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## Nomadic Migration Waves in the Pontic Region (Fourth–Thirteenth Centuries)

The Black Sea region is one of the most complex geographical and cultural areas of the globe. To study it in its entirety is almost impossible, since different parts of the coastal and the adjacent regions have significantly disparate cultural and historical pasts. The focus of this chapter rests on the northern and western regions of the Black Sea from the fourth to the thirteenth centuries because, owing to migration waves of mainly nomadic populations arriving from the east, this millennium witnessed unprecedented changes in power politics and in the ensuing ethnic processes. The southern Pontic region (the Anatolian littorals) will also be investigated cursorily, but to a lesser extent, since it was less influenced by nomadic migration waves.

The main divisions of the Pontic Region examined in this essay can best be described as follows:

- I. the northern and western Pontic region.
  1. the Volga-Don Caucasus triangle or northeastern Pontic Region; 2. the Don-Dnieper (Dniipro) region; 3. within the former region, the Crimean Peninsula can be regarded as a special unit, almost completely surrounded by the Black Sea (Pontus Euxinus) and its northeastern bay, the Sea of Azov (Maeotis); 4. the Dnieper-Dniester region; 5. the Dniester-Prut-Danube region called Moldova and Bessarabia in different periods (its southeastern part often designated as Bucak in Turkish); and 6. Dobruja, a territory bordered by the Danube and the Black Sea (called Scythia Minor in Antiquity).
- II. The southern Pontic region (the Georgian and Anatolian littorals).

The above historical territories were successively conquered and populated by Indo-European peoples, the Cimmerians (from the twelfth to the eighth century BC), the Greeks (from the eighth century BC onward), the Scythians (from the seventh to the fourth century BC), and the Sarmatians (from the fifth century BC to the fourth century AD), and the southern coastal area was colonized by the Greeks from the seventh century BC onward. Subsequently, a fairly high civilization came into existence in Antiquity along the entire Black Sea, which combined the finest elements of Scythian, Sarmatian, Greek, and Roman cultures (see fig. 24).<sup>1</sup> Although the fragmented Greek city states long preserved their relative independence and autonomy, the Roman conquests united the whole Pontic region under Rome's suzerainty (47 BC–330 AD).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mikhail Rostovtzeff, *Iranians and Greeks in South Russia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922).

<sup>2</sup> For the Greek colonies of the Northern Pontic region, stretching from Odessos (near today's Varna) as far as Dioscuria (near today's Sukhumi), see fig. 24.



Fig. 24: Greek colonies on the northern Black Sea, eighth to third century BC.

Rabbinic Jews (Krymchaks), Karaites, Armenians, and Italians (Genoese and Venetians) were also migrant groups that settled on the Black Sea littoral and especially in the Crimean towns at different times. These ethnic and religious groups also contributed considerably to the motley cultural landscape of the Northern Black Sea region, but—unlike the nomadic pastoralists of the North—they arrived within the framework of peaceful migration waves in smaller groups, and were mainly merchants, artisans, and mariners who—together with the Greeks—were typical representatives of the urban culture. As far as the polity of the region is concerned, the Roman suzerainty of the Pontic region slid imperceptibly into Eastern Roman (Byzantine) rule in the fourth century. But soon the first nomadic intruders, the Goths and the Huns, appeared, and from that time onward to the thirteenth century, the frequently changing nomadic conquerors were instrumental in shaping the military and social history of the region. They became undoubtedly the real actors of the political life of the Black Sea.

In the following a brief sketch will be given of the migrations to the northern Pontic, then to the southern Pontic region. The first section begins with the Goths and Huns and ends with the appearance of the Tatars at the Battle of the Kalka River in 1223, when the united Rus and Cuman forces were crushed by the Tatars (Mongols).

# 1 The Northern and Western Pontic Region

## 1.1 Goths, Alans, and Huns

Goth was the common name for various Germanic tribes living northeast of the Roman Empire. The Gothic tribal world was rather fragmented in the third and fourth centuries; it was divided into six or perhaps more “kingdoms.” By the 370s, the larger part of the Crimean Greek towns were under Gothic control, and the Bosporean Kingdom also fell under Gothic rule.<sup>3</sup>

