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## History of the Savirs / Suvars: Evidence from Archaeology

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**Abstract.** *Introduction.* The paper examines some archaeological evidence for a line of continuity between the Savirs (an ethnic group that had inhabited the Caucasus up to the mid-1<sup>st</sup> millennium CE), the Suvars (who were part of the northward migration of the Bulgar tribal federation to the middle reaches of the Volga later in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium CE), and the present-day Chuvash people (first attested under that name in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century). *Goals.* The article aims to shed light on the history of ancestors of the Chuvash. *Materials.* Pottery and other artefacts support the link postulated to exist between the mentioned ethnic groups from different periods in history, while other archaeological discoveries indicate what connected them to and what distinguished them from their neighbors, suggest how they lived, and show the persistence of certain traditions and practices up to date. *Results.* Excavations of archaeologists from Makhachkala reject the version of the mid-fifth-century migration of Savirs from the region of Derbent towards southeastern Ciscaucasia allegedly because of the Pseudo-Avars that had arrived from Siberia. In fact, such movement resulted from the offensive of Sassanid Iran. The paper also reviews burial grounds located in Kizilyurtovsky District of Dagestan. The analysis of archaeological evidence confirms there is a continuity of black-and-gray pottery from the North Caucasus and Volga Bulgaria.

**Keywords:** Savirs/Suvars, Chuvash, Caucasus, Middle Volga Region, archaeological excavations

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## История савиров / суваров по археологическим сведениям

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**Аннотация.** *Введение.* В статье рассматриваются археологические свидетельства преемственности между савирами (этнической группой, обитавшей на Кавказе с древнейших времен до 737 г.), суvarами (мигрировавшими сначала с Кавказа на Волго-Донское междуречье, а затем на Среднее Поволжье) и современным чувашским народом (впервые зафиксированным под этим именем в начале XVI в.). *Цель* исследования — осветить историю исторических предков чувашей. Археологические источники и изыскания в этом направлении играют одно из ключевых мест. *Материалы.* С 2014 г. в низовьях р. Рубас (Дербентский район Дагестана) проводятся интенсивные раскопки. На Кавказе нас больше всего интересуют могильники. Неустойчивая ориентировка здешних погребений свидетельствует об этнической неоднородности населения Присулакской низменности эпохи раннего Средневековья. Керамика и другие артефакты подтверждают исторические факты, постулируемые как существующую преемственность между этническими группами в разные периоды истории, другие археологические открытия указывают на то, что их связывало и что отличало от соседей, показывают сохранение определенных традиций и практик вплоть до наших дней. *Результаты.* Раскопки археологов из Махачкалы отвергают версию о перемещении савиров в середине V в. из Дербентского региона в Юго-Восточное Предкавказье якобы из-за псевдоаваров, мигрировавших из Сибири. По сути, такое движение продиктовано наступлением Сасанидского Ирана. Нас также интересовали могильники в Кизилюртском районе Дагестана. Анализ полевых исследований археологов доказывают преемственность черно-серой керамики Северного Кавказа и Волжской Булгарии.

**Ключевые слова:** савиры/сувары, чуваша, Кавказ, Среднее Поволжье, археологические раскопки

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### Introduction

The present work is a continuation of the author's research into the history of ancestors of the present-day Chuvash people — the Savirs/Suvars [Salmin 2014]. Archaeological sources and studies play one of the key roles in this sphere. The paper analyses materials and studies spanning a period from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries CE and a geographical area from the Caucasus to the Middle Volga. The article focuses on the Savirs'/Suvars' Dagestan and

Middle Volga periods. Moreover, the Middle Volga (Volga Bulgaria) period has a precise watershed date between its left- and right-bank stages. That is the year 922 when the Suvars left the main territory of Bulgaria, crossed over to the right bank of the river, and founded the settlement at Tigashevo.

