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0521837561 - Cumans and Tatars: Oriental Military in the Pre-Ottoman Balkans, 1185-1365

Istvan Vasary

Excerpt

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## CHAPTER ONE

*Introduction*

## REMARKS ON THE SOURCES

The greatest difficulty in investigating the Cumans and Tatars, like that encountering anyone who investigates the Eurasian nomadic peoples, lies in the almost total lack of indigenous sources. (The *Secret History of the Mongols* is a rare and happy exception.) Chinese, Islamic, Byzantine and medieval western historiographies are severely biased against the nomadic foes, and reflect only certain aspects of nomadic life. So, willy-nilly, we must be content with a Cuman and Tatar history written mainly through the prism of the 'civilised' enemy. The most we can do is to apply an equally 'severe' criticism of the sources, thereby making an attempt to find an equilibrium between the tendentiousness of the sources and the historical reality they reflect. The basic written sources of the time-span treated in this book are undoubtedly the Byzantine narrative works. Their testimony can be corroborated and supplemented by some Latin and Slavic sources, especially in the age of the Third and Fourth Crusades (Ansbert, Robert de Clari and Geoffroi Villehardouin) and the Tatar invasion of the Balkans (Albericus Trium Fontium, Thomas of Spalato, etc.). These sources will always be referred to in the appropriate place, but the basic Byzantine sources, to which reference is made on practically every page, need a separate short treatment here, so that readers may become familiar with them. There follows a short sketch of the five basic Byzantine narrative sources relating to the period 1185–1365.<sup>1</sup>

*Niketas Choniates (c. 1150–1213)*

Born in Chonai (former Kolossai), Niketas Choniates was originally called Akominatos. He arrived in Constantinople in his childhood. He later

<sup>1</sup> Only the most essential data will be given: the critical edition (if there is one) or edition, a modern translation (if there is one) and two bibliographies (Karayan.-Weiss and *Byz.-turc.*) for further references. It must be borne in mind that all these texts and their Latin translations can also be found in the Paris, Venice and Bonn corpuses of Byzantine historians.

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became secretary to Emperor Isaakios Angelos, and from 1189 was governor of the *thema* of Philippoupolis. After the capture of Constantinople by the Latins in 1204, he fled to Nikaia, and occupied important posts in the court of Emperor Theodoros Laskaris I. His works are theological and rhetorical treatises, speeches and poems, and one historical work entitled *Chronike diegesis* (Χρονική διήγησις). The latter treats events between 1118 and 1206, and consists of twenty-one books, referred to under the name of the ruling emperor; for instance, Isaakios Angelos in Books I–III, Alexios III in Books I–III, Isaakios Angelos in Book I, Alexios Doukas Mourtzouphlos in Book I, capture of the City in Book I, Statues of Constantinople in Book I. For the Second Bulgarian Kingdom and the Fourth Crusade he is the primary and sometimes an eyewitness source.

Critical edition: Nik. Chon. *Hist.*/van Dieten, I–II.

Translation: Grabler, *Abenteuer*; Grabler, *Kreuzfahrer*.

Literature: Karayan.-Weiss, II, pp. 460–1; *Byz.-turc.*, I, pp. 270–5.

*Georgios Akropolites (1217–1282)*

Born in Constantinople, Akropolites was sent to Nikaia in 1233 and became the tutor of the eventual Emperor Theodoros Laskaris II, who, after his enthronement in 1254, entrusted Akropolites with important tasks. In 1261 Akropolites returned to the reconquered capital of Constantinople with Emperor Michael Palaiologos VIII. He was sent as a diplomat to Lyon and Trapezunt. His works include poems, rhetorical and theological treatises, and one historical work entitled *Chronike syngraphe* (Χρονική συγγραφή). This is a continuation of Nik. Chon. *Hist.*, and treats events between 1203 and 1261. An objective and reliable source.

Critical edition: Georg. Akr. *Chron.*/Heisenberg, I, pp. 1–189.

