

Caroline Gurevich

**THE IMAGE OF THE CUMANS IN MEDIEVAL CHRONICLES:
OLD RUSSIAN AND GEORGIAN SOURCES IN THE TWELFTH
AND THIRTEENTH CENTURIES**

MA Thesis in Medieval Studies

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(Russia)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,
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Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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I, the undersigned, **Caroline Gurevich**, candidate for the MA degree in Medieval Studies, declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

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Abstract

Being the most numerous and military active people of the Eurasian steppe, the Cumans closely interacted with various medieval societies. In my MA thesis I move away from the historical accounts of the numerous sedentary-nomadic interactions to the consideration of the ways of their representation. Using contextual and comparative analysis of Old Russian and Georgian sources, I examine the perspective of medieval Christian authors who tend to ascribe certain features and behavior to the Cumans thereby creating an image of the Cumans. In my work I make an attempt to understand the main elements of this image and its stability in different periods and different sources.

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List of Abbreviations

PSRL – Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei (Concise collection of Russian chronicles)

Introduction

The Cumans who inhabited the Eurasian steppe from the mid-eleventh to thirteenth century and led a nomadic way of life were a Turkic nomadic people, representing the western branch of the Cumans-Qipchak confederation. Their original homeland must have been the territories of south-western Siberia near the basins of the Tobol and Ishim rivers, but already in the second quarter of the eleventh century the Cuman population occupied the nearby southern lands. In the middle of the eleventh century the frontiers of the nomadic world changed considerably due to the wide-ranging migration of the peoples in the Eurasian steppe zone. During this migration period the Cuman tribes came to the Pontic steppe region. Being the most numerous and military active people of the steppe, the Cumans exerted an

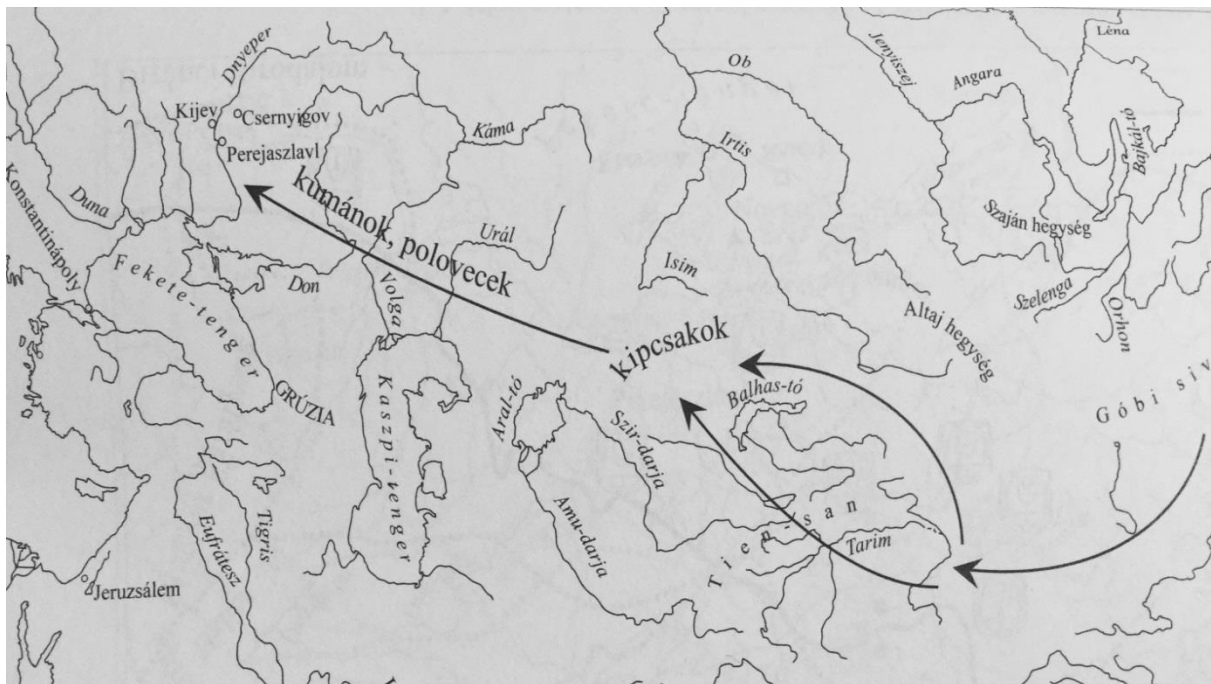


Figure 1 Cuman migration in the Eurasian steppe, 10th -11th centuries.

In Szilvia Kovács, *A kunok története a mongol hódításig*, Magyar őstörténeti könyvtár 29 (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2014), 265.

essential impact on the history of many medieval states (e.g. Byzantium, the Kievan Rus', the Kingdom of Georgia etc.).

Thus, in the southern part of Kievan Rus' the Cumans entered into a variety of military conflicts with the Russian principalities of Pereyasavl', of Chernigov, of Novgorod-Seversk and others. Naturally, the interaction with the Russian principalities was not limited to these confrontations: by the middle of the twelfth century the extensive network of dynastic marriages united the Cuman and the Russian elite guaranteeing mutual military obligations.

Nevertheless, in the policy of alliances and military actions each Cuman leader expressed his own interests. Though the Cuman-Qipchak confederation occupied a vast swath of the Eurasian steppe from the Danube to present-day Kazakhstan (the territory known in written sources as Cumania, Desht-i-Qipchaq, or Pole Poloveckoe), the separate Cuman tribes were disintegrated and did not form a state or a large-scale political unit.¹

It was not only the Russian elite which entered into alliances with the Cumans. The Byzantine and the Hungarian rulers also resorted to collaboration with these nomads. In Georgian history the period of 1118-1124 was characterized by the closest ally interactions with the Cuman tribe followed by the partial sedentarization of the Cumans in Georgia.

¹ Peter B. Golden, "The Peoples of the South Russian Steppes," in *The Cambridge History of Early Inner Asia*, ed. Denis Sinor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 280.

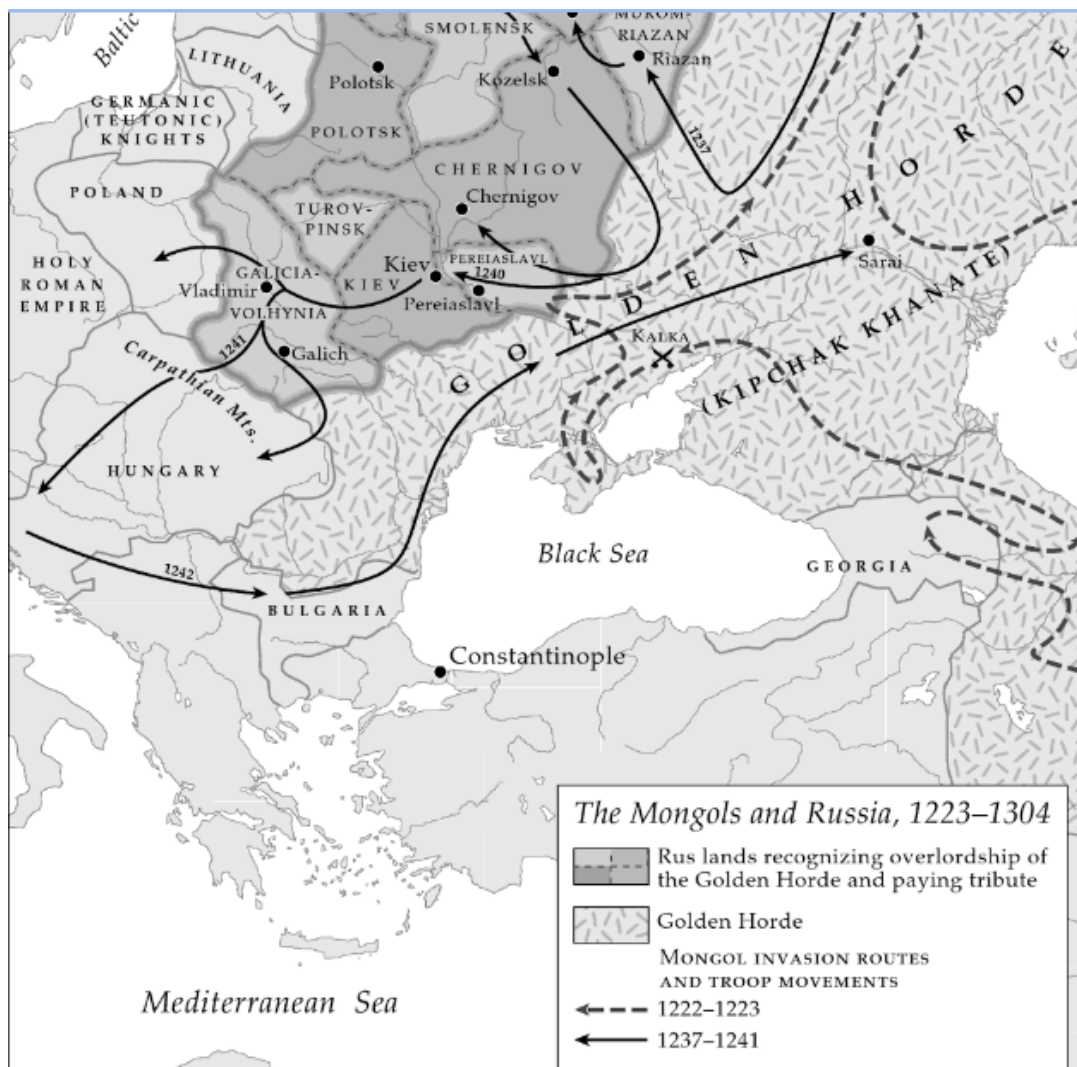


Figure 2 The Mongols and Russia, 1223-1304. Map №5.1 in Walter G. Moss, *A History of Russia. Vol. 1, To 1917*, 2nd ed., reprinted (London:

The historical fate of the Cumans could have been rather different if the Eurasian steppe had not faced the menacing power of the Mongols in the 1220s. Expanding their influence in the eastern part of the Eurasian steppe, the Mongols pressed the Cuman tribes and forced them to leave their camps and their pastures. It became clear that the Cumans could not resist the Mongols, even with the help of their frequent allies, the Russian princes, and also that they could not stay in the territories occupied by a stronger and more numerous enemy. After a series of fights in 1238-1239 between the Cumans and the Mongols, the Cumans finally lost their impact in the Pontic Steppe, and the Cuman-Qipchak confederation disintegrated into many tribes of small account, which partly mixed with the Mongols or migrated to the west.

This brief summary of the Cuman history demonstrates that throughout the whole period of their activity the Cumans interacted with a variety of medieval societies and these interactions had quite diverse forms. The historiographical traditions of the societies interrelating with the Cumans did not only preserve the factual information about the common past, but also presented a unique image of the Cumans.

Previous scholarship

The research on the image of the Cumans requires consideration of the scholarship in two main fields: first, the works on the interactions between the representatives of the Cuman-Qipchak confederation and the sedentary societies and secondly, the discourses on the attitudinal models which may be connected to the Cumans, primarily, discourses on nomadism, barbarism and otherness.

The scholarship on the interactions between the Cumans and Rus' is quite rich. The full account of the works examining these interactions is presented in Ruslana Mavrodina's historiographical essay.² Mavrodina gives a detailed analysis of the existing Russian and Soviet historical writings from the early eighteenth century to the 1960s. After Mavrodina's review a number of significant works appeared, including the monographs of the archeologists and historians Petr Tolochko and Svetlana Pletneva and also the anthropological and ethnological study of Iurii Evstigneev.³ Different aspects of chroniclers' perception of the Cumans were considered by Alexei Laushkin, Elena Koniavskaia and

² [Ruslana Mavrodina] Руслана Мавродина, *Киевская Русь и кочевники: печенеги, торки, половцы: историографический очерк* [Kievan Russian and the Nomads: the Pechenegs, the Torks, and the Cumans: a historiographical essay] (Leningrad: Nauka, 1983).

³ [Petr Tolochko] Петр Толочко, *Кочевые народы степей и Киевская Русь* [The nomadic steppe people and the Kievan Rus'], Славянская библиотека (Saint Petersburg: Aleteia, 2003); [Svetlana Pletneva] Светлана Плетнева, *Половцы* [Polovtsy] (Moscow: Lomonosov, 2010); [Iurii Evstigneev] Юрий Евстигнеев, *Кыпчаки / половцы / куманы и их потомки: к проблеме этнической преемственности* [The Qipchaks/ the Polovcians / the Cumans and their descendants: on the problem of ethnic succession] (Saint Petersburg: Asterion, 2010).

Dmitrii Dobrovolskii.⁴ Among the recent studies Szilvia Kovács's work has offered a new perspective on the origin and eschatological connotations of the image of the Cumans in the *Russian Primary Chronicle*.⁵

The short period of interactions between the Cumans and the Kingdom of Georgia is mostly regarded in the context of medieval Georgia statehood formation by the fundamental works of noted Caucasiologist Cyril Toumanoff and his follower Stephen H. Rapp.⁶ Among the works dealing particularly with the Cuman presence in Georgia, Zurab Anchabadze's paper and Melita Murguliia's monograph might be noted.⁷

It is impossible to consider the scholarly literature on the Cumans without mentioning the works of the American turkologist Peter B. Golden, who manages to analyze a wide picture of the large-scale Cuman movements and migrations without neglecting particular social and economic details. In his analysis of the role of the Cumans in the economic development of Rus', Golden goes beyond assessments, generally accepted in the Russian and Soviet scholarship, which considered the Cumans the main destructive power impeding the economic growth of the Russian principalities.⁸

⁴ [Elena Koniavskaia] Елена Конявская, "Половцы в ранних летописях: оценки и интерпретации летописцев [The Cumans in the early chronicles: Assessment and interpretations by the chroniclers]," *Slověne: International Journal of Slavic Studies* 4, no. 1 (2015): 181-8; [Dmitriy Dobrovolskiy] Дмитрий Добровольский, "Восприятие половцев в летописании XI-XII вв. [The perception of the Cumans in the chronicles of the eleventh to the thirteenth century]," *Диалог со временем* 39 (2012): 290-91.

⁵ Szilvia Kovács, "The Origin of the Cumans in the Russian Primary Chronicle," *Chronica. Annual of the Institute of History, University of Szeged* 11 (2011): 125-34.

⁶ Cyril Toumanoff, *Studies in Christian Caucasian History* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1963); "Armenia and Georgia," in *The Cambridge Medieval History: The Byzantine Empire Part 1: Byzantium and Its Neighbours.*, ed. Joan Mervyn Hussey, vol. 4 (London: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1966).

⁷ [Zurab Anchabadze] Зураб Анчабадзе, "Кипчаки Северного Кавказа по данным грузинских летописей XI-XIV веков [The Qipchaks of the North Caucasus by the Data of the Georgian Chronicles 11th-14th Centuries]," in *О происхождении балкарцев и карачаевцев [On the Origin of the Balkars and the Karachays]* (Nalchik: Kabardino-Balkarskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo, 1960); [Melita Murguliia] Мелита Мургулия and [Vladimir Shusharin] Владимир Шушарин, *Половцы, Грузия, Русь и Венгрия в XII-XIII веках [The Cumans, Georgia, Rus' and Hungary in 12th-13th centuries]* (Moscow: Inst. Slavjanovedeniia i Balkanistiki RAN, 1998).

⁸ For the collection of Peter B. Golden's works see: Peter B. Golden, *Nomads and Their Neighbours in the Russian Steppe: Turks, Khazars and Qipchaqs*, Variorum Collected Studies Series CS752 (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003).

The interactions between the Cumans and the other sedentary societies also have a long research history. Thus, the presence of the Cumans in Hungary was examined from the point of view of the social incorporation and inclusion (Nora Berend's monography); from the historical and archaeological perspectives, for example, in the works of András Pálóczi Horváth, or more recently in Kyra Lyublyanovics's doctoral dissertation.⁹ The Hungarian scholarship has a long research tradition dealing with the visual sources related to the Cumans. Visual representations of the Cumans with their undeniable cultural heritage value were discussed in the various contexts, such as hagiography and the legend of Saint Ladislás, reconstruction of the material culture of the Cumans, medieval manuscripts and art historical studies on church decorations (for instance, in the works of Ernő Marosi, more recently in Annamária Kovács's doctoral dissertation etc.).¹⁰ The studies on the Cuman presence in Bulgaria and the Balkans produced another discourse summarized in István Vásáry's monography.¹¹

The second part of the scholarship considered, concentrating more on the perceptive aspects, presents a complicated system of approaches which could be fully or partly useful for the analysis of Old Russian and Georgian sources. Thus, the image of the Cumans which emerged in the sedentary society could not be explored outside the discourse on sedentary-nomadic interactions, presented, for example, by Anatoly Khazanov's works.¹²

⁹Nora Berend, *At the Gate of Christendom: Jews, Muslims, And "pagans" in Medieval Hungary, C. 1000 - C. 1300*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, Ser. 4, 50 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006); Kyra Lyublyanovics, "The Socio-Economic Integration of Cumans in Medieval Hungary: An Archaeozoological Approach," PhD diss., CEU Medieval Studies Department (Budapest: Central European University, 2015).

¹⁰Ernő Marosi, "Magyarok középkori ábrázolásai és az orientalizmus a középkori művészetben," ["Medieval depictions of Hungarians and orientalism in medieval art,"] in *Magyarok Kelet és Nyugat közt* (Budapest: Balassi, 1996), 77–97; András Pálóczi Horváth, "Le costume coman au Moyen Age," *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 32 (1980): 403–27; Annamária Kovács, "Court, Fashion and Representation: The Hungarian Illuminated Chronicle Revisited," PhD diss., CEU Medieval Studies Department, (Budapest: Central European University, 1999);

¹¹István Vásáry, *Cumans and Tatars: Oriental Military in the Pre-Ottoman Balkans, 1185–1365* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005)

¹²Anatoly Khazanov, *Nomads and the Outside World* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984); "Nomads of the Eurasian Steppes in Historical Retrospective," in *Nomadic Pathways in Social*

The use of discourse on barbarism is only partly relevant: though both the Kingdom of Georgia and Rus' inherited the Byzantine historiographical models, the Georgian chroniclers were influenced by the Byzantine tradition to a greater degree (for instance, King David's historian calls David's enemies "barbarians"). In contrast, for the medieval Russian authors, representing a newly Christianized society, the "barbarism-civilization" dichotomy is hardly pertinent. Nevertheless, some observations on the development of the "barbarism" discourse in the Middle Ages, suggested, for example, in the work "The Image of the Barbarian in Medieval Europe" by W. R. Jones, are useful for my thesis.

The most complicated type of discourse in case of the Georgian and the Old Russian sources is the discourse on otherness. The policies of exclusion, detection of the "other", which is necessary for the identity-building processes, creation of "a collective memory, a sense of solidarity and of collective allegiance to and for the particular group" have been widely discussed in recent years.¹³ However, the majority of works focuses¹⁷² on the European civilization and European identity associated with "a degree of civilization, goods and values that had to be defended against enemies".¹⁴ Religious homogeneity played a dominant role in the European identity construction. Nora Berend, tracing the fate of non-Christian minorities (including the Cumans) in medieval Hungary, states that the processes of integration and exclusion were based on the perception of Christendom as a unified space. Berend emphasizes that it was the concept of Latin Christendom, "a cultural, social, political and religious unit under papal leadership" which was the result of "controversies and an

Evolution, ed. Nikolay N. Kradin, The Civilization Dimension Series 5 (Moscow: Russian Academy of Science, 2003), 25–49; "Myths and Paradoxes of Nomadism," *European Journal of Sociology* 22, no. 1 (2009): 141–53.

