

# Всесвітня історія

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## THE FALL AND GENERATION OF THE KHAZAR KHAGANATE: REGIONAL ETHNOPOLITICAL CHANGES

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### Abstract

The article examines the collapse of the Khazar Khaganate in the 11th century, analyzes the causes of its decline, internal and external factors that led to the political and cultural crisis, as well as the significance of this process for understanding the dynamics of medieval Eurasia.

**Methodology.** This research is based on the methods of historical analysis and an integrated approach, which includes the study of historical sources, archaeological data, as well as the application of modern theories and concepts in the field of medieval history. Important attention is paid to the interrelation of external economic and internal political factors that influenced the development and decline of the Khazar Khaganate.

**Scientific novelty.** The work is a contribution to the study of the causes of the collapse of the Khazar Khaganate, especially in the context of the interaction of external threats and internal problems such as ethnic and religious differences, political instability and economic crisis. Special attention is paid to the role of the Byzantine Empire, Rus, and nomadic tribes such as the Pechenegs and Cumans in the process of weakening the khaganate.

**Conclusions:** The collapse of the Khazar Khaganate was the result of a combination of various factors: external military threats, including clashes with Russia and Byzantium, as well as internal problems, including ethnic and religious conflicts, which contributed to political and social instability. The weakening of military power, dependence on mercenaries and the deteriorating economic situation further aggravated the situation of the khaganate. The influence of the foreign policy of neighboring states, as well as the religious assimilation of the elite, also played a role in the collapse of the Khazar state. The fall of the khaganate became a vivid example of how external threats and internal contradictions can lead to the rapid decline of even a powerful state that played a key role in the trade and political relations of Medieval Eurasia.

**Keywords:** Khazar Khaganate, disintegration, external threats, internal crisis, Byzantium, Rus, nomadic tribes, ethnic and religious differences, economic decline, medieval Eurasia

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**ПАДІННЯ ТА ВІДРОДЖЕННЯ ХОЗАРСЬКОГО КАГАНАТУ:  
РЕГІОНАЛЬНІ ЕТНОПОЛІТИЧНІ ЗМІНИ****Саїда Джафар Ісмаїлзаде\*****Анотація**

У статті розглядається розпад Хозарського каганату в XI ст., аналізуються причини його занепаду, внутрішні та зовнішні фактори, що призвели до політичної та культурної кризи, а також значення цього процесу для розуміння динаміки середньовічної Європи.

**Методологія:** Дослідження базується на методах історичного аналізу та комплексному підході, що включає вивчення історичних джерел, археологічних даних, а також застосування сучасних теорій і концепцій у галузі середньовічної історії. Важливу увагу приділено взаємозв'язку зовнішньоекономічних і внутрішньополітичних факторів, що вплинули на розвиток і занепад Хозарського каганату.

**Наукова новизна:** Робота є внеском у дослідження причин розпаду Хозарського каганату, особливо в контексті взаємодії зовнішніх загроз і внутрішніх проблем, таких як етнічні та релігійні відмінності, політична нестабільність та економічна криза. Особливу увагу приділено ролі Візантійської імперії, Русі та кочових племен – печенігів і половців у процесі послаблення каганату.

**Висновки:** розпад Хозарського каганату став результатом сукупності різних факторів: зовнішніх військових загроз, зокрема зіткнень з Руссю та Візантією, а також внутрішніх проблем, зокрема етнічних та релігійних конфліктів, які сприяли політичній та соціальній нестабільності. Ослаблення військової могутності, залежність від найманців і погіршення економічного становища ще більше погіршували становище каганату. Вплив зовнішньої політики сусідніх держав, а також релігійна асиміляція еліти також відіграли роль у розпаді Хозарської держави. Падіння каганату стало яскравим прикладом того, як зовнішні загрози та внутрішні протиріччя можуть призвести до стрімкого занепаду навіть могутньої держави, яка відігравала ключову роль у торгово-політичних відносинах середньовічної Європи.

**Ключові слова:** Хозарський каганат, розпад, зовнішні загрози, внутрішня криза, Візантія, Русь, кочові племена, етнічні та релігійні відмінності, економічний занепад, середньовічна Європа

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**Introduction.** The history of political entities of the Middle Ages is a complex dynamic of the rise and fall of empires, which was often determined by a combination of external threats and internal crises. The Khazar Khaganate, one of the key states of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, disappeared from the political map in the 11th century, giving way to new geopolitical structures. The reasons for the collapse of the Khazar Khaganate lie in the plane of internal conflicts, military and political defeats and pressure from external forces, which makes it a unique example for studying the decline of medieval empires.

