

## Relations Between Volga Bulgaria and Baghdad

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**Abstract:** This study discusses the considerable efforts carried out by Volga Bulgaria in its endeavour to establish resolute relations with Baghdad under the Abbasid Caliphate. The study employs a historical approach that involves systematic organization and assessment of data from past writings such as records from Ibn Fadlan. Data collection involved the qualitative method including library research while data were analysed through text and document analysis comparison as well as induction and deduction. The objective of this study is to effectuate an Islamic state. The study found that the relations between Baghdad and Volga Bulgaria had a positive impact on the development of Volga Bulgaria as an Islamic state and propelled a momentum for it to attain its zenith in the history of Islam in Central Asia. However, this high point did not last as a result of a series of attacks by the Mongols in the early 1230 A.C. which ultimately led to its conquest by former in 1236.

**Key words:** Religion, sovereignty, relationship, Volga Bulgaria, Baghdad

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### INTRODUCTION

#### **Volga Bulgaria-Baghdad; the early relationship:**

Historians stated that 240-241/855 is the starting point of the chronology of events in Volga Bulgaria until the official formation of an Islamic state in the Volga-Kama region. That year was also the beginning of a new Kara Bulgar rulling era after the death of Khan Aidar. In addition, there are two important things that attract the attention of historians on the individual and his actions that have changed the future of Volga Bulgaria in the years that followed; firstly, Khan Aidar was the first Bulghar ruler to embrace Islam and secondly, his son °Abd Allah Djilki who is the heir to the throne after him was regarded as the founder of Volga Bulgaria as an Islamic country.

Under Islamic ruling, middle Volga Valley has developed into an Islamic country with a new name, Volga Bulgaria as was recorded in historical literature at the time. Although, Volga Bulgaria claims that it is an Islamic country but without the recognition of the Caliph of Baghdad, the Volga Bulgaria can not be considered as an Islamic state in the truest sense. This is because a province that wishes to be known as an Islamic power should gain recognition and support from the Muslim caliphate which at the time led by the °Abbasiyah

government in Baghdad. In other words, without the recognition, Volga Bulgaria was not yet recognized as an official Islamic state.

Furthermore, the region of Volga Bulgaria as powerful Islamic country in Eastern Europe covers only a small population of Bulghar, Esegel and Baryndjar, based in three cities: Bulgar, Sulcha and Suwar. Therefore, some efforts have been made by Djilki to expand Volga Bulgaria Islamic ruling. Furthermore, the absence of competition, threats and active actions of other political enemies have given confidence to Volga Bulgaria to continue doing so. Djilkis action is aimed at strengthening his ruling.

### POWER EXPANSION EFFORTS VOLGA BULGARIA

The country began to expand its power to the North beginning in 250-251/865 and the outfall of the Tamtazay river which is also the Madjar's community settlement areas was its first goal. The Madjar society does not give any resistance even recognize the authority of the Bulghar ruling and therefore became the first district to be taken under the wings of Volga Bulgaria. The area is designated as Bershud while the ruler was given a position in the Volga Bulgaria ruling as the provincial governor with the prince title.

The power expansion campaign continued to the Northwest and Northeast regions of Bershud. With

initiatives of the leaders from the Bershud region, in the Northwestern part, the Volga Bulgaria has managed to apprehend the city of Kostroma. The River Kush-Urma was marked as the new border of the Volga Bulgaria ruling. A city which is also called as Kush-Urma was built to control the activities along the border.

In the North, the Volga Bulgaria has successfully captured the hearts of the Biy-Su river community people and the coast of Kar sea. These newly conquered areas were placed under the region of Biysu. The increase in new areas has made the borders of Volga Bulgaria beyond the coastal areas of lake Belozero in the West, the coastal area of the Kara sea in the East and the left bank of the River Biy-Su in the East. While at the Southern area, the border of Volga Bulgaria is the right bank of the Kama river.

The success of Volga Bulgaria in conquering the areas mentioned before have fueled up the desire to continue on the next steps of expansion. Thus in 251-252 AH/866 M, the regions of Ura and Baygul was added to the Volga Bulgaria imperial rule. Ura was located in the Northern Ural region between Biy-Su river and downstream of Baygul while Baygul was a part of the central region of Western Siberia. This expansion has further strengthened the power of Djilki. The existence of this new rule region once again has changed the boundaries of the Volga Bulgaria empire.

Now, there are four small states under the auspices of Volga Bulgaria; Bulgaria (based in the city of Bulgar), Esegel (based in the Sulcha city), Baryndjar (based in Suwar) and Bershud (based in the settlement at Tamtazay). Regions under the auspices of Volga Bulgaria are Biysu (based in the Kolyn city), Baygul (based in the Ob river settlements) and Ura (based in the Alamir Sultan city). The small states under the rule of Volga Bulgaria is known as Internal Bulgaria while the regions are known as external Bulgaria.

With Sviyaga river bordering the West, Sheshma at the East, Mesha in the North and Samarra at the South, Internal Bulgaria form the middle of Volga Bulgaria. External Bulgaria was formed by the outside of the settlement area. Regions of external Volga Bulgaria covers a wide area, from the white lake in the West until the Ob river in the East and from the Arctic ocean in the North to the Kama river at the South.