¹³ Henriette-Rika Benveniste and Costas Gaganakis, "Heterodoxies: Construction of Identities and Otherness in Medieval and Early Modern Europe," *Historein* 2 (2001): 8, doi:10.12681/historein.108; Anja Eisenbeiss and Lieselotte E. Saurma-Jeltsch, eds., *Images of Otherness in Medieval and Early Modern Times: Exclusion, Inclusion and Assimilation* (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2012); Laurent Mayali and Maria Mart, *Of Strangers and Foreigners: (Late Antiquity - Middle Ages)* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1993); Stuart Woolf, "Knowledge of Others and Self-Perceptions of European Identity," *Historein* 2 (2000): 55–64.

¹⁴ Karl J. Leyser, "Concepts of Europe in the Early and High Middle Ages," *Past & Present*, no. 137 (1992): 41.

increasing separation between Latin and Byzantine Christianity”.¹⁵ The identity-making processes in the Kingdom of Georgia and the Kievan Rus’, the societies which succeeded the Byzantine development paths and at the same time had their own political experience, may be compared to, but cannot be overlaid on the European templates.

My work will combine various approaches and rich scholarly traditions in order to find new aspects in the description, contextualization and interpretation of the image of the Cumans in the chosen medieval narrative sources.

Research Questions

In my thesis I would like to shift the research focus from the historical accounts of the interactions between the Cumans and their sedentary neighbors to the analysis of the representative aspect of these interactions, i.e. the image formed by the particular features ascribed to the Cumans. The sources which are traditionally used for the interpretation of historical events present a multilayer structure where factual account is only one element of the narrative system. In my work I intend to consider the evaluative code connected to the Cumans and to trace its development in different medieval written and visual sources.

My main research questions are: What are the main traits which are ascribed to the Cumans by medieval chroniclers? To what extent are these traits unique/ characteristic to the local elite or other social groups interacting with the Cumans? How are the Cumans perceived by different medieval authors? Is the image of the Cumans created in a positive or negative tone? To what degree is this image static or dynamic?

Primary Sources

Russian Sources

¹⁵ Berend, *At the Gate of Christendom*, 43.

For more than a century and a half the Cumans, who became “masters of the Eurasian steppes by the mid-eleventh century,” played a significant role in the social and political history of Rus’.¹⁶ Accordingly, the medieval Russian historiographical tradition could not avoid presenting a rich experience of relationship with these nomads.

The main source about the early interactions between Rus’ and the Cumans is the text of the *Russian Primary Chronicle* describing events from 852 (traditionally perceived as the origin of the history of Rus’) to the early twelfth century. The remarkable works of Alexei Shakhmatov (1864-1920) demonstrated the credibility of these records presented by the late manuscript copies from the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹⁷

Shakhmatov and his followers showed that medieval Russian chronicle writing, from the very first stages, should be considered as a complicated dynamic process characterized by reproductive, compiling and editorial practices. Modern historiographers assume that the chronicle tradition began with one hypothetically reconstructed integral text, usually called the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, which underwent different editions (see Fig.3). Three codices present the text of the *Russian Primary Chronicle* most completely: the Laurentian Codex (MS of the fourteenth century), the Radziwiłł Codex and the Hypatian Codex (the fifteenth century); other known codices present a combination of the *Russian Primary Chronicle* with texts taken from the Novgorod chronicle tradition: the First Novgorod Chronicle (its Synod Scroll goes back to the thirteenth century), First Sofia

¹⁶ Peter Golden, “Aspects of the Nomadic Factor in the Economic Development of Kievan Rus’,” in Peter B. Golden, *Nomads and Their Neighbours in the Russian Steppe: Turks, Khazars and Qipchaqs*, Variorum Collected Studies Series, CS752 (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003), 78.

¹⁷ [Alexei Shakhmatov] Алексей Шахматов, *Разыскания о древнейших русских летописях*, vol. 1, *История русского летописания: Повесть временных лет и древнейшие русские летописные своды*. [Studies on the Oldest Russian Chronicles, vol. 1, The History of the Russian chronicle writing: The Russian Primary Chronicle and the Oldest Russian Chronicles], pt. 1 (Saint Petersburg: Nauka, 2003); [Alexei Shakhmatov] Алексей Шахматов, *Раннее русское летописание XI-XII вв.*, vol. 1, *История русского летописания: Повесть временных лет и древнейшие русские летописные своды* [The Early Russian Chronicle Writing in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, vol. 1, The History of Russian chronicle writing: The Russian Primary Chronicle and the Oldest Russian Chronicles], pt. 2 (Saint Petersburg: Nauka, 2003).

Chronicle and Fourth Novgorod Chronicle (fifteenth century). According to Shakhmatov's generally accepted hypothesis, there were three significant editions of the text of the *Russian Primary Chronicle*: originally, the text was composed in 1113, then in 1116 considerably edited by Sylvester, the hegumen of Vydubychi Monastery near Kiev, and in two years, in 1118, was edited again. Analyzing the texts of the known codices, Shakhmatov came to the conclusion that the Laurentian Codex mostly reflects Sylvester's edition and the Hypatian Codex is much closer to the edition of 1118.

The later observations on the *Russian Primary Chronicle* showed that it contains certain insertions which are absent, for example, from the First Novgorod Chronicle. This demonstrates that the *Russian Primary Chronicle* is a copy of the earlier chronicle which is referred to as the *Initial Compilation*. The estimated date of this compilation is 1096-1099.

More recent studies indicated that the inadequacies and certain illogical details found in the First Novgorod Chronicle presume the existence of the *Oldest Chronicle*, created at the beginning of the eleventh century. That chronicle was a monothematic coherent narrative, not divided into annalistic entries. Scholars noticed that exact dates with the days of the events appear in the known codices after the descriptions of the 1060s. Accordingly, the division of the original coherent narrative was introduced later, about the 1070s.¹⁸ It was most probably connected to the activity of Nikon, the hegumen of the Kievan Cave Monastery. This means that the events connected to the early interactions with the Cumans, undergoing certain modifications, reached us in various forms.

¹⁸ [Savva Mikhëev] Савва Михеев, *Кто писал "Повесть временных лет"?* [Who was writing "The Russian Primary Chronicle"?], *Slavjano-germanskie issledovanija* 6 (Moscow: Izdat. Indrik, 2011), 124–27.

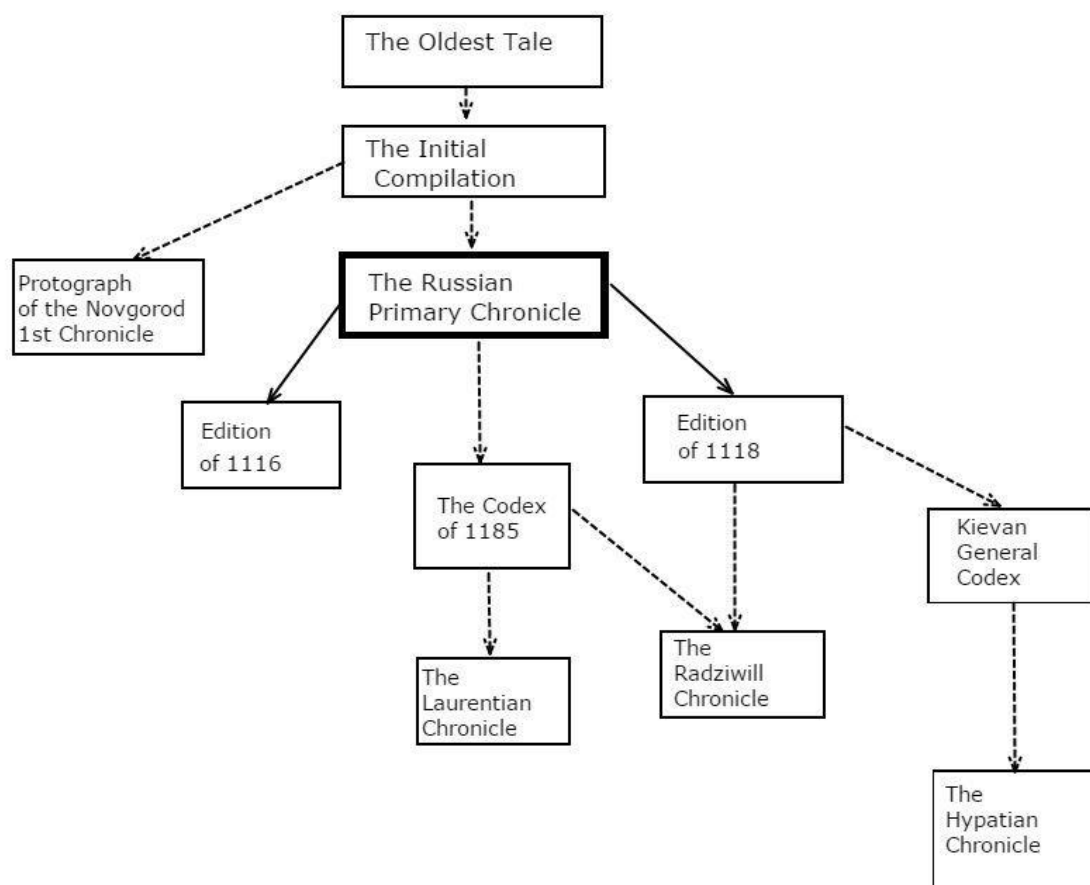


Fig. 1 The simplified chart of the history of the early Russian chronicle writing (based on Shakhmatov's and Mikheev's conceptions)

Considering the events up to the early twelfth century, I will primarily use the Laurentian text of the *Russian Primary Chronicle*. As for the further records about the Cumans, I will refer to the *Kievan Chronicle*, a text compiled around 1200 in the Vydubychi monastery which describes the events of 1118-1200, and to the *Galician-Volhynian* chronicle, initially a coherent narrative about the period 1201-1291, written in the 1280s and later divided into annalistic entries. Both chronicles are preserved in the Hypatian Codex.

Georgian Sources

Most of the Georgian historical sources are known within the medieval corpus of writings called *Kartlis Tskhovreba* (The life of Kartli/Georgia). This corpus is also known as

the *Georgian Royal Annals* or the *Georgian Chronicles*.¹⁹ In the eleventh and twelfth centuries the strengthening of the Bagrationi dynasty and the political consolidation of the Kingdom of Georgia required a new representation of the Georgian past that would contribute to the socio-political processes of integration.²⁰ During this period the main corpus of *Kartlis Tskhovreba* was composed. It was created by various authors and from different periods as a chronologically organized collection of historical writings with the aim to present a coherent and unified history of Georgia. Cyril Toumanoff presents the following structure of the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*:

1. The History of the Kings of Iberia, by Leontius, Archbishop of Ruisi
2. The History of King Vakhtang Gorgasali, by Juansher Juansheriani
3. The Martyrdom of King Archil II, by Leontius of Ruisi
4. The Chronicle of Iberia
- 5. The History of the King of Kings, (David)**
6. The Histories and Eulogies of the Sovereigns
7. The History of the Mongol Invasions²¹

Out of these writings the present thesis mostly discusses *The History of the King of Kings, (David)* written by an anonymous author in 1123-1126.

The *Kartlis Tskhovreba* corpus, as it is now, cannot be examined without taking into account the large-scale editorial work undertaken by King Vakhtang VI (1675-1737) at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The king appointed a commission of “learned men” who, using all accessible manuscript copies and charters, corrected, updated and harmonized the texts of the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*. Not much is known about the work of the commission and the selection process, but scholars assume a strong connection of the edited materials

¹⁹ Stephen H. Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography, Early Texts and Eurasian Contexts* 601, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 113 (Louvain: Peeters, 2003), 17.

²⁰ Roin Metreveli and Stephen Jones, eds., *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia = K'artlis C'xovreba*, trans. Dmitri Gamqrelidze (Tbilisi: Artanuji Publishers, 2014), 7–8.

²¹ Cyril Toumanoff, “Medieval Georgian Historical Literature (VIIth–XVth Centuries),” *Traditio* 1 (1943): 149.

with the previous manuscript tradition: the Vaxtangiseuli MSS are definitely based upon pre-Vaxtangiseuli ones, though specialists have been unable to identify precisely which old MSS were used and privileged by the commission.²²

Apart from the MSS of Vakhtang's cycle there are also MSS, discovered in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which go back to the earlier periods. Five of them are especially important: a seventeenth-century copy of the MS dedicated to Queen Mariam (1633-1638); sixteenth-century copy of the MS dedicated to Queen Anna, wife of Alexander I of Kakheti (ca. 1456-1511); the seventeenth-century Chalashvili MS with eighteenth-century additions; the Machabeli MS (1736) and the copy of 1697 discovered by Ak'ak'i Klimiashvili.²³ All these MSS contain *The History of the King of Kings, (David)* and all of them were taken into consideration in the latest editions and translations of this narrative.²⁴

It was King David IV Aghmashenebeli (the Builder, the Restorer) who invited the Cumans to Georgia (ca. 1118). Unsurprisingly, out of all the historical narratives in the Georgian Chronicles, the *History of the King of Kings, (David)* describes the Cumans in the most detailed and extensive manner. The Vakhtang Edition specified the title of this source, having added to the original title the name of the king: David. Accordingly, the source is also known as the *History of David, King of Kings*.

The *History* was written from 1123 to 1126; its final part was added after David's death in 1125. The *History* covers the period from 1072 to 1125; the first part (1072-1112) describes the uneasy reign of George II, a period when the Seljuk threat, natural disasters and internal conflicts brought about an acute socio-political crisis. Nevertheless, this description is only an introduction to the narrative about the reign of George's son, David IV the Builder,

²² Rapp, *Studies*, 26.

²³ Metreveli and Jones, *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, 6–7.

²⁴ Katharine Vivian, Anthony Bryer, and Simon Qauxč'išvili, *The Georgian Chronicle: The Period of Giorgi Lasha* (Amsterdam: A.M. Hakkert, 1991); Stephen H. Rapp, ed., *K'art'lis C'xovreba: The Georgian Royal Annals and Their Medieval Armenian Adaptation*, Anatolian and Caucasian studies (Delmar, N.Y.: Caravan Books, 1998); Metreveli and Jones, *Kartlis Tskhovreba*.

who ruled from 1089 (first, as co-ruler with his father) to his death in 1125. The *History* describes David's deeds and personal life in a highly eulogistic manner, using more rhetorical tools than the previous historical narratives in the *Kartlis Tskhovreba* corpus. The author idealizes David's image and in parallel creates a new ideology of power based on the "Byzantine imperial idea of a Christian ruler and his main virtues, such as courage, justice, piety, philanthropy, and wisdom."²⁵

The author of the *History* does not name himself, but the narrative indicates that he is likely to have been a confidant of the king and an eyewitness to many of the events represented. Moreover, the ecclesiastical affiliation of the Anonymous, who widely quotes the Old and the New Testaments, the writings of the Church Fathers and actively uses Biblical imagery, seems to be quite plausible. At the same time, the author is equally acquainted with the classical works and gives examples from the ancient literature of different periods.

Comparing the chronology in Anonymous's narrative to other historical sources, scholars have reached the conclusion that "among the authors of *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, the historian of David the Restorer, a highly enlightened person, a connoisseur of Western and Eastern cultures, is the most trustworthy and competent."²⁶

Methodology

In the present study I use a historico-philological approach. First of all, I examine the historical context of the events which are described in the sources. The historical background—the preconditions and the consequences of the events—becomes an important basis for further considerations of the narrative episodes.

²⁵ Sandro Nikolaishvili, "Byzantine Imperial Ideology and Political Thinking: Model for the 12th-Century Georgian Kingship," *Phasis* 14, no. 26 (2011): 346–47.

²⁶ Metreveli and Jones, *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, 10.

In case of sources which provide an extensive body of materials concerning the Cumans, such as the Russian chronicles, one of the methodological problems is the that of selection: the episodes mentioning the Cumans are numerous and diverse. I approach the process of selection through the stages of classification, generalization and differentiation. Firstly, the episodes representing the Cumans are classified according to the narrative models they follow. Secondly, the most numerous groups are regarded through the system of the most characteristic examples. Finally, the episodes which differ from the common tendencies and demonstrate nontrivial features are considered separately.

In order to reconstruct the inner logic of the narrative and to define the development of narrative lines in each specific case, I conduct a comparative analysis of narrative characteristics in semantically similar fragments. For the purposes of the comparative method, I theorize the criteria system for each source type. The criteria-establishing decision is especially important since various sources, even the same sources from different periods, put emphasis on different aspects of the Cuman image, ignoring one set of qualities and exaggerating another.

Contextualization is another important methodological step in my research. Pointing out the respective peculiarities in the description of the Cumans and identifying the set of stable characteristics, I will trace the impact of the historiographical tradition in each particular descriptive case: for instance, whether the author uses certain clichés or common patterns for the description of the nomadic tribes. It is essential to introduce the components of the historiographical analysis since the sources I am focusing on do not develop their own historiographical trends in isolation, but often assimilate, revise and transform the previous writing experience. Thus, both the Georgian and the Old Russian chronicles adopt elements of the Byzantine written tradition, although modifying them in their own unique way.

Seeking opinions and perceptions in long chronicle traditions such as these inescapably raises the methodological issue of reevaluation. Evaluative characteristics often change and evolve; in the same source they can change from period to period or from one author to another. The second problem is the definition and demarcation of the negative and positive poles in different narrative systems, including potential shifts and deviations. I approach both problems using the techniques of contextual analysis and close reading.

In the last part of my research which deals with the visual material I undertake iconographical analysis of chronicle miniatures. I apply the iconographical method with visual and comparative analysis in several successive stages. First of all, I describe the basic visual traits of the miniatures, the color system, the use of forms, the relevance of the composition, and so on. Then I establish the most prominent features in the visual representation of the Cumans, for example, the peculiarities of appearance, clothes and weapons, with special attention paid to the idea of dynamics and statics in the miniatures. The examination of the images concludes with the brief comparative analysis of the chronicle miniatures, taking into account the specificity of the particular sources and particular pictorial traditions. Due to the limitation of the thesis I do not go beyond the chronicle miniature tradition and do not correlate the visual images to the respective narrative passages in detail.

The methodological basis of this thesis can be described as a combination of approaches at micro and macro levels: the close consideration of the textual or visual elements, followed by their classification and differentiation, result in a contextual and comparative analysis which shed light to interesting connections and open new research perspectives.

Chapter 1 – The Image of the Enemy

The image of the enemy is one of the most complicated products of socio-political conventions. Usually it has many component elements and its construction requires more than one stage of development. This chapter will focus on the cases where the medieval chronicles present the Cumans as enemies. The main task of the chapter will be to describe the tools and the approaches of the writing processes leading to the creation of the negative image of the Cumans which was taken for granted in the later historiographical traditions.

Applying the notion “the image of the Enemy” to the Cumans, it is necessary to distinguish it from “the image of the Other.” Marija Vuorinen states that “the main difference between Other and Enemy lies specifically in their respective activeness—an enemy is perceived, or imagined, to be actually menacing.”²⁷ Thus, it would be logical to assume that the hostile image of the Cumans was primarily connected to the negative experience of armed clashes.

Military conflicts were a frequent (but not the only one) form of sedentary-nomadic interactions in the Middle Ages. It was mainly the difference in the economic behavior and lifestyle that determined the confrontation between the two societies. The nomadic groups of the Eurasian steppe were practicing a cattle-breeding economy where agriculture was lacking or was only an auxiliary part of the economic structure.²⁸ Therefore, the nomadic tribes waged constant raids on the sedentary communities in order to compensate in the easiest way for their scarce agricultural commodities. Naturally, such policy often led to a negative perception of nomads in the sedentary society.

Although the sedentary-nomadic clash was mostly based on political and economic tactics, the sedentary perception of the nomads was often expressed in terms of religion, ideology or ethnicity. Historians, having access to the written evidence originating only from the sedentary societies, can observe one point of view on the sedentary-nomadic conflicts and analyze only one type of their interpretation. Moreover, in most cases the description of the

²⁷ Marja Vuorinen, ed., *Enemy Images in War Propaganda* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2012), 3.