### The Precaucasus

The ancient communities of the Precaucasus appeared as a result of migration of pop-

ulations from the south. Archaeologists point, for example, to the importance of the regions of northern Mesopotamia, eastern Anatolia and Syria when seeking to resolve questions relating to the emergence of the Maikop culture in the Precaucasus. Radiocarbon studies of the Maikop-Novosvobodnaya culture have shown a connection in the time of the Uruk period. In particular, members of the Maikop-Novosvobodnaya culture preserved amongst themselves the traditions of producing wheel-made, sealed ceramic wares strongly reminiscent of the pottery from the Arslantepe VII site in eastern Anatolia, when they inhabited the valleys of the Rivers Kuban and Terek and their tributaries. One of the reasons for the appearance of the bearers of what would become the Maikop culture was the emergence of favourable climatic conditions for shallow tilling of the soil and keeping domestic animals in those river basins. The settlement on the Terek known as Galayugaevskoe 3 has been dated to 3950–3650 BCE, and so it is possible to postulate the very early appearance of bearers of the Uruk ceramic-making traditions on the territory of present-day South Ossetia and in the central Precaucasus, including the upper Kuban basin. Archaeologists find it difficult to determine how many migration waves there were from the south into the Precaucasus or, most importantly, how they were organized. The archaeological materials do, however, make it possible to speak of similarities in the details of objects and ornamentation patterns. Highly indicative in this regard, for example, are the bowls with a rim decorated on the inner side, which are localized to the Kuban basin. The same sort of bowls are recorded in eastern Anatolia and northern Syria in the Middle Uruk period [Korennevsky 2014: 68–69].

### The Caucasus

In 2014, excavations were carried out in the lower reaches of the River Rubas (Derbentsky District of Dagestan) (photo 1). The coincidence of the chronology of the architectural object uncovered (mid-5<sup>th</sup> c. CE) with the final stage in the existence of the Palasa-Syrt settlement (6<sup>th</sup> c. CE), the abrupt change in appearance dated to the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century CE, and also the *terminus ante quem* for the burial site (mid-5<sup>th</sup> c. CE) point to Sassanid Iran's penetration into the region and consolidation of its presence there — driving the tribes that had inhabited the area outside of the incomers'

sphere of influence, to the north of the Derbent Passage [Gmyrya et al. 2015: 165–170]. The significance of this discovery by Dagestani archaeologists is difficult to overestimate, as here is why.

Historical sources tell us that significant events took place in this region in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. In 445, Attila forcibly ousted his own brother Bleda, who had commanded the eastern Hunno-Savirs, and seized power for himself. In 453, Attila died, which opened up prospects for the Savirs. Around the year 463, the Savirs living on the western shore of the Caspian Sea fell upon the lands of the neighbouring tribes (Saragurs, Oghurs and Onogurs), supposedly driven by an invasion of the Avars. The Saragurs, as is known, in their turn attacked the Akatzirs. Soon the Savirs forced the Onogurs (Bulgars) to abandon their lands altogether and move to the west of Ciscaucasia. However, the Savirs left the Derbent region in the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century CE not on account of the Avars, but primarily due to the expansion of Sassanid Iran. At that time, the Savirs gained complete control of southeastern Ciscaucasia. So, the archaeological discovery made in 2014 brings final clarity regarding the wholesale relocations of tribes across the North Caucasus in the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century CE.

A secondary burial at the Uch-Tepe tumulus in Azerbaijan is associated with the northern tribes' armed ingressions into Transcaucasia. The finds made there include a Byzantine gold coin of Justin I (518–527). The grave goods (a sword with a single-edged blade, a gold belt set and gold ring with a Pahlavi inscription) make it possible to date the interment to the late 6<sup>th</sup> – early 7<sup>th</sup> century CE [Fedorov, Fedorov 1978: 61, 64]. That was the heyday of the magnificent Varachan and the 'Kingdom of the Huns' (i. e., Savirs) in general.

In the Caucasus, we are primarily interested in burial sites, such as that in Verkhny Chiryurt (Kizilyurtovsky District, Dagestan). The inconsistent orientation of the graves there testifies to the ethnic diversity of the Sulak basin lowlands in the early Middle Ages. That is also reflected in the craniological material. Taking into account the evidence of written sources, it is possible to assume that the population that left this site behind included a certain portion with Savir characteristics. Furthermore, in-ground burials occupy a particular section.