However in 268-269/882, Khan °Abd Allah Djilki has died and his death has caused the rupture of the Volga Bulgaria empire. This is because his three prince has divided the administration into three main areas. Almas, being the eldest son of the ruled Kara Bulgar to continue his father's reign. The second son, Bat Ugyr ruled a small state called Bulghar and the third declared the formation

of a new state called Esegel that consists of Archa, the settlements at the North of Buras, Suwar and Esegel region.

Volga Bulgaria's disintegration after Djilki's death caused fatal consequent to the Kara Bulgar rule when in 271-272/885, Almas's son, Arbat has dismiss his own father in order to rule Kara Bulgar. Consequently, Almas left Kara Bulgar and headed to Kiev to seek asylum. The Kiev has given a piece of an estate land to Almas.

According to Miftakhov, Kara Bulgar was never peaceful after the departure of Almas. In 280-281/894, the Kuman's have invaded Kara Bulgar. This event has caused the exodus of the Saban tribe out of the Kara Bulgar settlements. Some 5,000 Saban people from the Baryn tribe requested Almas to come back to Volga Bulgaria. Thus in the same year, this group returned to Volga Bulgaria under the leadership of Almas. The Baryn tribe was located at the Dyau Shir River bank with the consent of Bat Ugyr, the ruler of Volga Bulgaria at the time but then was attacked by the Turkish Oghuz tribe. However, the bloodshed between the two factions have been averted through the negotiations that was conducted. After the negotiation, both parties agreed that the Oghuz Turks are to leave Bulgaria provided Almas surrender his daughter to wed with Salar, its ruler. In addition, Almas must force Bat Ugyr to pay homage and tribute to the Oghuz Turks. In return, the Salar must help Almas to recover Sulcha.

Through negotiations, Sulcha was successfully recovered with the help of Salar. However, Almas has violated the agreement that has been agreed upon. He does not persuade Bat-Ugyr to pay homage and tribute to Salar. Then in 281-282/895, Almas invited prince Alabug of Bel-Umart and prince Askel in a meeting at the city of Bilyar to gain support in order to eliminate Bat Ugyr from the throne of Volga Bulgaria. Almas gained strong support from all three parties and Mullah Mikhail Almas Bashtu has restored him back to the reins of Volga Bulgaria in the same year.

Almas's restoration as ruler of Volga Bulgaria has fulfilled Djilki's ambition to obtain the Caliph of Baghdad's recognition to the country. Thus, to fulfill the dream, Khan Almas took several actions to get the official recognition from Baghdad regarding the status and existence of Volga Bulgaria as an Islamic state. One of the efforts include sending diplomats to Baghdad from Volga Bulgaria.

For the 1st time, the group of Volga Bulgaria's ambassador reached Baghdad in 288 289/901, during the reign of the Caliph al-Mutadid (278-290/892-902). Volga Bulgaria's Diplomat, Mullah °Abd Allah extended Khan Almas's desire in the recognition of his country

as an Islamic state. Previously, the situation of government, law enforcement and the community of Volga Bulgaria were presented by Mullah 'Abd Allah. After hearing that the majority of Volga Bulgaria are Muslims and their desire to become an Islamic state under the auspices of Baghdad, the caliph had agreed to send a special Baghdad delegation to Volga Bulgaria in the future. However before the deployment of Baghdad's delegation to Volga Bulgaria was made, the Caliph had sent envoys together with Mullah 'Abd Allah to learn routes to Volga Bulgaria. The messenger joined Mullah 'Abd Allah's journey back to Volga Bulgaria 2 years later. On 290-291/903, the group finally reached Volga Bulgaria. A cloth factory supervisor named Sheikh Hasan and a merchant named Musa was entrusted by the caliph of Baghdad to survey the route to Volga Bulgaria to facilitate the Baghdad delegation that traveled later.

The caliph of Baghdad's arrival was greeted by Almas and as a tribute to the caliph of Baghdad, he appointed Sheikh Hasan to become the leader during a prayer in Volga Bulgaria. Through discussions with Sheikh Hasan, Khan Almas planned a mission to attack the pagan areas to expand Islamic dominance as has been done by the Baghdad government. He has sent his son, Gasan and Mullah 'Abd Allah to Avaria for assistance in carrying out its mission. According to Al-Istakhri, Volga Bulgaria has a very good relationship with Kiev.

With the combination of military force from Volga Bulgaria, Avaria and Kiev, Volga Bulgaria has invaded the Roman Empire in 293/905. However, later when Kiev launched a campaign to attack Rome, the army of Volga Bulgaria did not participate because at the same time, the Buras along with Kuman have invaded Bulghar. Thus, the Volga Bulgaria military preparations that were to join the attack on the Roman empire turned to defend their own country. Even without help, the Kiev founded success. The spoils and captives were sent to Volga Bulgaria as a token of appreciation to Khan Almas. Part of it was presented to the Caliph of Baghdad as proof of their success in the jihad expansion.

However, news of the success and the gifts never reached the caliph because the trader Musa that was appointed was killed on the way to Baghdad in 293-294/906. One of his slaves had defected by helping the prince Salar to kill and confiscate all the goods carried. Saving himself, the slave fled to Baghdad. The news on Musa's death was presented to Caliph 'Ali al-Muktafi (289-296/902-908) and he has accused the government of Volga Bulgaria as responsible for the assassination of the caliph's envoy after leaving Islam to return to the old religion (Brill, 1999).

