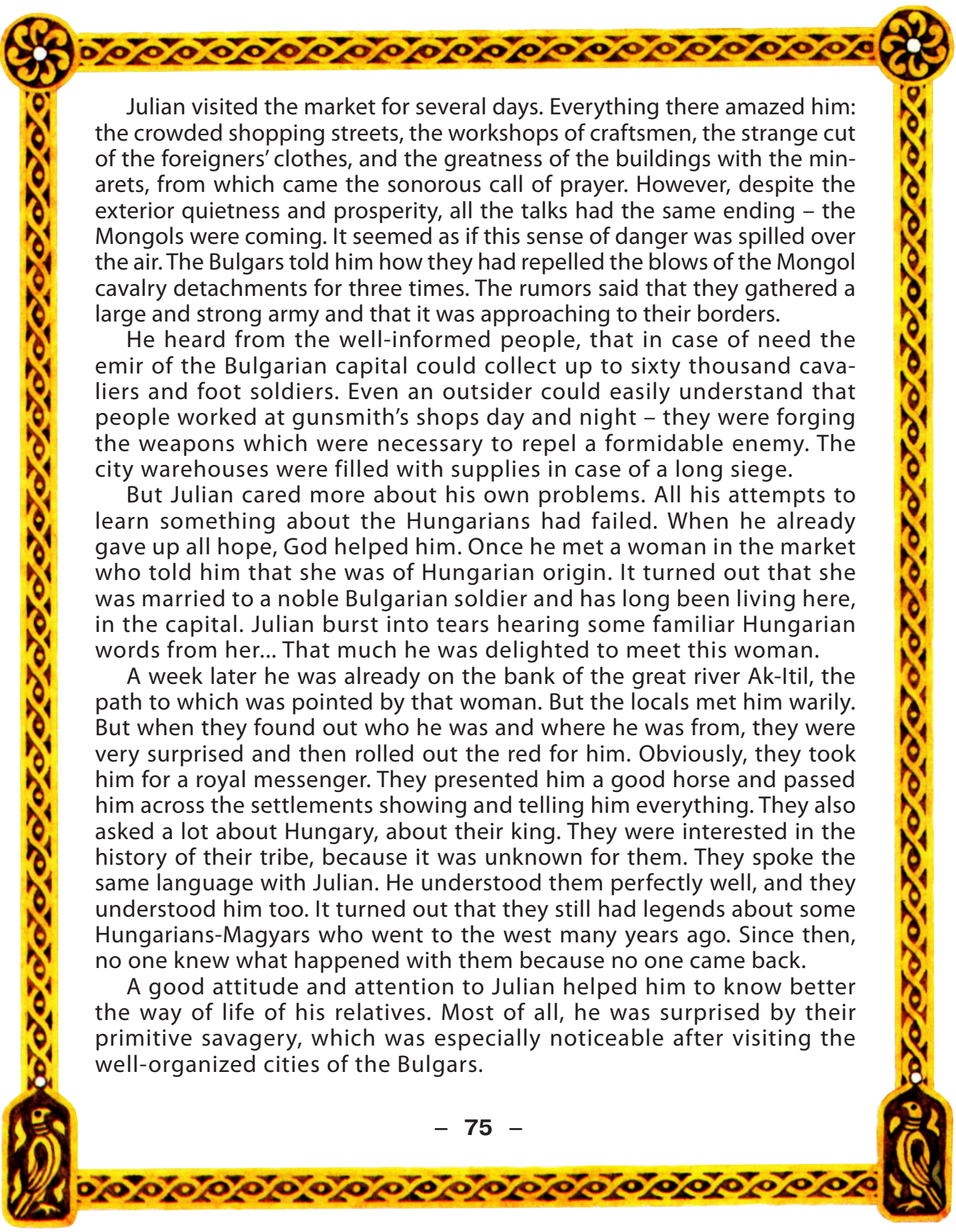
Finally, they saved up some money by the spring and set out again. But there was a problem: Brother Gerard fell ill on the way and Julian had to drag him. In addition, these strange travelers were constantly detained and searched because for some reason they were suspected in something. It seemed that they would both die, failing to complete their work...