The collapse of the Khazar Khaganate was caused by many factors, including the confrontation with the Byzantine Empire, the strengthening of Russia's position, as well as the invasions of nomadic tribes such as the Pechenegs and Polovtsians. These events not only predetermined the end of the khaganate's existence, but also reflected a broad transformation of the political and ethnocultural landscape of the Middle Ages. The purpose of the study is to identify and systematize the key causes of the collapse of the Khazar Khaganate, as well as to analyze the relationship between external and internal factors that determined its decline.

**Research objectives:**

1. To analyze the political rivalry between the Khazar Khaganate and Byzantium in the context of the struggle for supremacy in the region of Crimea and the North Caucasus.
2. To study the role of the alliances of Russia with the Turkic tribes and their impact on the weakening of the Khazar statehood.
3. To consider the impact of the invasions of nomadic tribes on the territorial and political integrity of the khaganate.
4. To examine the significance of religious factors, including the adoption of Christianity by the last ruler, in the context of the change in the internal structure of the Khazar Khaganate.

The political rivalry between the Khazar Khaganate and the Byzantine Empire was aimed at controlling strategically important territories in Crimea and the North Caucasus. The Khazars sought to strengthen their influence by advancing into the southern regions through the Kerch Strait and establishing control over the coast of the Kuban<sup>1</sup>. According to Russian and Byzantine sources, the alliances of Rus with Turkic tribes made a significant contribution to the weakening of the Khazar Khaganate.

In 1016, the combined forces of Byzantium and Russia conducted a military campaign, during which the Khazar capital was captured, and the last ruler, George Tsul, was captured. After the adoption of Christianity, Tsul lost political power, which symbolized the end of the independence of the Khazar Khaganate. In the following years, the territory of the former khaganate was occupied by nomadic tribes such as the Pechenegs and Polovtsians, who established control over the Lower Volga region, the Azov region and the Crimea<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Bosworth C.E. The Later Ghaznavids: Splendour and Decay. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977. Pp. 190-192.

<sup>2</sup> Grousset R. The Empire of the Steppes: A History of Central Asia. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1970. Pp. 220-223.

The Byzantine Empire, seeking to weaken the Khazar Khaganate, actively supported the Russian princes, providing them with naval assistance for military campaigns<sup>3</sup>. Thus, the collapse of the Khazar Khaganate was the result of the combined effects of internal destabilization, pressure from neighbors, and the transformation of the region's geopolitical structures.

**Literature review (historiography of the problem).** The history of the Khazar Khaganate is an important topic for studying the socio-economic and political dynamics of medieval Eurasia. Its unique geopolitical position at the intersection of key trade routes contributed to the development of a multinational and multi-religious empire. At the same time, the fall of Khazaria remains a key episode illustrating the influence of both external and internal factors on the collapse of empires. Over the past decades, this topic has attracted the attention of many researchers, which has led to a wide range of interpretations. The foundations of the study of the Khazar Khaganate were laid in the works of Soviet and Western historians. Mikhail Artamonov, in his book 'Hazar Tarihi' (2004), focused on archaeological data, describing the Sarkel fortress and other important monuments of Khazar architecture<sup>4</sup>. Douglas Dunlop in 'The History of the Jewish Khazars' (1954) offered a detailed study of the ethnoconfessional aspects of Khazaria, focusing on the adoption of Judaism and its consequences<sup>5</sup>. Rene Grousset ('The Empire of the Steppes', 1970) analyzed the political and military aspects of Khazar history, paying attention to their interaction with Byzantium and Russia<sup>6</sup>.