²⁸ Anatoliy M. Khazanov, “Characteristic Features of Nomadic Communities in the Eurasian Steppe,” in Wolfgang Weissleder and International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, eds., *The Nomadic Alternative: Modes and Models of Interaction in the African-Asian Deserts and Steppes*, World Anthropology (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), 120; Kyra Lyublyanovics, “The Cumans in Medieval Hungary and the Question of Ethnicity,” in *Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU* 17 (2011): 160-1.

nomads comes from the ecclesiastical written sources in which the authors consider the nomadic factor in a teleological and sometimes eschatological context.

The Cumans fitted this model in the sedentary-nomadic discourse: they did not have their own written tradition and their representation depended on the particular social and political situation in the sedentary society. Quite often the Cumans did not receive positive characterization in societies enduring recurrent nomadic raids, e.g. in the Byzantine Empire or in the southern Russian principalities.²⁹

It is natural that all kinds of religious, cultural and socio-political distinctions in combination with the negative experience of interactions often fostered the alienation and exclusion of the nomads from favorable social representation. A number of mechanisms can affect this estrangement, including the “moral barrier between civilization and barbarism,”³⁰ religious antipathy between monotheism and polytheism, ethnical tensions and even the ongoing processes of nation and identity-building.

Later Development of the Chronicle Image of the Enemy

Considering the image of the nomadic enemy formed in the sedentary society at the beginning of their interactions, it is crucial to distinguish the original tendencies and the later exploitation of this image. For instance, in order to justify the problems of economic or political development of the particular society, its members can identify the nomadic factor as the main reason of the untoward situation. Anatoly Khazanov notes that in such cases:

nomads served this role well because they were the ‘others,’ the outsiders. Russian, Hungarian, Romanian, and other politically charged and patriotic historiographies presented their countries’ retardation as the consequence of nomadic intrusions and conquests. [...] In this way myths have been created and were propagandized not only by historians, but also by writers, poets, artists, and even by governments. These myths were and still are taught at schools; they have penetrated deeply into the public consciousness and demonstrate remarkable vitality

It is obvious that such ideological representation of the nomadic contribution to the history of the sedentary societies should somehow refer to the image drawn by the contemporary sources. The main question here is to what extent the primary image of the enemy is connected to the ideological concept that has emerged recently?

²⁹ [Koniavskaia], “Половцы в ранних летописях,” 182.

³⁰ W. R Jones, “The Image of the Barbarian in Medieval Europe,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13, no. 4 (1971): 378.

The case of the Cumans illustrates perfectly the whole process of emergence and development of such a “hostile” image. On the one hand, in the medieval narrative sources the first descriptions of the Cumans inevitably became the part of the previous tradition where the nomadic groups were consistently considered as enemies. On the other hand, later the historiographical discourse could develop this image emphasizing its negative characteristics. It is especially evident in the case of the Russian historiographical tradition of the nineteenth century in which the Cumans were considered the enemies of the nation and the resistance to them was considered as a patriotic duty.³¹

The image of the nomadic enemy that was formed in the later historiographical traditions can be particularly useful in the reconstruction of the “initial” image. In the constantly “self-revising” chronicle tradition it is impossible to speak about the “very first” or “primary” representation of the enemy. It is more reasonable to explore the semantic field of negative characteristics where this image can be usually found. For specific examples, I consider each written tradition describing the Cumans separately.

The Image of the Enemy in the Russian Sources

The Cumans were not the first nomadic people to choose the Eurasian steppe for pastoralism. They displaced and partly absorbed the local Turkic population, first of all the Pechenegs, who were already weakened and partly sedentarized by middle of the eleventh century.³² Accordingly, the depiction of the Cumans in the territories neighboring the steppes followed the models formed during the interaction with other nomads. For the Russian principalities, especially on the south, the Cumans were another, more numerous, but not new military power threatening their borders. Naturally, after the first Cuman attack in 1061 the Russian sources placed the Cumans in the context of the negative experience acquired in the previous raids of other nomadic groups such as the Pechenegs and the Uzes.

Interestingly, the first record about the Cumans in the *Russian Primary Chronicle* is devoted to the Cuman-Russian peace treaty (1055). However, the second chronicle record (1061) accumulated considerable hostility towards the Cumans:

³¹ For example: [Nikolay Karamzin] Николай Карамзин, *История Государства Российского* [The history of the Russian state], vol. 2 (Moscow: Kniga, 1988), 75; 82-83; 109, etc.

³² [Pletneva], *Половцы*, 24–25.

The Polovcians [the Cumans] invaded Rus' to make war for the first time. On February 2, Vsevolod [Iaroslavich, the Russian prince] went forth against them. When they met in battle, the Polovcians defeated Vsevolod, but after the combat they retired. This was the first evil done by these pagan and godless foes. Their prince was Iskal.³³

It is interesting to mark the expression “the first evil”: it tells much about the “omniscient” position of the chronicler who does not record the events in real-time but observes the situation in hindsight, in this case the twelfth century, with the capacity to generalize and evaluate the previous experience.

The stable characteristics

The epithets which are used in this first record—pagan, godless—were to determine the negative image of the Cumans for many years.

“Godless” (“Безбожные”)

The epithet “godless” characterizes the Cumans most frequently. It usually describes in the *Russian Primary Chronicle* not just religious ignorance, but the wickedness of human nature inclined to perform blasphemous actions. “Godless” was also used to signify a general antagonism towards the Christian faith and Christian relics.³⁴ According to the Chronicle, the Cumans often confirm this epithet by burning monasteries and churches, and desecrating icons. Consequently, the adjective “godless” was not just the indication of the religious affiliation of the Cumans, but rather a general accusatory characteristic. The *Russian Primary Chronicle* and the *Kievan Chronicle* do not use this epithet in the characteristics of the Russian princes; this tendency appears only in the *Galician-Volhynian Chronicle*.³⁵ In the pre-Mongolian records this epithet is an important part of the narrative image of the Cumans.

“Lawlessness” (“Беззаконные”)

The epithet “lawlessness” is the second frequently occurring characteristic of the Cumans used in a different situation but consistently. It is a synonym of the word “sin” but it is used in different contexts: “lawlessness” is usually connected to the Old Testament and implies retribution; “sin” is related to the New Testament and can be forgiven.³⁶ Moreover, “lawlessness” in the *Russian Primary Chronicle* usually describes a rough violation of the

³³ Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, trans., *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Medieval Academy of America, 2012), 143.

³⁴ [Koniavskaia], “Половцы в ранних летописях,” 183.

³⁵ PSRL, II, 762-3, 774.

³⁶ [Ekaterina Boriushkina] Екатерина Борушкина, “‘Грех’ и ‘беззаконие’ в Толковой Палее [‘Sin’ and ‘lawlessness’ in Tolkovaia Paleia],” *Drevnyaya Rus’: Voprosy Medievistiki* 4, no. 54 (2013): 49–54.

moral norms and is rarely applied to Christians, but very often to the nomadic peoples, mostly to the Cumans.³⁷

Godless sons of Ismail (“Безбожные сыны Измаиловы”)

The descriptions of the Cuman intrusions often contain such a characteristic as “godless sons of Ismail”. For the first time it appears in the *Russian Primary Chronicle* in the entry of 1096 in which the chronicler describe the Cuman attack and then provides information about the Cumans’ origin.

The chronicler follows, though with certain deviations, the prophecy of Pseudo Methodius. This seventh-century text in an Old Bulgarian translation from the twelfth century is about the last barbaric invasion which will precede the Last Judgement: the Ismaelites, the descendants of Abraham and a handmaiden, will escape from the desert and then the cursed peoples Gog and Magog will break out of the Alexander’s Gate—it will be the last days of the world. The Russian chronicler, a member of ecclesiastical community, often seeks to correlate reality with the biblical images and models, placing it in the general course of Salvation history, and putting special emphasis on the last point in this history—the apocalyptic times when every people will have its own function and its own fate. Accordingly, the chronicler considers the Cumans the “godless” peoples, the Ismaelites who will have an essential role in the apocalyptic process. The medieval author places the Cumans, who in this passage are “cruel savages, enemies of God and civilization”, “the very essence of barbarity;” primarily in the teleological and eschatological context.³⁸ Such characteristic remains relevant throughout the century: for example, the description of the Cuman attacks in 1183 and 1184 in the *Kievan Chronicle* contains the same epithets: “godless Ismaelites”, “cursed Hagarenes” complemented by “the source of evil” and “the enemies of God and Christians”.³⁹

Not going into detail in the consideration of the major differences between the Byzantine tradition of chronicle writing with its frequent appeal to topoi or antique models and its Old Russian adaptation, it is possible to trace the Byzantine influence in the use of Biblical imagery. The European ethnonym “Cumans,” used instead of the usual Russian “Polovtsy,” also confirms that it was the Byzantine experience of interaction with the steppe

³⁷ [Koniavskaia], “Половцы в ранних летописях,” 184.

³⁸ Leonid S. Chekin, “The Godless Ishmaelites: The Image of the Steppe in Eleventh-Thirteenth-Century Rus’,” *Russian History* 19, no. 1 (1992): 13, doi:10.1163/187633192X00028.

³⁹ PSRL, II, 628, 634

peoples that was partly applied to the Russian situation. Nevertheless, in the interpretation of the Russian chroniclers the Cumans present a temporary problem which “can be lived through” rather than an eschatological threat influencing the universal processes.⁴⁰

“For our sins” (“Трех ради наших”)

In the *Russian Primary Chronicle* the Cuman attacks are often considered as the punishment “for our sins.” This explanation of the Cuman raids takes into account the personal responsibility of the Christian population: a sin can be committed more than once, and Cuman raids by that time also became a regular phenomenon. The Cumans are presented as almost inevitable evil: it is difficult to stop sinning, moreover, the chronicler can emphasize that it is characteristic to the man to return to sin. The Cuman plunder is a reminder and sacred call to return to the right path. The Christians are responsible for the Cuman attacks, they can and they ought to change the situation: to cry out to God, to fast, to confess and to atone for the sins. Thus, the records about the Cuman intrusion provide homiletical opportunities for the chronicler.

One of the examples is the entry describing the events of 1068 in the *Primary Chronicle*. The dogmatic content of this entry, as Ismail Sreznevsky demonstrated, is strongly connected to the Byzantine models, mainly to John Chrysostom’s works, but the discussion of the barbaric invasion is an insertion taken from the Old Bulgarian anthology *Zlatostruy*.⁴¹ The Chronicle explains the reason of the Cuman raid: “When any nation has sinned, God punishes them by death or famine or barbarian incursion, by drought or a plague of caterpillars or by other chastisements, until we repent of our sins and live according to God’s commandment”.⁴²

Under the year 1110 the second redaction of the *Russian Primary Chronicle* preserved in the Hypatian Codex explains the mechanism of this retribution: each land and each people has its own angel (even the pagan lands) and God can send these angels and these peoples against other lands.⁴³

⁴⁰ Kovács, “The Origin of the Cumans,” 133.

⁴¹ [Izmail Sreznevsky] Измаил Срезневский, “Источник поучения, внесенного в Повесть временных лет и приписанного препод. Феодосию Печерскому [The original of the exhortation inserted in the Russian Primary Chronicle and attributed to St Theodosius of the Caves],” in *Сведения и заметки о малоизвестных и неизвестных памятниках*, vol. 1, pt. 3. (Saint Petersburg, 1867), 35–43.

⁴² Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, eds., *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 146.

⁴³ PSRL, II, 262-263.

It is not only the *Primary Chronicle* which demonstrates the perception of the Cumans as God's punishment. Such an attitude is inherited by the *Kievan Chronicle* and is also relevant at the end of the twelfth century. The description under the year 1177 presents the intrusion of the Cumans as a scourge of God, an instrument that humbles Christians and points to their sinful life. The chronicler emphasizes that the invasion of the Cumans is not a reward for the pagans but a punishment to Christians.⁴⁴

The representation of the Cumans as God's punishment enhances the negative effect associated with the Cumans on the pages of the Old Russian chronicles. Placing the Cuman threat among a range of punishments such as the locust invasion, pestilence or famine, the chroniclers unambiguously characterize this nomadic group as one of the most grievous natural disasters.

Rhetorical devices

The negative assessment of the Cumans expressed at the dogmatic level is also reflected in the stylistic features of the chronicle text. The early records about the Cumans are worth particular attention since they form the attitudinal models for the following entries. Thus, the example of the passage under 1093 year demonstrates this double-layered structure. First, the author of the entry correlates the current situation, the Cuman intrusion, to the Biblical context. The reality fits perfectly into the general Biblical, mostly Old Testament, discourse: the events are terrible, but they correspond to the prophecies and prove the truth of the prophets.

“As the prophet said, ‘Ye shall be slain before your enemies; they shall hate you, shall oppress you...’”

“Let us exclaim with Job, ‘It hath been as the Lord appointed; blessed be the name of the Lord forever’”.⁴⁵

This “Biblical” interpretation of the Cuman attack could have been a humble acceptance of the situation, but the chronicler decides to colorize the negative image of the Cumans, using the following rhetorical devices:

⁴⁴ PSRL, II, 603.

⁴⁵ Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, eds., *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 177–8.

- Contraposition of qualities and ideas

This tool is most effective when the author tries to oppose the Cumans to somebody else, for instance, Christians in general, the Russian princes or the common people. For example, in 1093 the Cuman attack coincided with Church feasts and that gave an additional stimulus for contraposition.

“It was thus that the prophet said, ‘I will change your feasts to mourning and your songs to lamentation.’ For God caused great mourning in our land; our villages and our towns were desolated”

“We traverse the fields where horses, sheep, and cattle once grazed in herds, and behold them desolate. The meadows are grown wild, and have become the lairs of wild beasts”.⁴⁶

When the opposite qualities are placed in the same line, they significantly strengthen the dynamic of the text:

“Let no one venture to say that we are hated of God, lest it might be so. For whom does God love, as he has loved us?”⁴⁷

Another example: the Christian people suffering from the Cumans can be depicted with “pale faces” and “black bodies.”⁴⁸

- The use of active and passive voices

It is important how the chronicler uses the voices in the text where the Cumans are presented as enemies. In order to emphasize how much the Christians suffer from the pagans, the author uses the active voice describing the actions of the Cumans and the passive voice in the episodes dedicated to the troubles of the common people. With the combination of negative epithets this rhetorical device creates a vivid negative image of the Cumans. The active voice in the sentence “the malignant sons of Ishmael burned villages and granges, and consumed many churches with fire”⁴⁹ is in stark contrast with passive statements such as “some of them are bound and trampled underfoot, exposed to the chill of winter, and sorely wounded.”⁵⁰

- Repetition and the use of synonyms

⁴⁶ Ibid., 177; 178.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 179.

⁴⁸ PSRL, II, 216.

⁴⁹ Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, eds., *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 178.

⁵⁰ Ibid. PSRL, I, 223.

The repetitions and the concentration of the synonyms also intensify the negative effect in the depiction of the Cumans. Familiar tropes are repeated in sentences like “some tremble as they cast their eyes upon the slain, and others perish of hunger and thirst” and “a multitude of Christian people were thus reduced to dire distress; sorrowing, tormented, weak with cold, their faces ravaged with hunger, thirst, and misfortune.”⁵¹ Similarly, the concept of their otherness is intensified by repetition in statements such as “we have deserved to be delivered into the hands of an alien people” and “they made their painful way [...] toward an unknown land.”⁵²

- Negative vocabulary

The use of negative vocabulary, for instance, a range of nouns with negative meanings, is one of the most effective ways to present the image of the enemy: “And what is stranger and more terrible, it is among a Christian nation that this fear and terror and distress has been spread abroad”.⁵³

- (Super)natural phenomena

The creation of the negative image of the Cumans is often connected to natural catastrophes or to the natural phenomena which were considered to predict troubles and misfortunes, for instance, solar eclipse, storms, ball lightning and so on.

One of the most illuminating examples in the *Primary Chronicle* refers to 1092, when the author starts the chronicle entry with the information about the demons roaming through the town and then describes the natural phenomenon which was followed by a number of disasters including the Cuman attack: “At this time, a sign appeared in the heavens like a huge circle in the midst of the sky. There was a drought in this year, so that the earth was burned over, and many pine forests and peat-bogs were consumed. There were many portents in various localities, and incursions of the Polovcians were reported from all quarters.”⁵⁴ Whether the supernatural context emphasizes the general eschatological understanding of the role of the Cumans or it is a deviation from the Christian perception of the pagan people, the idea is the same: the Cumans are frightful and an unavoidable evil.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 179.

⁵³ Ibid., 178.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 173–74.

Former allies

The question of alliances with the Cumans posed one of the most difficult issues for the medieval Russian chronicler who most often takes an anti-Cuman position. The negative image of the Cumans was more usual around the turn of the eleventh century, after a series of Cuman raids on the boundaries of southern Russian principalities. But when the practice of military alliances with the Cumans became more widespread, the chronicler had to maneuver between the facts of reality and the static image of the enemy.

Scholars noted the strange passage under the year 1095 describing the arrival of the Cuman ambassadors to Vladimir Monomakh, the Great Russian prince, the mightiest prince of the epoch.⁵⁵ According to this entry, the Cumans asked for the treaty of peace, and Monomakh remembered that he had peace agreements with these Cumans. But Monomakh's confidants persuaded him to kill the Cumans who "constantly swear oaths to you, and yet they bring incessant ruin on the land of Rus' and constantly shed Christian blood." Monomakh hesitated for some time: the oath given to the Cumans was an important argument for him and surely for the chronicler. Nevertheless, the ambassadors were killed, and their death is described in detail and with some satisfaction: "Then Ol'beg, son of Ratibor, took his bow, and fitting an arrow to it, shot Itlar' through the heart. They also killed his whole escort. Thus Itlar' lost his life in evil fashion on February 24."⁵⁶

Konyavskaya concludes that the assassination of the captured Cumans or their ambassadors depended on the particular situation and particular relationship between the Cuman and the Russian elite.⁵⁷ Thus, in another entry, Oleg Sviatoslavich refuses to kill the son of the Cuman prince when other Russian princes asked him to do it. Describing these events, the chronicler automatically declares a member of the Cuman community to be an enemy. The Russian princes tell Oleg: "You did not accompany us upon our attack against the pagans who have brought ruin upon Rus'. You have a son of Itlar' at your court. Either kill him or deliver him up to us, for he is an enemy of Rus'."⁵⁸

The situation becomes more difficult when family ties are concerned. For example, in 1096 the Cuman prince was killed in the battle against his own son-in-law, Sviatopolk. This

⁵⁵ [Koniavskaia], "Половцы в ранних летописях," 184-85; [Dobrovolskiy] "Восприятие половцев," 290-91.

⁵⁶ Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, eds., *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 181.

⁵⁷ [Koniavskaia], "Половцы в ранних летописях," 185.

⁵⁸ PSRL, I, 228-9. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, eds., *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 181.

prince had to bury his Cuman relative “respecting him as his father in-law even though he was a foe, [...] at Berestovo, between the road to Berestovo and the road to the monastery.”⁵⁹

In general the attitude of the chronicler towards these assassinations is complicated: on the one hand, the author does not condemn the Russian princes who refused to be cruel towards their former allies, but on the other hand, the chronicler explicitly approves the cases of murders.

Military adversaries

It seems that the image of the Cumans as military adversaries should be clear and monopolar: here the chronicler has full freedom to present the most negative image of the enemy. However, the actual situation is more intricate. The chronicler often sees a worthy opponent in the Cumans and sometimes even describes the events taking into account the Cuman position.

Thus, in the description of the year 1103, when the Russian princes undertook a campaign against the Cumans, the chronicler uses a special device: he names one of the Cumans (Urusoba) and makes him give a speech where he persuades other Cumans to conclude peace with the Russians.⁶⁰ This rhetorical device expands the usual image of the enemy and adds a new perspective to it.

