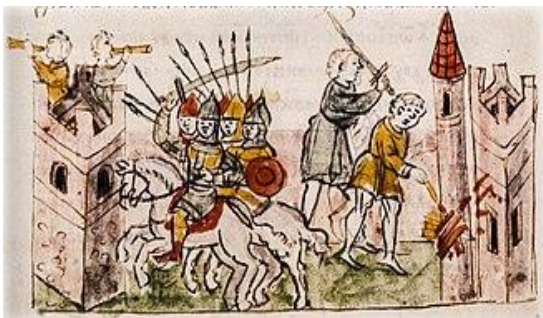


CUMANS (KIPCHAKS) – Military

OVERVIEW

The economy and lifestyle the Cumans determined their behavior. The Cumans had a pastoral economy where agriculture was lacking. Therefore, they had to engage in constant raids on the surrounding sedentary communities in order to fulfill their demands for scarce agricultural goods to survive. Naturally, this type of lifestyle often led to conflict with sedentary societies.

The Cumans (Polovtsy, Kipchak) had been a threat to the southern borders of the Kievan state since their appearance in the southern steppes of the Rus'.



Warfare on horseback was a major feature of the Cuman military. The keys to the Cuman success on the battlefield was to use tactics utilizing quick striking and retreating abilities.

The Cumans were the dominant military power in the area until the Mongols made their way westward in the early 1200s.

Cuman invasion of Kiev according to the Radziwiłł Chronicle (1096).

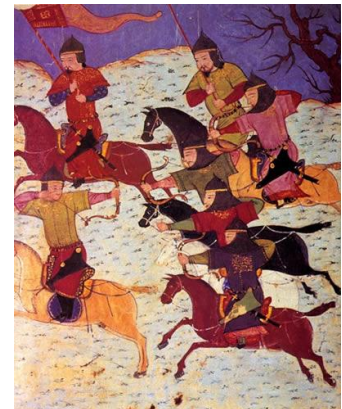
MILITARY

Maneuverability, speed and horsemanship were the Cumans' main characteristics. They had two types of cavalry: light and heavy. Light cavalry archers played an important role in the Cuman military in their major battles. When the Cumans won a battle, they did not stay to take over the territory; they plundered the place and returned to their homeland.

They used heavy cavalry for direct confrontations. If they encountered an enemy they could not defeat in a battle, they use a feigned escape tactic to wait while the enemy troops separated during the chase of the Cuman horsemen, and then ambush and attack the enemy.

The archers' main weapon was a recurve bow, but their also had curved swords, small and heavy spears, small circular shields, daggers, maces, javelins, iron or leather armor, and helmets.

The Cumans also had several horses to alternate them during military expeditions, allowing them to rest. The Cuman horsemen always carried light armor. That allowed them and the horse to carry less weight which gave them an advantage over more the heavily armored Rus' and other nations. The Cumans had very healthy and well trained horses, and the Rus' military elite constantly imported horses from the Cumans since they were superior to their horses.



The Cumans did not take too much booty from the enemy territories since they believed that it would make them lose their ability to weaken enemy with hit and run tactics.

The Cumans khans were not able to unite their tribes. Each tribe had their own khans and military organizations and all these tribal leaders were able to gather sufficient forces to assault the neighboring states.

The Cumans became frequent actors as allied or mercenary forces in a political environment of disintegration and internal feuds in Rus'. The Cumans played an important role in these conflicts due to their rich military experience and military techniques they used in supporting many Rus' tribes and joined in their military encounters.

The rulers of Khwarazm enlisted the Cumans for their military service besides giving them high positions and titles in the administration.

Before the Mongols swept across the steppes of Asia and Eastern Europe, the Cumans were a major military force in the area. The Mongol conquest resulted in waves of Cuman emigration during the 13th century. The Cumans who migrated to the Balkans began to form alliances with various political and military forces and were enlisted as mercenaries in the armies of the Byzantine military. The Cumans also served to the Hungarian kings as auxiliary troops in their campaigns. The Cuman light cavalry was practically invincible in the 12th and 13th century.

Discussion/Questions

1. Why were the Cumans enlisted in Rus' military?
2. What were the main features of the Cuman military?

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