*Photo 1.* Derbent Archaeological Expedition by the Institute of History, Archeology and Ethnography affiliated to Dagestan Scientific Center (RAS). 2013. Internet. A publicly available photo

Archaeological material makes it possible to assess the Savirs' assimilation with the aboriginal peoples of the Caucasus: 'An interesting fact is the presence in settlements in northern Dagestan of grey-and-black earthenware similar to that which is known in significant amounts in the Bulgar towns of the Middle Volga basin, both on the left bank of the Volga and on the right bank, including the territory of Chuvashia' [Smirnov 1973: 133]. Such vessels are found on the Middle Volga only from the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE onwards, i.e. after the emergence of the state of Volga Bulgaria.

#### **Left Bank of the Middle Volga Basin**

Upon arriving in the Middle Volga basin, the Suvars founded a settlement that bore their name.

In Bilyar and Suvar — the first urban centres of Volga-Kama Bulgaria — streams, watercourses and seasonal lakes were incorporated into the spatial planning structure and were a component part of the defensive systems. A similar approach can be observed in the layout of Pliska, the capital of Danube Bulgaria. Besides ramparts, the capital Bilyar was protected by fortresses, of which the Gorinskoye I and Svyatoi Kliuch sites have survived, the

city of Bulgar — by a fortress on its northern side (Kryvel site), Dzhuketau — by fortresses on the south and west (Belogor and Kubasy sites), Suvar — by a fortress to the east (Yakimovo-Strelka site) and others [Nadyrova 2012: 40–41, 46].

Suvar was one of the largest settlements in Volga-Kama Bulgaria. It is traditionally held that the city was founded by the Suvars, who together with the Bulgars and other tribes belonged to the Khazar Khaganate. In the late 9<sup>th</sup> – early 10<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, the period when the state was being formed in the Volga-Kama region, the Suvars were part of the Bulgar confederation of tribes. They founded the city that became the political and administrative centre of their own principality. The archaeological site has a roughly circular ground plan with a circumference of around 4.5 kilometres. (Suvar was therefore close in size to the inner city of Bilyar, which had a perimeter of ca. 4.86 kilometres). The diameter of the site averages 1.43 kilometres. The area of the ancient city within the fortifications was 64 hectares, or over 90 hectares together with the fortifications. On the northwest, southwest and south, the place was shielded by two lines of defences made up of ramparts and ditches. On the southeast and

east, the protection system was strengthened by a third line running at a distance of 40–50 metres from the first and second ones. The outer ditch originally had a depth of five metres. The fortifications system also incorporated natural gullies. On the north, along the left bank of the River Utka, hardly anything of the defensive structures has survived. Traces of an octagonal wooden tower three metres wide have been identified in the area by the river, as well as a square  $12 \times 12$  metre tower, also wooden, in the northeastern corner of the city site. In the southern part of the site, there were fortifications with log cribs within the embankment of the original inner rampart that was up to two metres high. The cribs ( $4 \times 5$  metres) were placed tight up against one another and filled with packed down clay and broken brick. There were towers averaging five metres in width all along the fortress walls. In front of the entrance towers, bridges ran across the ditch, the slopes of which were reinforced with wooden rails laid horizontally, while the bottom held upright stakes with sharpened ends. It has not been established whether the city had a fortified citadel within it. The River Utka ran along the north-western side of the city and a lesser watercourse 35 metres wide along the west. Beyond the outer walls, there were suburbs adjoining the city, one of which extended some four kilometres to the east [Nadyrova 2012: 56].

Archaeologists have uncovered the remains of dwelling houses, communal bathhouses and defensive installations with distinctive structural features. In the northern and western parts of the site, the remains of dwellings and utility buildings have been uncovered. The houses were of two types — pisé-walled or built of log cribs with cellars. They were heated by means of stoves with either a vaulted or cylindrical shape. Placed around the houses were granaries and storage cellars of various kinds. In the centre of the site, the remains of an imposing brick building have been excavated at the level of the foundations and lowest storey with a floor and underfloor heating system. It was constructed in the late 10<sup>th</sup> – early 11<sup>th</sup> century CE and functioned throughout the lifetime of the city. Some researchers consider it be a type of palace, others reckon it is a bathhouse. Virtually in the centre of the city, as in Bilyar, there were iron-working forges [Nadyrova 2012: 57].

The most imposing buildings in the cities of Volga-Kama Bulgaria had glazed windows.