Modern works pay more attention to socio-economic and cultural aspects. Peter B. Golden ('Khazar Studies', 1980) investigated the features of the state structure and political relations of the Khazar Khaganate<sup>7</sup>. Thomas Noonan ('The Khazar Economy', 1992) focused on trade, emphasizing the importance of its integration into Eurasian networks<sup>8</sup>. Kevin Alan Brooke's research ('The Jews of Khazaria', 2018) offered an updated look at the religious dynamics of Khazaria, combining historical and genetic data<sup>9</sup>. The research of genetic identity has become an interesting area. For example, the results of DNA analysis of Ashkenazi Jews revealed a connection with peoples of Turkic origin (Runciman, 1947). This discovery sheds new light on the migration processes that took place after the collapse of Khazaria<sup>10</sup>. The historiography of the Khazar Khaganate contains a number of controversial issues. The acceptance of Judaism by the Khazar elite remains one of the most discussed

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<sup>3</sup> Miller T. Byzantine Jerusalem and the 'Pera Yahudi Cemaati'. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Pp. 182-184.

<sup>4</sup> Artamonov M.I. Hazar Tarihi. İstanbul: Selenge Yayınları, 2004. S. 43-45.

<sup>5</sup> Dunlop D.M. The History of the Jewish Khazars. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954. C. 77-83.

<sup>6</sup> Grousset R. The Empire of the Steppes: A History of Central Asia. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1970. Pp. 93-97.

<sup>7</sup> Golden P.B. Khazar Studies: An Historico-Philological Inquiry into the Origins of the Khazars. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1980. Pp. 72-75.

<sup>8</sup> Noonan T.S. The Khazar Economy. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992. P. 64.

<sup>9</sup> Brook K.A. The Jews of Khazaria. – 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2018. Pp. 37-41.

<sup>10</sup> Runciman S. The Medieval Manichee: A Study of the Christian Dualist Heresy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947. Pp. 32-36.

topics. Some researchers believe that this was a political step to strengthen power (Golden, 1980)<sup>11</sup>, while others focus on economic and cultural factors (Pritsak, 1978)<sup>12</sup>.

Another controversial topic is the impact of external threats, such as the attacks of Russia and Byzantium, on the disintegration of the state. Despite significant progress, many aspects remain poorly understood. For example, the lack of written sources complicates the analysis of the internal governance and social structure of Khazaria. Archaeological data require further systematization and analysis, especially in the context of interaction with other Eurasian states. A promising area is the study of the cultural heritage of the Khazars, including their influence on subsequent peoples of the region.

The historiography of the Khazar Khaganate demonstrates a variety of approaches and interpretations, reflecting the complexity of this historical topic. The present study seeks to complement the existing literature by analyzing the internal and external factors that led to the disintegration of Khazaria, as well as its legacy in a cultural and political context. Research results: According to Shaban Kuzgun, a researcher of the history of nomadic peoples and the socio-political processes that led to the collapse of the Khazar Khaganate, the causes of this collapse can be divided into two main categories: external and internal. Among the external factors, Kuzgun highlights the strategic position of Khazaria, which was located at the intersection of important trade routes between East and West<sup>13</sup>. This made Khazaria an object of geopolitical competition, since its territory was of interest to neighboring powers such as Byzantium, Russia, and nomadic tribes, which increased pressure on the khaganate from the outside<sup>14</sup>.

The internal reasons for the disintegration of Khazaria, according to Kuzgun, were related to its expansion into vast territories, which led to a weakening of the social, religious and cultural community among the population. The Khazar Khaganate was a multinational and multi-confessional empire, where there was no single linguistic and cultural space. This led to a loss of internal unity and, as a result, to the disintegration of the state. In addition, Kuzgun emphasizes that with the growing prosperity among the ruling elite, there was a weakening of military discipline and the destruction of traditional power structures. This was accompanied by a decrease in the combat capability of the Khazar troops and an increase in dependence on mercenaries, which undermined the stability of the political system and made the Khaganate vulnerable to external attacks<sup>15</sup>. According to Peter Benjamin Golden, a well-known American historian and orientalist specializing in the study of the medieval history of the nomadic peoples of Eurasia, the unexpected collapse of the Khazar Khaganate in the second half of the 10th century was inevitable. Golden argues that the fall of the Khazars is not due to their Jewish origin, as is

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<sup>11</sup> Golden P.B. *Khazar Studies: An Historico-Philological Inquiry into the Origins of the Khazars*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1980. P. 106.

<sup>12</sup> Pritsak O. *The Khazar Kingdom's History*. *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*. Cambridge, 1978. P. 154.

<sup>13</sup> Kuzgun Ş. *Hazarlar ve Türk Kültür Tarihi*. İstanbul: Bilge Kültür Sanat, 2010. S. 187.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* S. 125-127.