The news had caused the caliphs to refuse sending Baghdad diplomats to Volga Bulgaria. This event also caused the end of the relationship between Baghdad and Volga Bulgaria for several years until in 298-299/911, Mullah 'Abd Allah that has been commissioned again by Khan Almas manage to reveal the real situation to Caliph Ja'far Al-Muqtadir (296-320/908-932). Therefore, the relationship with Volga Bulgaria was restored and the caliph has ordered to send the largest group of Baghdad delegates to Volga Bulgaria.

However, Almas's desire to gain recognition from Baghdad has failed. This was caused by Khud's complying to Khazar's order to attack Islamic territories along the shores of the Caspian sea. The caliph had charged Almas to directed the attack. This misunderstanding caused the Caliph of Baghdad to call back its delegates to Volga Bulgaria who was reached Bukhara to return to Baghdad in 299-300/912.

Again, Almas's desire to receive recognition from the caliphate of Baghdad, failed. However, the event does not prevent Almas to achieve his ambition. This is because there are several reasons for him to keep trying. First, he was pressured because of the provincial rulers' rebellion. The rebellion started due to him pressuring some of the people from the Bershud Mordja tribe after the death of Mullah Mikhail in 287/900. Similarly for the Bulghar tribe, Almas used the same method; forcing the remnants of the tribe that still hold the pagan believes to accept Islam. Almas's actions caused grave disquiet among his people, especially the Tengrianis.

Due to what has been happening, the region's rulers have gathered in the Bilyar city, to discuss and recommend a few solutions to Khan Almas. Among them is he was asked to stop forcing the Tengrianis to embrace Islam and to respect the rights and the hereditary rule of the Byral tribe in Bershud, Askal in Esegel, Mardjan in Arbuga and Djulut in Suwar. Khan Almas is entitled to only receive compensation as the ruler but have no right to intervene in any matter other than has been mentioned. Almas had to agree to the demands of the region leaders to avoid the discord experienced by Kara Bulgar from happening to Volga Bulgaria. The pressure from provincial rulers shows that the Volga Bulgaria government actually has no power over its territory.

In addition, Almas has been facing problems with throne struggle among his sons. This happened in 305-306/918 and has become more critical and beyond control. Prince Gasan tried to topple his own father from the throne of Volga Bulgaria by establishing good relations with Samanid ruler. All of these events has put pressure on Almas and caused him to fall ill. Mullah 'Abd

Allah suggested that all this happened due to the refusal of the caliph to send an envoy to Baghdad. Therefore, to resolve these problems, Khan Almas must send an envoy to Baghdad again to get the blessing of the caliph.

Thus once again in the same year, Mullah ʿAbd Allah was chosen to be the messenger to Baghdad with the same intent and purpose as before. In order to safely arrive at Baghdad, he has to get permission from the government of Khurasan to use the route to Baghdad with the help of Gasan who have good relations with them.

The delegates of Volga Bulgaria finally arrived at Baghdad in mid 308-309/921. A letter from Almas was presented along with accompanying gifts. Mullah ʿAbd Allah delivered the news about the success of the Volga Bulgaria in overcoming hordes of soldiers from Khulud who have committed a robbery in the area of Islamic rule on the shores of the Caspian and Persian sea. The news of success was presented to prove that Volga Bulgaria is certainly working hard to overcome those who threaten the security of Muslims. Success and the efforts made by Volga Bulgaria finally attracted the caliph's attention and finally agreed to send a delegation there for a serious and official relationship.

#### **THE EFFORTS OF IBN FALAN: DELEGATES FROM BAGHDAD AND OFFICIALLY ACCEPTING ISLAM BY THE VOLGA BULGARIA PEOPLE**

As stated by Ibn Falan, on Thursday, 11th Safar 309/4th June 921, Baghdad's delegation to Volga Bulgaria on the orders of the Caliph Al-Muqtadir left Baghdad for Khwarizm before continuing their journey to the North (Hitti, 1970; Koestler, 1976; Mirfatykh, 1995). Susan Al-Rasi has been assigned to lead the delegation accompanied by Ahmad bin Falan as secretary to the delegation (Bukharaev, 2000). The delegation also engaged Baris, a Bulghar as a guide to Volga Bulgaria. Joining the delegation was the in-laws of Al-Rasi, two Turkish slaves, Tegin a Turkey, jurists, teachers, preachers, mullahs and commercial groups.

From Baghdad, the delegation stopped in Northern Khwarizm, a regional administrative center of Jurjan and this was planned by the Caliph and Ministers of Baghdad. Apart from acting as a representative of the caliph, this visit was to strengthen the ties with the government and in addition to acquire financial assistance of 4,000 dinars to finance the traveling costs and also for submission to the Khan Almas as construction aid of a city. However, the money expected from the caliph's home sales revenue was not obtained.

According to Bukharaev, the failure to obtain the financial resources caused this delegation to face chronic financial problems. The much-needed financial resources not only for paying the salaries of jurists and the mu'allims who participated in the mission but also to support the cost of construction required by the Bulghar. This problem causes the jurists and mu'allims refused to go further because they feel that they will not acquire any financial provision for their services. Furthermore, they do not foresee the weather to be very cold in the North and can cause death (Bukharaev, 2000).

In truth, there are several factors that caused the expedition to encounter financial problems. This is because in the year 309/922, Baghdad faced issues of governance due to lack of control over the internal political movement even when serves as the center of government and commerce. It all started as a result of internal unrest and the intervention of the Turkish and Barbar guards in Baghdad's rule. In fact, the transfer of the ʿAbbasiyyah ruling from Baghdad to Samarra in 279/892 and then back again at Baghdad was also due to the intervention.