Julian hardly dragged his sick companion to the city in the country Burtas. Although it was a Muslim country, both monks found shelter there. Brother Gerard died there. Now Julian was left alone, but he was determined to continue the journey.

In one of Burtassia's\* cities he enlisted to the imam, who was returning to the capital of Bulgaria. Traveling with him Julian was surprised to learn that there was a huge Muslim country on the eastern edge of Europe. They say that there are sixty fortified cities in that country. He also was surprised that merchants from different countries came to the main market of the capital of Bulgaria, they had colonial settlements there. They lived and stored their goods in those settlements; in a word, they felt completely safe. Learning all this Julian came to the conclusion that if there was a place at all where one could find out anything about his Hungarian countrymen, it was only in the capital of Bulgaria.

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\*Country Burtas or Burtassia was in the south of Bulgaria and paid it tribute



Julian visited the market for several days. Everything there amazed him: the crowded shopping streets, the workshops of craftsmen, the strange cut of the foreigners' clothes, and the greatness of the buildings with the minarets, from which came the sonorous call of prayer. However, despite the exterior quietness and prosperity, all the talks had the same ending – the Mongols were coming. It seemed as if this sense of danger was spilled over the air. The Bulgars told him how they had repelled the blows of the Mongol cavalry detachments for three times. The rumors said that they gathered a large and strong army and that it was approaching to their borders.

He heard from the well-informed people, that in case of need the emir of the Bulgarian capital could collect up to sixty thousand cavaliers and foot soldiers. Even an outsider could easily understand that people worked at gunsmith's shops day and night – they were forging the weapons which were necessary to repel a formidable enemy. The city warehouses were filled with supplies in case of a long siege.

But Julian cared more about his own problems. All his attempts to learn something about the Hungarians had failed. When he already gave up all hope, God helped him. Once he met a woman in the market who told him that she was of Hungarian origin. It turned out that she was married to a noble Bulgarian soldier and has long been living here, in the capital. Julian burst into tears hearing some familiar Hungarian words from her... That much he was delighted to meet this woman.

A week later he was already on the bank of the great river Ak-Itil, the path to which was pointed by that woman. But the locals met him warily. But when they found out who he was and where he was from, they were very surprised and then rolled out the red for him. Obviously, they took him for a royal messenger. They presented him a good horse and passed him across the settlements showing and telling him everything. They also asked a lot about Hungary, about their king. They were interested in the history of their tribe, because it was unknown for them. They spoke the same language with Julian. He understood them perfectly well, and they understood him too. It turned out that they still had legends about some Hungarians-Magyars who went to the west many years ago. Since then, no one knew what happened with them because no one came back.

A good attitude and attention to Julian helped him to know better the way of life of his relatives. Most of all, he was surprised by their primitive savagery, which was especially noticeable after visiting the well-organized cities of the Bulgars.

They neither plowed nor sowed; they kept large flocks of sheep and herds of horses and were excellent hunters. Their food was rough: horse meat and a drink from mare's milk, kumis. On occasion, they did not refuse from the meat of wolves; they even drank the blood of dead animals.

Only two things were admired and valued among the Hungarian men: a good horse and expensive weapon. They were proud of it in front of the guest. They were brave and sophisticated warriors. The Bulgars concluded a peaceful alliance with them and supplied the craftsmen with goods and products for a good reason. In return the Hungarians guarded the borders of Bulgaria against the raids of the steppe Emenks and the Kypchaks.

It was interesting for Julian to learn about their first battles with the approaching Mongols.