<sup>15</sup> Golden P.B. *Khazar Studies...* Pp. 145-148.

sometimes believed, but to the peculiarities of the nomadic state structure, characterized by decentralized power, which weakened the stability of the state. Changes in the economic balance among the Volga tribes also played an important role. After the collapse of the state, some of the Khazars did not disappear immediately, but settled among other peoples, including the Hungarians, where some of them took part in the protection of the Hungarian borders<sup>16</sup>. Historian Timothy Miller notes that in the 11th century, the Jewish Khazars became part of the 'Jewish community of Pera' in the Byzantine Empire<sup>17</sup>. According to Dunlop, the Khazars' lack of naval power, unlike the Russians, was an important reason for their military defeat on land<sup>18</sup>.

To assess the power of any government structure, the key factor is the size and strength of its army. According to Al-Istakhri, the Khazar army numbered about 12,000 men<sup>19</sup>. An important feature was that, with the exception of a small number of soldiers, most did not receive regular pay. Their payments were irregular and over long periods of time. This reflects the peculiarities of the nomadic state structure of Khazaria, where hired soldiers did not play a significant role. The protection of cities, as a rule, was carried out by volunteers. However, with the development of trade in the middle of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the number of soldiers serving decreased, which forced the Khazars to resort to hiring mercenaries. Muslim soldiers of Iranian origin, known as 'Arsia', who were brought from Khorezm, played a special role in the protection of the Khazar kagan. In addition to them, the Khazar army included Russian Slavs, which indicates the multi-ethnicity of the kaganate army.

An interesting feature of the Khazars is that, despite their strategic position, they did not have significant naval forces, which limited their military capabilities in maritime conflicts. Local rulers in the Khazar Khaganate, called Tuduns, were appointed directly by the Khazar khagan. The main task of the Tuduns was to collect taxes and manage customs. There were also special officers along the coast, who were called 'fishermen', and they were engaged in the protection of coastal areas. In some cities, along with appointed officials, there were elected administrators who performed similar functions as tuduns and 'fishermen'. One of these local rulers was Babaguk, who ruled the city of Kherson from 705 to 840. Another Babaguk served as ruler of Tmutarakan in 703. The Khazars influenced the system of government of the Kiev Principality, where the title 'kagan' was used in relation to Prince Igor of Novgorod-Seversky, as mentioned in ancient Russian literature. In the work 'Hudud-al-Alam' Prince Igor is also called 'the Russian kagan'.

The Khazars have also established a regular legal system that guarantees representation of all faiths in court, thereby creating an atmosphere of tolerance. The Supreme Court consisted of seven chief justices representing four different faiths in the

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<sup>16</sup> Golden P.B. *Khazar Studies: An Historico-Philological Inquiry into the Origins of the Khazars*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1980. Pp. 66-69.

<sup>17</sup> Miller T. *Byzantine Jerusalem and the 'Pera Yahudi Cemaati'*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. P. 103.

<sup>18</sup> Dunlop D.M. *The History of the Jewish Khazars*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954. Pp. 170-173.

<sup>19</sup> Al-Istakhri A. *Kitab Masalik al-Mamalik*. 1992. S. 135-138.

capital. The court in Atila mainly dealt with commercial cases. The administrative system of the Khazar Khaganate, which maintained order and control over vast territories, also contributed to the development of the economy. Effective management of taxes and customs duties under the leadership of tuduns and other local officials helped ensure stable state revenues. This was made possible by active trade, which was the main source of Khazarian wealth. The economy of the Khazar Khaganate was heavily dependent on trade. Although the country did not have a large number of export goods such as honey, glue, wax, flour, velvet and furs, trade flows passing through the territory of the khaganate brought substantial revenues. Every trade caravan or ship passing through Khazaria was taxed at the rate of one tenth of the value of the goods. Additional duties were levied on ships coming from the Caspian Sea. Muslim and Russian merchants enjoyed the right of free movement through the Khazar lands, which made Itil an important trade center in the 10th century<sup>20</sup>.