Edition: Georg. Akr. *Chron.*/Bekker.

No modern translation.

Literature: Karayan.-Weiss, II, pp. 461–2; *Byz.-turc.*, I, pp. 137–9.

*Georgios Pachymeres (1242–1310)*

Pachymeres was born in Nikaia and moved to Constantinople in 1261, where he held high ecclesiastical and state offices. His works include rhetorical and philosophical treatises, poems, letters, and one historical work entitled *Syngraphikai historiai* (Συγγραφικαὶ ἱστορίαι). It treats events between 1261 and 1308, and consists of fifteen books (six books for Michael VIII's reign, seven for Andronikos II's reign), each of which bears the name of the

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ruling emperor as its title. By way of an introduction, the period between 1255 and 1261 is also discussed in brief. This work is a continuation of Georg. Akr. *Chron.* Pachymeres was the greatest polyhistor of his age, with a very solid knowledge of classical antiquity. A strong tendency to archaism and a prevalence of Greek Orthodox theological views are characteristic of his works. For the second half of the thirteenth century he is the primary Byzantine source.

Critical edition: Pachym. *Hist.*/Failler-Laurent, I–II (the first six books only).

Edition: Pachym. *Hist.*/Bekker, I–II.

Translation: Pachym. *Hist.*/Failler-Laurent, I–II. (French).

Literature: Karayan.-Weiss, II, pp. 492–3; *Byz.-tunc.*, I, pp. 148–50.

*Nikephoros Gregoras (c. 1290/1–1360)*

Gregoras was the greatest polyhistor of the fourteenth century. Because he was an active opponent of Gregorios Palamas, Emperor Ioannes Kantakouzenos banished him to the Chora monastery in Constantinople for a certain time. Among his works are rhetorical, grammatical and philosophical treatises, poems, speeches and letters, and one historical work entitled *Historia Rhomaike* (ἱστορία Ῥωμαϊκή). It covers events between 1204 and 1359, and so partly complements and partly continues Georg. Pach. *Hist.* It consists of thirty-seven books, the sources of the first seven being Georg. Akr. *Chron.* and Pachym. *Hist.*, together with other, unknown, sources. He is the primary authority for the first half of the fourteenth century. A strong tendency to archaism, in regard to both ethnonyms and ethnographical descriptions, can be observed.

No critical edition.

Edition: Nik. Greg. *Hist.*/Schopen-Bekker, I–III.

Translation: Nik. Greg. *Hist.*/van Dieten.

Literature: Karayan.-Weiss, II, pp. 493–4; *Byz.-tunc.*, I, pp. 275–7.

*Ioannes Kantakouzenos (1295/6–1383)*

The offspring of a distinguished family, during the reign of Andronikos II Kantakouzenos held high offices. After Andronikos III's death in 1341 he had himself crowned, but succeeded in reaching the capital only in 1347. There he reigned as emperor under the name John VI until 1354. He was an excellent soldier and commander; in 1353 he called in the Ottomans, who set foot for the first time in Europe in Gallipoli in 1354. In the same

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year Ioannes V Palaiologos coerced him to abdicate from the throne, and in 1355 he became a monk at Mount Athos under the name Ioasaph. He wrote several philosophical and theological treatises, and one historical work entitled *Historia* (Ἱστορία). It consists of four books, and deals with the events between 1320 and 1356, though he glances at events as late as 1362. In general it is a reliable source, and sometimes complements Nik. Greg. *Hist.* well.

No critical edition.

Edition: Kant. *Hist.*/Schopen, I–III.

Translation: Kant. *Hist.*/Fatouros-Krischer, I–II.

Literature: Karayan.-Weiss, II, pp. 494–5; *Byz.-tunc.*, I, pp. 177–9.

## CUMANS AND TATARS

Before proceeding to our work proper, a few words need to be said about the historical past of the nomadic tribes that are most frequently referred to in this book. In brief: who are the Cumans and the Tatars, and where did they come from before entering the history of the Balkans?