The same description of the Cumans as military adversaries contains the first and the last positive characteristic of the Cumans: one Cuman prince is described as “famous for his courage.”⁶¹ Dobrovolskiy notes that the Cumans in their battle readiness can even fascinate the chronicler.⁶² Depicting the Cuman warriors, the *Russian Primary Chronicle* uses interesting and rare metaphors: “The nomad troops came on like the trees of the forest, and their mass was impenetrable.”⁶³

⁵⁹ This description does not refer to the Cuman funeral ceremony as Koniavskaia suggests, but corresponds to the Old Slavic tradition of the interment of the non-Christians. Cf. [Dmitriy Zelenin and Andrey Toporkov] Дмитрий Зеленин, Андрей Топорков, *Избранные труды: Очерки русской мифологии; Умершие неестественной смертью и русалки*, vol. 2, *Традиционная духовная культура славян* [Selected Works: Essays on Russian mythology; [Persons] dying of unnatural death and *rusalkas*, vol. 2, The traditional spiritual culture of the Slavs] (Moscow: Indrik, 1995), 90.

⁶⁰ PSRL, II, 253; Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, eds., *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 201. The latter conveys only the indirect speech.

⁶¹ PSRL, II, 254.

⁶² [Dobrovolskiy], “Восприятие половцев,” 293.

⁶³ Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, eds., *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 201.

The ideological and religious functions of the image of the enemy

From the middle of the eleventh century the medieval Russian authors kept trying to identify the role of the newly Christianized Russian society among the other Christian civilizations. The historical space which the authors seek to conceptualize differs significantly from the European universe formed by Carolingian rhetoric and power of Latin Christianity.⁶⁴ This space is also distinct from the Byzantine historical space with its focus on the imperialism and revision of antique heritage. Such medieval Russian narratives as *The Sermon on Law and Grace* («Слово о Законе и Благодати»), written by the Kievan Metropolitan Hilarion in the mid-eleventh century, and the introduction to *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, composed at the beginning of the twelfth century, present an attempt of historical incorporation of Rus' into general Christian history. The search of identity was complicated by evident problems: the lack of political consolidation, the absence of geographical unity within the Russian lands and tribal heterogeneity. The solution for the pre-Mongolian Russian historical rhetoric is the replacement of imperial and cultural discourses by the ethnical and religious universalism.⁶⁵ This universalism helps to conceive own non-Christian past: the last may be first when each Christian ethnos receive its own function in the Salvation history

Nevertheless, in the early stages of self-determination in addition to the positive program, Russian narrators used the rhetoric of consolidation resorting to the image of a common enemy in order “to know not only what they stand for but also, what they oppose.”⁶⁶ In the processes of exclusion Russian medieval authors followed the same principles as in identity-making narratives, but with the opposite approaches. Identification of the ‘strangers’ was based on their ethnical and religious heterodoxy and contributed largely to the discussions on the problematic issue of political unity.

In the Old Russian chronicles, from the early records in the *Primary Chronicle* until the early post-Mongolian records in the *First Chronicle of Novgorod*, the Cumans are an important argument for the unification of the Russian elite. In reality the Rurikid tribes could be only partly integrated and often entered in feuds, but the chronicler tries to present their joint campaigns against the Cumans as the manifestation of the integrity of “the Russian

⁶⁴ Leyser, “Concepts of Europe in the Early and High Middle Ages.”

⁶⁵ [Victor Zhivov] Виктор Живов, “Два пространства русского средневековья и их позднейшие метаморфозы [Two Spaces of the Russian Middle Ages and Their Later Metamorphoses],” *Отечественные Записки* 20, no. 5 (2004), accessed May 15, 2017, <http://www.strana-oz.ru/2004/5/dva-prostranstva-russkogo-srednevekovya-i-ih-pozdneyshie-metamorfozy#s11>.

⁶⁶ Vuorinen, *Enemy Images*, 5.

lands.” In this regard, the description of the Council of Liubech (1097) is demonstrative. The chronicler ascribes to the Russian princes the following speech: “Why do we ruin the land of Rus’ by our continued strife against one another? The Polovcians harass our country in diverse fashions, and rejoice that war is waged among us. Let us rather hereafter be united in spirit and watch over the land of Rus’.”⁶⁷

The ideological use of the image of the enemy can be expressed in terms of social stratification: “Why do you not bear in mind that as soon as the peasant begins his plowing, the Polovcian will come, shoot him down with his bolt, seize his horse, ride on into his village, and carry off his wife, his children, and all his property?”⁶⁸ Here it is interesting to trace the use of synecdoche: the chronicler describes the part (one peasant, one “Polovcian”) in reference to the whole (the peasants, the Cumans). This device with abstract function demonstrates that the image of the Cumans penetrates from the layer of factual accounts to the very core of narration processes.

This ideological image of the enemy was also to develop the use of the substantivized possessive pronouns “ours” which usually refer to the Russian princes.⁶⁹ In such cases the Cumans can be defined as “foreigners” or more explicitly “enemies,” “foes,” and the socio-political boundary is clearly indicated.⁷⁰

Later in the *Kievan chronicle* the image of the common enemy is especially useful when the new campaign against the Cumans is planned.⁷¹ It fits the general function of the image of an as an image of threat which “represents an imminence of unwanted acts towards the Self, and motivates a subsequent need to remain vigilant, to plan defense or even to actively engage in a pre-emptive first attack.”⁷² However, after Monomakh’s period the joint Russian campaigns against the Cumans became rarer and less extensive. Accordingly, such rhetoric remained underdeveloped.

To sum, the image of the Cumans as enemies, presented by the medieval Russian sources, on the one hand, reflects the actual problems of the Cuman-Russian interactions, but on the other hand, is an elaborated and stable narrative construct with certain ideological implications which were borrowed and revised in the later historiographical traditions.

⁶⁷ Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 187.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁶⁹ For instance: PSRL, II, 156, 211, 222, 254, 557, 558 etc.

⁷⁰ PSRL, II, 289, 612.

⁷¹ PSRL, II, 633, 636.

⁷² Vuorinen, *Enemy*, 3.

The Image of the Enemy in the Georgian Sources

Prehistory of the Cuman-Georgian interactions

It is interesting that the history of the Cumans in Georgia starts on the territory of Old Rus'. The *Russian Primary Chronicle* records that in 1068 the Russian princes, the Iaroslavichi, suffered a crushing defeat by the Cuman forces on the Alta River. As a consequence, the triumvirate of the ruling elite, Iziaslav, Sviatoslav and Vsevolod, collapsed and the Kievan power was decentralized. The Cumans decided to consolidate their military progress and attacked Russian lands again. Sviatoslav had to counter the Cumans and with 3000 warriors against 12,000 Cumans. Despite the expectations, the battle turned out to be successful for the Russians: according to the protograph of the chronicle, many Cumans were killed and the Cuman prince Sharukan was captured.⁷³

We do not know when and how Sharukan escaped from the Russian captivity, or, what is more probable, was released after the conclusion of alliance, but already in 1107 he is presented as an active participant of the looting near Pereiaslavl'. This time the Cuman raids met serious resistance by Vladimir Monomakh.⁷⁴ In 1107 the Cuman prince, Sharukan, was almost captured again and barely escaped.⁷⁵

In general, the first decade of the twelfth century was turbulent in the steppe. The Russian princes undertook several campaigns in targeted form: it was not a series of occasional skirmishes on the principality's borders, but systematic devastation of Cuman lands carried out to weaken the Cumans as much as possible.

⁷³ The chronicle redactions are inconsistent in this question. See: [Mikheev], "Кто писал 'Повесть временных лет'?", 34.

⁷⁴ One of the mightiest princes of that period, Monomakh was governing three quarters of the Russian principalities through his sons' mediation. He organized a series of military campaigns against the Cumans (1103, 1107, 1111). At the same time, he also brought a Cuman wife for his son (PSRL, II, 259).

⁷⁵ The soubriquet *Old* [*Staryi*] accompanying the name of Sharukan may emphasize the non-uniqueness of his name, his age or his socio-political importance. The latter is especially likely since the chronicle also mentions a toponym *Sharukan*', a town with non-Cuman population but probably named after the prominent Cuman prince (PSRL, II, 266).

The Cumans indeed suffered defeat after defeat, losing their herds and pastures, and retreating further into the steppe: the battery of the Russian forces reached an unprecedented scale. The Russian chronicler describes the victories over the “pagan” and “godless” Cumans. The desperate position of the Cumans was evident; only a fortunate combination of circumstances could improve their life conditions. For some of the Cumans the solution came from Georgia.

About 1118 Georgian sources, primarily the *Life of the King of Kings, David*, recount that the king of Georgia, David IV the Builder (*Davit Aghmashenebeli*), invited the Cumans (Qipchaks), particularly the horde of Sharukan’s son, Atrak, to Georgia. Why did David decide to call in the nomads? Was it an act of charity because of their troubles? This is highly improbable since the political and social situation in the Georgian kingdom itself was rather unfavorable at the time. After the devastating raid of the Seljuk Turks in 1080 Georgia was entered into a lord-vassal relationship with the newly formed Seljuk Sultanate. This relationship lasted until 1097 when Georgian King David IV, benefitting from the weakness of the Sultanate during the First Crusade, stopped paying tributes and started military operations. By 1117, almost all Georgian territories had been released from the power of the Seljuks although the risk of a new raid never disappeared completely. The price of fighting against the Seljuks was grave: vast Georgian territories were devastated and depopulated and the Georgian army lost a large number of its capable warriors. Moreover, internal political situation was unstable: there were numerous clashes between the political elite and the king. This was the set of problems that prompted David to send for the Cumans.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Peter Golden describes David’s motives as a the combination of the internal and external plans: “Davit’ needed the manpower, especially a force that would be loyal to him alone, one that was free of membership in or connections with other ‘vested interests’ in Georgian society [...]. Such a force could be directed against his enemies, foreign (the Seljuqs and their allies) and domestic (the aristocratic opposition).” Peter B. Golden, “Cumanica I: The Qipčaq in Georgia,” in Golden, *Nomads and Their Neighbours in the Russian Steppe*, 59.

The Cumans accepted David's invitation and came to Georgia. According to the Georgian chronicles, 40,000 Cumans with their families and property settled in the kingdom and were Christianized for the most part.

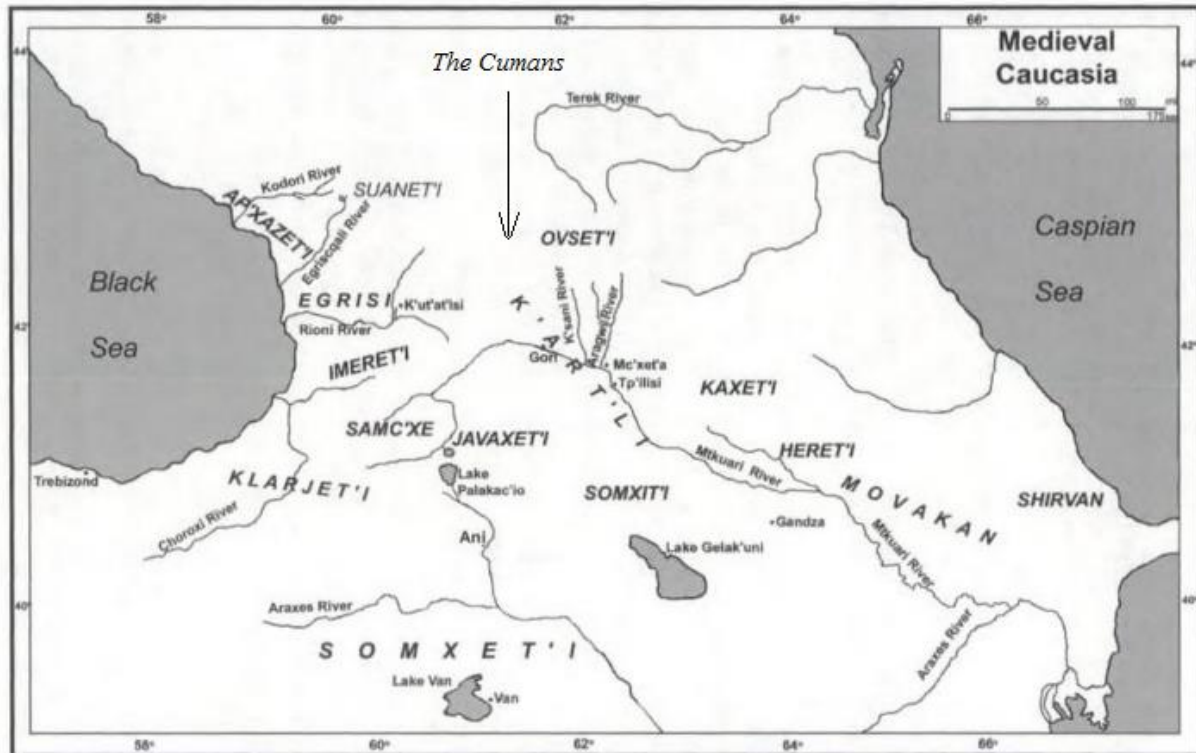


Figure 3 Medieval Caucasia

Source: Map Intro. 1 in Stephen H. Rapp, *Studies in Medieval Georgian Historiography: Early Texts and Eurasian Contexts*, vol. 601, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 113 (Lovanii: Peeters, 2003), 40.

Scholars point out the parallels between the situation of Cuman settlement in Georgia and the case of Cuman migration to the Kingdom of Hungary.⁷⁷ Not going deeper into the comparison of these two, it is worth noting that there are certain similarities between the settlement process and the assimilation of the nomadic community in the sedentary society, for example the reported number of the newcomers. However, there are also significant differences: the process of sedentarization and Christianization in Georgia took shorter time, so the toponymical system and military vocabulary does not reflect a sojourn of large Cuman groups, rather the acculturation of small units.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Berend, *At the Gate of Christendom*, 71–2; 148; 173; 264.; Golden, *Qipčaq*s, 64.

⁷⁸ Golden, *Qipčaq*s, 64f–65.

Using Cuman forces had a number of military advantages: by the beginning of the twelfth century the Cumans had already gained rich military experience and developed many military techniques, for instance, Anna Comnena mentions their ability to quickly reorganize during the battle.⁷⁹ Their experience and skill made them capable to fight in the vanguard of the Georgian army.⁸⁰

The chronicle reports that the joint Cuman-Georgian campaigns were very successful. David managed to establish his power almost in the whole Transcaucasian region; the Seljuk threat was considerably weakened.⁸¹ Archeological data proves that after David's death the majority of Cumans did not stay in Georgia, but returned back to the steppe.⁸²

The Cuman departure is also described in the Russian *Galician-Volhynian Chronicle*. In a passage under the year 1201 it recounts a legend, most probably of Cuman origin, in which the Cuman prince Otrok, the son of Sharukandecided to return to the "homeland" after the death of his enemy, Russian prince Vladimir Monomach. According to the story, when Otrok's brother, who stayed in the steppe and was so poor that he had only fish to eat, informed Otrok about Monomach's death, Otrok did not return immediately. Only once he smelled the bitter fragrance of wormwood, a herb of the steppe, brought by the courier, did he change his mind⁸³.

Scholars regard the short Cuman sojourn in the Kingdom of Georgia as a period which had a great impact on the social, economic and military development of Georgia.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, trans. Elizabeth A. S Dawes (Lawrence, KN.: Digireads, 2011), 174.

⁸⁰ [Murguliia] and [Shusharin], *Половцы*, 101.

⁸¹ Metreveli and Jones, *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, 182: 25-40.

⁸² [Murguliia] and [Shusharin], *Половцы*, 167.

⁸³ PRSL, II, 715-16.

⁸⁴ V. Abashmadze, *Narkvevebi Sak'art'velos Politikur Možgyvreat'a Istoriidan* (T'bilisi: T'bilisis universitetis gamomc'emloba, 1969) qtd. in. Peter B. Golden, "Cumanica I: The Qipčaq in Georgia," in Golden, *Nomads and Their Neighbours in the Russian Steppe*, 2003.

That is why it is especially interesting to look at the image of the Cumans in medieval Georgian sources.

King David and the Cumans: connection of the images

At first glance the Georgian sources present an image of the Cumans which by its characteristics is far from the image of the enemy: the Cumans are described as faithful allies of King David IV and as his main support. In *The Life of the King of Kings David* the emphasis is very naturally put on the royal actions and royal decisions. The rhetoric of Anonymous' narrative, influenced by the Byzantine model of the perfect ruler, demonstrates the full invulnerability of David's image, its excellence on physical, intellectual and spiritual level.⁸⁵ The king is always in the center of Anonymous' narrative; the period when the Cumans were serving David IV is also characterized by the clear tendency of associating the Cumans with the monarchical person. The Cumans become a tool in the hands of the absolutely wise ruler, and their image complements the image of their superior. In this situation the negative features of the Cuman image would question the rationale of the alliance with the Cumans and partly discredit the image of David IV "who had no match both among the ancient or the recent kings; that is convincingly proved by the things he performed so wisely, more brilliant and impressive than the crown of the Sun".⁸⁶

The beginning of the collaboration between David and the Cumans (which is conceptualized in terms of a hierarchical relationship more than in terms of military partnership) is described from the position of foreseeable good:

Thus he secured a peaceful journey for the Q'ipchaks [the Cumans]. And he brought a multitude of them: his father-in-law and the brothers of his wife; and the trouble he went to was not in vain, for with their help he destroyed thoroughly the Persian forces,

⁸⁵ Sandro Nikolaishvili, "Byzantine Imperial Ideology and Political Thinking: Model for the 12th-Century Georgian Kingship."

⁸⁶ Metreveli and Jones, *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, 185.

evoking fear and awe in all the kings of the world. He did many unbelievable things with their help, as will be shown in the following narration.⁸⁷

The Georgian narrator knows in advance the positive consequences of the invitation of the Cumans and incorporates the next episodes into the initially positive context.

The same teleological approach but with the opposite evaluation code can be found in the *Russian Primary Chronicle*: “The Polovcians [the Cumans] invaded Rus' to make war for the first time. [...] the Polovcians defeated Vsevolod, but after the combat they retired. This was the first evil done by these pagan and godless foes.”⁸⁸

The main difference here is that the Russian chronicler from the very beginning uses the ‘paradigm of the enemy’, while the Georgian author from the onset resorts to the ‘paradigm of the ally’. None of these paradigms supposes the immediate changes in the evaluative characteristics. Moreover, the image of the ally generally requires more stable basis which would correspond to the certain core. This center in the Georgian narrative is the figure of David. The image of the Cumans depends on the royal image which subjugates the rest of the space in the narrative. It is especially obvious in the descriptions of the joint military actions: “the King crossed the raging Mt’k’vari, wading with his Q’ipchaks through the extremely high waters.”⁸⁹

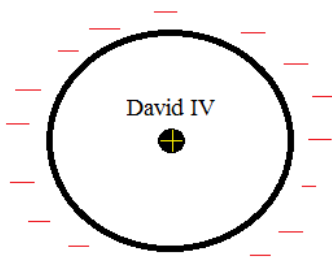
The image of the Cumans is part of the image of the king. The bipolar system of Anonymous’ narrative presupposes that David’s personality is a manifestation of absolute positivity. The visual sources of that period represented David, according to the Byzantine model, as “the champion of Orthodoxy who is concerned for the church and able to bring

⁸⁷ Ibid., 178.

⁸⁸ Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 143.

⁸⁹ Metreveli and Jones, *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, 180. Emphasis is mine.

together different nationalities and sects”⁹⁰. Thus, all the images belonging to the realm of the king’s image get the same positive charge:



The Cumans, invited by David and participating in his military successes, are very close to this absolute positive center. Their representation is definitely influenced by the majestic image and can hardly be tarnished.