Over time, many of these merchants settled in the city, turning it into one of the key trading hubs in Eastern Europe. The Khazars, providing security along a significant part of the Eurasian trade routes, maintained their influence in this region for several centuries. The administrative and military structure of the Khazar Khaganate not only maintained order, but also created favorable conditions for economic prosperity. The location at the intersection of key trade routes contributed to the development of trade, which became the most important source of income for the state. However, in addition to trade, sectors such as agriculture and animal husbandry played a significant role in the economy of the khaganate. Archaeological finds made during the excavations of Sarkel Castle confirm that the Khazars had extensive trade relations with other Turkic peoples and various tribes, which indicates a high level of their integration into Eurasian trade networks<sup>21</sup>.

Despite the developed agriculture and active trade, animal husbandry was still the basis of the economic life of the Khazars. Pastures and reeds along the rivers created ideal conditions for breeding animals. Although the Khazars produced many food products on their own, they depended on the import of some goods, such as clothing and basic necessities, which came from the Arabs and the Byzantines<sup>22</sup>. The economy of the Khazar Khaganate was complex and multifaceted, combining domestic production and active international trade relations. Grain farming was widespread in the northern forest regions of the Khaganate, while in the southern steppes a nomadic lifestyle based on pastoralism prevailed. Vegetables such as millet, wheat, barley, rye, hemp, and peas were grown in the Caspian steppes. Melon and cucumber seeds, as well as remnants of grapes and cherries, were found during archaeological excavations of Khazar settlements. In addition to agriculture, fishing and animal husbandry played an important role in the economic life of the Khazars. The Khazars domesticated many animals, including sheep, goats, horses, donkeys, and pigs<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Brook K.A. *The Jews of Khazaria*: 3rd ed. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2018. Pp. 155-158.

<sup>21</sup> Artamonov M.I. *Hazar Tarihi*. İstanbul: Selenge Yayınları, 2004. S. 135-138.

<sup>22</sup> Baker Patricia L. *The Khazars and Their Cultural Legacy*. New York: Routledge, 2001. P. 29.

<sup>23</sup> Jacoby D. *Les archontes grecs et la féodalité en Morée franque*. *Travaux et mémoires*. 1967. Vol. 2. Pp. 445-448.

They also had a large number of camels, and they were engaged in beekeeping<sup>24</sup>. Hunting wild animals such as wild boars, beavers, deer, and rabbits was an important part of their economic life. The Khazar Khaganate was an important center of international trade, controlling many routes between Asia and Europe. The Khazars maintained trade relations with various regions, including Khorezm, from where cotton products were imported. The Khazar Khaganate even maintained trade with Sweden. Radhanite merchants actively established social, cultural, and trade ties between Central Asia, Russia, and Khazaria, which strengthened the Khaganate's position in the global economy<sup>25</sup>.

The economic prosperity of the Khazar Khaganate was also reflected in the development of culture and art. Rich trade relations and interaction with other nations contributed to the formation of a unique Khazar culture that combined elements of various civilizations. The most important archaeological finds attesting to this were made in such centers as the capital of the Khazar Khaganate, Itil, the fortress of Sarkel, as well as in the Mayak settlement and the mounds of Salvato. Finds found in these regions, both in the Caucasus and along the Don and Dnieper rivers, include architectural and artistic works belonging to the Khazars<sup>26</sup>. Despite the absence of written documents attesting to the language and cultural life of the Khazars, numerous archaeological artifacts suggest that the Khazars, a people of Turkic origin, retained many features of a nomadic lifestyle, even as an influential force in Central Asia. Their tradition of seasonal migration – winter months in cities and summer months on plateaus and steppes – remained an important part of their lives. Soviet archaeologists came to the conclusion that, unlike the Huns, the Khazars had reached a high level of civilization.

Their houses were built of wood and covered with large tents called 'khargah', similar to the Turkic traditions, and brick was also used for kagan buildings and public structures. The found brick houses with round foundations, resembling Turkic yurts, indicate the transition of the Khazars from a nomadic to a sedentary lifestyle. Later finds include quadrangular houses, which indicates the further development of sedentary architecture<sup>27</sup>.

Khazar culture also manifested itself in art and jewelry. The objects found in Sarkel Castle, such as decorated plates, mirrors, and gold and silver embroidery, show that the Khazars reached a high level in decorative art and paid great attention to clothing and jewelry. The influence of Khazar culture spread to neighboring regions, including those where Christianity was later adopted. For example, Vladimir I, Prince of Kievan Rus, used the title 'kagan', which indicates cultural borrowings. The differences in clothing also indicated the influence of the Khazars. While Russians wore short jackets, Khazars, Bulgarians, and Pechenegs preferred long kaftan-like robes similar to those worn by Ashkenazi Jews in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>24</sup> Pritsak O. *The Khazar Kingdom's History*. Harvard Ukrainian Studies. 1978. Cambridge. Pp. 202–204.