By the 1030s the nomadic confederacy of the Kipchaks dominated the vast territories of the present-day Kazak steppe, the Uz (or Oguz) tribes (called *Torki* in the Russian sources) occupied the area between the Yayik (Ural) and the Volga rivers, while the Pecheneg tribal confederacy stretched from the Volga to the Lower Danube, including the vast steppe region of what is now the Ukraine, Moldavia and Wallachia. Considering the nomadic way of life of these peoples, these frontiers can be regarded only as approximate. The original homeland of the Kipchaks, the westernmost branch of the Turkic-speaking tribes, was the middle reaches of the Tobol and Ishim rivers in south-western Siberia in the ninth and tenth centuries, but, as mentioned above, by the 1030s they had spread further south. In the middle of the eleventh century a large-scale migration of nomadic peoples took place in the Eurasian steppe zone, a result of which was that parts of the Kipchak confederacy appeared also in the Pontic steppe region, south of the Russian principalities. This historical event was described by the Persian Marvazī (c. 1120)<sup>2</sup> and the Armenian Matthew of Edessa

<sup>2</sup> Marvazī/Minorsky, pp. 29–30: 'To them [the Turks] (also) belong the *Qūn*; these came from the land of Qitāy, fearing the Qitā-khan. They (were) Nestorian Christians, and had migrated from their habitat, being pressed for pastures. Of their numbers [is? or was?] \*Ākinji b. \*Qoçqar (?) the Khwārezmshāh. The Qūn were followed [or pursued] by a people called the *Qāy*, who, being more numerous and stronger than they, drove them out of these [new?] pasture lands. They then moved on to the territory of the *Shārī*, and the Shārī migrated to the land of the *Türkemāns*, who in their

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(d. 1142).<sup>3</sup> It is noteworthy that, while Marvazī speaks of a people called *qūn*, Matthew of Edessa mentions, instead, the people *xartes̄k* (the aspirated *k* being an Armenian plural suffix) in connection with the same event. At the same time (towards the middle of the eleventh century), the new conquering nomads of the Pontic steppe appear in the Byzantine sources as *Κούμνοι* or *Κόμνοι*,<sup>4</sup> in the Latin sources as *Comani*, *Cumani*<sup>5</sup> or *Cuni*,<sup>6</sup> in the German sources as *Valwen*,<sup>7</sup> and in the Russian sources as *Polovci* (plural of *Polovec*).<sup>8</sup> The Armenian, German and Russian ethnonyms are simply translations of the self-appellation *Qoman/Quman*, meaning in Turkic (and in related languages) ‘pale, fallow’.<sup>9</sup> This identification was quite evident to their contemporaries, since the Russian chronicles (for instance) use the phrase *Kumani, rekshē Polovci* several times,<sup>10</sup> and in a Latin source from 1241 the phrase *Comani, quos Theutonice Valwen appellamus* occurs.<sup>11</sup>

Though the new nomadic confederacy that appeared in the Pontic region in the eleventh century bore the name *Quman* in different sources, the Muslim sources consistently refer to it by the ethnonym *Qipčaq*, the only exception being Idrīsī, who must have taken the name *Quman* from a non-Muslim source.<sup>12</sup> What is the ethnic reality underlying this double

turn shifted to the eastern parts of the *Ghuzz* country. The Ghuzz Turks then moved to the territory of the *Bajanāk*, near the shores of the Armenian (?) sea.’ For a detailed analysis of this passage, see Marvazī/Minorsky, pp. 95–104.

<sup>3</sup> Under the year 1050/1, see in Marquart, *Komanen*, pp. 54–5.

<sup>4</sup> *Byz.-turc.*, II, pp. 167–8. <sup>5</sup> For its occurrences, see Gombos, *Cat.*, IV, pp. 46–7.