The allies of the enemy

Nevertheless, in this double pole system there is a boundary which separates the glorious world of King David from the world of his adversaries. Surprisingly, the Cumans appear not only inside the ‘royal’ circle, but also in the area of the enemies. One of the records about David’s campaigns tells: “In April he attacked the ruler of Derbent, Shaburan, destroyed the Kurds, Lek’is and the Q’ipchaks who were in the service of the ruler of Derbent.”⁹¹ It is worth remembering how detailed the description of the first Cuman appearance was on the pages of *The Life of the King of Kings*. The gradual introduction of the Cuman image into the narrative contrasts with the hasty mention of the fact that the other rulers also were allying with the Cumans, and David’s alliance is not a unique case. In this situation the image of the enemy (for example, the ‘Derbent’ Cumans presented as David’s enemies) fails to be formed because the allies and the enemies actually have the same origin.

⁹⁰ Antony Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia* (Philadelphia: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 67.

⁹¹ Metreveli and Jones, *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, 182.

Concerning the Cumans in Georgia, the perspective of the enemy can be inverted; the author describes the situation where the Cumans are enemies for the enemy:

The Sultan sent envoys one after another with gifts to propitiate the King. He sent precious things, rich and dainty things, diverse rare overseas birds and beasts, and he asked for peace, love and security from the raids of the Q'ipchaks. He did not care about his considerable expenses, if only he could find peace and security for himself⁹² Interestingly, describing David's enemies, the Georgian author combines the Biblical

imagery, which is a frequent detail in the depictions of the Cumans in the Russian sources, to the Byzantine notions "barbarians":

He made the Sultan his tributary, and the King of the Greeks he treated like a member of his household; he crushed heathens, eliminated barbarians, humbled kings, enslaved monarchs, routed the Arabs, defeated the Ishmailites, scattered the Persians like ashes and turned their rulers into peasants⁹³

The 'destructive' Cuman energy here is directed against David's enemies and serves the king's interests. Anonymous watches from the sidelines the frequent relation 'the raiding Cumans-their victims' – the situation which in the Russian sources is most often depicted from the position of the victim. The Cuman threat, targeted in the opposite direction, in the direction of the enemy, can be interpreted as a positive factor and becomes a significant part of the image of the ally.

The internal enemies

At the very end of the narrative about King David, in the part which was written after David's death, Anonymous hints that the situation inside "the royal circle" was not as ideal as he described at the beginning of his story. David, according to Anonymous' report, was at risk several times, and the Cumans played an important role in these situations:

And this should be enough to demonstrate his closeness to God, for many times and for many reasons he incurred mortal danger to himself. We shall tell of just of some of these cases [...]

And who knows, how many times his own Q'ipchaks contrived treachery against him: sending upon him daredevils, some with swords, others with spears, yet others with arrows. And such things took place not once, two or three times, but many times.⁹⁴

⁹² Ibid., 182.

⁹³ Ibid., 180.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 189.

As we can see, the image of the Cumans correlates to the image of the internal enemy as well. The closeness of the Cumans to the central figure of King David does not guarantee their favorable representation.

It turns out that the image of the ally is not absolutely positive, it has such dark spots as the disloyalty of the Cumans and their ingratitude (which is especially prominent after the records about David's personal concern about the Cumans, e.g. "He appointed for his Kipchaks a place for winter quarters and supplies, and men to oversee them."⁹⁵, "Who can count the captives freed by him, and the number of Q'ipchaks he ransomed!"⁹⁶). However, the situation when the negative charge is placed inside "the royal circle" is highly unnatural for the narrative constructing the image of the perfect ruler. That is why the record about the Cuman treachery stands out of the whole narrative and flatly contradicts the previous information about David's personality:

Nobody—whether an important or insignificant person – could even dream of intriguing against him or committing treachery, to say nothing of telling somebody about it, not even to his spouse who shared a bed with him, nor to a friend, neither his child, for everyone knew it well [...] And so nobody conspired against the King and nobody thought of betrayal, for everyone heeded and feared him.⁹⁷

On the one hand, in this context the behavior of the Cumans, the closest allies of the king, is quite exceptional, it breaks the harmony of the entirely ideal royal image and seems to be rather undesirable slip of the narrator. On the other hand, telling about the Cumans, Anonymous clearly emphasizes that the fact of perfidy was not a singular extraordinary event, but with its repeatability it had all signs of tendency ('not once, two or three times, but many times'). The fact that this part of the text was written later can partly explain such inconsistency: the focus of the narrative shifted from the description of David as a military

⁹⁵ Robert W. Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History: The Medieval Armenian Adaptation of the Georgian Chronicles; the Original Georgian Texts and the Armenian Adaptation*, Oxford Oriental Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 337.

⁹⁶ Metreveli and Jones, *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, 186. Another version of translation presents the opposite situation: 'Who could reckon up the captives whom he liberated and whom he ransomed with his own money from the Kipchaks?' Thomson, *Rewriting Caucasian History*, 345.

⁹⁷ Metreveli and Jones, *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, 186–87.

leader controlling everything to the description of David as a subject of God's grace and providence.

Thus, even in the narrative with the clear evaluative system the image of the Cumans is a very complicated construct, combining several layers of positive and negative characteristics which can be revealed at different stages of the narration.

The examples considered in this chapter demonstrate that the image of the enemy presented by the Georgian and Old Russian sources is more than reflection of the negative experience of interactions. Such image is a sophisticated narrative model which may have flexible and context-dependent parameters as in case of *The Life of the King of Kings* narrative or may remain rigid and non-diffusive system as in case of the Old Russian chronicles. Even within one narrative framework the strategies of representation and assessment of the same image may undergo significant changes displaying a unique combination of social and ideological processes.

Chapter 2 – The Image of the Ally

It would be a gross generalisation to assume that communication between the Cumans and sedentary people was limited to a series of military conflicts and was of an exclusively antinomic character. When the first stage of the Cuman raids was over and the military potential of the enemy became known, usually a new round of interactions started: the round of cooperation. The social elite of the medieval political units was seeking to use the Cuman military virtues in the most effective way. Certainly the degree of interest in such alliances varied in the heterogeneous Cuman society: some Cuman groups were more reluctant to get involved in the sedentary-nomadic cooperation, others provided constant military support for the generations of the ruling families in the sedentary world.⁹⁸

Entering into alliances, the Cumans, who never formed a state or political association with centralized political power⁹⁹, gradually became involved in the diplomatic and social practices of sedentary communities. As a result, the Cumans began to adopt their current political partners' typical ways of behavior. The authors of medieval chronicles are definitely aware of this process, very often placing new allies in the center of the narrative. Nevertheless, the assessments of the chroniclers can vary significantly. In order to establish a set of characteristics which the authors ascribe to the Cumans, I will deal with the cases of interactions with the Cumans in medieval Rus' and Georgia separately and then compare the results.

The Image of the Ally in the Russian sources

Russian chronicles abound with reports about Russian-Cuman alliances. The first record about peaceful agreements with the Cumans appears in the *Russian Primary Chronicle*

⁹⁸ Golden, "The Polovci Dikii," 147-50.

⁹⁹ Berend, *At the Gate of Christendom*, 70.

in 1055 and the last records in various chronicles refer to the first quarter of the thirteenth century, the early stages of the Mongol Invasion. Across the centuries, however, the monotony and repetitiveness of their mutual interactions is astounding. For more than one hundred and fifty years all records about the Cumans have similar content and follow the same pattern: once a certain alliance was concluded, a joint campaign took place, some Russian or Cuman princes were captured, some Russian prince married a Cuman princess. This regularity is only partly explained by the nature of the chronicle source, because the records about the interactions between the Russian princes have much more vivid details. It would be difficult to establish any system in this repetitive cyclicity and fragmentation of the records about the Cumans, but the narrative details and genealogical observations help to identify the general tendencies in Cuman-Russian alliances.

As was mentioned, the Cumans appeared near the boundaries of Russian principalities in the middle of the eleventh century. Already at the end of the century, after a series of records depicting significant military defeats by the Cumans, Russian chronicles obviously show that the dynasty of Rurikids began to arrange matrimonial connections with the Cumans. It was the generation of Iaroslav the Wise's grandsons which started to enter into marriage with the Cuman princesses.¹⁰⁰ Later they brought wives for their sons from the steppe, who also continued this practice.¹⁰¹ Among all the steppe peoples Russian princes had matrimonial ties only with the Cumans: a fact which indicates the highest degree of cooperation.

The fragmentary chronicle records demonstrate that there was no universal strategy of dealing with the Cumans through marriage alliances. It was important for every family of the ruling dynasty in Rus' to create their own connection with the steppe in order to ensure

¹⁰⁰ PSRL, II, 231, 232, 329, 334.

¹⁰¹ References to the brides of Iaroslav's sons: PSRL, II, 282, 283, 285; and grandsons: PSRL, I, 426, 504; PSRL, II, 521-522, 659, 747.

military support in case of internal conflicts. Anna Litvina and Fiodor Uspenskij, analyzing the matrimonial ties between the Rurikids and the Cumans, point out that the degree of attention which Russian chronicles pay to Cuman genealogy is almost equal to that one of the Rurik dynasty¹⁰². The knowledge of the genealogy was important for marriage arrangements since the princes were trying to arrange as many intradynastic marriages as possible without trespassing Christian commands concerning the closely-related connections: counting the degree of consanguinity, it was possible to realize political ambitions without risking incest.¹⁰³ A marriage was not a necessary part of Cuman-Russian alliance but agreements not sealed by marriage were liable to be broken shortly. It is also necessary to note that during the whole period of interactions the rule for marriages was the same: Russian princes marry Cuman princesses but Cuman princes never married Russian princesses.

Early contacts and their development (eleventh-twelfth centuries)

If we take a look at the dynamic of the Cuman-Russian relationship and particularly at the dynamic of alliances presented by the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, we can see that though some tendencies can be traced, the whole system is inconsistent and irregular.

First of all, records about the interactions with the Cumans in Rus' start with a message about a peace agreement, not conflict.¹⁰⁴ However, later, the chronicles contain a number of descriptions where the Russian princes suffer defeat after defeat by the Cumans, or the Cumans are plundering Russian lands (1061, 1071, and 1079).¹⁰⁵ The subsequent records about alliances with the Cumans are evidently influenced by the hostility caused by the early Cuman raids on Russian principalities and by confessional antagonism as well.

¹⁰² [Anna Litvina] Анна Литвина, [Feodor Uspenskij] Федор Успенский, *Русские имена половецких князей: Междинастические контакты сквозь призму антропонимики* [Russian names of Cuman princes: Cross-dynastic contacts through the lens of anthroponymics] (Moscow: Polimedia, 2013), 252.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 253-54.

¹⁰⁴ PSRL, I, 162, II, 151.

¹⁰⁵ PSRL, II, 152, 156, 161-62.

None of the Russian chronicles directly blame Russian princes entering into alliances with the Cuman leaders and marrying their daughters. However, Russian chroniclers use the first opportunity to curse the Cumans and point out their pagan nature:

In this same year, Oleg arrived from Tmutorakan' before Chernigov with a force of Polovcians. [...] The Polovcians committed many depredations in the vicinity of Chernigov, and Oleg made no attempt to restrain them for the reason that he himself had inspired their raids. This was, in fact, the third time that he had led a force of pagans to attack Rus'. May God forgive his sin, for many Christians were destroyed, while others were taken captive and scattered throughout the lands.¹⁰⁶

In this passage the Cumans are represented as an auxiliary and at the same time a dangerous tool in the princely strife: a double-edged sword which inevitably harms the Christian community in the end. But the chronicler presents only one edge of this sword saying nothing about the benefits of this alliance for the Russian princes. This is one of the infrequent examples where it is possible to trace the clash between the chronicler's perception of the Cumans and their active involvement in the political life of elite.

The discrepancy between the chronicler's and princes' perspective is visible throughout the whole text of the early Russian chronicles. One generation of princes can replace another, the interactions with the Cumans become increasingly active, but the chroniclers keep reproaching the princes, openly or latently, for their contacts with the Cumans, especially when it comes to Oleg Sviatoslavich's family.¹⁰⁷

Though the chronicler makes attempts to separate the actions of the Cumans from the Russian princes' behavior, the same chronicle demonstrates that the Cuman-Russian interactions were becoming more and more frequent and dynamic. For example, according to the *Hypatian Chronicle*, the Cuman steppe should never be a place of refuge for the Russian

¹⁰⁶ Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, trans., *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 179–80.

¹⁰⁷ Oleg himself was married to a Cuman princess (information about the Cuman maternal uncles of his son: PSRL, II, 334), and later brought a Cuman wife for his son. It is known that Oleg also brought up the son of a Cuman prince in his own family.

princes because it alienates them from their own principalities and culture—this suggests that such cases did occur.¹⁰⁸

By the first half of the eleventh century almost every Rurikid tribe had entered into some alliance with the Cumans. The majority of such alliances was secured by matrimonial ties. In these cases the chronicle often represents the Cumans as equal members of the military council during joint campaigns.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, the Cumans can be represented as forthcoming allies who, even when outside Russian territories, are always ready to anticipate the needs and desires of their Russian relatives.¹¹⁰ On the other hand, the representation of the Cumans is often connected to the idea of belonging which raises the question of equality in the Cuman-Russian relations. This tendency becomes especially visible in the Kievan chronicle: it describes the internal feud between Iziaslav Mstislavich and Yuri Dolgorukiy in 1147-1151 in which Yuri acts with *his* Cumans and is free to send them plundering his enemies' principalities.¹¹¹

Against the general background of intensifying interactions between the Russian princes and the Cumans, the chronicle's attitude towards the steppe allies remains remarkably stable. Sometimes the chronicler condemns the Cumans pillaging Russian lands during joint campaigns; sometimes he remains ominously reticent, merely listing the troubles which the "allies" caused in these campaigns.¹¹² The chronicler even speaks of the mercantilism of the Cumans, though it is rather an exceptional case: Russian princes usually reward their Cuman

¹⁰⁸ When in 1118 Oleg's son Vsevolod, prince of Chernigov, used the Cumans in his struggle with the Kievan prince and nearly lost his own principality, the chronicler reproaches him on behalf of Chernigov's population: "You hope to escape to the Cuman lands, but you will destroy your own land" ("ты надѣшися бѣжати в Половцѣ а волость свою погубиши"): PSRL, II, 301.

¹⁰⁹ For instance, when the Russian prince tells the Cumans his concerns and asks their advice about the future steps in his campaign: PSRL, II, 335.

¹¹⁰ Under the year 1146 the *Kievan chronicle* records the words of the Sviatoslav's Cuman uncles: "we are asking about your [Sviatoslav's] health; whether you order us to come to you with the forces" ("прашаемъ здоровья твоего а коли ны велишь к собѣ со силою прити"): PSRL, II, 341.

¹¹¹ PSRL, II, 285п-489.

¹¹² PSRL, II, 315.

allies, but the chronicle takes it for granted¹¹³. In general the image of the Cumans lacks positive characteristics and is constructed either in a neutral or in an extremely negative tone. Only once do the Old Russian chronicles mention the courage of one Cuman warrior. The *Primary Chronicle* does provide the record about courage, but it does so in the context of military conflict not that of alliance.¹¹⁴ In the eyes of the chronicler, the Cumans either deserve neutral characteristics, simply listing their actions in the alliance with Russian princes; or negative ones emphasizing their religious affiliation and devastations caused during allied campaigns. This situation remains unchanged until the late interactions between the Cumans and Russian principalities, that is, around the end of the twelfth and the mid-thirteenth century.

Later interactions

By the second half of the twelfth century the diplomatic practice used in the Cuman-Russian interactions had become extremely sophisticated. The *Kievan Chronicle* describes the Cumans as participants of carefully arranged ceremonials where each side had its own role with strictly prescribed behavior and clearly regulated functions. The experience of negotiations with the Cumans governed diplomatic rituals to the smallest detail: from spatial arrangements to the specific salutatory formulae. Diplomatic descriptions contribute effectively to the general image of the Cumans in Russian chronicles since they represent them in a delicate balance between truce and new military campaigns.

When Russian prince Gleb Iurievich became Kievan prince, a rank politically superior among all other local rulerships, in the first year of his reign the Cumans came to renew

¹¹³ The author quotes Mstislav Iziaslavish's exact words when the prince asks the Hungarian king for help against Yuri Dolgorukiy who leads the Cumans using the power of gold ("и Половци дикѣи с нимъ а и тыи золотомъ ѹзводитьъ": PSRL, II, 421.

¹¹⁴ PSRL, I, 278, PSRL, II, 253-54.

political agreements with him as the main ruler of the Russian principalities.¹¹⁵ In the entry of 1172 the *Hypatian* chronicle writes about a large number of Cumans, the united Cuman force including the whole Cuman elite, coming to the Russian lands. This passage is important both as a description of conflicts and as an account of alliances. In order to give a full image of the Cumans, the chronicler is not content with a brief description of the negotiations, but uses narrative techniques such as direct speech.¹¹⁶ The Cumans utter a long salutary speech where they ask to reestablish previous political contacts. First, the Cumans pronounce the greeting formula where they acknowledge the legitimacy of the Gleb's Kievan rulership, then they express their wish to establish the contract and finally they explain their purpose – mutual feeling of safety:

Бѣ посадиѣ та князь Андрѣи на вѣбѣ свои и на дѣдинѣ въ Киевѣ а хоцѣмъ с тобою радѣ положити межи собою и внидемъ в роту а ты к намъ да ни мы начнемъ боятиса васъ ни вы насъ¹¹⁷

Why is the use of direct speech important in the discussion of the image of the Cumans? First of all, such speeches directly convey the image of the Cumans especially if the chronicler did not have access to the negotiating charters and these speeches are fictional. This way the chronicler has an opportunity to personalize the Cumans, conveying his own image of them. For instance, the descriptions of the diplomatic practice where the chroniclers give the Cumans a right to express their political ambitions represent them as equal political partners who have almost the same political clout as their Russian neighbors.

¹¹⁵ The tradition of reestablishing political contracts between the steppe and the Kievan principality should be further explored since there are many similar cases, e.g. 1146, when the replacement of one Kievan prince by another made the Cumans ask for peace guarantees: PSRL, II, 328.

¹¹⁶ The whole narrative of the Kievan Chronicle is usually divided into two main parts: the author's narration, including the speeches of the clergymen, and the exact words of lay persons such as princes, military commandment, town council and so on. Analyzing the use of enclitics, Andrey Zaliznyak concludes that the passages of direct speech quoting secular persons are close to the texts on birch barks and directly reflect the spoken language of that period [Andrey Zaliznyak] Андрей Зализняк, *Древнерусские Энклитики* [*Old Russian enclitics*] (Moscow: Iazyki Slavianskikh Kultur, 2008), 22–24. Some scholars suggest that the chronicler incorporated into his text a number of princely charters used in diplomatic practice, e.g. [Boris Rybakov] Борис Рыбаков, *Древняя Русь: Сказания, Былины, Летописи* [*Old Rus': Tales, bylinas, chronicles*] (Moscow, 1963), 317–38. There are records in the chronicle about the use of such charters (e.g. PSRL, II, 347), but none of them refer to the Cumans.

¹¹⁷ PSRL, II, 555.



Figure 4 Rus' Principalities and Territories in the Early 13 Century.

Source: Map no. 4.1. in Walter G. Moss, *A History of Russia, vol. 1: To 1917* (London: Anthem Press, 2005), 55.

The situation, however, was not so simple. In the description of 1172 the Cumans came as one social unit and then decided to split into two groups.¹¹⁸ One stayed near Pereyasavl', another one approached Kiev and was waiting for Gleb near Korsun.¹¹⁹ Prince Gleb Iurievich choosing between two groups of the Cumans, decided to go first to Pereyasavl' since this principality was under the rule of his son Vladimir, and to send his ambassador to Korsun with the explanations. This solution had devastating consequences. After a while, when Gleb was on the way to Korsun, the Cumans waiting near Korsun thought that Gleb stayed in Pereyasavl' and chose to ignore them. In revenge they rushed to raid the Kievan principality. Later, the chronicle gives a standard description of the devastation and troubles caused by the Cuman attack.

