

## Cumans and Kipchaks: Between Ethnonym and Toponym

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In the Middle Ages, Central Europe was exposed to several waves of nomadic raids from the East, frequently also connected with the resettlement of certain nomadic ethnic groups (Huns, Avars, Magyars and Pechenegs) in a new territory. The penultimate and to a large extent also the final waves were associated with the Cumans, a people of Turkic origin.

The *Cumans* were the last of the steppe nations who came from Central Asia before the Mongolian invasion. They spoke the Turkic language, yet it seems that many of them were blond with blue eyes<sup>1</sup>. We can include their journey westwards, which came about for various specific reasons (and how specifically their arrival showed itself in Hungary), with the same wave of nomadic raids of Central Europe which started with the Old Hungarian tribes. The *Pechenegs*, *Oghuzs* and *Cumans* followed the same route, but Hungary was already a barrier between them and Latin Europe<sup>2</sup>.

In the 10<sup>th</sup> century, these people were brought to the notice of historians and geographers. At that time they resided in the north-east of what is today's Kazakhstan, to the east of the *Khazars*, to the north of their relatives the *Oghuzs*, and to the east of another related ethnic group, the *Kimaks*. They were divided into several tribes, which were often nothing more than bigger clans. In the mid-10<sup>th</sup> century, the *Kipchaks* followed the *Oghuzs*, crossed the Volga River and "flooded" the steppes to the north of the Black Sea and the Caucasus Mountains. They gave their name to this territory, which in medieval European

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<sup>1</sup> MUSSET, *Les invasions : le second assaut contre l'Europe chrétienne*, p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

sources was called *Cumania*, the land of the *Cumans*; for the Russians it was known as the Polovetsian Steppe, and for the Arabs and Persians it was the Kipchak Desert. A reflection of this toponym has been probably preserved today in the name referring to the steppes to the north of the Caucasus Mountains, *Kuban*.

The first empire was born in the Kipchak steppes when the successors of Genghis Khan shared and divided the Mongol Empire among themselves. Therefore, the empire is better known as the “Golden Horde”.

Among other things, this ethnic group is interesting due to the fact that we have accounts of it from several “civilizational domains”. Western European, Russian and Byzantine chroniclers as well as Arabic and Persian annalists wrote about them.

To their contemporaries, they were known by various names. The Russians knew them as the *Polovtsi*, Latin and Greek Europe as *Cumans*, and Persia and the Arabic East knew them as the *Kipchaks*. The three names were three designations for one people. Moreover, one needs to add different variations of these three names<sup>3</sup>, which are more than enough for one people.

However, another interesting fact is that very few sources acknowledge the unity or at least the kinship of these three names, which all refer to one ethnic group. This becomes especially conspicuous in ancient texts, which use two traditional names for this ethnic group without realizing that the two refer to the same people.

Almost univocally (virtually with only one exception), European authors never used the name *Kipchak* with regard to this ethnic group. This tempted the conclusion that the texts do not refer to the same ethnic group but rather to two or even three different groups: namely the *Cumans* in the west between the Dnieper River and the Carpathian Mountains (later on even as far as the Danube River), the *Polovetsians* between the Dnieper and Volga Rivers, and the *Kipchaks* between the Volga and Irtysh Rivers.

The Kipchak confederation, containing Turkic, Mongolic, and Iranian elements, comprised three large sub-confederations: the Cuman union in the west, divided into Ural-Volga, North Caucasian, and Pontic-Danubian groups; the Kipchaks in Central Asia and Kazakhstan; and the West Siberian Kipchaks<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> The Medieval world knew them by different names: Polovetsy, Polovtsy (rus.), Kunok (hung.), Qipchaq, Kipchak, Qifjaq, (arab. and pers.), Falven (ger.), Cumani, Comani (latin). The Anglicized forms for this nation (or nations) are Kipchak and Cuman.

<sup>4</sup> AHINZHANOV, *Kipchaki v istorii srednevekovogo Kazakhstana*, pp. 195–197.

Regional groupings, such as the Ural-Volga-Don-centered “Wild Cumans” (*Polovtsi Dikii in Russian sources*), were involved in Rus internecine strife<sup>5</sup>. Despite marital ties with the ruling houses of Rus’, Georgia, Khwarizm and later Hungary, the Kipchaks were often fickle allies.

However, the question is: When is the ethnonym and when is the toponym?