In the 370s, the new and formidable nomadic tribal confederation of the Huns appeared in the Pontic steppe region, and their presence totally convulsed the power structure in the area. First, the Alans<sup>4</sup> living east of the Don were subjugated and compelled to join the Hunnic forces. Ammianus Marcellinus remarks that “by repeated victories they [the Alans] gradually wore down the peoples whom they met and like the Persians incorporated them under their own national name.”<sup>5</sup> Obviously, the Alans did not disappear from the Pontic region, but after the Hunnic invasion, in the fourth and subsequent centuries, the historic records are silent on the Alanic tribes which remained in the Pontic steppes.<sup>6</sup> According to Peter Golden, the Iranian nomads remained in the Pontic steppes and formed an important substratum of the later Turkic peoples of western Eurasia.<sup>7</sup>

After the subjection of the Alans, the Greuthungi (predecessors of the later Ostrogoths or Eastern Goths) were attacked. (H)ermanaric, king of the Greutungi, resisted but soon he died (he probably committed suicide), and his successor Vithimer also lost his life on the battlefield. The remaining Goths, under the command of Alatheus and Saphrax, drew west of the Dniester. Athanaric, the ruler of the Tervingi (later the Visigoths or Western Goths) also tried to resist the Hunnic storm, but he failed to halt them.<sup>8</sup> The

3 For a foundational monograph on the history of the Crimean Goths, see Aleksandr A. Vasiliev, *The Goths in the Crimea* (Cambridge, MA: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1936), 21–23. See also Mikhail Kizilov, *Krymskaia Gotiia: Istoriia i sudba* (Simferopol: Nasledie Tysiacheletii, 2015); Aleksandr I. Aibabin and Elzara A. Khairedinova, *Krymskie goty strany Dory (seredina III-VII v)* (Simferopol: Antikva, 2017).

4 For the Alans, see Vasilii I. Abaev and Herold W. Bailey, “Alans,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, Vol. 1, Fasc. 8, 801–3. Alemany’s monograph (Agustí Alemany, *Sources on the Alans: A Critical Compilation* [Leiden: Brill, 2000]) provides an inexhaustible wealth of information concerning the history of the ramified groups of the Alans from Antiquity to the late Middle Ages.

5 Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 31.2.13: “Ammiani Marcellini Historiae Liber XXXI,” accessed March 3, 2021, <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/ammianus/31.shtml>.

6 Agustí Alemany, “Alans in Khazaria and Khazars in Alania: On the Nature and Role of North Iranian Elements in the Khazar Empire,” *Chronica: Annual of the Institute of History, University of Szeged* 11 (2011): 169.

7 Peter B. Golden, “Cumanica III: Urusoba,” in *Aspects of Altaic Civilization III*, ed. Denis Sinor (Bloomington, Indiana: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 1990), 44.

8 Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 31.3.1–8: “Ammiani Marcellini Historiae Liber XXXI,” accessed March 3, 2021, <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/ammianus/31.shtml>.

Eastern Goths, now under Alavivus and Fritigern's command, also drew to the Danube. Soon, in 376, the two Gothic groups, the Tervingi and the Greuthungi, met at the Danube, at the northern border of the Eastern Roman Empire, and requested admittance. In 378 the Byzantines suffered a devastating defeat at the hands of the Goths in the Battle of Adrianople. The further fate of the Goths within the Roman Empire falls outside the interest of this paper, but several Gothic groups under Hunnic rule remained in the Pontic region and a sizable portion of them migrated to the Crimean Peninsula, where they occupied the southern coastal area, which was mainly populated by Greek colonies.<sup>9</sup>

After displacing the Goths and compelling them to move west and south, subsequent to 376 the Huns inundated the northern Pontic region and permanently streamed toward the west. The Huns also invaded Crimea, but the Hun conquest of the peninsula is poorly documented in the sources. Common opinion has it that the bulk of the Huns flocked from east to west but a smaller part of them turned south and crossed the Cimmerian Bosphorus (Kerch Straits). Then they drove through the Crimean steppe, pushing the Goths to the southern mountainous region, before moving toward the north and left Crimea through the Isthmus (Perekop).<sup>10</sup> All this allegedly happened during the reign of Emperor Valens (364–78). But the chronology of the events has been questioned recently; most probably the Huns must have crossed the Kerch Straits and plundered the Bosporan towns only twenty to thirty years later.<sup>11</sup>

The widely dispersed Gothic groups underwent a long process of Christianization from the mid-fourth century onward, and Crimea was no exception. Unlike the majority of Goths, the Crimean Goths were not Arians, but lived under the jurisdiction of the Constantinopolitan patriarchs, who ordained the bishops and organized the Eparchy of Gothia.<sup>12</sup> The center of the bishopric of Gothia was the town of Dory or Doros in southwestern Crimea (later, from the eighth century onward, also known as Mangup, and from the eleventh century Theodoro).<sup>13</sup>