Besides Bilyar, pieces of window glass have been found at the Suvar, Valynskoe, and Krasnosyundukovskoe I sites. They are analogous to the panes found in buildings in the Middle East, Central Asia and Transcaucasia. Window glass was produced in the cities of Bulgaria, as is shown by the workshops with furnaces and the vestiges of artisanal glassmaking found at the Bilyar site [Nadyrova 2012: 86f].

The ‘Suvar’ toponym can be associated with archaeological artefacts of the Suvaz clan: for the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE that means the area south of Bulgar, where the Suvar site is, as Alfred Khalikov and Yevgeny Kazakov wrote. It is possible that they also include artefacts from the late 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries CE on the right bank of the Volga in the area of Ulyanovsk – the Avtozavodskoi burial ground in that city, the 1<sup>st</sup> Bolshie Tarkhany site in Tetyushsky District of Tatarstan, as well as a complex of sites by the village of Undory with finds from the early Bulgar period, secondary burials at the Kaibely site, and isolated finds made on the headland within the Volga’s Samara Bend (Samarskaya Luka). In the 9<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> centuries CE (and possibly later) this clan was probably localized in the Ulyanovsk part of the Volga basin, while in the 10<sup>th</sup> century some part of it moved to the basin of the River Sviyaga [Rudenko 2015: 185].

Fayaz Khuzin is not entirely correct in his assertion that ‘classic sites whose time of origin can be in no doubt are the Bolgar, Suvar and Bilyar city sites, where the pre-Mongol strata contain almost identical, chronologically indistinguishable materials’. An analysis of that kind has still not been performed, and, considering the capabilities of archaeology, their time of origin has not in the least been definitively confirmed, even despite the evidence from written sources [Rudenko 2007: 13].

### Right Bank of the Middle Volga

Archaeologists confirm that the Suvars established themselves on the right bank of the Volga in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century CE. On the territory of the present-day Chuvash Republic, Suvar settlements appeared on the chernozem lands along the Rivers Bula, Ulema and Kubnya. Sites of ancient habitation have been discovered near Bolshiye Yalchiki, Baideryakovo, Arabuzi, Novoye Akhperdino, Starye Toisi, Russkiye Norvashi, Yanashevo and other places. Finds include pottery shards, spindle whorls, the bones of domesticated animals and



other cultural remains [Kakhovsky, Smirnov 1972b: 116].

Of particular interest is the Tigashevo archaeological site located on the right bank of the Bula. In just three years, an area of almost 6,000 square metres was excavated there. It has been determined that the history of the site can be divided into four periods:

1. A settlement of log-built dwellings.
2. Construction of the first sanctuary (German Fedorov-Davydov, generalizing, termed it Bulgar, but it is clearly Suvar) surrounded by a ditch (but no ramparts).
3. Construction of a settlement with a strong set of defences. A second sanctuary is built containing a wooden figure of a deity within.
4. The internal part of the site is built up with dwellings and buildings for the practice of crafts. The second sanctuary is destroyed. The living area of the settlement is expanded at the expense of the destruction of the inner ring of defences [Fedorov-Davydov 1962: 49–89].

The thickness of the Bronze Age site averages 0.6–0.7 metres (three 20-centimetre layers). Fedorov-Davydov dated it to the first half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE. Later, the Suvary constructed a mighty stronghold on the site of the destroyed sanctuary. The Tigashevo site was safeguarded by a complex arrangement of fortifications. Three lines of ramparts and ditches shielded it on the east, south and southwest. On the north and northwest, the settlement was protected by the river and impassable marshland. A drawbridge connected it with the outside world. Attackers who broke through the first gateway in the outer ring of fortifications would find themselves in the area between the first and second ramparts. That would cause them to turn and deploy their forces, exposing their flanks to the defenders of the fortress. If the attackers got through the second line, they would likewise enter the enclosed space between the second and third ramparts. The enemy's strength would diminish considerably at each stage. The head of the excavations believed that at this time the stronghold was functioning as a feudal castle. It had been built on the site of an old sanctuary. Within it, alongside that old *Kiremet*, a new place of worship was created. The figure of a deity in the form of a pillar stood inside a rectangular enclosure, in the middle, opposite the entrance. Only the lower part of that pillar survived, dug