<sup>6</sup> *SRH*, I, p. 518; II, p. 646, and Györfy, ‘Kun és komán’, pp. 11–15. Györfy, in his later work, represented a particular view of the ethnonym *Cuni*. Since the Hungarian appellation of the Cumans, the ethnonym *Kun* (*Cunus*, *Cuni* in the Hungarian chronicles), was also applied to earlier nomadic tribes such as the Pechenegs and Uz, Györfy came to the conclusion that the Hungarian name *Kun* must be separated from the ethnonym *Qun* (attested in Birūnī and Marvazī) and can most probably be derived from the ethnonym *Hun* (Györfy, ‘Kun és komán’, esp. pp. 18–19). This hypothesis cannot be defended, since the identity of the ethnonyms *Quman* and *Qun* is beyond doubt. Consequently, the Hungarian name of the Cumans must go back to one of their self-appellations, i.e. to *Qun*. Further evidence of the *Quman* = *Qun* identity can be found in the Russian annals. In the Lavrent’evskaia letopis’, under the year 6604 (= 1096), a certain Cuman occurs whose name was *Kun* (*Polovčinu imenem Kunui*: *PSRL*, I, p. 239). The same person is called *Kuman* in the parallel account in the Ipat’evskaia letopis’ (*Polovčinu imenem Kumanu*: *PSRL*, II, p. 229). The form *Kunui* is probably a corruption of \**Kunu*, Russian dative from *Kun*. This identification was first referred to by Marquart, *Komanen*, p. 57, but later Pelliot, ‘Comans’, p. 136, refuted it. Nevertheless, Pelliot’s argument’s are not convincing, and I see no real reason to object Marquart’s conjecture.

<sup>7</sup> Gombos, *Cat.*, I, pp. 23, 171, 194, 269, 307–8, 424, 477, 505, 546, 776; II, pp. 852, 880, 1318, 1331; III, pp. 1732–5, 1740, 1762, 1767, 1792–5, 1826, 1858, 1863, 1880, 1884, 1903, 1957.

<sup>8</sup> Németh, *HMK*, pp. 142–3. <sup>9</sup> See Németh, ‘*quman* und *qūn*’, pp. 99–101.

<sup>10</sup> In the Lavrent’evskaia letopis’: *PSRL*, I, pp. 234, 376.

<sup>11</sup> Fejér, *CD*, IV/1, p. 213. A few further examples can be found in the *Floridi Horti Ordinis Praemonstratensis* under the year 1227: ‘Chumanorum, quos Theutonici Walwein vocant’ (*MGH SS*, XXIII, p. 511), and in the *Annales Cracovienses compilati* under the year 1135: ‘Plaucorum sive Comanorum’ (*Mon. Pol. hist.*, II, p. 832, and III, p. 347).

<sup>12</sup> Idrīsī/Jaubert, II, pp. 399–401.

usage of names? On the basis of Marvazī's text we may claim that the Kipchaks and Cumans were originally two separate peoples. The Cumans must have lived to the east of the large bend of the Huanghe, in the vicinity of other Nestorian peoples such as, for example, the originally Turkic Öngüts. The Kitans spread their dominions to include this territory at the end of the tenth century, and the Kitan expansion must have expelled a large number of tribes from their former habitats. The Cumans, or Cuns, must have reached the territory of the Kipchak tribal confederacy in south-eastern Siberia and the Kazak steppe round the middle of the eleventh century. The historical process is obscure, and essential data are lacking, but the final result is indisputable: two Turkic confederacies, the Kipchaks and the Cumans, had merged by the twelfth century. A cultural and political intermingling took place, and from the middle or end of the twelfth century it is impossible to detect any difference between the numerous appellations applied to the same tribal confederacy. Though they were originally the names of different components of the confederacy, by that time these appellations (*Qipčaq*, *Quman* and its various translations: *Polovec*, *Valwe*, *Xarteš*, etc.) became interchangeable: they denoted the whole confederacy irrespective of the origin of the name. As Marquart, the greatest authority on the ethnogenesis of the Cumans and Kipchaks, has put it: 'Seit dem Ende des 12. Jahrhunderts sind die Namen Qypčaq, Polowci und Komanen nicht mehr auseinander zu halten.'<sup>13</sup> The best example to demonstrate this fusion of different names can be found in Guillelmus Rubruc, the famous Franciscan traveller of the thirteenth century, who expressly identifies the terms *Qipčaq* and *Quman*. After he left the Crimea for the East, he wrote as follows: 'In this territory the Cumans called Kipchak used to graze their flocks, but the Germans call them Valans and their province Valania, and Isidorus calls (the region stretching) from the river Don as far as the Azov Sea and the Danube, Alania. And this land stretches from the Danube as far as the Don, the borderline of Asia and Europe; one can reach there in two months with quick riding as the Tatars ride. The whole land is inhabited by the Cumans and the Kipchaks, and even further from the Don to the Volga, which rivers are at a distance of ten days' journey.'<sup>14</sup> At another place: 'And in the territory between these two rivers [i.e. the Don and the