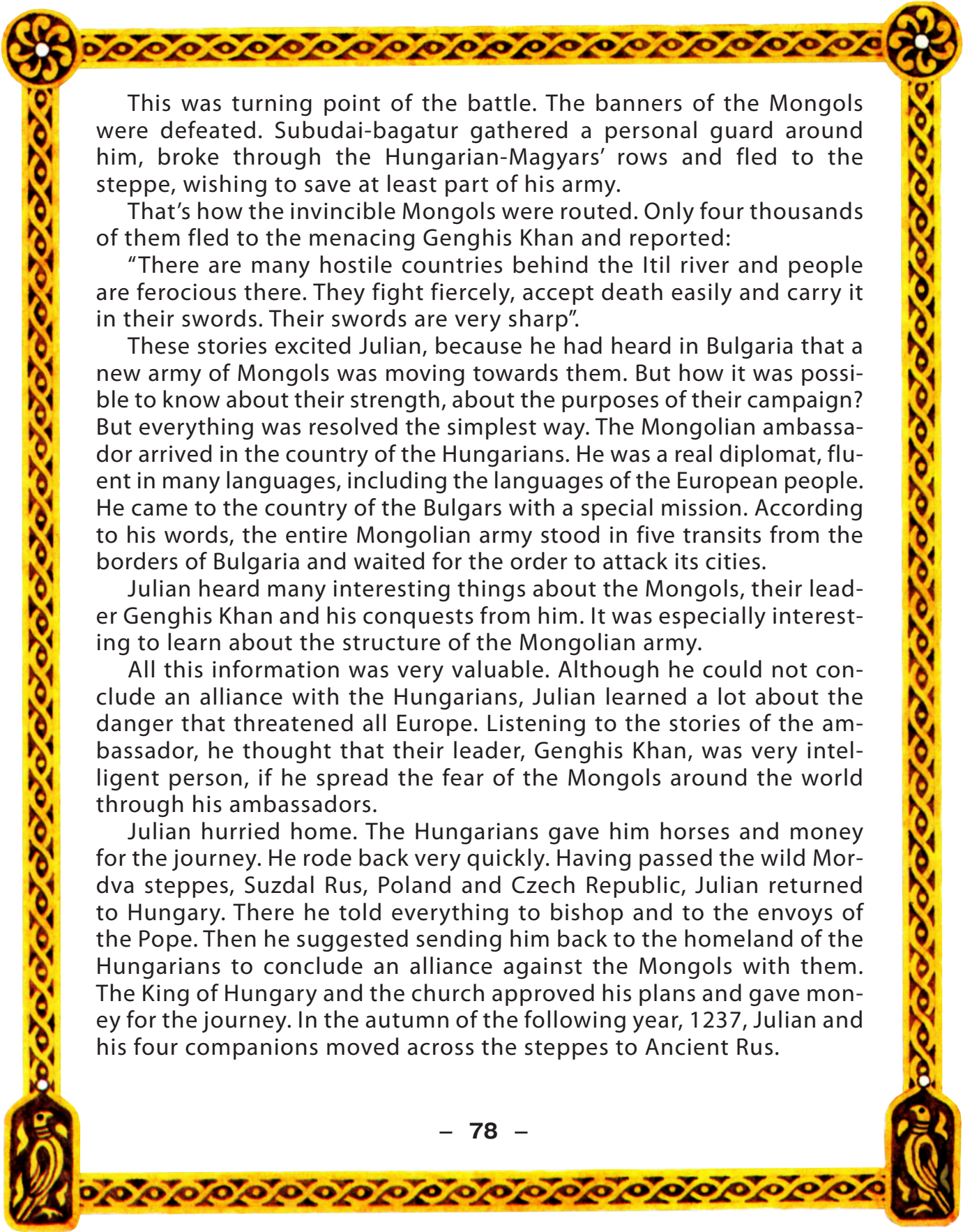
"The Mongols could not defeat us in the war. We won the first battle", they said.

Listening to their stories, Julian clearly imagined the bloody events of 1223. That year the Mongolian regiments under the command of the best generals of Genghis Khan, Subudai-bagatur and Dzhebe-noion, came to the borders of prosperous Bulgaria. The commander Aiub, son of Iakub, did not hurry to attack, knowing about their recent slashing victory over the Russian-Kypchak troops. On the contrary, he ordered the Hungarian and Bulgarian cavalry to attack and constantly disturb the enemy, without getting involved in a fierce battle. And then he pretended that he was going to retreat with the main forces. That time the Mongols, who turned the whole Central Asia into the black ruins and who got used to win everywhere, also thought that the victory was close and that their rich plunder was already waiting for them. They rushed to pursue the fleeing enemy. It was self-confidence that brought them down. It turned out that the cavalry archers of the Bulgarian commander Aiub led the Mongols into an ambush. There they were attacked from all the directions by the Bulgars.

