

The Cuman Studies as a Scientific Discipline¹

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As for the Cumans, they were discovered only in the 18th-19th centuries, when Oriental studies, archaeology and ethnography developed and made it possible to study their history. Firstly, the Cumans could not be identified among the Eastern European Nomadic peoples such as the Pechenegs, Oguz/Uz. The study of the material in Codex Cumanicus, the oriental elements in the Song of Igor's Campaign, and other sources brought new results in Turkology and a new field of study came into being: Cumanology including the history, language and archaeology of the Cumans/Kipchaks. There were historians, archaeologists, linguists, Slavists, Byzantinists, Turkologists, Arabists among the founder fathers (P. Golubovskiy, J. Marquart, D. Rasovsky, S. Pletneva, O. Pritsak, P. Golden etc.) . The peculiarities of this field of research are discussed in this article.

Whether it was a paradox or a law, the scholarly interest in the Cumans did not emerge until they had already vanished from the historical scene, and their descendants became part of the neighbouring nations (Tatars, Georgians, Russians, Wallachians, Hungarians, Bulgarians and so on). They assimilated them and participated in their ethno-genesis, which led to the creation of local ethnographic groups, including today's Kipchak nations. The Cumans were of course already mentioned by the contemporary chroniclers and by the later historians close to their epoch. Their data represent the primary source of knowledge for the exploration of this people. However, not only the Russian chroniclers, but also the Georgian, Byzantine and Latin-speaking authors of the European Middle Ages, as well as their Muslim (Arabian, Persian) colleagues and the Chinese biographers from the Mongol period, gave reports on the

¹ For the authors mentioned here see in: V. Stojanov. *Kumanologija. Opiti za rekonstrukcija*. [Cumanology. Attempts at Reconstructions] Sofia 2006; V. Stojanov. *Kumanologija. IstorioGRAFSKI eskizi*. [Cumanology. Historiographical Sketches] Vol. 1-2. Sofia 2009; V. Stojanow, "Die russische Historiographie über die *Kočevniki* – ein Beitrag zur Ideengeschichte des späten Zarenreichs," *Bulgarian Historical Review* 40:3-4 (2010), 167-192.

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Cumans (Polovcians, Kipchaks) only so far as concerned with the political events of the time they described. Since it was characterised by stormy conflicts in which the nomads played an active role – either on their own initiative or because they were drawn on the side of one or the other of the opposing parties – the information about them was not impartial, but subjected to the general course of exposition; this is a tradition which has continued in the later national historiographies.

In this sense, it is no coincidence that the special interest in the Cumans awoke with the development of the historical science in the 18th-19th centuries, together with the new scientific field of “Oriental Studies”, as the importance of language in defining and grouping of population was recognised, the foundations of the Archaeology and Ethnography as separate fields were put, and more accurate scientific methods were developed in the historical analysis. This is also the time when the idea of an ethnically conditioned nation arose, for the consolidation of which contributed the myth-building of the national historiographies. During this time, the focus of research began to be concentrated on the past of one’s own people and its relations with the neighbouring nations; to a large extent, this made the history an “ethnocentric” science. This also led to the curiosity to those Eastern tribes, whose migrations changed the ethno-political map of the continent.

The interest in the East and its history (including the Cumans) was quite logical for two more reasons. First of all, this coincided with the neutralisation of the Ottoman danger. After the defeat of Kara Mustafa Pasha by Vienna (1683) and the Ottoman troops at Mohács (1687), the expulsion of the “Turks” from Europe stimulated the desire for a better understanding of the ancient “opponent”. This led to the first detailed studies on their history and language, which were crowned with the works of F. Meninski, De la Croix and J. Hammer. At the same time, Russia’s process of “Europeanisation” occurred under Peter the Great, with the new empire stretching to the coasts of the Pacific Ocean and including dozens of foreign nations in its imperial frontier. After the disappearance of the danger from the East, it was much easier to write quietly from the position of the winner over the “Asians” already “pacified”, whether they were Tatars, Mongols, Iranians, Indians or Chinese. The growing weight of Russia in European politics evoked interest in its history again, including the past of the non-Slavic nations. On the other hand, this type of “reconquista” constituted a continuation of the expansion of the Christian Europe, ongoing since the previous centuries, which put it in contact with many foreign cultures. Their better understanding was needed for imposing of the European trade and economic interests, for the purpose of the mission, or the practical implementation of the colonial administration. Thus, from purely pragmatic needs, the Oriental studies developed in Europe as a complex science including the languages, history, culture and religion of the Eastern nations. First, the information about the East had been drawn above all from the descriptions of travellers such as Marco Polo, William of Rubruck, Plano Carpini and others; the autochthonous source material was then also used from the 18th century,