<sup>13</sup> Marquart, *Komanen*, p. 140. Cf. also pp. 78–9.

<sup>14</sup> 'In hac [sc. terra] solebant pascere Commani qui dicuntur Capchat [var. Capthac], a Theutonicis vero dicuntur Valani et provincia Valania, ab Ysidoro vero dicitur, a flumine Tanay usque ad paludes Meotidis et Danubium, Alania. Et durat ista terra in longitudine a Danubio usque Tanaym, qui est terminus Asiae et Europe, itinere duorum mensium velociter equitando, prout equitant Tartari; que tota inhabitabatur a Commanis et Capchat, et etiam ultra a Tanay usque Etiliam, inter que flumina sunt x diete magne.' (Rubruc, *Itinerarium* XII.6, in *Sin. Franc.*, I, pp. 194–5). *Valania* as a

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Volga] where we continued our way, the Cuman Kipchaks lived before the Tatars conquered them.<sup>15</sup> In the twelfth century and at the beginning of the thirteenth, the Kipchak-Cuman confederacy occupied an immense land stretching from the middle reaches of the Irtysh as far as the Lower Danube. This vast territory had never been politically united by a strong central power before the advent of the Mongol conquerors in 1241. There existed no Kipchak or Cuman empire, but different Cuman groups under independent rulers, or khans, who acted on their own initiative, meddling in the political life of the surrounding areas such as the Russian principalities, Byzantium in the Balkans, the Caucasus and Khwarezm.<sup>16</sup> The territory of this Kipchak-Cuman realm, consisting of loosely connected tribal units, was called *Dašt-i Qipčaq* (Kipchak steppes) by the Muslim historiographers and geographers,<sup>17</sup> *Zemlja Poloveckaja* (Polovcian Land) or *Pole Poloveckoe* (Polovcian Plain) by the Russians,<sup>18</sup> and *Cumania* in the Latin sources.<sup>19</sup> Naturally enough, *Dašt-i Qipčaq* or *Cumania* was not known to the various sources in precise terms, but as a *pars pro toto*; the Muslim sources meant the eastern parts of *Dašt-i Qipčaq*, while the Russian and Western sources had the western parts of *Cumania* in mind. Depending on their region and their time, different sources each used their own word to denote different sections of the vast Cuman territory. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, for instance, when the Cuman missions of the Dominicans began to work their way to the east of the Carpathian Basin, *Cumania* was predominantly the territory of today's Wallachia and Moldavia, while its eastern frontiers were rather loose.<sup>20</sup> For the Russians, the *Pole Poloveckoe* was primarily the steppe region between the Dnieper and the Volga.

name for *Cumania* does not occur elsewhere, and it is probably an invention of Rubruc taken from the German ethnonym *Valwe* in order to make possible a link between *Alania* and *Valania*. The two terms have nothing to do with each other in either the linguistic or the geographical respect. For a description of *Alania* by Isidorus Hispalensis, see his *Etymologiarum libri*, in *PG* 82, p. 504.

