

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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THE PECHENECS – Gender

OVERVIEW

The available sources dealing with the Pechenegs provide extremely limited information about women and their place in Pecheneg society.

Like other nomadic tribes on the steppes, relative gender equality among the Pechenegs was a very common practice.

Among the ancient Turkic tribes not only the khagan, but also his wife, the Khatun, had the right to assume supreme power, with the result that the Khagan and the Khatun came to be regarded as sacred.

GENDER

Division of labor in Pecheneg society existed among men and women. There were the strict regulations in household work. Responsibility for the care of livestock was divided between the two sexes. Women were in charge of goats, sheep, cows and their feeding, while men were in charge of horses, camels etc.

In general, women were much busier than men. In addition to their domestic responsibilities, women within Pecheneg society assumed a number of military roles ranging from active combat to guarding their home villages. In times of conflict, any man able to use a weapon was expected to fight, and if the conflict was sufficiently serious, women were also expected to take up arms. In addition, if a tribal leader died, his wife could take his place as head of the tribe.

Pecheneg women, through marriage to outsiders, helped to integrate foreigners into Pecheneg society. Following a major Byzantine incursion into Pecheneg territory that killed many Pecheneg warriors, the survivors made an offer to their Byzantine and other foreign captives: they would be freed if they elected to join the Pechenegs as equal members of their society with the right to marry a Pecheneg woman.

Handcrafts were also among the activities of the Pecheneg women. The abundance of leather inspired women to master the processing of tanned leather and the manufacture of leather sandals, boots, and clothing, putting them together by using thread made of animal tendons.

Discussion/Question

1. Why did women in traditional Pecheneg society have a greater degree of equality than women in neighboring Byzantium?

Reading

1- Pritzak, O., *The Pechenegs A Case of Social and Economic Transformation*, The Peter De Ridder Press, 1976.

2- Horvath P.A., *Pechenegs, Cumans, Iasians, Steppe Peoples in Medieval Hungary*, Hereditas, Corvina, 1989.

3- Marey, A.V., "Socio-Political Structure of the Pecheneg", In *Alternatives of Social Evolution*, 2000.

4- Paroń, A., *The Pechenegs: Nomads in the Political and Cultural Landscape of Medieval Europe*, translated by Thomas Anessi in *East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450–1450*, edited by Florin Curta and Dušan Zupka, Brill, 2017.

5- Zhivkov, B., "The Pechenegs in Khazar History: The Late Ninth and Tenth Centuries", in *Khazaria in the Ninth and the Tenth Centuries*, Ch.2, Edited by Florin Curta, Vol.30, Brill, 2015.