thus enabling Joseph de Guignes (1721-1800) to describe the history of the Huns, Turks, Mongols and the "other Western Tartars" in general.

Of course, the Cumans were seen in the ethnically indivisible sea of the eastern nomadic peoples at that time, and they have been continuously confused with Uzes, Pechenegs, or even Sarmatians, before coming to their more precise demarcation as a particular ethno-cultural conglomerate. The development of the Turkology undoubtedly contributed to it including the disclosure of the linguistic material of the *Codex Cumanicus* and the Eastern influences of the *Song of Igor* ("Slovo o Polku Igoreve"), the exploration of onomastic data, the comparative analysis of data from different sources (such as Russian, Hungarian, Byzantine and "Eastern"), as well as the achievements of the archaeology.

Thus, the formation of the "Cumanology" constituted a complicated and protracted process driven by a growing interest in the subject of research and the development of those humanities, whose methods revealed the peculiarities of the past of the Cumans. Various experts (historians, archaeologists, linguists, Slavists, Byzantinologists and Turkologists, Sinologists, Arabists, etc.) have contributed to the building and development of the discipline, defining its complex character. It has its development phases as well as specific thematic areas, whose totality characterises the parameters of the field.

It is difficult to define the stages in the research of the Cumans chronologically. This is not only because they are sometimes distinguished by the activity of individual researchers (P. Golubovskiy, J. Marquart, D. Rasovskiy, S. Pletneva, O. Pritsak, P. Golden, etc.) and their scientific "production" or by the predominant thematic orientation in a period of time (such as language, history, material remnants), but also because the hypotheses of early authors were "reanimated" in much later works (compare e.g. P. Suhm in the 18th century and S. Pletneva in the 20th century, or perhaps J. Marquart and the works of O. Pritsak and P. Golden).

The Cumans were originally treated together with *Pechenegs* and *Uzes* (P. Golubovskiy) and this practice was also retained in the 20th century, as the interest was directed to the late nomads and their material remains, to their traces in the onomastics (in toponymes and anthroponymes) of individual regions, or to the pre-Turkic and pre-Tatarian super-stratum of the modern Eastern European languages. As early as the 18th century, however, the Cumans were dissociated from the *Pechenegs*, and in the 19th century their separation from the *Uzes* (*Torks*) followed, although in the first decades of the 20th century some authors also continued to identify the Cumans with the *Uzes*. The publication of the *Codex Cumanicus*, whose Turkic records were definitely assigned to the Cumans (*Polowcians*), gave a powerful boost in their study. A new impetus in the area was caused by the work of J. Marquart, in which the history and the original migrations of this "nomadic people" were sketched on the basis of a series of Eastern data. The results of the archaeological researches of S. Pletneva and A. Pálóczi-Horváth, as well as the works of a number of Turkologists such as Gy. Németh, Gy. Győrffy, L. Rásonyi-Nagy, A. Tietze, N. Baskakov, I. Mándoky-Kongur, contributed significantly to the development of the

Cumanology in their turn. The contributions of O. Pritsak and P. Golden from the last decades of the 20th century are particularly valuable in this respect; these continued the tradition once laid by J. Marquart in a higher level.

