



Summary :

Asiatic nomadic people that during the 9th century settled in the southern Russian and Ukrainian steppes, along the northern coast of the Black Sea, and during the 10th century occupied the region north of the Danube, becoming – within two centuries– one of the most important for the Byzantine foreign policy northern neighbours of the empire. During the 11th century their relations with the Byzantine empire were generally hostile and they constituted the empire's most dangerous opponent in the north, a situation that was maintained up to the disappearance of this people from the limelight in the beginning of the 12th century.

Date

9th - 12th c.

Geographical Location

Northern coast of the Black Sea

1. Introduction

Pechenegs, who in the Byzantine texts are also called *Πατζινάκοι* or *Πατζινακίτες*, from the Turkish root name Pečenek, constitute one of the many nomadic Asiatic peoples, that during the Middle Ages moved from Central Asia to the borders of Eastern Europe and then came into contact with the Danubian border of the Byzantine Empire. This people preserved its nomadic way of life and its organisation in tribes for as long as it was in the limelight. The distinguishable tribes that comprised this people preserved their particular leadership; as a result, they did not constitute a single state in the territories they occupied, while their diplomatic handling by the Byzantines was difficult due to this fragmentation of power. Concerning the religious identity of the Pechenegs, the majority seemed to maintain pagan beliefs, even if it is said that parts of them converted to Christianity or Islam. Their language is classified in the family of Turkic languages.¹

Their arrival in the steppes of southern Russia and Ukraine took place in the ninth century, while the Byzantine-Bulgarian conflict during the reign of tsar Symeon brought them to the limelight of Byzantine history at the end of the ninth - beginning of the tenth century, when they further expanded to the north of the Danube. To be precise, this last movement of the Pechenegs took place in 895-96, after Symeon had invited them to expel the Hungarians (or Magyars), allies of Byzantium, and also a nomadic Asiatic people that had recently arrived in the same region.² This movement of the Pechenegs caused the transportation of the Hungarians in the central-European region, which developed in the Hungarian state, while the land north of the Danube (the southern part of modern Romania) was also annexed in the territory under Pecheneg control.

2. Relations with Byzantium

The [Byzantines](#) achieved the enlistment of the Pechenegs against the [Bulgarians](#) in 917.³ This cooperation did not bring about any benefits for Byzantium during the war against Symeon. It inaugurated, however, the policy of gaining over the Pecheneg tribes, as well as the maintenance of friendly relations with them, which constituted since then a fixed



point of the Byzantine foreign policy concerning the northern border affairs during the tenth century. Due to the nomadic way of life and the corresponding traditions of the Pechenegs, their relations with the neighbouring peoples were not smooth and were characterised by their constant tendency to raid against their neighbours. Their presence in the intermediary region between powers the Byzantines considered as potentially threatening (such as Bulgaria, Hungary, and the Russian principality of Kiev), with which Byzantium's relations were generally hostile, rendered the Pechenegs considerable counterbalancing factor, serving the Byzantine interests concerning the northern Black Sea region, the safety of the Byzantine northern border, and the imperial possessions in the [Crimea](#). This view is analytically illustrated in the diplomatic handbook known as *De administrando imperio*, generally attributed to the emperor [Constantine VII Porphyrogennitos](#). Several chapters of this text are dedicated to the Pechenegs and contain instructions on how to approach them using diplomatic means, which aimed not only at using them against other rival powers, but also at the development of commercial relations between them and Byzantine [Cherson](#) (the centre of Byzantine possessions in the Crimea).⁴

The situation altered in the eleventh century, when (after 1018) the obliteration of the Bulgarian state and the annexation of its lands to the Byzantine Empire caused the movement of the Byzantine border to the Danube, resulting to the direct neighbouring of the Byzantine territory with that of the Pechenegs. Soon they commenced their raids against the Byzantine territory, which were increased from the middle of the century onward; thus, the Pechenegs became the most considerable threat for Byzantium in the Balkans. Each attempt to confront them with military means brought in poorly results, while the Byzantines applied a policy of gaining over some of the Pecheneg tribes, according to which the frontier region south of the Danube was given to them as a place of settlement, in return for their integration into the Byzantine military structure, as well as for the protection of the border from (among others) the tribes of the same nationality who lived beyond it. However, this method was ineffective in the long-run.⁵ The interception of the Pecheneg danger was finally achieved during the reign of [Alexios I Komnenos](#) (1081-1118), when the Byzantines managed to temporarily gain over another nomadic people, recently arrived in the Black Sea region, the [Cumans](#), and to turn them against the Pechenegs. The weakening of the Pechenegs because of the attacks of the Coumans made possible their military crushing by the Byzantines in 1122. Since then the Pechenegs disappear from the historical limelight, as their remnants were assimilated either by the Coumans, or the Hungarians.

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2. Ζακουθηνός, Δ.Α., *Βυζαντινή Ιστορία, 324-1071* (Αθήνα 1972), p. 268.

3. Ζακουθηνός, Δ.Α., *Βυζαντινή Ιστορία, 324-1071* (Αθήνα 1972), p. 272.

4. Moravcsik, G. - Jenkins, R.J.H. (eds.), *Constantine Porphyrogenitus De administrando imperio* (CFHB 1, Washington DC 1967), pp. 48-57, 64-65, 166-71.

5. Ζακουθηνός, Δ.Α., *Βυζαντινή Ιστορία, 324-1071* (Αθήνα 1972), pp. 500-504; Stephenson, P., *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier. A Political Study of the Northern Balkans, 900-1204* (Cambridge 2000), pp. 81-100.



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