

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
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# THE CUMANS (KIMAK, KIPCHAK) – SCRIPT

## OVERVIEW

The Cumans-Kipchaks were Turkic nomadic peoples who were part of the Kimak tribal union. According to the Russian Turcologist Nikolay Aleksandrovich Baskakov the Quman's (Polovtsy) language "belonged to the Kipchak-Polovets sub-category of the Kipchak branch of Turkish".

The first appearance of the term Kipchak as an ethnonym was found in a runic stone inscription that belong to the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

## SCRIPT

The Kimak were literate, using the Old Turkic script. This argument was supported by an Arab writer from the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Abu Dulaf, who stated that he personally travelled to the Kimak tribe and witnessed that "They had reed pens which they wrote with". The Persian writer Ibn al-Fakikh also wrote about the Kimaks and noted their use of writing.

Archeologists have found bronze mirrors with Old Turkic inscriptions near Urdzhar in the Tarbagatai mountains, and in the Irtysh region from 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries.

A buckle found with runic script from a Cuman grave indicated that the Cumans had an alphabet and used the Turkic runic script. However, some historians claim that the signs on the buckle were ornamental rather than writing.



The Codex Cumanicus is the only document written in Latin by Italian merchants and German missionaries. It has a Latin–Persian–Cuman glossary, grammar remarks on the Cuman language and Cuman riddles.

## Discussion/Questions

1- Can we theorize why there are so few examples of Cuman writing? How can we relate this to other contemporary Turkic groups?

## Readings

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