The image of the Cumans changes from that of solid political partners to a more conventional depiction of nomadic raiders plundering Russian lands. This shift is also reflected on the semantic level: the author ascribes another speech to the Cumans in which they express their suspicion about Gleb's perfidy and announce the decision to plunder Russian lands and then return to the steppe.¹²⁰ This way the chronicler has the opportunity to describe the real nature of the Cumans not bound by the mutual allegiances. It is clear that their character, according to the author, is that of nomadic warriors at its core: temperamental (the Cumans were easily offended), impulsive (they cannot wait) and destructive (the series of raids).

Another important account characterizing the Cumans as negotiating partners in the political interactions with the Rus' comes from a passage describing the events of the end of

¹¹⁸ It is notable that the representation of the Cumans as a unit that is never stable but always can be divided into groups is characteristic for the chronicle, e.g. in descriptions of the joint campaigns of Yuri Dolgorukiy and his Cuman allies: PSRL, II, 618.

¹¹⁹ Geography of the Cuman-Russian negotiating space also requires attention because it is possible to trace certain regularities in chronicle records about it. For instance, the main localizations of the negotiations are Zarub, Kanev, Korsun.

¹²⁰ "Се Глѣбъ ѣхалъ на нѣмъ сторону къ нѣмъ Половѣцѣмъ, а тамо ему пострати, а къ намъ не ѣхалъ, поидемъ за Кыевъ, возмемъ села, поидемъ же с полономъ въ Половѣцѣ": PSRL, II, 556.

the twelfth century. In 1193 it was the duumvirate of the Kievan prince, Sviatoslav Vsevolodovich, and the ruler of the rest of the Kievan lands, Rurik Rostislavich, who decided to establish new alliances with the Cumans. The chronicler writes that Rurik already had alliance ties with one Cuman tribe (*Lukomorskie*), so Sviatoslav suggested engaging another one (*Burchevichi*). The town Kanev, situated on the right bank of the Dnieper River, was appointed as the place of negotiations. Russian princes came first and were waiting for the Cumans. Rurik's allies came willingly but the second Cuman tribe stopped on the left bank of the Dnieper, opposite Kanev, and refused to cross the river.

The importance of spatial arrangement in the diplomatic practice is clearly visible in this passage, especially through the use of deixis, which Charles Fillmore defined as a “part of spatial semantics which takes the bodies of the communication act participants as significant reference objects for spatial specification.”¹²¹ The use of a deictic pronoun, such as “come to us, if you want, to **this** river side,” clearly indicates that the chronicler identifies himself with the Cuman spatial position and represents the Cumans as political figures deserving independence and equality. When one of the negotiating sides breaks the law of spatial arrangement, the negotiations fail.¹²² The situation described is not just a failure of negotiations, but a demonstration of the growing Cuman intention to assert their political status. Here the Cumans are represented not as a tool in the princely struggle (yet?) but as a mobile society in terms of flexible political behavior.

It is not clear what factors contributed to the growing complexity of the diplomatic practices and why the chronicler pays more attention to their description in the twelfth century. In earlier descriptions of alliances the chronicle tends to use a limited number of

¹²¹ Charles Fillmore, “Towards a Descriptive Framework for Spatial Deixis,” in *Speech Place and Action*, ed. Robert J. Jarvella and Wolfgang Klein (London: Wiley & Sons, 1982), 37.

¹²² According to this passage, the Russian princes said that neither their grandfathers nor their fathers ever went to meet the Cumans (“ни дѣди наши ни вѣи наши не ѣздѣли противу вамъ”) and told them to cross the river after all. The Cumans refused and left for the steppe: PSRL, II, 675.

constructions. Sometimes reduce to a standard formula for Cuman-Russian alliance: Russian prince X sends his ambassadors to the Cumans → Y (where Y is a number) of the Cumans come.¹²³ It is important for the chronicler how many Cumans came to the Russian prince: he either gives the exact number or talks of “plenty” of troops. In general, the terms of multitude used to describe the Cumans is characteristic: most often the Cumans are depicted as moving in large numbers.¹²⁴

¹²³ For instance: PSRL, II, 229, 290, 354

¹²⁴ For instance: PSRL, II, 268, 337, 455.

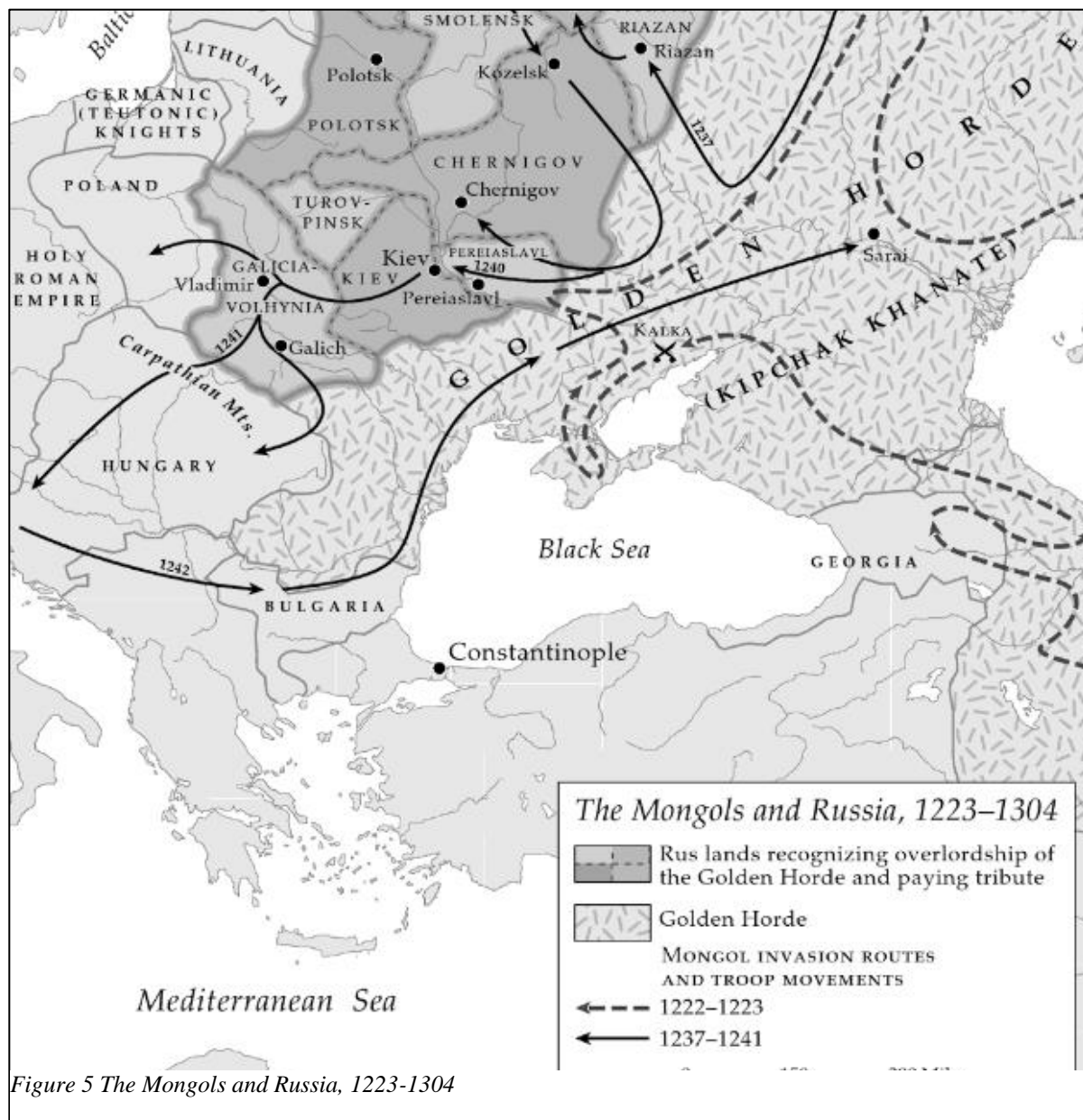


Figure 5 The Mongols and Russia, 1223-1304

Source: Map no. 5.1 in Moss, *A History of Russia*, vol. 1, 70.

Kotian

One of the latest examples of military-kindred alliances involved such important personality in the Cuman-Russian and Cuman-Hungarian relationship as the Cuman prince, Kotian (Hungarian: Kötöny). Although his military activity largely coincided with the turbulent period of the Mongol expansion in the Eurasian steppes, Kotian had gained a wide fame in the Old Russian chronicles before the Cuman hordes fled from the Mongols to the Hungarian kingdom the complex process of their assimilation and integration began.

In 1223, when the Mongol conquest became a real threat not only for the Eurasian steppes, but also for the Southern Russian principalities, Kotian became an important figure in the chronicle narrative. After the Cumans suffered a series of military defeats by the Mongols, they decided to ask the Russian princes for help. The rhetorically loaded passage under the year 1223 is worth consideration. This passage contains a dialogue between the Cuman and Russian princes where the speaker of the Cumans is Kotian. It is Kotian who is entrusted by the chronicler to transmit the primary concerns of the whole Cuman society, describing their motives and thoughts: “If you will not help us now, then [as] we were defeated today, you will be defeated tomorrow”.¹²⁵

It is especially useful to look at the image of the Cumans in such an extreme situation as the Mongol threat. The gravity of the hazard is attested to by the first case of baptizing the Cuman prince described in the Russian chronicles.¹²⁶ Kotian’s words with the practical reminder of inevitable catastrophe waiting for the Russian principalities in case of their refusal not only emphasize the degree of collaboration between the Cuman and Russian princes, but also imply a certain element of equality in their relationship. Later on in the text, the Russian princes are seen attending a council where they decide that it is better to ‘engage the Tatars in a foreign land than in their own’: the boundaries are still there, the Cumans are still alien from the chronicler’s perspective.¹²⁷

Another Russian chronicle, the *First Chronicle of Novgorod* is much more hostile towards the Cumans, considering the Mongol attack on them as deserved punishment:

those cursed Polovets people had wrought much evil to the Russian Land. Therefore the all-merciful God wished to destroy the Kuman people, godless sons of Ishmael, that they [might] atone for the blood of Christians which was upon them, lawless ones; for those Tammen people passed through the whole Kuman country, and came close to Russia where it is called the Polovets Wall. And the cursed Polovets people,

¹²⁵ George A. Perfecky, trans., *The Hypatian Codex, Part Two: The Galician-Volynian Chronicle*, vol. 16, II, Harvard Series in Ukrainian Studies (München: W. Fink, 1973), 28.

¹²⁶ PSRL, I, 505, II, 741.

¹²⁷ Perfecky, *The Hypatian Codex*, 28.

the survivors of those who were killed, escaped [to Russia], Kotyan with other Knyazes.¹²⁸

Even the Mongol threat could not change the general antipathy toward the Cumans. Chronicle sources from the thirteenth century show that to a certain extent the author connects the fate of one people to that of another, but he does not think in terms of the common historical path and blur of the boundaries between the steppe and the sedentary world.

As is well known, the joint campaign of the Cuman and Russian princes against the Mongols finished with a crushing defeat of the coalition near the Kalka River. The *Chronicle of Novgorod* again expresses animosity towards the Cumans blaming them for the defeat:

the Polovets men ran away back, having accomplished nothing, and in their flight they trampled the camp of the Russian Knyazes [princes], for they had not had time to form into order against them; and they were all thrown into confusion, and there was a terrible and savage slaughter...¹²⁹

Kotian escaped death in this battle and remained a close ally of the Russian princes. Thus, already in 1225 Mstislav “brings” Kotian to fight against his (Mstislav’s) son-in-law, Daniil of Galicia. In 1226 Mstislav promises to deliver his enemies to ‘his father-in-law [Kotian] to be slaughtered [by him]’.¹³⁰ Here it is obvious that nothing was left of the illusion of equality between the Cuman and Russian princes. Kotian is presented as a tool in the princely strife: grammatically, Kotian is never a subject of action in the chronicle sentences. The Cuman prince is used as an amplifier in the realization of princely ambitions.

Insignificant changes are visible in 1228 when Daniil of Galicia decides to weaken Kotian’s attacks by negotiations. He addresses the Cuman prince using the term of kinship “father”. On the one hand, this proves a significant age difference between Daniil and Kotian,

¹²⁸ Robert Michell and Nevill Frobes, trans., *The Chronicle of Novgorod 1016-1471*, vol. 25, 3 (London, 1914), 65–66.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 66.

¹³⁰ Perfeky, *The Hypatian Codex*, 31.

on the other hand, it establishes an intricate connection where Daniil recognizes the father-in-law (Kotian) of his own father-in-law (Mstislav) as his “father”. Here the Christian author’s position sheds light on the growing involvement of the Cumans in the Russian kinship system. Later Kotian appears in Hungarian sources where he is framed in yet another image which should be explored separately.

In sum, the Old Russian chronicles present on the one hand, a very diverse image of the Cumans, on the other hand, this diverse image is remarkably stable: it lacks positive characteristics and is inextricably linked to their image as the enemies with its emphasis on their paganism. Against the general background of the growing number of allegiances with the Rus’, the image of the Cumans does not show any visible dynamic. The chronicler tries to bridge the gap between the actual situation of collaboration with the Cumans and the image which took shape during the repeated Cuman raids. Occasionally, he disapproves of alliances with Cumans or stays silent about the Cuman’s contribution to the battle outcome. This may be connected to the chronicler’s general reluctance to endorse the internal princely feud in which the Cumans were frequently enlisted. Though the alliances between the Russian princes and the Cumans remained the common practice until the Mongol invasion, the image of the Cumans did not undergo significant revaluation during the period of interactions.

This discrepancy between the factual background of alliances and their representation in the chronicles can be described by Charles J. Halperin’s concept “ideology of silence”. Analyzing the Mongol-Russian relationship, Halperin came to the interesting conclusion:

the Russians did not permit their pragmatic relations with the Tatars to soften the religiously hostile portrayal of the infidels in the medieval Russian sources. Silence shrouded cooperation; value judgments concerning Tatars dwelt only on Tatar evil.

No medieval Russian writer articulated an ideology for coexistence with the Tatars.¹³¹

After consideration of the Cuman-Russian relationship it becomes clear that such model of interactions was established long before the Mongol Invasion; and it remained powerful throughout the decades.

The Image of the Ally in the Georgian Sources

The list of Cuman qualities

The invitation of the Cumans to Georgia was, first of all, a practical solution. Accordingly, the “Historian of King David” presents the image of the Cumans by describing the rationale of the invitation of the Cuman tribe in the form of a list. The author enumerates the reasons which led to David’s decision in a logical and structured way:

And like Alexander, David conceived a plan, for there was no other way out. Knowing the numerical strength of the Q’ipchaks, their courage in battle, their quickness in travel, their fury in assault, their nimble control, their readiness to obey their commander’s will – and because they lived close by and in poverty, that made them easy to call upon, and because many years before he had brought the worthy Guarandukht’, daughter of the Q’ipchaks’ leader Atrak, son of Sharaghan, and made her his lawful spouse and Queen of the entire Georgia - for all these reasons he sent some men to summon the Q’ipchaks and his own father-in-law. And the Q’ipchaks accepted the invitation with joy and asked only for assistance in passing peacefully through the territory of the Ovses (Ossetians).¹³²

It is worth looking closer at this description where the reader is supposed to make acquaintance with the Cumans and receive essential information about this people. What is considered as essential? How is the first description of the Cumans organized? To my mind, this passage is motivated, first of all, by a practical approach.

1. strength in numbers

The first, and apparently the most important, characteristic of the newly arrived Cuman tribe is their multiplicity. One of the possible explanations why it is mentioned in the

¹³¹ Charles J. Halperin, “The Ideology of Silence: Prejudice and Pragmatism on the Medieval Religious Frontier,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26, no. 3 (1984): 464.

¹³² Metreveli and Jones, eds., *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, 178: 12-20.

first place is that it responds directly to the main problem of King David's period: insufficient military resources and lack of manpower in particular. Russian chronicles also pay attention to the number of the Cumans entering into alliances with them. It is reasonable to suggest that for nomadic warriors, their number often determines the success of the alliance.

2. courage in battle

The second feature described balances quantity and quality. The great number of the Cumans is amplified by their suitability for the military purposes they were invited for; otherwise the quantitative advantage would be lost. On the one hand, "courage" can be considered as the main military virtue. On the other hand, such quality as courage has a special meaning for Georgian chronicles in general and this source in particular. The author considers it his duty to characterize King David, first of all, as a man of courage: "I believe that David, this man of courage, recovered countries, captives and riches in an amount far exceeding what had been lost by his ancestors."¹³³ The Georgian praise brings to mind the one positive quality ascribed to the Cumans in the Old Russian chronicle, which was also "courage".

3. quickness in travel

From this point onwards it is possible to trace the planning element in the presentation of the Cumans: "and like Alexander, David conceived a plan."¹³⁴ The author does not simply list the characteristics of the Cumans but implicitly explains how they will be used in the

¹³³ Ibid., 182: 37.

¹³⁴ Metreveli and Jones, *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, 178: 12.

future.¹³⁵ The Georgian author mentions mobility, one of the specific features of the nomadic military force that also was marked in the Byzantine sources.¹³⁶

4. fury in assault

Fury in assault corresponds to the second one (courage) due to its psychological nature, but it also continues the set of “nomadic” traits. In the context of the Georgian chronicles it is considered neither positive nor negative. Importantly, the Georgian rulers are never associated with this characteristic: King David himself is described as reasonable person who acts soberly even in moments of great pressure: “King David, fearless and steadfast in his heart, formed his army; how perfectly and prudently he arranged things, ordering everything to be done calmly and without fuss, demonstrating his experience and wisdom.”¹³⁷ Fury as the certain sign of the Cuman temper makes this steppe people appropriate for King David’s military plans.

5. nimble control

6. readiness to obey their commander’s will

On the one hand, the next two characteristics of the Cumans, nimble control and readiness to obey, are separate from the previous qualities since they present the Cumans not as subjects but rather as objects of action. On the other hand, these traits, both sharing the idea of control, embrace all the Cuman qualities listed: the multitude of the Cuman horde, their bravery, mobility, and especially their military ferocity must be controlled. The author does not explicitly mention wildness and barbarism in the description of the Cumans, but the overall image he creates suggests a socially fluid community that requires management and organization at all times. In the same source there is another piece of evidence for order

¹³⁵ Here the reader enters the beginning of the “Cuman story.” The structure of the text usually implies that the narrative and the action go in parallel.

¹³⁶ Comnena, *Alexiad*, 175.

¹³⁷ Metreveli and Jones, *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, 180: 26-8.

imposed upon the Cuman tribes. After the series of successful campaigns King David lets the Cumans winter in his kingdom, but necessarily preserves the control over them:

The King arranged all the affairs in Shirvan and lavishly bestowed gifts upon the Kurds, Lek'is and Tarases. Travelling all over Kartli he assigned winter camps for the Q'ipchaks, provided them with subsistence and **appointed supervisors over them**. And he put in order all the affairs in Kartli, Somkhiti and Anisi, planning to accomplish great deeds in the spring and to perform yet a greater march, for there was nobody who could oppose him¹³⁸.

It is worth noting how the information about control over the Cumans is placed in the general context of planning and organizing the affairs of the state in a logical and consistent way: “the king arranged all the affairs”, “he put in order all the affairs.” Thus, the wording of the chronicle suggests that the Cumans represent a group that can be embedded in the political structure of the Georgian state only after careful ordering and under the strong control.