<sup>15</sup> 'Et inter ista duo flumina [sc. Tanaim et Etliam] in illis terris per quas transivimus habitabant Comani Capchac, antequam Tartari occuparent eos' (Rubruc, *Itinerarium*, xiv.3, in *Sin. Franc.*, 1, p. 200).

<sup>16</sup> For the different Cuman groups, see Rasovskij, 'Polovcy', III: Predely 'Polja Poloveckogo', pp. 58–77. For the tribes of the Cuman-Qipchaqs, see the excellent survey of Golden, *Tribes*. For the Cuman–Russian interactions see the foundational study of Pritsak, 'Polovcians'.

<sup>17</sup> The Kipchaks are first mentioned as neighbours of Khwarezm in c. AD 1030 (AH 421) by Bayhaqī, and the term *Dašt-i Qipčaq* occurs for the first time in Nāšir-i Ḥusraw's *Dīvān*, replacing the former *maḥāzat al-ghuzziyya* used by Iṣṭaḥrī. For these data, see Bartol'd, 'Guzz', in *Soč.* v, p. 525, and 'Kipčaki', in *Soč.* v, p. 550.

<sup>18</sup> E.g. *PSRL*, I, p. 522; II, p. 781, and *passim*.

<sup>19</sup> For occurrences in the Greek sources, see *Byz.-turc.*, II, p. 167; in the Latin sources, see Gombos, *Cat.*, IV, p. 47. Practically all the data for *Cumania* were attested in the thirteenth century.

<sup>20</sup> Makkai, *Milkói püspökség*, pp. 19ff.

Cumania became known in its whole width and breadth only after the tempest of the Mongol invasion in 1241, especially in the wake of the famous Dominican and Franciscan travellers. They had fixed the territory of Cumania to the boundaries that existed on the eve of the great Mongolian thunderbolt. In 1246, Plano Carpini personally traversed the whole land of the Cumans (*totam terram Comanorum*), which is totally flat (*tota est plana*) and has four major rivers, the Dnieper, Don, Volga and Yayik (i.e. the Ural).<sup>21</sup> Later, he described the borders of Cumania exactly, ending with the words: 'And the above-mentioned land is vast and long.'<sup>22</sup> It is important to note that, while Plano Carpini did not define the eastern border of Cumania, Benedictus Polonus, who was his companion during the journey, clearly states in his own travel account that the eastern border of Cumania is the river Yayik (i.e. the Ural), where the land of the Kangits begins.<sup>23</sup>

Who are these Kangits? It is the other Franciscan traveller, Guillelmus Rubruc, who helps us to understand the situation clearly. In his *Itinerarium* he claims that this people is related to the Cumans (*Cangle, quedam parentela Comanorum*), and in another place he asserts that north of the Caspian Sea there is a desert in which the Tatars now live, 'but formerly certain Cumans lived there who were called *Qangli*'.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, the *Qangli*, whose name was known well before the Mongol period,<sup>25</sup> must have been a Turkic tribe or tribal confederacy closely related to the Kipchak-Cumans. Their name often occurs in the *Secret History of the Mongols*, where it is always linked with that of the Kipchaks (*Ḳanglin Kibčā'ut*).<sup>26</sup> In the enumeration of peoples defeated by the Tatars, Plano Carpini also placed the names of these two peoples side by side: *Kangit, Comani*.<sup>27</sup> All in all,

<sup>21</sup> See Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, ix.13, in *Sin. Franc.*, 1, pp. 107–8.

<sup>22</sup> 'Et est terra predicta maxima et longa' (Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum* ix.20, in *Sin. Franc.*, 1, p. 112).

<sup>23</sup> Benedictus Polonus, 8: 'In fine Comanie transierunt fluvium cui nomen Iarach [var. *Jajach*], ubi incipit terra Kangitarum' (*Sin. Franc.*, 1, p. 138).