As far as the language of the Crimean Goths is concerned, from the fifth century onward they were subjected to a strong influence of the Greek language and culture but it is difficult to tell to what extent they were Hellenized. There are numerous accounts by historians and travelers concerning their language but the only serious ac-

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<sup>9</sup> For the Goths and the Gothic wars there is an extensive literature; for a selection, see Peter Heather, *The Goths* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 98–104; Arne Søby Christensen, *Cassiodorus, Jordanes and the History of the Goths. Studies in a Migration Myth* (Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen/Museum Tusculanum Press, 2002); Michael Kulikowski, *Rome's Gothic Wars: From the Third Century to Alaric* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> Vasiliev, *The Goths*, 23–32.

<sup>11</sup> Aleksandr I. Aibabin, "Gunny v ravninnom Krymu," *Nizhnevolzhskii arkheologicheskii Vestnik* 18, no. 2 (2019): 48–50.

<sup>12</sup> Vasiliev, *The Goths*, 32–38.

<sup>13</sup> Omeljan Pritsak, "Dory," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Alexander Kazhdan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 654–55.

count providing some Gothic words and sentences came about very late, in Busbecq's book of 1581.<sup>14</sup>

Although the center of the Hunnic Empire gradually shifted to the Carpathian Basin, the entire northern Pontic region remained under Hunnic rule. The Hun Empire reached its apogee in the years 434–53 under Attila's reign but after his death in 453 the gigantic nomadic realm immediately collapsed and was dismembered.<sup>15</sup>

## 1.2 Ogurs and Bulgars

Subsequent to Attila's sudden death in 453, part of the Hunnic core tribes inhabiting the Carpathian Basin dispersed, and some of them drove back to the northern Pontic region, their pristine homeland before the European campaigns. In a short decade thereafter a new wave of nomadic migrations reached the Black Sea region, changing the extant power relations in the area again. This large migration wave, encompassing almost the entire territory of Central Eurasia, was recorded only by Priscus of Panium (c. 410–72), to whom we owe the only eye-witness account on Attila and his court. In the 460s (probably in 463) envoys of the so-called “barbarian” peoples of the Saragur, Urog, and Onogur appeared at the Byzantine court and gave an account of a large-scale migration wave which had prompted them to flee and request the tutelage of the Byzantine Empire. The above three peoples were dislodged by the Savirs, who in turn were ousted and compelled to run from their abodes by the Avars. Their embassy was favorably received and, as usual, the new barbarians performed military border-line services for the Roman Empire in return for tribute (euphemistically called “gifts” by the Byzantines).<sup>16</sup> For example, a few years later, in 466, the Saragurs fought in Byzantine service against the Persians, in Transcaucasia on the territory of Iberia and Armenia.<sup>17</sup>

14 The Fourth Turkish letter by Ogier Giselin de Busbecq (1522–92), a sixteenth-century Flemish writer and diplomat, describes the language of the Crimean Goths. The whole language corpus of the Crimean Gothic was analysed by Todd B. Krause and Jonathan Slocum, “Gothic Online, Lesson 10, 46–5,” The University of Texas at Austin. Linguistic Research Center, accessed March 3, 2021, <https://lrc.la.utexas.edu/eieol/gotol/100>; cf. also Kizilov, *Krymskaia Gotiia*, 153–202.

15 Edward A. Thompson, *The Huns* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 69–175.

16 The excerpt from Priscus's text, together with equally important texts concerning the Byzantine embassies, was preserved by Constantine Porphyrogenitus's (mid-tenth-century) compilation: See “Constantine Porphyrogenitus,” in *Excerpta de legationibus*, vol. 2, *Excerpta de legationibus gentium ad Romanos*, ed. Carl de Boor (Berlin: Weidmann, 1903), 586, fragment 14. Cf. also J. Moravcsik, “Zur Geschichte der Onoguren,” *Ungarische Jahrbücher* 10 (1930): 54–61; Denis Sinor, “Autour d'une migration de peuples au V<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Journal Asiatique* 235 (1946–1947): 1–77; András Mohay, “Priskos' Fragment über die Wanderungen der Steppenvölker (Übersicht über die neueren Forschungen),” in *Studies in the Sources on the History of Pre-Islamic Central Asia*, ed. János Harmatta (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1979), 129–44.

