

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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THE PECHENECS – Trade

OVERVIEW

The economy of the Pechenegs was based on semi-nomadic pastoralism on the vast extents of the Black Sea steppe, and raiding on trade routes.

The Pechenegs also conducted active trade with the Rus' and other neighboring peoples. The Pechenegs raided Rus' territories and attacked Rus' traders traveling from the north to the south along the rivers in Rus' territory to reach Constantinople. The Rus' bought livestock such as horses, sheep and cattle from the Pechenegs that were unavailable or difficult to obtain in their own territories.

Peace with the Pechenegs was essential for the Rus' to conduct almost any activity, including military campaigns, beyond their borders. Without the Pechenegs' permission they could neither travel to Constantinople, nor conduct their trade.

TRADE

B- PECHENECS: An important part of the economy of the Pechenegs involved raiding on the trade routes of the Rus' extending from the Varangians to the Byzantines. The Pechenegs attacked traders of the Rus' traveling down rivers to transport their goods to Constantinople.

According to Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, the Pechenegs established diplomatic and trade relations with the Byzantines and the Rus', and conducted active commerce through the Crimean city of Cherson. The *De administrando imperio* records that the Rus' purchased livestock such as horned cattle, sheep, and horses from the Pechenegs because such animals could not be found in their own lands.

Porphyrogenitus also mentioned the exchange of goods between the inhabitants of Byzantine Cherson with the Pechenegs. The Pechenegs exchanged wax, honey, slaves and furs with the Chersonites, in return they received luxury goods such as gold, silk, salt, wines and salt.

If the Rus' and Byzantines were not friendly with the Pechenegs, they launched raids against Cherson and Rus' territories and ravaged them. Around 950 Porphyrogenitus related that as Rus' traders on the Dniepr occupied themselves with loading and unloading of various goods and slaves on their boats, the Pechenegs would wait on the high banks of the river for an opportune moment to attack.

Service as mercenaries in Rus' armies was another economic interaction between the Pechenegs and the Rus'.

The Pechenegs could control the Rus' access to Constantinople and the Byzantine Empire by blocking the rivers. This forced the Rus' to transport their boats overland around these barriers. This portage made the Rus' vulnerable to attacks by the Pechenegs.

The Pechenegs, besides trading with the Byzantines and Rus', also sold their horses and sheep to other sedentary neighbors such as the Middle East, Asia Minor, the southern Caucasus, and Khwarazm.

During a period when the Khazar state had been temporarily weakened, the Pechenegs took advantage of this opportunity to increase their wealth by plundering traders, and their activities on the Volga trade route increased. However, when the Pechenegs were driven out of these lands and away from the trade routes

in 1036 by the Oghuz, new sources of income were found. The main sources of Pecheneg wealth became payment by the Byzantines for Pecheneg military service, and ransoming captives taken by the Pechenegs.

Discussion/Questions

1. What were the sources of Pecheneg wealth in the Black Sea steppe, and why did they change when the Oghuz drove the Pechenegs westward?

Readings

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