The directions in the study of the Cumans are also very different. Firstly, it is necessary here to mention the topic on their *past*. It includes works on the relations between Kievan Rus', Byzantium and Georgia with the nomadic people, on the settlements of Cumans in Hungary and in the Balkans, on their role in the history of Eastern Europe, etc., as well as on the identification of their territories (the "*Poloveckoe Pole*", *Cumania* and *Dešt-i Qipčaq*). There are further studies on the "prehistory" of the Cumans (Kipchaks) and their place in the ethnogenetic processes of Central Asia, as well as their possible descendants in the Caucasus and the Crimea, in Central and Eastern Europe, in Asia Minor and Egypt. However, the historical discourse is broadly based on the needs of national historiographies, and this affects the interpretation of the source material. In the 20th century, the historical theme was enriched by the contributions of *archaeology*. Some of the main works in the area were published by archaeologists who compared the written sources with the results of their own investigations to locate the most important settlement areas and to characterise the material culture of the Cumans, hypothesising the organisation of their society, the specific of the nomadic economy and the peculiarities of their intellectual culture. In addition to the Cuman funerals and the discovered burial stock, the "Stone Babas" should also be mentioned here as bearers of complex information, which turned into a thematic subdivision of the "historical-archaeological" direction of research. The focus of the *linguistic studies*, which have been grouped around the analysis of the main written sources (*Codex Cumanicus*, *Slovo o polku Igoreve*) and types of linguistic materials also varies. This includes both onomastic data (ethnonyms, anthroponyms, toponyms), as well as individual Middle Turkic loanwords, which may have entered the Russian, Romanian, Hungarian, Bulgarian and other "Eastern European" languages from the Cuman dialects. In a wider perspective, research on the "Armeno-Kipchak" and "Arabo-Kipchak" sources is to be counted, which highlights the peculiarities of the early Kipchak language. Under the range of subject areas (or the sciences that serve the Cumanology), the *folkloristic* ones are finally worth mentioning, which has also contributed to the enrichment of our knowledge in the field. This includes the data incorporated in the works of V. Parhomenko and V. Gordlevsky, or the results of the comparative analyses of A. Tietze.

Thus, due to the work of several generations of scholars (historians and linguists, archaeologists and ethnologists, literary scholars and folklorists, Byzantinologists, Slavists, Turkologists and other "Orientalists"), much more is known about the Cumans now than a century ago, when the more intensive studies started on their origin, history and language.

At the beginnings of the Cumanology, a number of objective and subjective approaches were present. The introduction of a new source into the scientific circulation caused numerous publications which, in turn, catalysed further

works in the field. When an author studies the Cumans for a long time, he left a deep impact in the historiography. The peculiarities of the historiography of Cumans cannot be understood without taking into account the effects of the “environment” of the researcher because he is a “product” of his own time, which is reflected in his work in terms of methodology, as a scientific concept and also as a disposition towards the object. Therefore, the dominant social ideas, the political events and the cultural and/or intellectual attitudes typical of the time have always influenced the interpretation of the Cuman theme. It is enough to recall how long (even in the “enlightened” 18th century) scholars have used the biblical genealogies to find the place of the Cumans among the descendants of *Shem* and *Japheth* in determining their ethnicity. The Cumans were later equated with the *Uzes* in the 19th century and in the first decades of the 20th century, not only because of the lack of precision of the sources (the Hungarian word *kún*, i.e. “Cun”, can sometimes also be related to the *Uzes* and the Pechenegs, and the archaic Byzantine appellation “Scythians” reveals nothing in itself, if it is not compared with other data), but also because of the tradition. The early Bulgarian Turkologist S. Džansāzov (1912), similarly to P. Suhm (18th c.), distinguished between Polovci and Cumans (he connected the former to the Pechenegs and the latter to the *Uzes*, *Oghuzes*). Later on, S. Mladenov (1931) also wrote about “*Uzes-Cumans*” in the spirit of C. Jireček (1876), referring to the pre-Ottoman Turkic traces in the language and to the problem of the *Gagauzes*.