deep into the ground. The damp clay soil preserved the wood well. The lower part had been worked with an axe. The pillar had a diameter of 65 centimetres at the bottom and 50 at the top. The surviving fragment is 1.26 metres high. The bones of a horse have been found in a pit on the outer side of the fence, near its eastern corner. The dismembered skeleton of a dog was unearthed in the same place. Two more canine skeletons were discovered on the settlement's northern rampart. With time, the second sanctuary enlarged, and its inner territory was built over. There was a heating stove here. The positioning of the stove in the corner of a house and the presence of wooden beams beneath it is evidence of parallels with the traditional arrangement of a Chuvash peasant house. The floor area of the dwelling, including the stove, is 45 square metres. The cellar of another house was found alongside. Remnants of bronze and copper clinker, as well as bronze nails unearthed there indicate that this was the home and workplace of a smith and bronze-founder.

A large amount of broken pottery has been recovered from the Tigashevo site — over 19,000 separate shards. The percentage of hand-moulded ceramics among the fragments is in accordance with the usual proportion for the 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. Also typical for that period is the high percentage of brown pottery. The handle of a jug made of three twisted strands has very close analogies in artefacts from the first half of the first millennium CE from the lower Don basin, including from late strata at Tanais. Other finds include arrows, clasps, an axe, a fired brick and slate whorls. The whole site generally dates from the 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> centuries CE.

The Tigashevo site is rich in remnants of craft and agricultural activities, weapons, household and cultic objects. A craftsman would have bought metal in ingots. Examples of these with pieces already cut off have been found during the excavation of a workshop. Bronze and copper scrap would be remelted. A bronze ladle that had been used to pour out molten metal has survived. A scales pointer was found in the workshop, which is indicative of the craftsman's connection with the market. There are objects (cut pieces of bone, slabs of bone bearing a twisted pattern) that speak of a bone-carving craft. The slate whorls testify to weaving. A coulter gives an idea about agriculture. Other finds include broken pieces of a

scythe, a quern with a smooth working surface, a fishing hook and weight. A great rarity among the archaeological material — an 11<sup>th</sup>-century saw — testifies to the high standard of wood-working. Weaponry is represented by iron arrowheads and fragments of a battle-axe.

On the whole, the Tigashevo site is a relic of pre-Islamic religion and nascent feudalism in Volga Bulgaria. Fedorov-Davydov came to the conclusion that ‘the Tigashevo sanctuary was the religious centre for the tribe or group of tribes that relocated to the area in the south of the present-day Chuvash ASSR in the 10<sup>th</sup> century’ [Fedorov-Davydov 1962: 85]. The move to the River Bula was apparently neither slow nor gradual. It is possible to assume that it involved the transfer of large numbers of people in a brief span of time. And that it was connected with the relocation of the tribal place of worship.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the site near Tigashevo was venerated as a *kiremetishche*, a place for public offerings and prayers. Excavations turned up a dozen or more coins of the pre-Islamic period — offerings to the deity of the locality. The land occupied by the sanctuary was not ploughed. ‘In the southern part of the outer rampart an opening can be seen that, so inhabitants of the village of Tigashevo report, was made relatively recently. They used to drive livestock through that gap... After that ceremony, it was believed that the livestock was protected from illnesses and murrain’ [Fedorov-Davydov 1962: 89]. In 1995, the site was included in the federal list of monuments protected by the state. It should, however, be noted that archaeological excavations are not being conducted in the south of the Chuvash Republic. The early 10<sup>th</sup>-century sites there still await their turn. Among other things, there is a pressing need for further work at Tigashevo.

The Khulash settlement site, dated to the 10<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, is located three kilometres from the village of Koshki-Novotimbayevo in Tetyushsky District of Tatarstan. Its total area, with the outskirts, amounts to 40 hectares. It appeared in the year 922, at the same time as the Tigashevo site, as a Suvar stronghold. It was the residence of local rulers with a fortified citadel and a trading quarter. The fortress itself had an irregular quadrilateral shape, with the north side measuring 230 metres, the east — 150 m., the south — around 300 m., and the west — 100 m. The level terrain and rich *cher-*

*nozem* soil favoured the population’s agricultural activities [Kakhovsky, Smirnov 1972a].