However, the failure of the delegates to obtain financial resources does not affect their mission. The trip to Volga Bulgaria was continued in order to achieve the ultimate goal of establishing a formal delegation Baghdad-Volga Bulgaria with are only a few delegation members now; Susan Al-Rasi, Ahmad ibn Falan, Al-Rasi's in-laws, Baris, Tegin and a slave.

Apart from establishing an official relationship, one of the factor Baghdad sent a delegation to Volga Bulgaria during the ʿAbbasiyyah time, especially Ibn Falan was to strengthen Islam, introducing Islamic law and to assist in the construction of a mosque and pulpit and also to deliver the message of Islam to the rest of Volga Bulgaria (Koestler, 1976). All the aforementioned was a mission of trust and responsibility that must be properly executed, although the delegation faced constraints and obstacles along the way.

Thus, the delegation then joined a trade caravan heading downstream of Volga river (Koestler, 1976). On the 2nd Zulkaedah 309/4th March 922 in spring, the delegation headed North from Khwarizm through the Oghuz Turks residential areas. When the group reached the downstream Yayik river, the Baghdad delegation and the trade caravans separated to their intended destination. The trade caravan trails down Volga river and the Baghdad delegation continued to the North across the Bashkirt settlements to reach the Khan Almas ruling area. Finally on Thursday, the 12th of Muharram 310/11th May 922, after 70 days of >2,000 km traveling from the

Khwarizm city, the Baghdad delegation arrived to Volga Bulgaria. A day later they arrived at Khan Almas's Summer home at the three lakes village in the territory of Spassky in Tatarstan.

After consulting with the Volga Bulgaria, the Baghdad delegation fixed 16th Muharram 310/15th May 922 as the date to hand over the letter of recognition, 4 days after arriving. It was aimed to bring together the leadership of Volga Bulgaria and to spread the news to the people. The recognition from Baghdad was presented in the form of formal Islamic leader attire that is a black robe and a white turban as a sign that Almas has been recognized as an Islamic ruler under the auspices of Baghdad.

The ceremony was held near a lake in Volga Bulgaria starting the caliph's deputation, the ministers of Baghdad deputation and the Islamic banner submission to Khan Almas as a symbolic recognition of Volga Bulgaria as an Islamic state. According to Susan Al-Rasi, the banner submitted by the caliph must be touted when facing the enemy on the battlefield. Apart from the banner, the caliph also presented Khan Almas an Arab horse and two pieces of gold embroidered prayer mat while his wife received a coat made from sabel wool.

In accordance with his status as a Muslim leader, Khan Almas changed his name to Amir Ja'far ibn 'Abd Allah, after the caliph of Baghdad's name. However, he was disappointed because the Baghdad delegation did not bring the financial assistance as stated in the caliph's message (Koestler, 1976). According to Ibn Falan's assessment, Volga Bulgaria's situation with vast areas of governance and participation in international trade, does not require assistance from Baghdad to cover the cost of construction because Volga Bulgaria are still capable to obtain financial resources for that purpose. But, for Khan Almas, although Volga Bulgaria was able to build a city with its own wealth but it is important to get financial aid from Baghdad because Baghdad's financial wealth are from halal and acceptable sources. However, the failure to obtain financial assistance from Baghdad and did not affect the relations between the two sides.

Thus in mid-Safar 310/Jun 922, Khan Almas together with his sons and joined by the people, once again gathered on the riverbanks of Dyau Shir to announce to the people that the country has gained recognition and blessings from the caliph of Baghdad. In other words, people were informed that the caliph of Baghdad as the head of the Islamic empire had recognized the existence of Volga Bulgaria as an Islamic state. This also means that the caliph put Volga Bulgaria under his protection. This declaration was also to inform that Islam have been selected and accepted as the official religion of

Volga Bulgaria. Almas's announcement indicates that the objective of the Baghdad delegation has been achieved. Thus, at Dhu'l Qa'idah 310/Ogos 922, the delegation departed for Volga Bulgaria to return to Baghdad to deliver the good news to the caliph on the success of the relationship with Volga Bulgaria.

### **VOLGA BULGARIA AS AN ISLAMIC STATE**

The relationships built in political, economic and religious aspect has sparked a few major implications on Volga Bulgaria. Based on the findings, implications towards Volga Bulgaria can be assessed in three main aspects, namely; political, economic and social.

Generally from the political aspect, the greatest implication on Volga Bulgaria was in relation to the status of an Islamic country. Recognition from the caliph of Baghdad had raised the status of Volga Bulgaria from an occupied territory to the status of an independent nation. Volga Bulgaria's recognition as an Islamic nation also means the country is officially under the auspices of the Islamic empire based in Baghdad.

Therefore, the government's wishes to obtain recognition from Baghdad have been achieved. This recognition is in two forms; recognition of Volga Bulgaria as an Islamic state and the government's recognition as a leader of an Islamic nation by the Caliph Al-Muqtadir. This was clearly recorded by Ibn Falan on bestowal of a formal Islamic leader attire, the banner and recitation of the caliph's message. This was Volga Bulgaria's first success in political aspects.

The recognition of the Baghdad abrogates the status as occupied territory under the rule of the Khazar which also means Khazar's grip on Volga Bulgaria Khazar has ended. Volga Bulgaria stands as an independent Islamic state and are free to determine his own ruling policy without referring to the Khazars (Koestler, 1976).