7. they lived close by

8. in poverty

The pragmatic aspect of the reasoning is clearly demonstrated by the penultimate characteristic of the Cumans: the spatial and the economic factors prior to their arrival to Georgia. Considering the structure of the paragraph, the last Cuman features balance the original reason of invitation: not only does the Georgian king need manpower desperately, but the Cumans themselves are in the strained circumstances. The question of poverty was already noted.¹³⁹ Most probably, it was their poverty and the loss of herds that brought about the Cuman sedentarization. The spatial proximity of the Cumans is also an important feature in the process of acquaintance with new people. Their neighborliness facilitates the incorporation of the new ethnic group first into the worldview on a perceptual (textual) level, and then into the social structure.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 182: 25-9. (Emphasis is mine.)

¹³⁹ Golden, “Cumanica I,” in *Nomads*, 71.

9. ‘many years before he had brought the worthy Guarandukht’

It is striking that the matrimonial bond which determined the whole Cuman-Georgian alliance is mentioned in the last place. It can be explained by the minor significance of the marriage compared to the coming of the Cumans. Guarandukht was the second wife of the king. Scholars suggest that David married Guarandukht in 1106 when he divorced his first wife of Armenian origin and imprisoned her in the Georgian monastery in Jerusalem.¹⁴⁰ By the time of writing, more than decade had passed after his marriage with the Cuman princess, which may explain why the author casually mentions the marital bond only after listing all possible practical reasons for the invitation.

Interestingly, the Cuman princess is perceived in this source as a part of the Georgian society, no longer belonging to her Cuman milieu. First of all, the name of King David’s wife is a dynastic name of the Georgian Baratid family, her Cuman name is unknown¹⁴¹. The epithet applied to Guarandukht in the original text, conveyed in English translation as “worthy”, may refer to the Christian virtue “blessed” and is often used in descriptions of the Georgian Queen Tamar. The trait which the author bestows on the Cuman princess clearly indicates that she now belongs to the royal court and can be approached through the system of notions and values applied to Georgian royal persons.

As for the consequences of the invitation of the Cumans, the Georgian chronicler openly acknowledges that the Cumans turned out to be helpful in the military plans of King David: “the trouble he went to was not in vain, for with their help he destroyed thoroughly

¹⁴⁰ [Murguliia] and [Shusharin], *Половцы*, 109.

¹⁴¹ Akhmat Karsanov [Ахмат Карсанов], “Об Одном Известии Ипатьевской Летописи” [On one entry in the Hypatian Chronicle], in *The Alans: The History and Culture*, Alanica 3 (Vladikavkaz: SOIGI, 1995), 396.

the Persian forces, evoking fear and awe in all the kings of the world. He did many unbelievable things with their help, as will be shown in the following narration.”¹⁴²

The same perception of the Cumans can be detected as in the Russian chronicle: the Cumans are described as a tool in political enterprises, not as partners. But their appraisal is different. The Cumans serve David’s plans well and this automatically means that they belong in the realm of his victorious image. The Georgian sources use the idea of belonging even more extensively than the Russian chronicles: David wins his victories with *his* Cumans, he equipped them and gives proper places to settle, i.e. he takes a full responsibility of the Cumans who are now inseparable from the king’s figure.

In comparison to the Russian chronicles, the Georgian source solves the “confessional” problem with greater ease. The Georgian author says that following the example of the best Cuman warriors who were chosen for the king’s guard, the majority of the Cumans were willing to be baptized: “he had five thousand of the choicest servants, well-experienced in war, all of whom adopted Christianity, trustworthy and proven in their valor in battle. Most of the Q’ipchaks turned gradually to Christianity and came in large numbers to Christ’s bosom.”¹⁴³

The text suggests that the elite of the Cuman forces, David’s confidants, converted to Christianity without exception (“all of whom”) and it is this elite which receives the most praise in the Georgian chronicle as “trustworthy” with “valor in battle”. However, in this passage the chronicler also mentions other Cuman warriors, gently shifting from the comprehensive “all of whom” to “most of the Q’ipchaks”. Without discussing religious differences, the Georgian chronicler puts special emphasis on the positive dynamics

¹⁴² Metreveli and Jones, *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, 178.

¹⁴³ Metreveli and Jones, eds., *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, 179:4.

according to the principle “slowly but surely” by using the word “gradually” counter-balanced by “in large numbers”.

In general, the description of *Kartlis Tskhovreba* tends to be more optimistic. The problems caused by the nomadic nature of the new allies, such as repeated Cuman raids on the sedentary community, are mentioned casually, without further discussion.¹⁴⁴ To a large extent the image of the Cumans as allies in Georgian sources can be characterized as “idealized”.

Comparison of the Georgian and Old Russian sources

The image created by the Georgian chronicle differs significantly from the c is especially remarkable in comparison with the neutral or mostly negative representation of Cumans in the Old Russian material. The following chart represents the way in which the list of characteristics given by the Georgian author may be referred to the records in the Russian sources:

The perspective of the Georgian sources on the Georgian-Cuman alliance	The perspective of the Old Russian sources the Russian-Cuman alliance
The opposition “pagan/Christian”	
“Most of the Qipchaks turned gradually to Christianity...”	<p>“he had led a force of pagans to attack Rus'. May God forgive his sin, for many Christians were destroyed”¹⁴⁵</p> <p>“Oleg and Boris led the pagans to attack Rus', and fell upon Vsevolod with their Polovcian reinforcements”¹⁴⁶</p>
The importance of multiplicity	
“numerical strength”	X of the Cumans came; many of the Cumans came ¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ For instance: “And who knows, how many times his own Q’ipchaks contrived treachery against him: sending upon him daredevils, some with swords, others with spears, yet others with arrows?” Ibid., 189: 39-40.

¹⁴⁵ Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 179–80.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 165.

¹⁴⁷ PSRL, II, 377, 455-6, 485

Personal qualities	
“courage in battle”	Only once: 1103 (in context of military conflict ¹⁴⁸)
“fury in assault”	Only in cases of Cuman intrusions
The idea of control and instrumentality	
“nimble control” “readiness to obey their commander’s will”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • belonging (the Russian prince uses <i>his</i> Cumans) • a unit which can be split into groups
The matrimonial ties of alliances	
“many years before he had brought the worthy Guarandukht”	The records about the marriage alliances with the Cumans
“quickness in travel” “they lived close by” “poverty”	- - - <p>It is also important what characteristics of the Cumans remain irrelevant for the Old Russian chronicles. Thus, the authors are not interested in economic state of the Cuman hordes, their mobility and spatial closeness. The majority of these characteristics seem to be obvious to society neighboring the steppe.</p>

The image of the Cumans as allies presents a complicated system of the preconceptions and stereotypes of the medieval authors. It is always inseparably linked to the current context of interactions in alliance. Thus, the material of the Old Russian chronicles shows a certain divergence between the factual background of the chronicle’s descriptions and the remarkably stable position of the chronicler. In reality, by the mid-twelfth century there is already a great number of close contacts between the Cuman and the Russian elite: having baptized them, Russian princes willingly marry the daughters of Cuman princes.

¹⁴⁸ PSRL, I, 278, PSRL, II, 253-54.

These dynastic marriages create a perfect basis for military alliances between the Cuman and Russian princes. Very often the Russian prince calls for his steppe relatives in order to use them as a military force in a campaign against another Russian prince. There are also cases when the Cumans themselves come to the Russian prince and express their readiness to help. These mutual obligations born out of dynastic marriages often lasted very long, sometimes for several generations.

The information about close relationships between the Cuman and the Russian elite exists only in the text of the Russian chronicles. The chronicler himself communicates the details of the Cuman-Russian interactions. The most striking fact here is that despite all the insight into the engagement of the Cumans in the Russian political and social milieu, the Russian chronicler keeps a very firm position of “anti-Cumanism.” He does not miss his chance to condemn the Cumans, to characterize them as “godless,” “cursed,” “wicked,” “the principals of evil,” “enemies of Christians and God,” “with satanic temper and deeds” using these attributes separately or even in the same passage.¹⁴⁹ This hostility would be normal in the mid-eleventh century when the Cumans were an unknown threat for the Russian principalities, but at a time when a social and political network united the steppe and the Russian principalities, this characterization comes as a surprise. Importantly, the Russian chronicler is in the center of this network. He extensively quotes Cuman names, actively uses Cuman patronymics and navigates Cuman genealogy as easily as the Russian one. He even disapproves cases of “cumanophilia,” when Russian princes collaborate with Cuman chieftains, thereby acknowledging this phenomenon as a fact of reality. The Russian chronicler’s attitude, however, remains stable throughout: the Cumans are portrayed as “godless pagans” during the whole period of Cuman-Russian interaction in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. It should be noted that this static point of view is set against the background

¹⁴⁹ PSRL, II, 612.

of the latent dynamic of the Cuman-Russian contacts, for example, the increasing level of complication of the diplomatic practices.

The Georgian sources are more open and more pragmatic in their evaluation of the Cuman contribution to the Georgian domestic and foreign policy. The Georgian chronicler openly declares the Cumans to be useful for the state, as reliable allies for the Georgian king, and the “tower of strength” for the Georgian people. Compared to the Russian chronicler who uses every opportunity to condemn the Cumans in alliance with the Russian princes, the Georgian author is much more optimistic. He tries to mitigate problems, focusing more on the beneficial traits of the Cuman warriors, and demonstrates a more positive attitude towards this short-term, but politically significant alliance with the Cumans.

Chapter 3 – Visual Images of the Cumans: Comparative Analysis of the Chronicle Miniatures

In addition to the written descriptions, this chapter will deal with the visual representations of the Cumans which appear in the Old Russian *Radziwiłł Chronicle* and compare them to the miniatures depicting the Cumans in the Hungarian *Illuminated Chronicle*. This comparison does not aim to establish the differences in the pictorial traditions; it rather offers an attempt to highlight certain peculiarities related to the representations of the Cumans as enemies and allies.

The medieval miniatures

The miniatures could be regarded as “the windows through which it is possible to look at a long-gone world,”¹⁵⁰ especially considering that the depiction of the material objects in the miniatures (e.g. costumes, weaponry, agricultural tools) corresponds to the archaeological finds of the period.¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, it is necessary to remember about the “curtain” separating these “miniature-windows” from the modern perspective of interpretation. This is the “curtain” of conventions and symbols used in certain miniature tradition and adopted individually by illuminators.

In terms of Roland Barthes’s visual semiotics, for the manuscript illumination the “connotative” layer of the image (the concepts and ideas transferred by the image) can be as important as the “denotative” layer (the subject/s depicted).¹⁵² Iconographical symbolism is one of the most characteristic features of medieval miniatures: an object or a pose can

¹⁵⁰ [Artemii Artsikhovskiy] Артемий Арциховский, *Древнерусские миниатюры как исторический источник* [*The Old Russian miniatures as a historical source*] (Moscow: Moscow State University, 1944), 4.

¹⁵¹ [Boris Rybakov] Борис Рыбаков, *Из истории культуры древней Руси. Исследования и заметки* [*From the Cultural History of Old Rus'. Studies and Notes*] (Moscow: Moscow State University, 1984), 189.

¹⁵² Theo van Leeuwen, “Semiotics and Iconography,” in *SAGE Visual Methods*, vol. 3, ed. Jason Hughes (Los Angeles: SAGE Publ, 2012), 94–96.

represent a whole idea through the system of implied analogies. Thus, the analysis of miniatures is connected to the decoding the symbols. The main difficulty here is, as Erwin Panofsky states, that “the objects accepted and plainly recognizable as symbols could mingle with real buildings, plants or implements on the same level of reality—or, rather, unreality,”¹⁵³ so it is not enough to find the necessary key for decoding, but it is essential to use it in the correct case. Moreover, in Panofsky’s iconological approach, the context of the image creation is also very important: the particular circumstances of this creation, and the influence of current socio-political tendencies on the traditional canon.

The miniatures in these chronicles belong to a special type of manuscript miniatures. Their primary characteristic is that they are secondary in relation to the chronicle text, and they function in the descriptive linear (year by year) context. The chronicle narrative usually governs the images, determining their sequence and content. Another feature of chronicle miniatures is that they are a serial product: they often represent the series of the same figures or events, and therefore they seek identical or, at least, identifiable representations. Hence, the chronicle miniatures can constitute certain image cycles with similar iconographical attributes, for example, the image cycle of King Ladislas in the Hungarian *Illuminated Chronicle*, as analyzed by Béla Zsolt Szakács.¹⁵⁴

What could be the basis of “identifiable” representations? First, such representations can be based on the social conventions describing certain persons or phenomena. These conventions can be expressed in the visual form or can exist in the descriptions (verbal or written). In case of miniatures in chronicles, which are reproducible and copyable, the exemplars are especially important. Secondly, both the individual interpretation of the images

¹⁵³ Cited in van Leeuwen, “Semiotics and Iconography,” 110.

¹⁵⁴ Béla Zsolt Szakács, “Between Chronicle and Legend: Image Cycles of St Ladislas in Fourteenth Century Manuscripts,” in *The Medieval Chronicle IV*, ed. Erik Kooper (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2006), 149–76.

and the personal experiences and social factors that are not part of the convention affect these identifiable representations

Therefore, the chronicle miniatures depicting the Cumans will shed light on the basic conventions which determine the Cuman visual image and at the same time show how the chroniclers' perspective was reflected by the illuminators.

The Cumans in the miniatures of the Radziwiłł Chronicle

The Radziwiłł Chronicle

The *Radziwiłł* (or *Königsberg*) *Chronicle* is one of the most notable Old Russian illuminated manuscripts. It is a fifteenth-century manuscript which belonged to the Radziwiłł family in the period between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and then was found in Eastern Prussia (Königsberg). During the Seven Years' War it was taken as a spoil and moved to Saint Petersburg. The text of the *Radziwiłł Chronicle* reproduces the *Russian Primary Chronicle* and the *Chronicle of Vladimir*. The records about the events of 1206 are the last records of the Radziwiłł Chronicle narrative. The fact that in the entry of 6662 (1154) the Cumans are called "Tatars" indicates that the closest protograph of the *Radziwiłł Chronicle* was copied after 1223. Some scholars suggest that the earliest protograph of the *Radziwiłł Chronicle* was also an illuminated manuscript; and this protograph and the *Lavrentian Codex* go back to a common protograph dating to the illuminated chronicle of 1185.¹⁵⁵ The place of origin of the *Radziwiłł Chronicle* is debated: some scholars point to Novgorod,¹⁵⁶ others suppose that it was Smolensk,¹⁵⁷ recent opinions suggest that the original was created in the Volhynian principality.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ [Mikheev], *Кто писал "Повесть временных лет"*, 20–25.

¹⁵⁶ [Vladimir Sizov] Владимир Сизов, "Миниатюры Кенигсбергской Летописи: Археологический Этюд" [The miniatures of the Königsberg Chronicle: Archaeological Etude], *ИОРЯС* 10, no. 1 (1905), 50.

The *Radziwiłł Chronicle* contains 617 color miniatures illustrating different episodes of the chronicle. The last edition of the chronicle distinguishes four illuminators working on the manuscript: three of them were illuminating different parts of the chronicle simultaneously while the fourth artist was responsible for the small details of the miniatures.¹⁵⁹ The scholars note the different manner of miniature execution: the artist who made the folios until fol. 194v had a more archaic approach to forms and composition and relied more on the conventional representations, for instance, in landscapes.¹⁶⁰ The artists who performed the rest of the miniatures used more dynamic models; their style is more vivid, the sketchiness of the images is livelier and more realistic.¹⁶¹ The style of the first artist with its diligent accuracy seems to be a careful imitation of the original of the *Radziwiłł Chronicle* while the rest of the miniatures demonstrate more recent and more independent tendencies.¹⁶² There is also evidence for corrections: the work of the previous miniaturist was sometimes changed and complemented.

The depictions of the Cumans

Considering the depictions of the Cumans in the *Radziwiłł Chronicle*, it is essential to remember that by the time the Chronicle was created (the 15th century) the Cumans had disappeared from the political and cultural horizon of Rus'. Accordingly, it is more relevant

¹⁵⁷ [Boris Rybakov] Борис Рыбаков, "Миниатюры Радзивилловской летописи и русские лицевые рукописи X–XII веков [The miniatures of the Radziwiłł Chronicle and the Russian Illuminated Manuscripts from 10th–12th centuries]," in *Радзивилловская летопись: Текст, Исследование, Описание миниатюр* (Saint Petersburg; Moscow: Glagol'; Iskustvo, 1994), 280–81.

¹⁵⁸ [Oleksei Tolochko] Алексей Толочко, "Не преступати предела братня': Об источниках миниатюр Радзивилловской летописи" ["Ne prestupati predela bratnia": About the sources of the miniatures of the Radziwiłł Chronicle], *Ruthenica* 12 (2014): 67–81.

¹⁵⁹ [Margarita Kukushkina] Маргарита Кукушкина, and others, eds., *Радзивилловская летопись: Текст, Исследование, Описание миниатюр* [The Radziwiłł Chronicle: The text, the study, the description of the miniatures] (Saint Petersburg; Moscow: Glagol'; Iskustvo, 1994), 302–3.

¹⁶⁰ [Stepan Temushev] Степан Темушев, "Дань в миниатюрах Радзивилловской летописи" [The Tribute in the miniatures of the Radziwiłł Chronicle], *Drevnyaya Rus': Voprosy Medievistiki* 60, no. 2 (2015): 7.

¹⁶¹ [Aleksei Chernetsov] Алексей Чернецов, "К изучению Радзивилловской летописи" [On the Question of the Studies of the Radziwiłł Chronicle], *ТОДРЛ* 36 (1981): 275.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 275.

to speak about symbolic value of the miniatures rather than about the realistic representations (which could be also influenced by the Mongol Invasion).

Analyzing the miniatures of the *Radziwiłł Chronicle*, scholars identified various peculiarities in the representation of the nomadic groups¹⁶³, their weapons¹⁶⁴ and battle flags.¹⁶⁵ Sapunov considered one of the most well-known episodes of the *Russian Primary Chronicle* telling about the campaign against the Cumans undertaken by Igor Sviatoslavich.¹⁶⁶

By my calculations the *Radziwiłł Chronicle* contains more than 60 miniatures depicting the Cumans in different statuses and roles: as military adversaries, as military allies, as ambassadors and as captives. In the visual representations of the Cumans the consistent elements are equally important as the unique cases. It is not my task to consider all the miniatures in detail; I will rather describe the main tendencies of the visual image of the Cumans and point out the most remarkable exceptions.

The similarities of representations

First of all, the most striking fact, concerning the Cuman image, is that the majority of the miniatures do not visually distinguish between the Cuman and the Russian warriors in the scenes of military conflicts. In contrast, the Cuman and Russian elite can be distinguished. The Russian princes are easily identifiable by the princely round hats, usually red, and the

¹⁶³ [Artsikhovsky], *Old Russian Miniatures*, 19–20.

¹⁶⁴ [Anatolii Kirpichnikov] Анатолий Кирпичников, *Древнерусское оружие* [Old Russian weaponry], vol. 3 (Moscow -Leningrad: Nauka, 1966), 78.

¹⁶⁵ [Mikhail Rabinovich] Михаил Рабинович, “Древнерусские знамена (X - XV вв.) по изображениям на миниатюрах” [The Old Russian flags (10th-15th Centuries) in miniatures], in *Новое в Археологии* (Moscow: Moscow State University, 1972), 170–81.

¹⁶⁶ [Boris Sapunov] Борис Сапунов, “Миниатюры Радзивилловской летописи о походе Игоря на половцев” [The miniatures of the Radziwiłł Chronicle about the Igor’s Campaign against the Cumans], in *Книга в России XVI – середины XIX в. Материалы и исследования* [The Book in Russia between the sixteenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries: Materials and studies] (Leningrad, 1990), 11–27.