The national approach to history is undoubtedly reflected in the Cuman theme. With a few exceptions, almost all former researchers treated the Cumans (*Cuns*, *Polovtsians*) mainly in close connection with the history of their own people. This is particularly the case with Russia and Hungary, where the Cumans have already become an object of increased scholarly interest in the 18th-19th centuries. The Hungarians later saw relatives of the ancient Magyars in them, looking for the continuity between Attila’s Huns, their own ancestors and the additional settlements in Pannonia of splinter groups of the Pechenegs, Cumans and Jasses, which became an integral part of the Hungarian nation. The situation in Russia was quite different. The influence of the so-called “Tatar complex”, which seems to have become one of the most important elements for the formation of the Russian national identity, was felt here for years (even in Soviet times) on the works in this field. The fight against the steppe is a permanent motif in the literature devoted to Kievan Rus’, which contributed to the demarcation of the “own” (Slavs, sedentary farmers) from the “strangers” (Turks, nomads). This is also reflected in the idea of the guarding role of Russia, which protected Europe from the “Asian hordes”, and therefore of its mission as a bulwark of the Christian civilisation against the Islamic pressure. This opposition was strengthened by the imperial expansion to the East, when the Russians became administrators and “civilisation carriers” in the conquered countries by helping to modernise them at the expense of the traditional local cultures. It was so deeply rooted in the public perception that the manifestation of a positive attitude towards the nomads and the emphasising

of the impact of their culture on the Russian Slavs met a serious resistance. Karamzin (1816), and after him, also Ustrialov (1837) defined the steppe peoples as “tireless malefactors”, which delayed the economic development of Russia – a thesis later developed in the works of Aristov (1866) and the leading Russian historiographers. For Kunik (1855), the nomads were “unhistorical” and “inferior races of mankind”. Pogodin (1857) also regarded the Polovcians as a “predatory” nomadic tribe living by prey. Soloviev (1870) argued the thesis of the “inherited” rivalry between Asia and Europe, the struggle between the “forest and the steppe” (between sedentary peasants and the wandering herdsmen people, between urban culture and the nomadic way of life, respectively), highlighting the role of the Russian resistance to the “steppe” for the fate of the European civilisation. During the Russian-Turkish wars of the 19th century, this theory has ideologically served the policy of imperial expansion and has been accepted by most Russian historians (such as Kliuchevsky, Chicherin, Miliukov). To the “struggle with the steppe”, Kostomarov (1903) and Hrushevsky (1904) also added the idea of a struggle between the two state-forming principles in the Old Russian history – the federal (Ukrainian) and the unitary (Great-Russian) principle. They reiterated the thesis of Golubovsky (1884), i.e. the nomads contributed to the preservation of the old political order and to a weakening of the Russian South at the expense of the North. In fact, long before him, Zatyrevich (1874) believed that the struggle between settlers and nomads was also the “cause of movement” in the Russian history; the Eastern nomads have influenced the emergence of the Russian state and, with its expansion in the steppe, the nomads became a predominant population. The state was then “barbarised”, and in time the conquerors and conquered mingled with one nation. Zatyrevich was, however, strongly criticised for this “constructed theory”. In the first half of the 20th century, Pokrovsky (1925) tried to re-evaluate the idea of the nomads as a “dark Asian power” by noting that for the Kievan Rus’ the East was the same, which later Western Europe became for Russia of Peter the Great. Parhomenko also denied the “civilising role” of the Kievan Rus’, and he emphasised that the nomad culture was not poor and that Cumans were not barbarians. He (as well as Gordlevsky after him) was criticised by traditional-minded historians. Kudriashov (1947) presented Russia as a “shield of the European West” once again. Popov (1949) wrote about the “plundering being” of the nomads, about the “predatory hordes-states of the Crimea and Kazan”, about the “Russian elemental force”, and the Slavic swarms who drove the Polovcians away and smashed down “both the power of the Tatars and the strength of the Germans”.