According to the Brill (1999), the use of Amir Bulghar to replace the yiltuwar title was evidence of the positive implications of the relationship with Baghdad. This also evidence of the change from a provincial government to the ruler of a Muslim country. Use the title of Amir also lifted the status of Volga Bulgaria rulers compared to other small states under his colonies. Other than that, the name changes from Almas bin Djilki to Amir Ja'far bin 'Abd Allah indicate that the ruler of Volga Bulgaria is a Muslim.

The effect of this relationship from political aspect can also be evaluated in terms of the process of expansion by Volga Bulgaria. Before the arrival of the Baghdad delegation, an Arab traveler who visited the middle Volga region in the 4/10 century has identified the regions of Volga Bulgaria as geographical boundaries located

between Cheremshan river in the South, Sviaga river in the West, Kama river in the North and the Sheshma river in the East. However, after a delegation from Baghdad reached Volga, Volga Bulgaria has spreaded North. At Century 5/11 and 6/12, the government has extended the boundaries of Volga Bulgaria reign in the West to reach the river and on the south side Zai also been extensively up to the city of Samarra.

Throughout the 4/10-7/13 century, Volga Bulgaria has developed into a strong Eurasian empire, overcoming the Roman empire as the implication of relationship with Baghdad. The Volga Bulgaria empire stretched from the Caspian Sea, North of the Caucasus, Arctic Sea, Eastern Europe and Siberia. This shows that in terms of political expansion, Volga Bulgaria's jihad mission was successful as expected by Baghdad who in the meantime has helped to strengthen the rule of power in the North.

As expected by Baghdad, the participation of Volga Bulgaria has expanded the Islamic empire domination (Koestler, 1976). Volga Bulgaria's position at the North of Caspian sea caused the Khazar empire to be surrounded by land owned by Muslims in the North to the East. This new placement has restricted foreign relations between the Khazars and the Northern and Eastern parts of the world. Baghdad's wise strategy contributed to the fall of the Khazar after facing a surprise attack from Prince Sviatoslav in 965 AD.

This relationship also have implications in economic sector. The economic activity of the Bulgars resulting from relationship with Baghdad has led to urbanization. Brill (1999) stated that due to the skills of Bulghar locals, archaeologists have discovered a total of 2,000 villages and 150 cities in excavation expeditions undertaken. Of that number, the Bilyar city has been identified as the largest city in Malaia Cheremshan with area measuring 7 million m<sup>2</sup>.

The discovery of Bilyar-Bulgar site in an archaeological research proved the truth of the statement made by Al-Gharnati, Bulgar city is a big city where the walls are made of oak while the houses are built of pine wood. Most of the monuments founded in the Bulgar were small cities, home of the rulers. These small cities are covered by two or three lines of earth bunds and surrounded by countryside and believed to be built at the beginning of 4/10 century along with two other cities, Suwar and Oshel. These small cities are located in an area of high plateau near the place of worship of an ancient pagan society at Dzavysher hill, near Cheremshan river. Archaeologists concluded the location was the same spot where Khan Almas declared acceptance of Islam by Volga Bulgaria in the Summer of 309/922 (Brill, 1999). This location witnessed the beginning of Islam in and the

starting point of Islamic civilization at Volga Bulgaria. This city is also believed to be the city mentioned by Volga Bulgaria rulers in its letters to the caliphs of Baghdad.

Other than city of Bulgar-Bilyar, other cities with a slightly smaller size compared to Bilyar is Oshel and Kashan near the Kama river. Both cities cover 1 million m<sup>-1</sup>. The expansion of Volga Bulgaria are related to the existence of the traditional center where the people gather during official ceremony held by the government before the advent of Islam. According to archaeologists, this community center later expanded to permanent settlements and small towns after the year 309/922.

Development of cities such as Suwar, Oshel and Buras has shown the influence of Islam in its architecture. An archaeological research in Suwar has foundede a city made of wood and palace built of stone. There was a large decorative object on the palace gate and square shaped tower resembling the early Islamic architecture. The same building structure has also been found and is believed to be the city Buras. According to Yaqut Al-amawi, there is a large mosque in Buras city. Same goes to Oshel city, the building structure is slightly different from other Bulghar cities. However, overall the cities were built in the 4/10 century showed that there is correlation between urbanization of Volga Bulgaria with its relationship with Baghdad.

The discovery of the cities proved that trade is an important Bulgar economic branch that led to the urbanization process. The serious involvement in trade activities contributed to the growth of markets and trading regions of Volga Bulgaria. Aga-Bazaar, located on the banks of the Volga river is one of the famous market in Volga Bulgaria. It was said almost all cities and settlements outside the city in Volga Bulgaria has a market like Aga-Bazar.

Aga-Bazaar's strategic location believed to lie in the vicinity of the Bilyar-Bulgar, at the Volga and Kama Rivers has made it an easily accessed trade center from the North and South. In Ibn Falan's notes, he mentioned Russian merchants visit to Volga Bulgaria to do business with the people of Bulghar and it is believed to have been conducted in Aga-Bazaar. Active trading activities in Aga-Bazaar has led to growth of another city which later developed into a commercial center for the entire Volga-Kama region where the traders from the North and South gather. Most of these traders came to Aga-Bazaar attracted by the convenience and comfort provided (Brill, 1999).