In the sections of their compositions devoted to peoples who lived far from the Caliphate Eastern European and Asian steppes, Arabian and Persian geographers, travelers and historians of the 9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> centuries were continuously mentioning the people and the country of the Kimaks. The first to name the Kimaks (and their branch the Kipchaks) in the list of Türkic tribes was the well-known Arabian geographer Ibn Khurdādbih in the *Book of Roads and Kingdoms* (second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century), who in his work used earlier compositions (possibly even from the 8<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>6</sup>. Probably this is the first mention of the *Kipchaks* in Arab sources<sup>7</sup>.

وبلدان الأتراك التغرغز وبلدهم أوسع بلاد الترك حدّهم الصين والثبت والخرلخ والكيماك والغز والجغر  
والبجاناك والترکش وأذکش وخفشاخ وخرخيز وبها مسك والخرلخ والخلج وهي من هذا الجانب من  
النهر

The land of the Turks Toquz Oghuz (al-Atrāk at-Tağazğaz) is the most extensive of the Turkic countries. They border with China and Tibet (at-Tubbat) and the Karluks (al-Kharlukh), Kimaks (al-Kimāk), Oghuzs (al-Ġuzz), Chigils (al-Ġigir), Pechenegs (al-Bağānāk), Turgesh (at-Turkash), Edghishs (Adkish), Kipchaks (Khifshākh) and Kirghizes (Khirkkhīz), who have musk, Karluks (al-Kharlukh), and Khalajis (al-Khalağ). They are on this side of the river<sup>8</sup>.

For comparison, here is the text from Yaqūt’s *The Dictionary of Countries*<sup>9</sup>:

أوله حيث يكون الظل نصف النهار في الاستواء سبعة أقدام وستة أعشار وسدس عشر قدم يفضل  
آخره على أوله بقدم واحد فقط ببندىء من مساكن ترك المشرق من قانى وقون وخرخيز وكيماك  
والتغرغز وأرض التركمانية وفاراب وبلاد الخزر

<sup>5</sup> GOLDEN, *The Polovci Dikii*, p. 298.

<sup>6</sup> PLETNEVA, *Polovtsi*, p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> IBN KHURDĀDBIH, *Kitāb al-masālik wa al-mamālik*, p. 31.

<sup>8</sup> Syrdarya.

<sup>9</sup> YAQŪT, *Muḥam al-buldān I.*, p. 31.

(The sixth iqlīm) begins where the meridian shadow at the equinox is seven, six-tenths, and one-sixth of one-tenth of a foot. Its end exceeds its beginning by only one foot. It begins in the homelands of the Turks of the East, such as Qānī, Qūn, Khirkhiz, Kīmāk, at-Tağazğaz, the lands of the Turkomans, Fārāb, and the country of the Khazars<sup>10</sup>.

Surprisingly enough, in spite of a three-century gap between the writing of *The Book of Roads and Kingdoms* and *The Dictionary of Countries*, the people of Qūn was located almost in the very same place as the *Khifshākh* had been.

By the Discourse on the Khifchākh Country<sup>11</sup> In Ḥudūd al-ʿālam from an anonymous author (10<sup>th</sup> century):

“The southern frontier of the Khifğākh marches with the Pechenegs (*Khifğākh rāḥadd-i ġunūbash ba-Bağānāk dāraḍ*), and all the rest marches with the Northern Uninhabited Lands where there is no living being. The Khifğākh are a clan (*qaum*) which, having separated from the Kīmāk, have settled down in these parts, but the Khifğākh are more wicked than the Kīmāk. Their king (*malik*) is (appointed) on behalf of the Kīmāk.”

The only Arabic source which refers to this ethnic group as the Cumans is al-Idrīsī. The reason is very simple: in addition to being an Arabic author, he was also a “Western” one. The information he used for his work had largely come from Western sources.

More precisely, al-Idrīsī does not refer to the ethnic group as the *Cumans*; rather, he calls *Cumania* the land in which they live. At the same time, he states that this region got its name from the city of *Cumania*. In addition, the *Cumans* also derived their name from the name of this city. *Cumania* was the land of the *Cumans*. However, he mentions the *Cumans* themselves no more than twice in the whole work and he does that with regard to their land; he does not write anything more specific about them.

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<sup>10</sup> YĀQŪT, *The Introductory Chapters of Yaqut's Mu'jam al-Buldan*, pp. 48–49.