17 Boor, *Excerpta de legationibus* 2:588, fragment 19.

Who were the newcomers to the Pontic region? At first sight, one can see that *Ogur* is a common element in these ethnonyms, which can be interpreted in Turkic:<sup>18</sup> *Saragur* (< *Sharī* + *Ogur* ‘white Ogur’; *Onogur* < *On* + *Ogur* ‘Ten Ogurs’). So the Ogurs were the first ethnic group in Central Eurasia who can securely be identified as belonging to the Turks. (The ethnicity and language of the Huns is much debated). The Ogur tribal groups must have arrived from the Kazak Steppe, where they formed parts of the large tribal confederation of the northern steppe region stretching from Mongolia to the Urals and known as Tiele in Chinese sources.<sup>19</sup> The eastern Tiele groups were called *Oguz* in Turkic (the later Uyghurs also belonged here), and the western tribes were the Ogurs.<sup>20</sup> The origin of the Savirs, who ousted the Ogur peoples, is shrouded in obscurity; perhaps they came from the Ili river and Dzungaria.

The Ogur peoples must have been in a hegemonic position in the history of the region stretching north of the Caucasus but from 506 to 557 the Savirs took overlordship of the region, frequently making incursions into Transcaucasia. In 557 the appearance of the Avars put an end to the Saver rule but the Avar presence was only temporary, since from 567–68 they escaped from the Turks (*Türk*) further westward and invaded the Carpathian Basin. In their wake, the Turks appeared as new lords of the new Inner Asian Turkic (*Türk*) Empire founded in 552 and drew the Ogur and Saver tribes under their rule. A Syrian author, Pseudo-Zacharias rhetor (ca. 555), who largely drew on former Byzantine sources, enumerated the nomadic peoples inhabiting the steppe region north of the Caucasus, among others the Onogurs, Ogurs, Savirs, and Saragurs.<sup>21</sup> This is the last mention of the Saragurs; thenceforth their name disappeared from the sources, unlike that of the Ogurs. In 569, Zemarchus, head of the Byzantine embassy to the new Turkic Empire, makes mention of the Ogur tribes whom he met on his way back from the Turks west of the Lower Volga river, where the Ogur ruler exercised his power in the name of the Turkic Khagan.<sup>22</sup> The last mention of the Ogurs occurs at Theophylact Simocatta (fl. 620s),<sup>23</sup> whereafter the name disappears from the sources.

Among the various Ogur tribal groupings in the northern and eastern Pontic region, only the Onogurs succeeded in sustaining their power for a rather extended period of time, in the sixth and seventh centuries.

18 The forms *Saraguroi* and *Onoguroi* in Priscus’ text clearly show that the form *Urogoi* must be amended to *Oguroi*.

19 For the Tiele confederation see Peter B. Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples: Ethnogenesis and State-Formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992), 93–95.

20 The two forms of the same name (*Oguz* ~ *Ogur*) clearly refer to the two basic groups of Turkic languages, the *z-Turkic* (Common Turkic) and the *r-Turkic* (Oguric) types.

21 See Károly Czeglédy, “Pseudo-Zacharias Rhetor on the Nomads,” in *Studia Turcica*, ed. Lajos Ligeti (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1971), 133–48.

22 *The History of Menander the Guardsman (Historikon syngramma)*, trans. R. C. Blockley (Liverpool: F. Cairns, 1985), 125 and 266, n. 144.

23 Theophylactus Simocatta, *The History of Theophylact Simocatta*, trans. and annotated Michael Whitby and Mary Whitby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 224–25.



But before we proceed to the treatment of Onogur history in the Pontic region, a short bias seems reasonable to survey another ethnonym, *Bulgar*, and to clarify its ethnic content and possible connection with the Onogurs. The well-known ethnonym *Bulgar* surfaces in the Byzantine sources, first at the end of the fifth century and a few decades later than the ethnonyms of the Oguric peoples (Ogurs, Saragurs, Onogurs) emerged in Priscus' account. The first unambiguous mention of the Bulgars was made in 482, when they were employed as the allies of the Byzantine Emperor Zeno (474–91) against the Ostrogoths.<sup>24</sup> Afterwards, in the sixth century, they are frequent actors of the historical scene in the Northern Pontic region as well as in Thrace and Moesia in the Balkans. The origins of the Bulgars and their name has caused much headache for historical researchers, and despite the voluminous literature of the problem, a definitive answer cannot be given.<sup>25</sup> The most plausible opinion tries to explain the name on Turkic ground as far as the ethnonym Bulgar is a participle of the Turkic verb *bulga-*, meaning 'to mix, stir' and/or 'to rebel.' The ethnogenesis of the Bulgars is even more mysterious. According to a widespread, yet unproved opinion, the Turkic interpretation of the name Bulgar as 'mixture' or 'rebel' is explained by the fact that after the dissolution of Attila's empire (453) the Hunnic ethnic elements fleeing to the Pontic steppes melted with the Oguric tribes arriving there in the 460s. At any rate, the Hunnic contact must be taken into consideration since the emergence of the name Bulgar in most former territories of the Hunnic Empire (the western and northern Pontic region) from the 480s on cannot be coincidental.<sup>26</sup>