Economic functions of each city in Volga Bulgaria has encouraged the growth of trade centers and have an impact on the physical development of the cities. Caravanserai that has been provided to fulfill the needs of

traders from the east grew like mushrooms in Bulgar city. Initially a caravanserai only serves as lodging for merchants but the development of Bulgar's economy has added its function to a combination of accommodation, warehouse and cultural centers which provide food and shelter, warehousing facilities and storage of merchandise and also serves as a mosque to Muslim merchants for prayers.

Inspiration from Baghdad as the city that has led other cities in the Islamic empire has helped Volga Bulgaria to emulate the glories of Baghdad. Relations with Baghdad has brought progress in economic sector by bringing the Bulghar community out of semi-nomadic life to permanent settlement. The presence of Islam has accelerated the urbanization process in Volga Bulgaria. The emergence of several other cities have become the key evidence to the implications.

In addition, Baghdad's influence in economic aspects can be evaluated with the discovery of Islamic empire coins in large quantities in the city of Bulgar by archaeologists (Noonan, 1984, 1986a, b; Bykov, 1974). Islamic empire coins were initially used exclusively in commercial exchanges (Noonan, 1986a). However, in the 4/10 century Volga Bulgaria started issuing their own coins using the name of Bulghar Islamic leader as Baghdad did in the year 365/976 and this became the evidence of achievement in the economic aspects of Volga Bulgaria.

From the social aspect, the implications for relations with Baghdad was assessed based on the dispatch of the Baghdad delegation in 309/922 that led to the participation Bulghar community to be part of the Muslim Ummah under the rule of Islamic empire based in Baghdad. In the same year was the formal declaration of Islam as the official religion of Volga Bulgaria, even before the arrival of Baghdad Islam delegation that has been holding most of the people who inhabited the banks of the Volga and Kama rivers.

Hence, the arrival of the Baghdad delegation sent by the Caliph Al-Muqtadir, other than to meet three Almas's demands is also aimed to meet a total of 5,000 Muslims who had converted to Islam. The people of Volga Bulgaria, also known as Al-Barandjar is among the earliest Muslims in the valley of the Volga and Kama. Their existence has been identified from the records of Ibn Rustah, an Arab nomad who states that most of the population of Volga Bulgaria in the middle Volga valley are Muslims. In fact, the Brill (1999) also stated the population Volga Bulgaria has had its own mosque and religious institutions.

Declaration of Volga Bulgaria as a Muslim country means Islamic law is the administrative core as desired

by the government of Volga Bulgaria. As Baghdad, Volga Bulgaria have also implemented the Islamic system administration and law. Even though the delegation members are only about four people, the role they played has helped the Bulghar leaders to rule Volga Bulgaria according to the true path of Islam. Ibn Falan's records relating to his role and the members of the Baghdad delegation in teaching the people of Volga Bulgaria on questions of Islam has clearly indicated that the desired social goals have been achieved.

Shortly after the acceptance of Islam, the Muslims Bulghar are introduced to the Arabic script. Introduction of the script is not only a testament to the spreading of Islam but even a factor of knowledge building and Islamic heritage. It must be mentioned that Bulghar do not have any civilization in terms of writing until they embrace Islam. Although, earlier Volga Bulgaria used Turkish letters called Orkhon in writing, the characters are not treated as Bulghar's own absolute alphabet. A true writing system has been developed and expanded in line with Bulghar's economic development after officially embracing Islam where all transactions involving tax, legal and political were noted. Records were written on wood and plaque made of sand until 4/10 century when paper produced by the Islamic empire was brought from the city Khwarizm in central Asia to the Volga region. With the acceptance of Islam by the Bulghar, Arabic script began replacing Bulghar letters. There are two popular types of calligraphy among the Bulghar, the Kufi and Thulus.

Rorlich added, replacement of Bulghar alphabets to Arabic script has contributed to new developments in Bulghar's literature in the 6/12 century. The existence of literary language has also impacted on the educational system and the development of educational awareness among the people of Volga Bulgaria. They began to realize the importance of education as a means to a better nation. This development is in line with the organization of educational institutions such as madrasah that not only focuses on religious education as the core but also introducing secular subjects to enrich knowledge. The existence of mosque made of wood as well as religious education centers or maktab has strengthened the evidence that Islam is established in the area. For example at the end of the 3/9 century, there were 42 colleges of religious studies at Volga Bulgaria. This number increased after the arrival of the Baghdad delegation.

The development of Volga Bulgaria's education system is in line with educational efforts in Baghdad that not only emphasized the religious aspects but also emphasizes the development of other knowledge. Furthermore, the community began to see educational institutions as very important to produce future scholars

and bureaucrats of the country. The existence of these institutions will be able to eradicate illiteracy among Bulghar.

Religious consciousness has been a fundamental to the realization of the importance of educational institutions to produce Bulghar scholar-intellectuals. As Baghdad, most of the Bulghar scholars in the 6/12 and 7/13 century are recognized by both local and foreign. A Bulghar historian, Ya'kûb ibn Nu'fman have written about the history of the Bulgars in 505/1112 and is valuable record of the community's history. Ibn Nu'fman not the only Bulghar scholar born in that region, there is Burhan ad-Din Ibrahim ibn Yusuf and his writings is in the field of rhetoric, medical and religious commentary. In addition, several other names such as amid Ibn Idris, Ahmad Al-Bulghari, Muhammad Sadr ibn 'Ala ad-Din, Hassan ibn 'Umar and Muhammad Al-Bulghari are between Bulghar scholars that emerged due to the development of educational institutions in Volga Bulgaria. Unfortunately, history only sees one Bulghar poet named Kul Gali while the others are not recognized. Kul Gali's poetry titled Qissaiy Yusuf has attracted literature and linguistics historians to study it because this poem reflects the spiritual glories achieved by the Bulghar community by 7/13 century as a result of their acceptance of Islam in the previous century. Baghdad's aspiration has indirectly affect the psyche of the Volga Bulgaria society. Success and excellence of Baghdad has inspired the people to succeed as what has been achieved by Baghdad.