A synthesis of the indigenous cultures and the Bulgar and Suvar cultures brought from the south Russian steppes led to the formation of the Bulgar archaeological culture in the Middle Volga throughout the 10<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. The Suvar heritage accounts for a significant portion of it. The most typical material among the archaeological finds is pottery (jugs, pots and bowls). The creations of smiths and jewelers (locks, agricultural tools, weapons and personal adornments) also figure largely among the finds. In-ground burials of little depth are oriented in a west-east direction. They have yielded a large amount of grave goods: personal adornments, weapons, horse tack, vessels. In the burial grounds, wooden posts have been recorded at the head end of graves — the *yupa* that remain a feature of Chuvash cemeteries to this day.

In 2010, two settlements by the village of Bolshie Klyuchishi in Ulyanovsk Oblast were investigated. An analysis of the ceramic material made it possible to attribute it to the Srubnaya or Timber-Grave culture and date it to the 16<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE. Later, in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, a different archaeological culture existed in the location, as is indicated by two pottery fragments. Participants in the excavations assign them to the group of Bulgar ceramics [Vorob’yeva, Fedulov 2016: 235, 238, 245]. History informs us, however, that the southern parts of the present-day Chuvash Republic and northern parts of Ulyanovsk Oblast were occupied by the Suvary. This pottery displays such characteristics as sanding, roughness and a ringing tone when shards are tapped.

Excavations of a settlement site and burial ground near the village of Bolshaya Tayaba in Yalchiksky District of the Chuvash Republic made it possible to date the stratum to the late 12<sup>th</sup> – early 13<sup>th</sup> century CE. The pottery (with the exception of the red ceramics) and the slate whorls found there usually occur in pre-Mongol cultural layers, while in the Golden Horde period the production of whorls from pink slate ceased [Smirnov 1950: 134f].

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, stone grave markers with Arabic script epitaphs emerged. Burial grounds in the basin of the River Cheremshan also stand out from the general run in Volga Bulgaria. While such sites in other areas are marked by uniformity in the burial rites, the

Cheremshan ones are not. Presumably this is due to vestiges of pre-Islamic Suvar practices.

In general, the identification of a separate 'Ancient Chuvash' (or 'Bulgaro-Chuvash') group of pottery is an urgent task, as the formation of the Chuvash as a people was occurring at just this time, the late Middle Ages (the first mention dates from 1508). The ethnogenetic processes should find reflection in the archaeological material [Mikhailov, Berezina, Myasnikov 2015: 36].

Naturally, as time passes, less and less material evidence remains, but new archaeological finds make it possible to fill that gap. For example, the local Tatars attribute old cemeteries in Sviyazhsky District to the Chuvash. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, water began washing away the soil near the village of Tatarskie Naratly, resulting in the discovery of many iron artefacts there (a tool for making bast shoes, a small knife and so on) [Akhmerov 1998: 216]. It is a known fact, however, that Tatars do not put objects in graves. Cemeteries that yield such items ought therefore to be acknowledged as belonging to the Chuvash.

### Conclusion

The history of the ancestors of the Chuvash people, the Savirs/Suvars, can be examined in

three stages in terms of time and location. The first is the period in the Caucasus. The second is focused on the left bank of the Middle Volga, while the third encompasses life on the right bank. There is also the Saltovo-Mayaki period that lasted around a century and accounts for the time of the migration from the Caucasus to the Volga basin.

Excavations performed by archaeologists from Makhachkala favour a rejection of the version that has the Savirs moving in the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century CE from the region of Derbent to southeastern Ciscaucasia supposedly due to an onslaught by the Pseudo-Avars from Siberia. In point of fact, that relocation was prompted by the encroachment of Sassanid Iran. We are also interested in burial grounds in Kizilyurtovsky District of Dagestan, especially the in-ground interments. A line of succession can be observed in the black-and-grey clay pottery of the northern Caucasus and Volga Bulgaria.

The Suvars founded a stronghold named Suvar on the left bank of the Middle Volga, but in the year 922 differences over religion with the ruler of the Volga Bulgars made them move to the right bank and establish new settlements. These are in the southern districts of the present-day Chuvash Republic and northern districts of Ulyanovsk Oblast.

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