The battle was bloody. Mongols were not accustomed to retreat or surrender, and that's why they fought to the last bit. The Bulgars violently broke through their rows, breaking them into separate parts. It was easier to destroy the army that way. Bloody horsemen rushed about, horses ran without riders, and the ground was covered with dead bodies on that battlefield. There was a terrible noise: screams, groans, the sound of metal, the neighing and rattling of wounded horses.

Finally, the moment came when the strength of the Mongols began to dry out.





This was turning point of the battle. The banners of the Mongols were defeated. Subudai-bagatur gathered a personal guard around him, broke through the Hungarian-Magyars' rows and fled to the steppe, wishing to save at least part of his army.

That's how the invincible Mongols were routed. Only four thousands of them fled to the menacing Genghis Khan and reported:

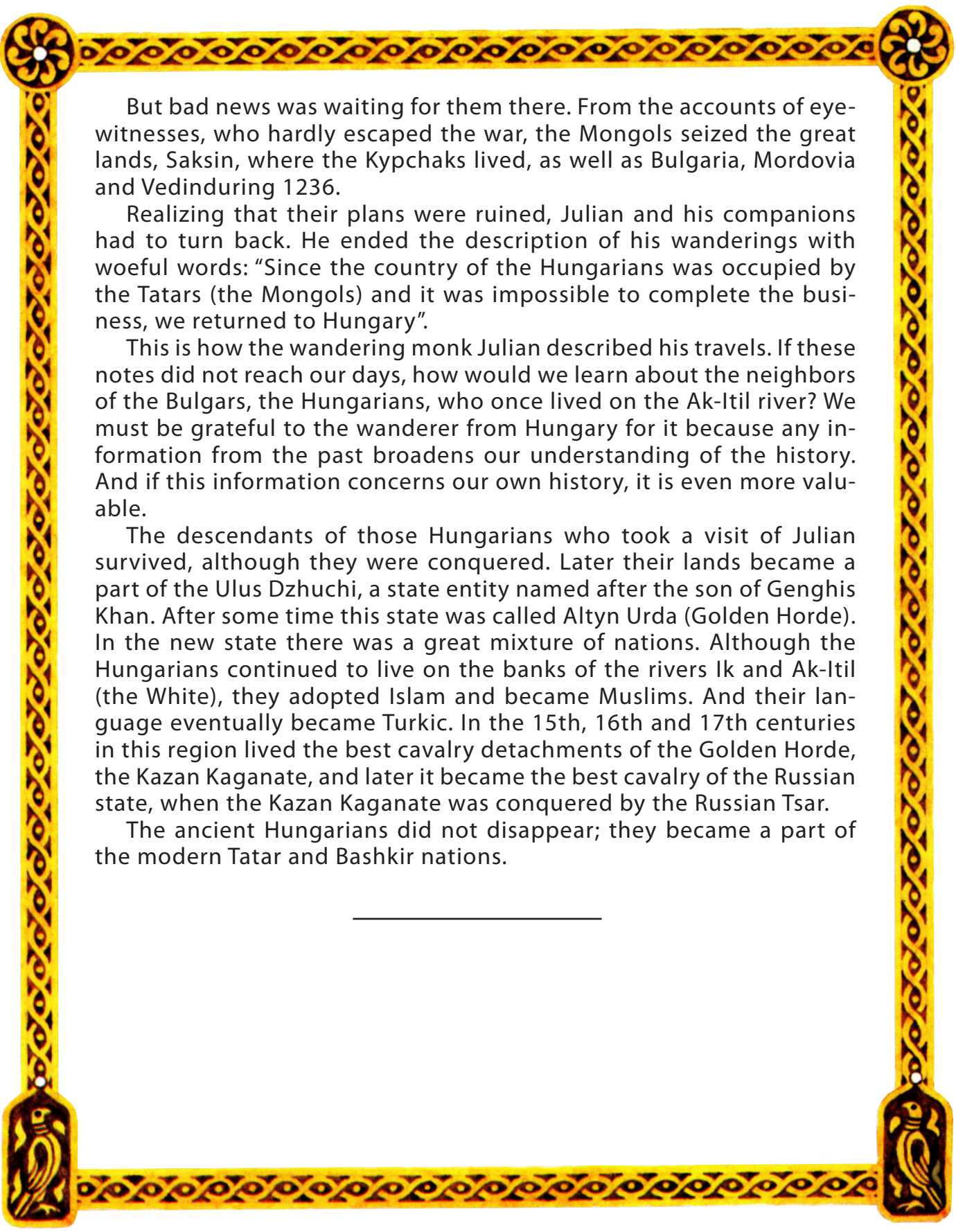
"There are many hostile countries behind the Itil river and people are ferocious there. They fight fiercely, accept death easily and carry it in their swords. Their swords are very sharp".

