

# PECHENECS (PATZINAKS) 860-1122 – Introduction

## OVERVIEW



In the late 8th century new nomadic tribes began to move westwards under pressure from the Turkic Karluks and Oghuz. The Pechenegs were expelled from their homeland by the Oghuz and were forced to migrate to the west into the region between the Ural and the Volga rivers. They lived in the forested steppes of western Siberia and were related to the Kipchaks and Cumans who spoke a similar Turkic language.

The original homeland of the Pechenegs is not known. Some sources claim that their homeland was located to the east of the Aral Sea and along the lower course of the Syr Darya River.

The Pechenegs were a loose tribal confederation who carried out raids on their neighbors, especially against the Khazars, Rus' and Byzantines.

## RELATIONS WITH OTHERS

From the 10th century, the position of the Pechenegs was determined by their relations with their surrounding neighbors. The Pechenegs were pushed westwards and took over the Pontic steppe between the Don and Danube due to their hostile relations with the Rus'. Some of the remaining groups served as the auxiliary forces of Kievan Rus', and some who migrated into Byzantine territory provided military service for the Byzantines in their expeditions against the Rus'.

The first written information on the Pechenegs, dated to the latter half of the 8th century, was obtained from a diplomatic report written by five agents of the 'King of the Uyghurs' who mentioned the peoples of the North and called them the *Be-ča-nag* (Pecheneg) tribe who were warring with the *Hor* (Uyghurs).

Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Muhammad al-Farisi al-Istakhri was a 10th-century Iranian geographer who mentioned in his *Kitab Masalik al-Mamalik* a tribe of the Turks that were driven from their homeland and migrated to an area between the Khazars and Rum. They were called *Bajanak*.

There is no information on when the Pechenegs moved from Asia to Europe. Some scholars have connected the Pechenegs originally with the area of *Kang*, the middle Syr Darya and adjoining territories, and some researchers have located them north of Lake Balkhash or in the Upper Irtysh region.

During the time when there was an ongoing struggle between Byzantium, the Arabs and Khazaria, the Pechenegs moved from Central Asia to the west. By 870, the Pechenegs occupied areas east of the River Volga and north of the Caspian and the Aral Seas (the steppes of today's southern Russia and Ukraine).



When the Oghuz tribes moved into the Syr Darya region in the 8th century, the Pechenegs began to struggle with the Central and Inner Asian nomads who were moving into this region.

### Pecheneg and Khazar Relations



In the early of the 9th century, the Oghuz were pushed from the east by the Kimeks and Cumans.

In the region near the mouth of the Volga, the territory of the Pechenegs bordered the Khazar Khanate, and the Khazars regularly attacked the Pechenegs to obtain slaves.

Around the 830s, the Khazars and Oghuz forced the Pechenegs to migrate to the Volga-Ural region.

The Pechenegs were constantly engaged in wars with their neighbors, attacking the southern borders of Kievan Rus', fighting with the Byzantine Empire and Khazaria. In 889, the Khazars made an alliance with the Oghuz, defeated the Pechenegs and forced the Pechenegs to migrate from the Volga-Ural and Syr-Darya steppes into the Pontic steppes, driving the Magyars from their homelands. They held this area until the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

### Pecheneg and Rus' Relations

Due to their location the Pechenegs began to control not only the East-West trade, but by holding the North-South water route, they blocked the Rus' from reaching to the Black Sea. Pechenegs warriors ambushed the traders using this route to obtain booty.

The relations of the Pechenegs with Rus' were not always hostile. The Pechenegs were hired by the Rus' princes to provide light cavalry for their campaigns. In 941, Igor of Kiev made an alliance with the Pechenegs in his campaign on Byzantium. In 944, they launched an attack to invade Byzantine lands.

Information regarding the relations, both hostile and friendly, between the Rus' and the Pechenegs can also be found in Constantine Porphyrogenitus' work *De Administrando Imperio* written in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. In it he describes the Pechenegs as neighbors of the Russians who launched destructive raids against Rus' when relations were hostile, but who fought with the Rus' when relations were friendly. He also notes that the Russians found it to their advantage to try and maintain good relations with the Pechenegs.

The Pechenegs besieged Kiev in 962. However, in 965 they joined Russian Prince Svyatoslav's campaign against the Khazars. The Pechenegs accompanied the Russian prince in his campaign in the Balkans in 968. Svyatoslav had to give up his claims in the Balkans and went back to Kiev to save the city from the attack of another Pecheneg tribe. Hostile relations resumed in 972, when the Russian prince Svyatoslav, on his way back to Kiev, was caught and killed by order the Pecheneg Khan Kurya.

During Vladimir I (the Great), the Rus' conducted many campaigns against the Pechenegs, and built fortifications on their southern frontier to protect Kiev against the Pecheneg attacks. In 1036, the Pechenegs launched an attack on Kiev, however, they were defeated by Yaroslav the Wise near Kiev. At that time they were settled along the Lower Danube, and continued to be a threat to Byzantium.

At the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the unification of the Eastern Slavic tribes was completed and the Kievan Rus' state increased its power in the region. The conditions were not that favorable for the Pechenegs to establish a strong state due to the complete decentralization of their tribal federation. Especially after a new wave of migration of nomadic peoples, such as the Oghuz from the East, the Pechenegs began to move increasingly into Byzantine territory.