<sup>24</sup> 'Prius vero erant ibi quidam Comani qui dicebantur Cangle' (Rubruc, *Itinerarium*, xx.7 and xviii.4, in *Sin. Franc.*, 1, pp. 218, 211).

<sup>25</sup> See Pelliot-Hambis, *Campagnes*, 1, pp. 43–114. There is an Old Turkic word *qañli*, 'wagon, cart, carriage' (Clauson, *ED*, p. 638), and we must agree with Clauson, who claims that 'it is an open question whether the tribe was so called because it used carts, or whether, as is more prob., carts were so called because the Kañli; a western tribe, were the first Turks to use them' (*ibid.*). Cf. also Clauson, *Uyğur*, p. 147. The tribal name *Qañli* can most plausibly be derived from *Kang*, the Iranian name of the Middle and Lower Syr-Darya region, and would mean 'people from Kang' (cf. Marquart, *Komanen*, p. 78; but later, on pp. 168–9, he denies this possibility without referring to his former view).

<sup>26</sup> §§ 262, 270: *Ḳanglin Kibčā'ut* (*SHM/Ligeti*, pp. 235, 243); § 274: *Kanglin Kibčā'ud-i* (*SHM/Ligeti*, p. 247); § 198: *Ḳanglin-i Kimčā'ud-i* (*SHM/Ligeti*, p. 163). The form *qimčaq* must have been a secondary form of the name; it is not attested elsewhere.

<sup>27</sup> See Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum* vii.9, in *Sin. Franc.*, 1, p. 90.



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it may safely be assumed that the Qangli were the eastern tribal group of the Kipchak-Cuman confederacy, their territory lying east of the Ural river.

After the blow at Kalka in 1223, when the Cumans first tasted defeat at Tatar hands, and then their mortal defeat in 1241, when the Kipchak-Cuman confederacy ceased to exist as a political entity, the Kipchak tribes were partly dispersed, and partly became subject to the new Tatar-Mongol conquerors. Who were these newcomers in the nomadic world? Before the thirteenth century the ethnonym *Tatar* was used to denote different ethnic realities. Its first occurrences can be found in the Orkhon inscriptions (*otuz tatar*, *toquz tatar*), where it was the name of tribes who, in all likelihood, spoke a Mongolian language.<sup>28</sup> But certain western groups of Tatar tribes became associated with Turkic tribes, as were the Kimeks at the river Irtysh, who are said by Gardīzī to have been a branch of the Tatars.<sup>29</sup> But the majority of Tatars remained in the vicinity of the Kerülen river, near the Buyir-nur Lake, which, according to Rašīd ad-Dīn, was their basic habitat.<sup>30</sup> The Tatar tribes were Chingis Khan's ancestral enemies, and the reason why the victorious Mongol conquerors of Chingis Khan were later called Tatars by most of the sources is a historical puzzle unsatisfactorily explained to this day.<sup>31</sup> The initial words of Plano Carpini's famous work clearly state that by the middle of the thirteenth century the ethnonyms *Mongol* and *Tatar* had become totally synonymous ('Incipit Ystoria Mongalorum quos nos Tartaros appellamus'),<sup>32</sup> like the ethnonyms *Qipčaq* and *Quman*. Consequently, throughout this book we may take the liberty of using these terms interchangeably, though with a certain preference for the terms *Quman* and *Tatar*, since they were favoured by our sources relating to the Balkanic area.

Having surveyed the use of the ethnonyms *Qipčaq*, *Quman* and *Tatar*, we may fairly ask to what extent these and other ethnonyms can be utilised in ethnic history. The brief answer is: only in a very limited way. These appellations, like those of any large nomadic confederacy or state, are primarily *political* names referring to the leading, integrating tribe or clan of the confederacy or state. The Cumans and Tatars, when they appear in written sources, are members of a confederacy irrespective of their tribal origin. Former tribal names disappear before our eyes when the tribe in question

<sup>28</sup> See Orkun, *ETY*, IV, pp. 161, 167, 169. Cf. also Thomsen, *Inscr.*, p. 140.