It is likely that similar ideas spread early in the Serbian and Bulgarian milieu under the influence of the older Russian historiography, but they were primarily directed against the “Turkish oppressors”. In the national histories of the Balkan countries, the thesis of the hindering influence of the Ottoman rule on the development of the native population is also present. Their sacrificial role in the defence of the accesses to Europe is also evident. Even at the end of the 20th century, the Serbs / Bulgarians continued to see themselves as a

“shield” of the “Christian world” against a new “Islamic invasion” – an argument that was used for the mobilisation of Serbian nationalism in the process of the disintegration of former Yugoslavia. In Bulgaria, the “ethnic question” found a much civilised solution, but even there, the “Turkish problem” was already reflected for decades in the historical science. Even the idea of an “Iranian” origin of the old Bulgarians, renewed in the 1990s, shows the flavour of a distinct “Anti-Turkism” that can be traced back to the motives of M. Drinov in the 19th century in determining the “Slavic” Bulgarian origin. In this respect, both factors (the “Tatar complex” in Russia and the “Turkish problem” in Bulgaria) were in a certain correlation.

The dependence of the researchers on factors external to the science (the political and mental processes that determined their time) is to also be pursued in other countries. When the society *Turán* was founded in Hungary, Marquart ended his work on the Cumans, which he would complete in the coming years. However, while the “Turanians” stressed the constructive role of the Turks (hence also the Magyars) in the world history, the German Iranian expert did not hide his negative attitude towards the Cumans and the Ottoman Turks, who, according to him, proved themselves to be “total injurious robbers to the Cultural world”. He complained about the outcome of the Second Balkan War and condemned the German support for the “mass murderer” Abdulhamid II, but remained isolated amongst the “Turkophile feelings” of imperial Germany on the eve of the First World War. The political changes that followed had also influenced the studies in the field. The increased Romanian nationalism and the Romanian integration policy undertaken in Transylvania encouraged Rásonyi to write his “Valacho-Turcica”, where, as elsewhere, the importance of the “Turkic element” for the emergence of the Romanian statehood was shown. The changes in Turkey itself with the revolutionary modernisation of the country pursued by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk raised the question of the invention of a new “non-Ottoman” Turkish national identity. It was founded on the basis of the common “Turanian” origin which integrated the history and the cultural achievements of all Turkic (and Altaic) peoples. The “Asianitic” cultures of Asia Minor were added to this, arriving at the “Sun-language theory” which lays in the ground of the human development the ancestors of today’s Turks. In this context, the Cumans (the Kipchak Turks) became a building block in the Eastern European history, which also led to the rise of the medieval Bulgarian state and strengthened the “Turkish presence” in the Balkans long before the appearance of the Ottomans. They are also linked to the “Pomak Turks”, in which the Turkish nationalist propaganda sees descendants of the Cuman Muslims, who allegedly have “forgotten” their mother tongue because of the “constant Bulgarian pressure” and the Slavic-speaking environment.

Despite such pseudo-scientific theses in the Turkish national[istic] historiography, the great role of the Turkologists and the Orientalist schools (Russian, Hungarian, German, and more recently American too) is not to be negated for the rise of the Cumanological researches. The interpretations of the Turkic linguistic and folkloristic material combined with the data from the “Eastern” and

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“Western” sources of history and the results of archaeology, comparative ethnology and anthropology allow much more complex characteristics of the studied object to be revealed. In this sense, the “Cuman historiography” is largely determined by the specific achievements of the international Turkological science.

After the abolition of a series of ideological restrictions in the last decades of the 20th century, the Cumanian theme became an object of profound interest in many new independent states in the post-Soviet space. It has been studied, on the one hand, as an element of their national historiography (in Ukraine, Kazakhstan and in Russia itself) and, on the other hand, in revising Eastern influences in the genesis of the Russian culture. Besides the already established representatives in this scholarly area, some young researchers from Central Asia (Nurken Kuseмбаev), Turkey (Kutluay Erk), Hungary (Szilvia Kovács) and Bulgaria (Konstantin Golev) have also successfully contributed to it. Additionally, this gives us hope for the further development of the Cumanology as a complex, serious, and all-round scientific discipline that extends our knowledge not only in the wide field of the nomad research but also in our own cultural past.