In addition, the people of Volga Bulgaria consists of five major tribes; Bulghar, Suwar (Savan), Esegel (Askel), Bersula and Barandjar that shows tribal diversity united under one rule of Islam. Although, middle Volga valley are inhabited by various tribes, only one cultural form leaves impact that is pottery. The discovery of patterned pottery in 1960's along Suram Mokhsa and Vada River are prove of this.

Diversity of tribes under one rule of Islam proves that Islam has brought unity to Volga Bulgaria. Islamic unity in Volga Bulgaria has become a key factor to the formation of a community and this idea of unity exemplified from Baghdad. The city of Baghdad with various tribes and descendants also united under one rule Abbasid Islam empire. The main model is the Rasulullah's pbuh sirah where the formation of an Islamic state of Medina and Medina Charter provides guidance in the rule of a Muslim country.

Eight years after the Baghdad delegation left Volga Bulgaria, there was a town and a mosque that proves Amir Bulghar rules Volga Bulgaria on behalf of the Islamic caliphate and holds Islam. Although on the first phase of

the relationship, acceptance of Islam in its early stages of the Bulghar rule is to ensure leaders determine the religion to be in accordance with Islam but subsequent developments showed Islamic culture blooms among the Bulghar without any coercion.

The soundness of the Bulgars to the teachings of Islam can be seen with the growth of mosques in every major city in Volga Bulgaria for Friday prayers. Furthermore, Hudud al-'Alam strengthens the fact that the population of Bulghar and Suwar are actively fighting the spread Islam. According to al-Mas'udi, a Bulghar ruler's son pilgrimage to Mecca during the reign of Caliph al-Muqtadir. Other evidence showing the government's emphasis on the Islam is the existence of Sabzawar and Khusrawdjird mosque built in 415/1024 by Amir Bulghar Abu Ishaq bin Ibrahim bin Muhammad. This indicates that the Bulghar community practice Islam in their daily lives.

In addition at the same time, the passion to spread Islam was also inherited from Baghdad. The thing that differentiates Baghdad and Bulghar missionary efforts is the emphasis on a sect, namely; the Hanafi while the Baghdad missionaries are of various denominations and course will of course bring their own sect to be spreaded. Bulghar missionaries tried calling to the people of Bulghar, such as the Pecheneg and Kuman tribe to accept Islam and hoped to spread Islam throughout Russia that were still holding on paganism beliefs. For example in the year 375/986, Volga Bulgaria religious delegation group have been sent to Kiev to face Prince Vladimir to urge him to embrace Islam (Likhachev, 1978; Kimball, 2008). Although, the delegation failed to convince Prince Vladimir to embrace Islam, the efforts have proven Bulghar's seriousness to spread Islam throughout Europe.

#### **FACTORS OF VOLGA BULGARIA'S DOWNFALL**

Volga Bulgaria achieved glory after getting recognition from Baghdad. However, Baghdad's recognition to the rulers of Volga Bulgaria and the use of Amir title is not a factor that guarantees Volga Bulgaria will not be threatened by any outside forces or internal threats. Events that occurred after Volga Bulgaria's declaration as an Islamic nation strengthens this fact. Baghdad's recognition as expected by Khan Almas, the ruler of the Volga Bulgaria at that time, to strengthen his position politically is not fully achieved. Volga Bulgaria's leadership credibility held by Khan Almas in the early acceptance of Islam is still shaky. This can be explained based on the resistance by Prince Vryvig and a small group of Suwar people before the declaration ceremony of



an Islamic state and Islam as Volga Bulgaria was held. The behaviour of a group of Suwar people leaving the ceremony before it started shows their protest against Almas's leadership that wants to bring his people to Islam.

The incident was followed by transfer of the non-Muslim settlements to the left bank of the Volga river. This acts does not mean they refuse to live under the rule of Volga Bulgaria but just to show their protest against Almas that forced the entire population of Volga Bulgaria to convert to Islam against their will. Even in this situation, the group did not walk out of the Volga Bulgaria region. This also means that they still remain under the Islamic government and administration. Just in terms of faith, they still choose to hold fast to the faith of their ancestors.

In addition, competition and power struggle inside the government are usually between tribes who have strong and influential force. In 4/10 century, Suwar and Bulghar, both have the features mentioned previously, has been competing closely to seize supreme power rule of Volga Bulgaria. The competition of these dominant tribes caused the existence of two political rule center; Bilyar-Bulgar and Suwar city. However, the development and progress achieved by Bilyar-Bulgar in the same century overcomes Suwar in terms of breadth of territory as a result of the expansion process was to abolish and dissolve Suwar's sovereignty.