<sup>29</sup> Gardīzī/Martinez, pp. 120–1.

<sup>30</sup> Raš./Ali-zade, I/1, p. 159: 'va yurti ki bā-išān maḥšūstar ast mawzi'ist ki ān-rā Būyir [var. *Būyūr*] nāvūr gūyand'.

<sup>31</sup> For the use of the ethnonym *Tatar*, see Bartol'd, 'Tatar', in *Soč.*, v, pp. 559–61; Pritsak, 'Two migratory movements', p. 159; Kljaštornyj, 'Das Reich der Tataren'.

<sup>32</sup> See Plano Carpini, *Ystoria Mongalorum*, in *Sin. Franc.*, I, p. 27.

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becomes part of a political unit, and hitherto unknown tribal names may crop up in sources suddenly, though obviously they existed before the point at which they are mentioned. For instance, when we hear of an incursion of Cumans in the Balkanic territories of Byzantium, it means that certain tribes of the Cuman confederacy took part in a military enterprise. But, to our great regret, the foreign sources are silent about the ethnic composition of the nomadic marauders. It is a rare and fortunate event indeed when our source reveals any greater detail about the nomadic assailant. One such happy case occurs when Rašīd ad-Dīn describes the Tatar campaign of 1236/7. Mengü-qa'an succeeded in capturing two leaders of the rebelling Kipchaks, Bačman and Qaçir-üküle. Bačman was of the *Qipčaq* people, from the *Olbirlik* tribe, while Qaçir-üküle was from the *As* tribe.<sup>33</sup> It is evident from this description that both leaders were of the Kipchak confederacy, but their first loyalty bound them to the *Olbirlik* and the *As* tribe respectively. The *As* was a tribal unit within the Kipchak confederacy, but formerly also a separate political unit, the confederacy of the Iranian Alans. Whether the *Olbirlik* and *As* leaders in question were Turks or Iranians cannot be decided with any certainty, though their names may indicate that the former was a Turkic, the latter an Iranian. This small detail preserved in Rašīd ad-Dīn may demonstrate the difficulty of making an ethnic history of the steppe region. Since the written sources have mostly preserved the ethnonyms of the leading tribe of a confederacy, the most we can do is investigate the political role of the Cumans and Tatars in the political history of the Balkans. The ethnonym 'Cuman' embraces mainly Turkic ethnic components, though other elements (such as Iranian, as in the case of Qaçir-üküle) may be hidden under the general designation. But in the case of the term 'Tatar', the situation is much more complicated. The Tatars, having conquered Eastern Europe in 1241, mingled with the basically Turkic population of Dašt-i Qipčaq. Consequently, the label *Tatar* will be used in this book only as a political term, without any ethnic connotation.

Finally, brief mention must be made of the phenomenon whereby ethnic names often became personal names for many reasons. A direct

<sup>33</sup> Raš./Ali-zade, 11/1, p. 129: 'az jamā'at-i Qibčāqān az qavm-i Ölberlik [ʿwlbrylk] va Qaçir-üküle [qajr-'wkwllh] az qavm-i Ās har du-rā bā-girift.' The same Kipchak tribe can be found in Dimašqī's list as *Ölberli* ['lbrly] (*Tiz.*, 1, pp. 539, 541; in *Dimashqī/Mehren*, p. 264, in the corrupt form [brkw]), read as *Bärgü* by Marquart, *Komanen*, p. 157; and *Elberli* by d'Ohsson, *Histoire*, 1, p. 338, n. 1). It is also attested in the *Slovo o polku Igoreve* as *Ol'bery* (Menges, *Vost. èl.*, pp. 122–4; Fasmer, 111, p. 133). For a detailed description of this tribal name, see Golden, 'Cumanica'. For *Alpar*, *Olper* as Cuman personal names in Hungary in the thirteenth century, see Rásonyi, 'Anthrop.', p. 135; Rásonyi, 'Kuman özel ad.', p. 79.