

THE CUMANS – Trade

OVERVIEW

The Cumans occupied the steppe between the Emba and Ural Rivers in winter, but they spent time in the pasturelands near Irtys in summer.

The Cumans' economic system was based on pastoralism. They raised great numbers of horses, sheep, goats, camels, and cattle. However, they had limited pastureland, therefore they were forced to move along the routes crossing the steppes to find the best pasturage. These migrations within the steppe led to bloody conflicts and disturbed many sedentary societies on the steppe. Eventually, it resulted in the Cumans extending their territory by conquering the sedentary peoples between the Syr-Darya, the Aral Sea and the Ural, making them the dominant power controlling the major trade routes between Kievan Rus' and Mawarannahr, as well as China.

TRADE

Pastoralism and trade were the main occupations of Cuman society. They traded horses, sheep, goats, camels, cattle and animal products (meat, hides, fur etc.).

The Cumans were active in Central Asian trade as they controlled three main routes such as the Khanzhol Route, the Syr-Darya Route, and the Western Route. These were the important trade routes crossing Cuman territory which connected Volga Bulgaria, Eastern Europe, Byzantium, Khwarezm and the Rus'.

All of these trade and travel routes were very important for the Cuman-Kipchak economy. The meat from their sheep and the skins of ermine, sable, fox, and marten were among the commodities traded with neighboring states. Their control over the Volga river allowed them to use the major trade routes to establish contact with the Byzantines, Kievan Rus', Northern Europe and the Norse.



commerce ended in 1238.

By extending their influence into Crimea, the Cuman-Kipchak began to collect tribute from the Crimean cities, and used the ancient commercial city of Sudak, the most important trans-steppe trade center of the region to the north of the Black Sea, to deliver their commodities to the Byzantines and Europe; and to buy textiles in exchange for furs to sell to Eastern Mediterranean countries.

The Cumans also profited greatly from building a good trade relationship with the Kievan Rus' until the arrival of the Mongols, but the revenue obtained from this

After the Mongol conquest, the merchants who conducted their trade crossing Cuman territory found the steppes insecure and this situation created a crisis in Near Eastern markets since there was a severe shortage of goods from the Eurasian steppe.

Taking Christians as prisoners and selling these people as slaves was also an important source of Cumans' income.

Discussion/Questions

1. What factors allowed the Cumans to become so influential in the trade across the Eurasian steppe and with neighboring states?

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