<sup>11</sup> *Hudud al-'Alam. The Regions of the World: A Persian Geography 372 A.H. – 982 A.D.*

Sixth iqlīm, fifth part<sup>12</sup>:

إن الذي تضمن هذا الجزء الخامس من الإقليم السادس قطعة من البحر البنطسي بل أكثر وما على ساحليه معاً من البلاد الممدنة والمعازل المشهورة والمراسي الممكنة والجزائر العامرة والغامرة وتضمن أيضاً قطعة من أرض برجان ومثلها من أرض الروسية وكثيراً من أرض القمانيّة وبلادها وطرف بلاد مقدونية ونحن نريد تبيان ذلك كله بإيضاح من القول وإيجاز معنى فنقول: إن هذا البحر البنطسي هو بحر خليجي كبير طوله من المغرب إلى المشرق ثلاثة عشر مجرى وأما عرضه فمختلف وأعرض موضع يكون فيه ستة مجار. وعلى ضفة هذا البحر الجنوبية مما يلي المغرب بلاد هرقلية ثم بلاد القلات وبلاد البنطيم وبلاد الخزرية وبلاد القمانيّة والروسية وأرض برجان.

“This fifth part of the sixth iqlīm contains parts of the Black Sea: in particular its major part together with what is located on the seashore, burgeoning cities, well-known fortresses, reliable harbors, and both inhabited and uninhabited islands. It also contains parts of the land of Bulgaria (Burġān), the land of Russia (ar-Rūsīya), a major part of the land of Cumania (al-Qumāniya) together with its cities, and a border of the land of Macedonia (Maqḏūniya). We want to speak about all of this in clear words and short sentences.

We say: indeed, the Black Sea (al-Bunṭusī) is like a large bay. Its length from the west to the east takes thirty days of voyage. As far as width is concerned, it varies; at its widest place it takes six days of voyage. On the southern shore, where it reaches to the west, there is the land of Heraklea (Haraqliya), behind which there is the land of Galatea (al-Qalāt), the land of Pontum (al-Banṭim) and the land of the Khazars (al-Khazariya), Cumania (al-Qumāniya), Russia (ar-Rūsīya) and the land of the Bulgars (Burġān).”

وتضمن أيضاً قطعة من أرض القمانيّة وبلاد الروسية الخارجة وبعض بلاد البلغارية وبعض بلاد بسجرت وبلاد اللان وأرض الخزر وبلادها وأنهارها

(The sixth part) also includes a part of *Cumanie*, outer Russia, a part of the land of Bulgaria (al-Bulġārīya) the land of the Bashkirs (Basġirt), the land of Alans, the land of the Khazars together with its cities and rivers.

ومن مدينة الخزرية إلى مدينة كبيرة خمسة وعشرون ميلاً ومنها إلى قمانيّة التي ينسب إليها القمانيون وتسمى هذه المدينة قمانيّة السود خمسة وعشرون ميلاً

<sup>12</sup> AL-IDRISĪ, *Kitāb nuzhat al-mushtāq fī ikhtirāq al-āfāq*, p. 905.

ومن مدينة القمانية السود إلى مدينة مطلوقة وتسمى قمانية البيض خمسون ميلاً وقمانية البيض مدينة كبيرة عامرة.

From the city of *Khazaria* to the city of *Kira* it is 25 miles. From there to *Cumanie*, which has given its name to the *Cumans*, it is 25 miles; this city is called *Black Cumania*.

From the city of Black Cumania to the city of *Tmutorakan* (*Maṭlūqa*), which is called *White Cumania*, it is 50 miles. White Cumania is a large inhabited city.

Seventh iqlīm, fifth part<sup>13</sup>:

إن هذا الجزء الخامس من الإقليم السابع فيه شمال أرض الروسية وشمال أرض القمانية

Indeed, in this fifth part of the seventh section there is the northern part of the land of *Russia* and the northern part of the land of Cumania

Seventh iqlīm, sixth part<sup>14</sup>:

إن هذا الجزء السادس تضمن بلاد القمانية الداخلة وبعض بلاد بلغارية

“In this sixth part there is a description of the land of *Inner Cumania* and parts of the land of *Bulgaria*.”