The Rus' were able to control the majority of the Pechenegs' trade routes at the turn of the 11th century which resulted in losing their hegemony on the Black Sea. Some of the Pechenegs entered the service of Rus' princes.

### **Pecheneg and Byzantine Relations**

According to the Primary Chronicle, those Pechenegs who survived did not entirely disappear from Rus' territory. They moved towards Byzantium's Danubian frontier and joined the Byzantines. Some Pechenegs settled in the Balkans. Others who stayed in northeast of Kiev joined the Torks (Oghuz Turkic tribe) creating a confederacy called Chernye Klobuki (Black Hoods).

The Byzantines wanted to use the Pechenegs for their own diplomatic missions. The first Byzantine attempt to make an alliance with the Pechenegs was against the Bulgarians in 917. The Byzantines sent ambassadors with gifts from the emperor to gain the support of the Pecheneg rulers and to propose them to use a Byzantine fleet when the Pechenegs attack the Bulgarians. However, this operation never took place and the Pechenegs withdrew back into the steppes.

In 944, combined Rus' and Pecheneg forces launched an attack to invade Byzantine lands. The Byzantines bribed them to attack the Bulgars instead. The Byzantines began to use Pecheneg auxiliaries. The Byzantines travelled up the Dnieper and Danube Rivers to negotiate with the Pechenegs to prevent the Rus' from being able to use the Pechenegs against Byzantium in any future conflict, and to make the Pechenegs a potential threat against the Rus' if they attacked Byzantium. The Byzantines wanted to keep good relations with the Pechenegs to prevent them from invading their territory in the Balkans.

However, in 1027, the Pechenegs conducted a campaign to invade Byzantine territory in Bulgaria, and throughout the 1030s they launched numerous raids in the Balkans.

The Pechenegs began to settle in small groups near the Danube. In 1045, after losing an internal power struggle, one group of Pechenegs led by a man named Kegenes, offered his services to the Byzantine emperor, Constantine IX Monomakhos and he accepted the offer. Kegenes was brought to Constantinople, assigned three fortresses on the Danube to defend and given lands around them for his people.

The Pechenegs were no longer an independent state north of the Black Sea, but a people living within other states. The majority of the Pechenegs lived under Byzantine rule and continued to be a threat to the Byzantines. The Byzantines eventually defeated the invaders and resettled them in the Empire on the condition that they provide military service.

In 1064, the Cumans attacked and defeated the Pechenegs. However, they gained their strength back and continued their campaigns from the north and began to threaten Constantinople in 1091. The Byzantine and the Cuman joint forces defeated the Pechenegs at the Battle of Levounion.

The last mention of the Pechenegs in Byzantine sources was in connection with an invasion of Byzantine territory in the Balkans in 1122-1123 by the Pechenegs who had been driven out of the Pontic steppe by the Rus'. They were finally defeated and were sent to live in the south of the Balkan region by the Byzantines, but one group of them took refuge in Hungary.

### **Discussions/Questions:**

1. What were the motives behind the Pechenegs attacks on neighboring peoples?
2. What were the roles of the nomadic tribes in the rise of the Kievan Rus'?

### **Readings:**

- 1- Halperin, Charles J., *Russia and the Golden Horde*, Ch. II, Kievan Rus and the Steppe, Indiana University Press, 1987.
- 2- Голубовский. П.В. *Печенеги, торки, и половцы*, Москва, Вече, 2011.

- 3- Noonan, T.S., “European Russia c.500 – c.1050, in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, Vol. III, edited by Timothy Reuter, Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- 4- \_\_\_\_\_. “Rus', Pechenegs, and Polovtsy: Economic Interaction along the Steppe Frontier in the Pre-Mongol Era”, *Russian History*, 19, Nos. 1-4 (1992), 301-327.
- 5- Черных, Е.Н., *Культуры кочевников в мезоструктуре Евразийского мира, том 2, Языки славянской культуры* (ЯСК), Москва, 2013.
- 6- Ball, W., *The Eurasian Steppe, People, Movement, Ideas*, Edinburgh University Press, 2021.
- 7- *Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*, Editor Denis Sinor, Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- 8- Baumer, C., *The History of Central Asia, The Age of Steppe Warriors*, Vol.3., I.B. Tauris, 2012.
- 9- \_\_\_\_\_, *History of the Caucasus: Vol. 1, At the Crossroads of Empires*, I.B. Tauris, 2021.
- 10- 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 · Wiesbaden, 1992.
- 11- \_\_\_\_\_, “The peoples of the south Russian steppes”, Ch.10, in *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia*, Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- 12- \_\_\_\_\_, “The peoples of Russian forest belt”, Ch.9, in *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia*, Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- 13- *The Cambridge World History*, Vol. V., *Expanding Webs of Exchange and Conflict, 500 ce–1500 ce*, Edited by Benjamin Z. Kedar And Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- 14- *The Russian Primary Chronicle, Laurentian Text*, Translated and Edited by Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1953.
- 15- Waldman, C. & Mason, C., *Encyclopedia of European Peoples*, Facts on File, 2006.
- 16- Paroń, A., *The Pechenegs: Nomads in the Political and Cultural Landscape of Medieval Europe*, translated by Thomas Anessiin East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450, edited by Florin Curta and Dušan Zupka, Brill, 2017.
- 17- Pritsak, O., “The Pečenegs, A Case of Social and Economic Transformation, *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi*, 1975.