

THE CUMANS –Government

OVERVIEW

The Cumans never established a politically united, strong, centralized state. The territory of the Kipchak-Cuman was composed of loosely allied tribal groups which was called the *Dasht-i Kipchak* (the steppes of the Kipchak).

The Cumans had many tribal groups ruled by independent khagans, who interfered in the political life of the surrounding states and had enough authority to claim tribute from other nomads and their subjects.



The Kipchak-Cuman Confederation was a loose alliance of ethnically diverse groups. Although there was no political unity, the Kipchak-Cuman confederation, with their strong military power, established their influence and apower in the region threatening many strong states in Europe. Therefore, they were hired as auxiliary troops to serve in neighboring states.

The two Turkic confederacies, the Kipchak and Cuman, were united in the 12th century. By the early 13th century, the Kipchak-Cuman confederation had expanded their territory from the Irtysh as far as the Danube river.

GOVERNMENT

KIMEKS, KIPCHAKS AND CUMANS: The Kimek tribal confederation was composed of seven tribes, each of which was ruled by a khagan. The Kimek state was formed at the end of the 9th century, and the first ruler of the Kimek carried the title of *Shad Tutuk*. By the end of the 9th century the ruler of the Kimeks began to use the title *Khagan*. The khagan had enough power to appoint the leaders of the other tribes. The transmission of the khagan's power in the clan was hereditary. The Khagan had his own officials, a *hājib* (palace chamberlain) and a *vizier* (assistant).

The Kimek state was divided into a number of ethno-territorial groupings called *ulus* (fiefdom). The rulers of these *ulus* were the descendants of the supreme khagan and their domains were given in exchange for their military service. Each *ulus* had to supply mounted and infantry units to aid the khagan during his campaigns, and the leaders of these *ulus* were subject to the supreme khagan.

The Kipchak were subject to the Kimek Khagans. Later, they began to split into independent ethno-political groups. In the Dasht-i Kipchak there was no uniform administrative and political system. The Kipchak tribes were ruled by their *begs*, and the tribal groups were spearheaded by the hereditary families of *khagans*. Each khagan had his own military forces, servants and slaves.

The *Hudud al-'Alam*, written in the 10th century, noted that the Cumans were a clan and had separated from the Kimek. The Cumans did not form a state, but were divided into a number of hordes. The hordes of the Cumans were larger social units that were ruled by khagans.

Cuman statue (12th century balbal (stone) from Luhansk)

In the late 11th – early 12th centuries, the tribes living west of the Dnieper river formed the political leadership of the Cumans.



The Kipchaks and Cumans were united by the 12th century, and they set up the Cuman-Kipchak confederation. During the first half of the 12th century, as a result of the breakaway attempts by individual tribes, the growth of the tribal chieftains' power at the expense of their khagan, and the creation of sub-confederations by various Cuman tribes, the Kipchak-Cuman confederation split into two alliances: an alliance of eastern Cuman tribes (Black Cumania) around the Donets Basin and an alliance of western Cuman tribes (White Cumania) between the Dniester and Dnieper Rivers.

By the end of the 12th century, the khagans of the eastern tribes reunited the two branches, however, they were not able to establish a state organization since they did not attempt to do anything to break the power of the tribal and clan chieftains and to create a centralized system of government due to the lack of significant external threats and weakness of the fragmented enemies. Their territory provided them with great opportunities, rich pasture land and booty received from raids and goods obtained by plundering their civilized neighbors to increase their wealth.

Although individual khagans or begs often ruled over large areas, this vast territory was never politically united by a strong central power, there was no coordination between the Cuman rulers, and political ties were very weak. Different Cuman groups under independent rulers acted on their own initiative. That was the major reason for the rapid victories in the Mongol invasion of Cumania in 1222. A smaller Cuman group under the leadership of Khagan Bortz migrated to Magyar territory and his forces began to serve as mercenaries in the Magyar king's army.

Discussions/Questions:

1. What factors prevented the Cumans from founding an organized state?
2. What principle determined leadership among the Cuman?

Readings:

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