The description of the land of Cumania and all its parts indicates that in al-Idrīsī’s work this land by far exceeds the extent of the territories where we can expect to find the people of the *Cumans*. *Cumania*, the land of the *Cumans*, is much bigger and larger than the Polovetsian Steppe. It goes far to the north but does not reach the proportions of the Polovetsian Steppe in the east.

However, in addition to the *Cumans*, al-Idrīsī also knows of the *Kipchaks*, more precisely the land of the *Khifshākh*, which in the ninth part of the seventh section he puts right at the border of Gog and Magog<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 957.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 958.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 962.

إن الذي تضمنه هذا الجزء التاسع من الإقليم السادس قطعة من أرض خفشاخ وأرض التركش وسد  
ياجوج وماجوج فأما بلاد التركش فهي بلاد تتاخم الردم وهي بلاد باردة كثيرة الثلوج والأمطار وكذلك  
أرض خفشاخ مثلها

*Idrīsī* was probably familiar with an Arabic or Persian source which had described the land of the *Kipchaks*. However, he was apparently not aware of the connection between his *Cumans* or the land of the *Cumans*, and the *Kipchaks* or the land of the *Kipchaks*.

In the other side, the only Western European source which refers to this ethnic group as the *Kipchaks* is William of Rubruck (Willielmus de Rubruquis)<sup>16</sup>:

*Et tendebamus recte in orientem ex quo exiimus predictam prouinciam Gasarie, habentes mare ad meridiem et vastam solitudinem ad aquilonem: que durat per viginti dietas alicubi in latitudine; In qua nulla est sylua, nullus mons, nullus lapis. Herba est optima. In hac solebant pascere Comani, qui dicuntur Capchat. A Teutonicis vero dicuntur Valani, et prouincia Valania. Ab Isidoro vero dicitur a flumine Tanai vsque ad paludes Meotidis et Danubium Alania. Et durat ista terra in longitudine a Danubio vsque Tanaim; qui est terminus Asie; et Europe, itinere duorum mensium velociter equitando prout equitant Tartari: Que tota inhabitabatur a Comanis Capchat, et etiam vltra a Tanai vsque Etilian: Inter que flumina sunt decem diete magne<sup>17</sup>.*

“And we were traveling due east from the time we left this province of Gasaria<sup>18</sup>, having the sea to the south and a vast wilderness to the north, which extends in places over thirty days in breadth; and in it is neither forest, nor hill, nor stone, but only the finest pasturage. Here the Comans, who are called Capchat, used to pasture their flocks; the Teutons, however, call them Valans,

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<sup>16</sup> William of Rubruck, a Flemish Franciscan missionary, explorer and writer of travels. In 1253, on the Pope’s orders, he set out from Constantinople on a missionary journey to convert the Tartars. William was at the court of Mongke Khan (1251–1259) in Karakorum in Mongolia from 1253–1255. He made a report to King Louis IX of France regarding his travels.

<sup>17</sup> *Itinerarium fratris Willielmi de Rubruquis de ordine fratrum Minorum, Galli, Anno gratia 1253, ad partes Orientales*, p. 246.

<sup>18</sup> *Prouinciam Gasarie ... que dicitur Kersona*. Ibid., p. 214. Chersonesus Taurica, the ancient city located on the shore of the Black Sea on the outskirts of Sevastopol on the Crimean Peninsula.

and the province Valania. However, it is stated by Isidorus that Alania extends from the river Tanais to the Palus Maeotis and the Danube, and that this country, which extends from the Danube to the Tanais (which is the boundary between Asia and Europe), and which takes two months of hard riding as the Tartars do to cross, was all inhabited by the Capchat Comans, as was also that beyond the Tanais to the Etilia: between these two rivers are ten good days.”

*Et inter ista duo flumina in illis terris per quas transiuimus habitabant Comani Capchac antequam Tartari occuparent eas*<sup>19</sup>.

“And in the territory between these two rivers where we continued our way, the Cuman Capchac lived before the Tartars conquered them.”

We can without much doubt relate the names *Capchac* and *Capchat* to the *Kipchaks*. It is evident that the *Polovetsian/Cumans* were the *Kipchaks* not only for the Arabs and Persians; this name was common, or at least not seldom used, in the very heart of *Cumania* by the *Cumans* themselves<sup>20</sup>. To the contrary, there has been no known Oriental source, be it Arabic or Persian, which would relate the name *Kipchak* and its variations with the name *Polovets* or *Cuman*.