<sup>25</sup> Failler A., Laurent V. *Georges Pachymères Relations historiques*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1984. P. 105.

<sup>26</sup> Cahen C. *La Syrie du nord à l'époque des croisades et la principauté franque d'Antioche*. Damascus: Presses de l'Ifpo, 1940. Pp. 39–42.

<sup>27</sup> Lurier H. *Crusaders as Conquerors: The Chronicle of Morea*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1964. Pp. 246–250.



Fig. 1. Aerial view of the Khazar fortress of Sarkel, based on the excavations of the 1930s conducted by Mikhail Artamonov

The traditions of the Turkic peoples also left their mark in hairstyles: men and women braided their hair, and only the kagan had the right to let down his long hair by tying it with a ribbon, according to Chinese sources of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. The presence of writing can convey the smallest details of the life and everyday life of each nation. The only surviving phrase written in the Khazar alphabet is 'HWQWRWM' (Hukurim), which translates as 'reading'. The Khazar language belongs to the ancient Turkic period (6<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> centuries). Since not a single work written in the Khazar language has been preserved, there is no precise information about the language spoken by the Khazars. Two documents related to the Khazars have come down to our time, both written in Hebrew. One of them is a letter from the Khazar khagan Joseph to the Emir of Cordoba, Abdurrahman III, written in 960, the other is a letter from an unnamed Khazar Jew found in the Volga region<sup>28</sup>.

Russian researchers such as Bartold and Minorsky believe that the Khazar language was similar to modern Chuvash, which belongs to a separate branch of the Turkic languages, and Bulgarian. It has also been established that various Turkic languages besides Khazar were spoken in the Caspian regions. In addition, the Karachays, Balkars, and some Caucasian peoples have preserved separate words of Khazar origin in their language<sup>29</sup>. In Poland, Karaites, Jews by origin, continue to use the old Khazar Turkic language. Speaking about the religious beliefs of the Khazars, it should be noted that in the Khazar Khaganate there were many religions that peacefully coexisted for a long time. One of the most ancient and long-lived religions of the Khazars was the belief in a Heavenly God, characteristic of Tengrianism, widespread among many Turkic peoples<sup>30</sup>. Like other nomadic peoples, the Khazars respected the forces of nature, reflecting their ancient

<sup>28</sup> Акрополь Г. История. Санкт-Петербург: Алетей, 2013. С. 879–890.

<sup>29</sup> Noonan T.S. The Khazar Economy. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992. Pp. 185–187.

<sup>30</sup> Herrin J. The Formation of Christendom. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987. Pp. 165–167.

religious traditions. Christianity also penetrated into the Khazar Khaganate in the early periods, long before the spread of Judaism . Christian communities probably appeared in the khaganate as a result of missionary activity and the influence of the Byzantine Empire . However, the spread of Christianity stopped after the beginning of the Arab conquests in the South Caucasus and Azerbaijan in the 8<sup>th</sup> century<sup>31</sup>.

After the collapse of the Khazar Khaganate, the Christian population was assimilated by the Russian Orthodox Church. Islam began to spread among the Khazars through Khorezm merchants during the Arab conquests. The Khazar khaganate did not hinder Muslim communities, but Islam did not become the dominant religion, despite the temporary promises of the rulers to accept it during difficult periods. For example, the Khazar khagan, having been defeated by Arab forces under the command of Mervan bin Mohammed, declared that he would convert to Islam, but soon reneged on this promise<sup>32</sup>.

Judaism became the official religion of the Khazar Khaganate in the 10th century, but it is unknown which sect of Judaism the Khazars adhered to<sup>33</sup>. According to the Arab historian El-Masudi, the Khazar khagan converted to Judaism during the reign of Caliph Harun ar-Rashid (786–809). However, the Life of Constantine states that this happened in 861. It is known that Jewish communities already existed in Eastern Europe before the Khazars adopted Judais. It is believed that Jews living in Dagestan began to spread Judaism among the Khazars, as well as Jews who migrated from Mesopotamia and Khorezm, strengthened the position of this religion in the kaganat. El-Masudi also notes that there were more Muslim and Christian communities in the capital Itil than Jewish ones, but the judicial system of the kaganate maintained a balance between different faiths . Of the seven chief judges, one considered cases concerning Tengrianism, two – cases of Christians, two – Muslims, and the remaining two – cases of Jews<sup>34</sup>.