These stories excited Julian, because he had heard in Bulgaria that a new army of Mongols was moving towards them. But how it was possible to know about their strength, about the purposes of their campaign? But everything was resolved the simplest way. The Mongolian ambassador arrived in the country of the Hungarians. He was a real diplomat, fluent in many languages, including the languages of the European people. He came to the country of the Bulgars with a special mission. According to his words, the entire Mongolian army stood in five transits from the borders of Bulgaria and waited for the order to attack its cities.

Julian heard many interesting things about the Mongols, their leader Genghis Khan and his conquests from him. It was especially interesting to learn about the structure of the Mongolian army.

All this information was very valuable. Although he could not conclude an alliance with the Hungarians, Julian learned a lot about the danger that threatened all Europe. Listening to the stories of the ambassador, he thought that their leader, Genghis Khan, was very intelligent person, if he spread the fear of the Mongols around the world through his ambassadors.

Julian hurried home. The Hungarians gave him horses and money for the journey. He rode back very quickly. Having passed the wild Mordva steppes, Suzdal Rus, Poland and Czech Republic, Julian returned to Hungary. There he told everything to bishop and to the envoys of the Pope. Then he suggested sending him back to the homeland of the Hungarians to conclude an alliance against the Mongols with them. The King of Hungary and the church approved his plans and gave money for the journey. In the autumn of the following year, 1237, Julian and his four companions moved across the steppes to Ancient Rus.



But bad news was waiting for them there. From the accounts of eyewitnesses, who hardly escaped the war, the Mongols seized the great lands, Saksin, where the Kypchaks lived, as well as Bulgaria, Mordovia and Vedinduring 1236.

Realizing that their plans were ruined, Julian and his companions had to turn back. He ended the description of his wanderings with woeful words: "Since the country of the Hungarians was occupied by the Tatars (the Mongols) and it was impossible to complete the business, we returned to Hungary".

This is how the wandering monk Julian described his travels. If these notes did not reach our days, how would we learn about the neighbors of the Bulgars, the Hungarians, who once lived on the Ak-Itil river? We must be grateful to the wanderer from Hungary for it because any information from the past broadens our understanding of the history. And if this information concerns our own history, it is even more valuable.

The descendants of those Hungarians who took a visit of Julian survived, although they were conquered. Later their lands became a part of the Ulus Dzhuchi, a state entity named after the son of Genghis Khan. After some time this state was called Altyn Urda (Golden Horde). In the new state there was a great mixture of nations. Although the Hungarians continued to live on the banks of the rivers Ik and Ak-Itil (the White), they adopted Islam and became Muslims. And their language eventually became Turkic. In the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries in this region lived the best cavalry detachments of the Golden Horde, the Kazan Kaganate, and later it became the best cavalry of the Russian state, when the Kazan Kaganate was conquered by the Russian Tsar.

The ancient Hungarians did not disappear; they became a part of the modern Tatar and Bashkir nations.

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