At the same time, we have to take into account all possible variations of the change of the ethnonym *Kipchak* to the toponym *Kipchak* and vice versa. A people which achieved a certain level of political and especially military power gained control over a certain territory and transmitted its name also to subject ethnic groups or conquered territories.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 253. See also VÁSÁRY: *Cumans and Tatars*, pp. 6–7.

<sup>20</sup> This is practically the only written evidence which brings the Cumans of the European annals into connection with the Kipchaks of the Arabic and Persian sources. But also here we must be careful because nowhere is it mentioned that the name was used by the Cumans themselves. They were named thus by the interpreter of the expedition, a Muslim, who could have been influenced by knowing the Arabic name. But this is also conversely applicable and nothing precludes the possibility that the Cumans in Kuban used the name “Kipchak” for themselves. In this case it is interesting that this ethnonym appears only in Kuban and not earlier than the crossing of the Don.



Source: *Kitāb al-masālik wa l-mamālik* Muḥammad al-buldān *Ḥudūd al-ālan*  
Nuzhat al-muštāq Itinerarium fratris...

*The geographical distribution of terms associated with Cumans and Kipchaks.*

However, this regards not only peoples, but also smaller units such as a smaller tribe, clan or a bigger family. If it gains control and political and military power over neighboring clans, be they possibly related, the latter will subsequently adopt the name of this new sovereign. It can also be the name of a ruler or chieftain, which then becomes the name of (as it were) a new-emerged tribe or people. Peoples, particularly nomadic ethnic groups in permanent motion, often emerged (and perished) in such a way.

Therefore, the name *Kipchak* could also have been designated to different ethnic groups in different time periods or alternatively to an ethnic group which had evolved and changed in the course of centuries, while a comparison of its origins with that which had been designated by the name *Kipchak* in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries would be very surprising. If we take into account that really this name originally belonged to one Turkish tribe, living somewhere in the foothills of the Altai Mountains (or even as far as the Yenisei River basin), its individual parts gradually set out for the west (but possibly also for the east), gained new names, and, in spite of this, there was an affinity of these parts in the awareness of geographers and historians to such an extent that for outside observers it was a unified people deserving a single name; this is more surprising than logical.

If the name *Kipchak* is derived from the words or word phrases which denote a characteristic feature of this ethnic group - light hair and blue eyes<sup>21</sup> – it is interesting that references from later periods about this appearance (which was not typical for the nomadic Turkic ethnic group) disappear. The mutual mixing of different tribes, clans and ethnic groups erased this anatomical peculiarity from general awareness.

Similar changes happened also in the language. Already *Maḥmūd al-Kashgarī*<sup>22</sup> differentiates two dialects of the *Kipchaks* in two separate regions where two groups of the *Kipchaks* lived<sup>23</sup>. Later on the Cuman/Kipchak language became the *lingua franca* for many tribes of the Eastern European and Western Siberian steppes. We include the north-western Turkic languages into the Kipchak group of languages<sup>24</sup>, which is further divided into three subgroups<sup>25</sup>. In the Altay Mountains, in the vicinity of the original territory of the Cumans/Kipchaks, the region in which the Kipchaks were “discovered” in the 9<sup>th</sup> century by Arabic geographic literature, there nowadays lives a small ethnic group of Kumandins<sup>26</sup>. They are considered as part of the historical Cumans/Kipchaks<sup>27</sup> who did not participate in moving to the west. However, we include the language of these Kumandins into the south-eastern (Uyghur) group of the Turkish languages, the *Karluk* subgroup. By their appearance, the Kumandins do not differ from their neighbors in any way (they are neither blond nor blue-eyed); they are a certain mix of the Mongolian and Caucasian phenotype. Of course, they could be the ones who digressed from the common “original ethnicity” by assimilation with neighboring nations. However, most probably both groups went their own way.

If not evidence in itself, the differences between the historical Cumans and the contemporary Kumandins are at least an indication which more or less confirms the assumption that the ethnogenesis of the Kipchaks (in all regions of the Kipchak steppe) during the five centuries from the departure from the Altay

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<sup>21</sup> HAZAI, *Qumān*, p. 373.

<sup>22</sup> A lexicographer in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>23</sup> NASILOV, *Kipchaki u Mahmuda Kashgarskogo*, p. 289.

<sup>24</sup> BASKAKOV, *Languages*, p. 913.