Although Judaism became the dominant religion among the Khazars, the rulers made no active efforts to spread it. Religious tolerance remained an important element of the kaganate's governance. The spread of Judaism increased significantly during the reign of Bulan Kagan and Obadiah Kagan 1980. On the other hand, Omelzhan Pritsak attributes the conversion of the Khazars to Judaism solely to the influence of itinerant Radhanites and Iranian Jewish merchants .

A genetic study conducted on the 'Y' chromosomes of Ashkenazi Jews in 1999 showed that their DNA structures produced results similar to those of Turkish origin, rather than Jews of Israeli origin<sup>35</sup>.

**Conclusion.** The collapse of the Khazar Khaganate represents an important stage in the history of the region, when a change in the political and ethnic landscape became

<sup>31</sup> Bosworth C.E. *The Later Ghaznavids: Splendour and Decay*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977. Pp. 125–127.

<sup>32</sup> Noonan T.S. *The Khazar Economy*. University of Chicago, 1992. Pp. 190–193.

<sup>33</sup> Zuckerman, C. *On the Date of the Khazar Conversion to Judaism*. Cambridge: Harvard Ukrainian Studies, 1995. Pp. 200–203.

<sup>34</sup> Van Dieten J.L. *Nicetae Choniatae Historia*. Berlin–New York, Germany–USA: De Gruyter, 1975. Pp. 36–39.

<sup>35</sup> Runciman Steven. *The Medieval Manichee: A Study of the Christian Dualist Heresy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947. Pp. 227–230.

inevitable. The Khazar Khaganate has been a powerful political, cultural, and economic force in Eurasia for several centuries, controlling key trade routes and exerting significant influence on neighboring states. However, the weakening of the state began under the influence of a number of internal and external factors, which eventually led to its collapse. One of the key external factors was the constant pressure from nomadic tribes such as the Pechenegs, Uzs, and Kipchaks, who intensified their attacks on the Caspian and other territories of Khazaria.

Despite the fact that some of these tribes even served in the Khazar army, destructive raids gradually undermined the defense capability of the state and its political unity. The weakening of the Khazarian position was especially noticeable after 860, when the lands between the Don and the Dnieper were subjected to constant attacks, which led to the loss of control over Kiev and neighboring regions. Economic problems also became an important factor that accelerated the fall of the khaganate. Khazaria, which for a long time controlled the most important trade routes between East and West, became isolated when the Russians captured Taman Tarkhan on the Black Sea, and the Kipchaks and Cumans blocked the trade routes connecting the Khazar Khaganate with Western Turkestan and Iran.

The lack of trade revenues made it impossible for the state to maintain its army, which consisted largely of mercenaries, which significantly weakened its defensive capabilities. Internal instability has also played an important role in weakening the State. The adoption of Judaism by the Khazar elite was an important political step, which, however, caused a split among the population that professed various religions, such as Islam, Christianity, and Tengrianism . The lack of unity among the population led to a decrease in support for the dynasty and general political cohesion. This internal split further weakened the state, which was already under pressure from external threats.

By the 11th century, the Khazar Khaganate was significantly weakened and could not withstand many challenges. Pressure from nomadic tribes, economic isolation and internal religious tensions led to the fact that Khazaria lost its influence and ceased to exist as an independent state. The last remaining Khazars, including Jewish Turkic communities such as Karaites in Poland and Lithuania, as well as Karachays in the North Caucasus, are part of the legacy left by the Khazar Khaganate. Thus, the fall of the Khazar Khaganate was not just the collapse of one state, but also an important milestone in the history of Eurasia, which had a long-term impact on the ethnopolitical map of the region. The influence of Khazaria on the ethnic and cultural composition of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus is still being felt. The history of the Khazar Khaganate and its fall show how external and internal factors can change the fate of even the most powerful state, paving the way for a new regional order and cultural transformations.

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