

# THE PECHENECS – Language

## OVERVIEW

There are no surviving written documents from the Pechenegs. However, the *De Administrando Imperio* mentions many names of the Pecheneg tribes and titles of the people, which has provided some information on the language of the Pechenegs.

Some historians claim that the Pechenegs who were succeeded by the Cumans spoke a Northwestern Kipchak language similar to that of the Cumans.

## LANGUAGE



Because the Pechenegs did not have any written documents, the only available and information about their past an language materials for the Pechenegs are proper names, toponyms and ethnonyms that has been obtained through the accounts of foreign Arab, Byzantine, Rus' and European historians and travelers.

Some additional information on the culture and language of the Pechenegs was provided in the *Compendium of the Turkic Dialects*, written by Mahmud al-Kāshgarī. He stated that the Pechenegs were a Turkic nation settled around the Rum. The Ilkhanate historian Rashid ad-Din also pointed out that the Pechenegs belonged to the Oghuz tribal association.

On the other hand, Paroń stated that the Pechenegs spoke a Turkic language close to Old Bulgarian. According to Golden, Németh and Ligeti claimed that the Pechenegs were the speakers of Common Turkic (Kipchak variation) that originated in the East. In addition, it has been claimed that like the Volga Bulgars and Khazars, the Pechenegs used a variant of the Turk runic script. and there have been some artifacts found in their territory with runic inscriptions.

There are other factors that make it difficult to determine the Pecheneg language. The Pecheneg realm was not homogenous ethnically, rather, it was a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual society. Another factor is the fact that the Pechenegs never converted en masse to one of the major world religions, meaning that none of the languages associated with these religions (Arabic, Greek, Latin etc.) were adopted by the ruling classes.

In Byzantine Empire, there were people who were said to know the Pecheneg language. For example, the Emperor John Comnenos sent ambassadors in 1123 to the Pechenegs. Based on information in Anna Comnena's *Alexiad*, some historians have claimed that the word *Sycthians* used by Comnena in the *Alexiad* was used for the Pechenegs (Patzinaks), and that the Pechenegs and Cumans (Comans) could freely understand each other, proving that they had some connection through their language.

## Discussion/Questions

1. What makes it difficult for scholars to make definitive statements about the Pecheneg language?

## Reading

1- Pritsak, O., "The Pečenegs, A Case of Social and Economic Transformation, Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi, 1975.

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- 3- Васильевский, В.Г.и Голубовский П.В., *Печенеги*, Ломоносов, 2013.
- 4- Menges, K.H., "Etymological Notes on Some Păčänäg Names", *Byzantion* , 1944-1945, Vol. 17, 1944-1945, pp. 256-280
- 5- Comnena, A., *The Alexiad*, Translated by E. R. A. Sewter, Penguin Books, 2003.
- 6- Golden, P., *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples Ethnogenesis and State-Formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East*, Otto Harrassowitz, 1992.