<sup>25</sup> The Uralo-Caspian subgroup (Bashkir and Tatar (Siberian and Astrakhan Tatar) languages), the Ponto-Caspian subgroup (Karachay-Balkar, Kumyk, Karaim, Krymchak and Crimean Tatar languages) and the Aralo-Caspian subgroup (Kazakh, Karakalpak, Kyrgyz and Nogay languages).

<sup>26</sup> Endonym Kumandy/Kuvandy.

<sup>27</sup> PRITSAK, *Stammesnamen und Titulaturen der altaischen Völker*, p. 94.

Mountains to the arrival of the Mongols was a dynamic process during which a very intense mixing occurred not only with related Turkish nations but also with all available neighbors – Slavs, Finno-Ugric ethnic groups and the nations of the Northern Caucasus. This can even lead to the assumption that it was not a single ethnic group but a conglomerate of tribes which did not have to be related mutually; they only had a common origin of a ruling-class warrior aristocracy. However, without closer evidence such a statement does not have substantiation. In any case though, there are many such indications.

The arrival of the Mongols changed the ethnic structure of the Kipchak steppe. The basis of a new structure was created not only by the Mongols themselves (who formed the ruling but certainly not the most numerous group) but also by dozens of tribes and groups which the Mongols annexed, took along forcefully or drove out after their arrival in new settlements on their way from the Mongolian Plateau to the southern Russian steppes. Despite the fact that from this new conglomerate a group of related tribes was created in a very short time, known by the joint name of *Tatars*, the use of the name *Kipchak* continued. The Mongolian raid can be considered as a certain boundary which meant the “disappearance” of the *Kipchaks* and the “origination” of the Tatars, but this process only began at that time and lasted at least one century. For instance, during this time the synonym and also the name “Kipchak Khanate” was used for the Golden Horde<sup>28</sup>. Of course, the basis for this name could have been the toponym *Kipchak*, i. e. the khanate on the territory which was given its name according to the ethnic group which once lived there. However, it does not exclude in any way the fact that the ethnic group still lived there.

The name of the *Kipchaks* has not perished. It has survived in the form of personal names, the names of places, and the names of minor clans or families. The *Kipchaks* have given their name to a whole family of Turkic languages. Have the *Kipchak* people perished? Their most western part, the *Cumans*, merged with the Hungarians or in the Balkans with the Turks, or alternatively dispersed among their neighbors. The *Kipchaks* of the east had the same fate; they contributed to the ethnogenesis of the peoples of Central Asia. However, a major part of the *Kipchaks*, with a great contribution by the Mongols, dispersed among the new-emerged Tartar people in all its lines. For a certain period of time it is even possible to say that the *Tatars* and *Kipchaks* constituted the same

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<sup>28</sup> GROUSSET, *The Empire of the Steppes: A History of Central Asia*, p. 264.

ethnic group; after some time, however, the name “Tatar” prevailed<sup>29</sup>. The Kipchaks experienced the same fate that they “had prepared” for other peoples and tribes centuries before.

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<sup>29</sup> KOROBENIKOV, *A broken mirror*, p. 406.

## R e s u m é

### **Kumáni a Kipčaci: medzi etnonymom a toponymom**

Jaroslav DROBNÝ, Bratislava

V 10. st. sa Kumáni/Kipčaci dostali do povedomia historikov a zemepiscov, sídlili vtedy na severozápade dnešného Kazachstanu. Máme o nich správy z mnohých zdrojov, písali o nich západoeurópski, ruskí i byzantskí kronikári, aj arabskí a perzskí letopisci. Toto pomenovanie mal pôvodne iba jeden turecký kmeň (žijúci kdesi v predhorí Altaja), pričom postupom času sa jednotlivé jeho časti vydávali na západ. Etnogenéza Kipčakov (vo všetkých regiónoch Kipčackej stepi) počas piatich storočí od odchodu z Altajských hôr, do príchodu Mongolov, bola dynamickým procesom, počas ktorého dochádzalo k veľmi intenzívnemu premiešavaniu nie len s príbuznými tureckými národmi, ale aj so všetkými dostupnými susedmi. Etnonymá Kumán i Kipčák dokonca mohli v rôznych dobách označovať rôzne etniká. Skutočnosť, že napriek tomu bola stále v povedomí vtedajších geografov a historikov predstava o jeho jednote, je viac prekvapujúca, než logická.