The hoped support from Baghdad will help the government of Volga Bulgaria overcome the internal and external enemies and also deal internal politics, meets most of the goals that have been set. However in terms of moral support, Baghdad has given confidence to Volga Bulgaria to overcome the Khazars and rise as an independent state. The absence of historical records on military aid from Baghdad to Bulghar as expected by the government has strengthen this argument. The historical sources only mentioned the recognition received from the Baghdad but never mentioned on any other assistance, even though Volga Bulgaria now protectorate the status of an Islamic empire. According to Lantzeff (1973), a few series of wars that occurred after the return of Baghdad delegation from Volga Bulgaria is not associated with any military assistance from Baghdad. Instead, Volga Bulgaria built its own military strength to defend his country. The construction of a fortress was believed to have been built by the Bulghar without the aid from Baghdad. Archaeological findings have confirmed the existence of Bulgar city. This is further strengthened by records from later historians on the existence of this city.

However, the main factors identified as the cause of Volga Bulgaria's fall and the end of its relation with Baghdad was the Mongol invasion either on Volga Bulgaria or Baghdad. The Mongol invasion on Volga

Bulgaria occurred during 1230's. During this period, Volga Bulgaria was forced to defend their country without assistance from Baghdad.

Despite this, the early stages of invasion by the Mongols were defeated with the help of the regions under Volga Bulgaria. In the year 620/1223 for example, the army defeated the Mongols with the help from Turkish from Qipchak descendant. At the time of the Volga Bulgaria's army was led by Bulghar's Amir, 'Abd Allah Chelbir. Volga Bulgaria's military operational excellence was continued by the next leader. Amir Ilham has become a key planner for the Bulghar. To strengthen his position, he maintained good relations with the Russian government.

In addition, Amir Bulghar has built defensive fortresses around the city of Bulgar. The discovery of three wooden forts lined 10 km by archaeologists proves the efforts undertaken by Volga Bulgaria in facing the Mongol invasion. The construction of this embankment has helped maintained Volga Bulgaria's independence at 629/1232 from being captured by the Genghiz Khan.

Recognizing the difficulties to conquer Volga Bulgaria, the Mongol army strengthens their force. The mission to capture Volga Bulgaria was given more attention at the time as Volga Bulgaria was at its zenith, after developing as an Islamic state by yielding good relations with Baghdad. Thus, in 633/1236, Volga Bulgaria once again faced the onslaught of the Mongol army. This time, the Mongols came with 300,000 warriors (Spuler, 1960).

Unfortunately, the battle takes a long time and Volga Bulgaria's military can not afford to hold the Mongols back. The year 633/1236 has been a witness to the fall of Volga Bulgaria Mongol into the army led by Batu Khan. The city's defense was destroyed they conquered Bulgar city (Spuler, 1960), thus opened up to the expansion of the Mongols into Europe (Spuler, 1960; Pares, 1955). The people Bulghar that became war hostages had been deployed to join the Mongols in their military missions.

In the meantime, the city of Baghdad began to be attacked by the Mongols in 615-619/1218-1222 in the Eastern and Southern of Persia. Starting from the control over that area, the Mongol army expanded their power to the Caucasus. However at that time, Baghdad was still safe. However, the Islamic empire under the reign of Caliph of Baghdad began to get smaller following the fall one by one into the hands of the Mongols. It started with Khwarizm in the east to the Transoxiana region, fallen into the hands of the Mongol army led by Hulagu Khan in 651/1253 (Spuler, 1960; Lewis, 1987).

Mongol's threat has weakened the defense of the Islamic empire. In 656/1257, the Mesopotamia region was really threatened by the presence of the Mongol armies. Baghdad under the reign of the Caliph Al-Mutasim finally

fell into the Mongols hands at 4 Safar 656/10 February 1258 (Spuler, 1960; Lewis, 1987). The fall of Baghdad to the Mongols has ended the relationship of Baghdad under the °Abbasiyah Caliphs with Volga Bulgaria.

The fall of Islamic Volga Bulgaria to the hands of the Mongols in early 633/1236 was ahead of Baghdad which had just ended the Islamic rule there. Looking at the excellence, opportunity and power of Volga Bulgaria, Batu Khan tried to restore the country. He has made the town of Bulgar as the government center to a cavalry known as the Golden Horde around 7/13 and 8/14 century. In fact, the city was also a center of Bulgar's Golden Horde coins production (Spuler, 1960).

While under the rule of the Mongols, Bulgars city which previously had been involved in international trade, once again risen as an important trading center connecting Europe and the East under the rule of the Golden Horde (Malik, 1994; Uyama, 1998; Kimball, 2008).

### CONCLUSION

In general, the idea to establish a relationship between Volga Bulgaria and Baghdad has been triggered by the Volga Bulgars who sees that the relationship with Baghdad is a need to address the problems faced. Thus, Volga Bulgaria has been trying to establish a relationship with the Baghdad through sending an envoy to Baghdad in 288/901, 298/911 and 308/921. Although, the first and second delegations have failed miserably, the seriousness of Volga Bulgaria in establishing relationship is very clear. The third attempt in the 308/921 finally received good response from Baghdad. The Baghdad agreed to establish a relationship with Volga Bulgaria by sending delegates in 309/922. The deployment of delegates to Volga Bulgaria in 309/922 by the caliph has led to a few impressions and consequences, effects from the relationship between Volga Bulgaria with Baghdad in the following years. The effect is seen in the form of political, economic, social and religion, thus the creation of a glorious Muslim country. The glory attracted foreign powers such as the Mongols to launch a series of attacks on the Volga Bulgaria and mastered it at 633/1236. Therefore, there is no doubt that Baghdad's relations with Volga Bulgaria was seen as a major catalyst for growth and the development of Volga Bulgaria as an Islamic country before and after the heyday.

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