Cuman princes are also recognizable by their shaved heads and clean shaven face.¹⁶⁷ In the *Radziwiłł Chronicle* the latter is a sign of youth, inferior position or foreignness.¹⁶⁸ The absence of the beard is testified by other sources; the absence of moustache is less typical: “As both *kamennye baby* and Hungarian sources show, Cuman men had no beards, wore a narrow moustache.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ About the function of hair in differentiating people: Robert Bartlett, “Symbolic Meanings of Hair in the Middle Ages,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, 4 (1994): 43–60.

¹⁶⁸ [Temushev], “Дань в миниатюрах Радзивиловской летописи,” 10–11.

¹⁶⁹ Berend, *At the Gate of Christendom*, 258.



Figure6 Ad annum 1093: The Cumans bring the local population to captivity. Fol. 129

The miniature illustrating the events of 1103 shows that absence of beards is not a rule in the depictions of the Cumans:



Figure7 Ad annum 1103: A bearded Cuman warrior is taken as captive. Fol. 150v

As noted previously, the ordinary warriors both on the Cuman and the Russian side are depicted in the same manner. The armor, the weapons and the battle flags are the same in most of the cases. This similarity is especially important against the background of the images depicting the internecine conflicts of the Russian princes: it is often difficult to understand what kind of conflict is pictured: a conflict with the Cumans or an internal

conflict between groups of Russian princes. In contrast, the Hungarian *Illuminated Chronicle* depicts the Cumans and the Hungarians in a distinctive manner. First, the image of the Hungarian ruler, for instance, that of Saint Ladislas, differs from the representation of the Cuman warrior, his enemy. Secondly, the images of the other Hungarian warriors differ from the images of the Cumans (by their attires, weapons etc.). This remarkable contrast is well demonstrated on the front page of the Hungarian *Illuminated Chronicle*, where the two military groups supporting the king (western knights and “Cuman” warriors) are depicted in a very distinctive way.



Figure 8 The front page of the Hungarian *Illuminated Chronicle*. Fol.1

As for the Old Russian miniatures, in most instances the *Radziwiłł Chronicle* does not mobilize the additional visual tools in order to emphasize the features distinguishing the Cumans from the Russian princes and does not construct a special image of the enemy.

The following examples can demonstrate indistinguishability of the representations in the *Radziwiłł Chronicle*:



Figure9 Ad annum 1067: The defeat of the triumvirate of the Russian princes (Iziaslav, Sviatoslav and Vsevolod) by the Cumans. Fol. 97v



Figure10 Ad annum 1071: The defeat of the Russian prince Vsevolod Iaroslavich by the allied troops of the Cumans and the Russian prince Oleg Sviatoslavich. Fol. 115v



Figure13 Ad annum 1184: The pursuit of the Cumans by Vladimir Glebovich's troops. Fol. 231v

The distinctions in representations

The flags

However, among all the similarities there are rare attempts of the miniaturists to differentiate the Cumans from the Russian warriors. Research on the battle flags used in medieval Rus' points out that some of the miniatures have a cross as a finial of the flag of the Russian troops, and a tassel if the flag belongs to the "pagan" Cumans.¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ [Mikhail Rabinovich], "Древнерусские Знамена (X - XV вв.)," 177.



Figure 14 Ad annum 1154: The Russian prince Gleb Iurievich uses the Cuman troops in his campaign against Mstislav Iziaslavich. Fol. 198.

Such distinctions in the battle flags, however, are rather an exception than the rule. Generally, the Cuman and the Russian flags are depicted very similarly with the same pointed finials.

The Cuman hats

Notably, the previously discussed equality between Russians and Cumans only apply to images which represent a military conflict: a battle, a pursuit or a capture of warriors. Generally, the miniature follows the chronicle image of the enemy: the negative traits of this image are the least accentuated in the military conflicts and most emphasized in the descriptions of the Cuman intrusions. When the chronicle describes situations where the “pagan” Cumans cause harm to the settlements of Christians, destroying the churches and killing local people, the Cumans are portrayed by using the most negative characteristics. The accompanying miniatures imbibe and often intensify this principle.

For example, when the Cumans are not presented as warriors on the battlefield but as civilians, their images become more individualistic. One of the most remarkable details in such images is a characteristic detail of the Cuman costume: the pointed hat. Some of the

miniatures in the Radziwiłł Chronicle depict this “conical fur-edged felt hat is a typical item of Cuman clothing”.¹⁷¹



Figure 15 Ad annum 1093: The Cuman attack. Fol. 127v

The example of 1093 illustrates the events when the Cumans, according to the chronicle records, caused a lot of harm to Christians who «suffer many wounds, various woes, and awful torture».¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ Antony Karasulas, Angus McBride, and Martin Windrow, *Mounted Archers of the Steppe 600 BC-AD 1300*, 5th impression, Elite 120 (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2008), 63.

¹⁷² Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *The Russian Primary Chronicle*, 178.



Figure16 Ad annum 1093: The Cumans are arsoning the town. Fol. 128v

Fig.9 and 10 demonstrate that the Cuman hats are different: the hats which have clearly accentuated raised brims probably belong to the noble Cumans who do not physically take part in the ravages themselves but give the orders. The other type of Cuman hat has lowered brims and elongated upper part. In the sketchiest miniatures these hats look like a transition between a pointed hat and a pointed helmet:



Figure17 Ad annum 1093: The Cumans are burning the town. Fol. 131v



Figure 18 Ad annum 1136: The Cumans allied with the Russian Olgovichi are defeated by another coalition of the Russian princes, the Monomakhovichi. Fol. 167v.

Pointed hats also appear in the miniatures depicting Cuman ambassadors in the later records (see Fig. 13, 14). In contrast, Russian ambassadors do not wear a hat in presence of the Kievan prince.¹⁷³



Figure 19 Ad annum 1146: The Cumans are asking the Russian prince Iziaslav Mstislavich for peace. Fol. 176.

¹⁷³[Artsikhovsky], *Древнерусские миниатюры*, 32.



Figure 20 Ad annum 1147: The peace conclusion between the Cumans and Iziaslav Mstislavich. Fol. 177.

In the miniature illustrating the events of 1147 the coloring more than contour emphasizes that the upper part of the hats is spirally bent to the bottom.

To sum, the Radziwiłł Chronicle presents more examples in which the Cuman and Russian warriors are indistinguishable, the cases of distinct visual characteristic are much rarer and are connected to the details of costume, particularly, the hats. This indistinguishability of the images, to my mind, directly corresponds to the ambiguous situation with the textual representation of the Cumans as allies in the chronicles. On the one hand, the chronicler often expresses a negative attitude towards the «pagan» Cumans; and the unfavorable image of the Cumans created in the second half of the 11th century became very stable throughout the whole chronicle tradition. On the other hand, from the second quarter of the 12th century the chronicles tell more about the growing collaboration of the Cuman and Russian elite, about the numerous alliances tied by family connections, about the frequent joint campaigns where the Cumans were fighting along the princely troops. It seems that the miniatures reflect the latter position of the Cumans in their developing relations with Rus' when they were often involved in the political life as neighbors and relatives.

The Cumans in the miniatures of the Hungarian Illuminated Chronicle

The Hungarian visual material on the image of the Cumans is a complex system which includes different types of sources (frescoes, other illuminated MSS, such as the *Angevin legendary*) and cannot be easily compared to the Old Russian miniatures. That is why this chapter focuses on the Hungarian *Illuminated Chronicle*, the closest typological and chronological parallel to the Old Russian *Radziwiłł Chronicle*.

The *Illuminated Chronicle*, created in the second half of the 14th century, gives rich visual material for the image of the Cumans.¹⁷⁴ This chronicle may be especially effective for the comparative analysis since it is the “first Hungarian Codex to offer a mine of information in its miniatures on heraldry, armour, and national dress”.¹⁷⁵ Certainly, comparing the miniatures of the Hungarian *Illuminated Chronicle* to the images of the *Radziwiłł Chronicle*, it is necessary to take into account the shift in pictorial traditions: from the Eastern tradition and Byzantine iconography to the Western European miniature tradition.

Though the Hungarian *Illuminated Chronicle* differs significantly from the *Radziwiłł Chronicle* by a number of features, including, for instance, the use of colors, composition elements and the degree of detailing, there are some similarities in the depiction of the Cumans. First of all, they are connected to the Cuman costumes. The noble type of the

¹⁷⁴ The scholarly tradition on the representations of the Cumans in the *Illuminated Chronicle* is extensive. The major works on the topic are: Ernő Marosi, “Zur Frage des Quellenwertes mittelalterlicher Darstellungen: ‘Orientalismus’ in der Ungarischen Bilderchronik,” in *Alltag und materielle Kultur im mittelalterlichen Ungarn*, ed. András Kubinyi and József Laszlovszky, *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* 22 (Krems, 1991), 74–107; Ernő Marosi, “Magyarok középkori ábrázolásai és az orientalizmus a középkori művészetben,” [“Medieval depictions of Hungarians and orientalism in medieval art,”] in *Magyarok Kelet és Nyugat közt* (Budapest: Balassi, 1996), 77–97; András Pálóczi Horváth, “Le costume coman au Moyen Age,” *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 32 (1980): 403–27. Annamária Kovács, “Court, Fashion and Representation: The Hungarian Illuminated Chronicle Revisited,” PhD diss., CEU Medieval Studies Department, (Budapest: Central European University, 1999); András Pálóczi Horváth, “Le costume coman au Moyen Age,” *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 32 (1980): 403–27.

¹⁷⁵ Krisztina Fügedi, “Modifications of the Narrative? The Message of Image and Text in the Fourteenth-century Hungarian Illuminated Chronicle,” in *The Development of Literate Mentalities in East Central Europe*. Ed. Anna Adamska, et al. Turnhout: Brepols, 2004. 470.

pointed brimmed hats described as “hats with turned-up brims and tall conical crowns terminating in a rounded point” appear in Hungarian sources as “the hats of the native Hungarians and of some of the Cumans who, by that time [14th century], had been absorbed into the population.”¹⁷⁶ These hats as a part of the Cuman (and also Mongol) dress are depicted in the *Hungarian Illuminated Chronicle*. One of the miniatures featuring this representation is the well-known scene illustrating the events of 1068 when the people called “Cumans” devastated the Hungarian borders and suffered defeat, followed by a story of a captive girl.

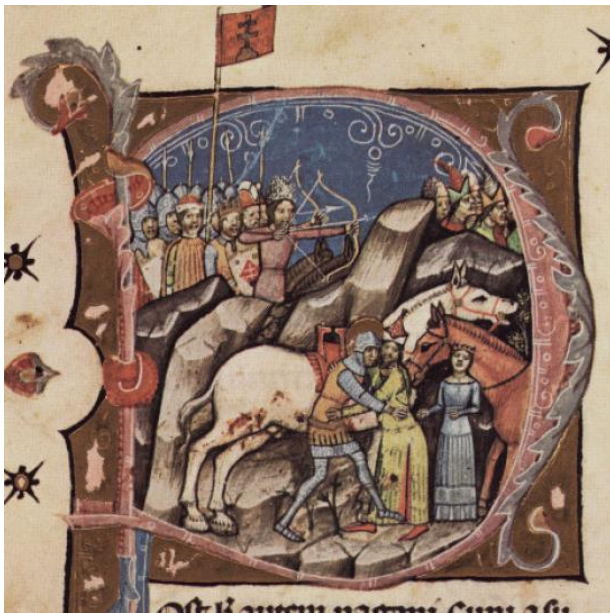


Figure 21 The victory of the Hungarians over the Cumans. Fol. 72

The Cumans are depicted here with the same pointed hats with turned-up brims. A similar hat is represented in the miniature illustrating the coronation of Stephen III: the figure

¹⁷⁶ Stella Mary Newton, “Tomaso Da Modena, Simone Martini, Hungarians and St. Martin in Fourteenth-Century Italy,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 43 (1980): 235, doi:10.2307/751199.

wearing an oriental dress and pointed hat apparently participates in the ceremony. The scholars identify this figure with a Hungarian nobleman.¹⁷⁷



Figure 22 The coronation of Stephan III. Fol. 121

Another notable examples concern the image of King Ladislav IV (Fig. 17) who, being of Cuman origin and having three Cuman concubines, was often blamed for adopting the “pagan” Cuman customs and promoting the culture of his relatives. Berend emphasizes that the representation of Ladislav IV had symbolic meaning:

The *Illuminated Chronicle* reinforces this negative judgement through visual means. László's portrait is strikingly different from that of his predecessors; he wears the traditional Cuman attire of a caftan and conical hat. This visual message is especially powerful, since the image contrasts with that of other kings [...] The only scenes that the illuminator chose to illustrate in the story of King László, furthermore, were the portrait of the king (in Cuman costume), the second Mongol invasion, the arrival of the papal legate Philip, and László's assassination by the Cumans, with the king himself again in Cuman clothing. These images definitely convey the condemnation of László as a pagan, dying a death that would lead to damnation.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Klára Csapodiné Gárdonyi et al., *Képes Krónika [The Illuminated Chronicle]* (Budapest: Európa Könyvkiadó, 1986), 550.

¹⁷⁸ Berend, *At the Gate of Christendom*, 2006, 178.

The Cuman costume of Ladislav IV has the same oriental pointed hat:



Figure23 Ladislav IV. Fol.128

In the scene illustrating Ladislav's death at the hands of the Cumans, Ladislav's hat has lower brims and, regarding the previous image (Fig. 17), differs by its finial and shape from the hats of his assassins:



Figure 24 Ladislas' death. Fol.129

Thus, parallel to the Russian miniatures, the Hungarian *Illuminated Chronicle* also distinguishes various types of Cuman hats. The main difference between the Hungarian and Old Russian depictions of the Cumans is that the Hungarian miniatures depict the hairstyle and all the detail of the Cuman costume in a distinctive way (the hat, the long kaftan) while the Old Russian miniatures display the Cumans in the Russian attire, occasionally marking only the hats as a specific Cuman feature.

In my view, the main reason for the opposite strategies in the visualization of the Cuman portraits is miniaturists' perception of the social discrepancies described by the chronicle narratives. The miniatures of the Hungarian *Illuminated Chronicle*, depicting the Cumans, pay special attention to those episodes which demonstrate a meeting of two worlds: the world of "familiarity" and the world of "otherness". The fights with the Cumans and the elements of a foreign culture receive their own visual interpretation in the Hungarian miniatures. The Cumans here are aliens who disturb the homogeneity of the familiar world.

The Old Russian miniatures, illustrating the narrative where the Cumans are part of the Old Russian social world, do not emphasize the differences between the ordinary warriors but concentrate more on the dissimilarity inside the Cuman elite (i.e. different types of hats, shaved heads and clean shaven faces of the Cuman leaders). Thus, the visual image of the Cumans presented by the Hungarian sources reflects the juxtaposition of the world of “familiarity” to the world of “otherness”, while the same image found in the Old Russian sources mirrors the contiguity of two worlds.

Conclusion

The experience of interactions between the Cumans and medieval sedentary societies is rich and diverse. Various kinds of alliances and dissimilar forms of military conflicts present a broad picture which medieval chroniclers reflect in different manner. My analysis of the Georgian and Old Russian sources demonstrates that most often the descriptions of the interactions with the Cumans are not simply an account of historical events, but a contextualization, interpretation, and legitimation of these interconnections.

The examples considered indicate that the contextualization of the image of the Cumans may either describe exclusively the current historical environment, as in the case of the Georgian narrative *The Life of King of Kings, David*, or may refer at the same time to the past, present and even the future, as in case of the Old Russian sources which consider the Cumans in the context of the previous and actual interactions and also connect them to the eschatological expectations.

My comparison of the Georgian and Old Russian sources shows that narrative interpretation of the Cumans, as well as of other groups, depends on the moral evaluation and appeal to the set of values adopted in these societies, first of all, Christian values. Thus, the authors of the Old Russian chronicles create an image of the Cumans as enemies which is primarily based on the “pagan/Christian” opposition and is described by such epithets as “godless”, “lawless”, “cursed” etc. Moreover, non-Christian affiliation of the Cumans also influences the image of the ally and impedes the penetration of the positive characteristics into this image. This causes a significant discrepancy between the factual information on the developing collaboration of the Cuman and Russian elites and its actual representation. For the historian of David, the king of Georgia, the interpretation of the Cuman image depends on the central figure of his narrative. The Georgian author correlates the image of the Cumans to

that of King David emphasizing the characteristics useful for the king (especially, Cuman military virtues and readiness to obey) and trying to avoid the negative representation of David's allies.

Finally, my analysis reveals that the image of the Cumans presented in the sources highly depends on the process of legitimation. This process passes through the stages of authorization (when the author refers to the “authority of tradition, custom, law”) and rationalization (when the author appeals to the utility of the actions, to the “knowledge society has constructed to endow them with cognitive validity”).¹⁷⁹ For the Georgian narrative the rationalization process is especially important: the Cumans are useful for the king, therefore their appearance in the narrative and social space is appropriate and relevant. The instrumentality in the Georgian sources always has positive connotations since the Cumans passed the stage of authorization – they were settled, they were mostly baptized, and they got under the political and social control of the royal administration.

For the Old Russian chronicles, rationalization is mostly connected to instrumentality of two types. The first type concerns the cases when the Cumans are instruments in the princely feud. The second type relates to the cases in which the Cumans are God's scourge: when the Cuman intrusion or Cuman victory over the Russian princes is conceptualized as God's punishment. The negative rationalization substantially contributes to the anti-legitimation of the Cumans in the Old Russian sources. Here the Cumans did not pass the stage of authorization by tradition, custom or law: Cuman paganism, nomadism and uncontrollability remain grave impediments for such authorization from the early chronicle records to the last representation of the Cumans.

¹⁷⁹ Norman Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*, reprinted (London: Routledge, 2010), 98.

In the context of recent studies on identity making processes, “external constructions” and policies of exclusion, my examination of the Old Russian and Georgian material displays that the depiction of the Cumans is always a choice for a medieval author: it is either a narrative and social familiarization or conclusive estrangement. My conclusion is that though the Georgian and Old Russian narratives have several common features, they present opposite solutions to the problem of exclusion determined by the particular socio-political situation.

Thus, the period of David’s IV reign (1089-1125) was characterized by the rise of nation- and identity building processes. The attenuation of the Seljuk threat and reintegration of the Kingdom of Georgia under David’s rulership required an articulated strategy in the representation of historical figures and events. This strategy, following the Byzantine imperial model, defined David as the center of the socio-political narrative. Illuminated by David’s positive image, the Cumans were transported from the nomadic world of “otherness” to the world of “familiarity”. Not by chance, the anonymous historian of King David introduces the Cumans in his narrative with a detailed list of their characteristics and tells about their unproblematic Christianization. The Cumans, alien to Georgian society in practice, in the narrative are approximated to this society through the system of alleged values (Christianity, war against the enemies of the society, military virtues etc.).

The situation in the Old Russian sources is the opposite. The political environment of the eleventh to the thirteenth century was often characterized by disintegration and internal feud. The Cumans played an important role in these conflicts, supporting different Russian tribes and participating in their military clashes. In practice the Cumans represented the world of “familiarity” for Russian princes and for medieval Russian chroniclers. However, the chroniclers, not acknowledging the fact of close cooperation between the Cumans and the

Russian elite, alienate the nomads and transpose them from the world of “familiarity” into the world of “otherness”. It is debatable to what extent a chronicler can be regarded as a defender of the political integrity of dissociated principalities and a contributor to the identity-making process. More plausibly, the chroniclers represent a Christian community in general and consider it impossible to let in the external “other” either into the narrative space or into social world.

Further perspectives of this research could be connected to the deeper investigation of the interconnections between identity-creating processes and the development of the image of the Cumans. The medieval image may be further compared to its later transformations, for instance, in the history textbooks of school curriculum. The enlargement and differentiation of the source body and geographical area of the research, for instance, including Hungarian and Byzantine narrative sources, might reveal new facets of the Cuman image, a highly sophisticated narrative construct reflecting the factual framework of sedentary-nomadic interactions through the prism of prepossessions and flexible evaluative models.

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