### 1.3 Onogurs or Onogundurs

To return to the Onogurs, their central habitat was between the Lower Don and Kuban rivers. According to Jordanes' *Getica* (ch. 5.37), the "*Hunuguri* are known to us from the fact that they trade in marten skins. But they have been cowed by their bolder neighbors."<sup>27</sup> The Anonymus of Ravenna (seventh century) also places the land of the Onogurs (*Onogoria*) near the Black Sea.<sup>28</sup> It is of special interest that in the *Notitia episcopatum* (mid-eighth century) an Onogur episcopate that belonged to the eparchy of

<sup>24</sup> Ioannis Antiocheni *Fragmenta ex Historia chronica*, ed. and transl. Umberto Roberto (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), no. 303, p. 516, lines 72–75.

<sup>25</sup> For the best presentation of all the prevailing views on the issue, see Ziemann, *Vom Wandervolk zur Großmacht*, 32–44.

<sup>26</sup> For an excellent, detailed treatment of the Ogur and Bulgar question, see Daniel Ziemann, *Vom Wandervolk zur Großmacht: Die Entstehung Bulgariens im frühen Mittelalter (7.–9. Jh.)* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2007), 24–141 ("Die bulgarische Frühgeschichte").

<sup>27</sup> *The Gothic History of Jordanes in English version*, trans. Charles Christopher Mierow (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1915), 60.

<sup>28</sup> *Ravennatis Cosmographia et Guidonis Geographica*, ed. Moritz Pinder and Gustav Parthey (Berlin: Fridericus Nicolaus, 1860), 170, lines 16–17.

Gothia is mentioned.<sup>29</sup> The Onogur Episcopate must have come into existence as early as the seventh century given Byzantine missionary activity in Gothia.

After Zemarchus' legation to the Turks in 576, another Byzantine envoy, Valentinus, was sent to the Western Turks. He was hosted by the Turkic local chief Turxanthus (a rendering of *Türk shad?*), probably a son of Silziboulus, the first western Turkic ruler. Turxanthus openly accused the Byzantines of treachery, since they made alliance with the Avars, the archenemies of the Turks. He openly cautioned them not to oppose the Turks and warned them by referring to the fate of the Alans and Unigurs,<sup>30</sup> who were subjected by the Turks. Soon the Western Turks began to attack the Pontic region at the Cimmerian Bosphorus and occupied the city of Bosphoros (ancient Panticapaeum) at the Kerch Straits and the adjacent territory belonging to Byzantium.<sup>31</sup>

Returning to the terms (On)ogur and Bulgar, originally in the sixth century, the appellations Onogur and Bulgar may have referred to different kindred tribal groups, since they were used separately as for example in Jordanes<sup>32</sup> (*Vulgarum sedes [...] Hunuguri*) as well as other sources, but later they seemingly came to designate more or less the same ethnic formations, as witnessed by Agathon, who, under the year 713, mentioned the inroads of the Onogur Bulgars into Thrace.<sup>33</sup> The same event is recounted by two other, later sources, Theophanes and Patriarch Nicephorus, in which both authors designate the attacking barbarian enemy simply as Bulgars.<sup>34</sup> The exact ethnic processes underlying these ethnonyms cannot be clarified but seemingly by the eighth century the terms Onogur and Bulgar became *quasi* equivalent, the term Bulgar being a generic term for all groups of the Ogur branch.

The above-mentioned Theophanes and Patriarch Nicephorus give an excursus on the origins of the Unnogundur-Bulgars and the Kotrags.<sup>35</sup> The primordial habitat of the Bulgars is placed to the region of the Maeotis and the Kuban river (in the Greek text Kufis/Kofis). Here lay the old homeland of the Bulgars, called Great Bulgaria, founded by Kubrat, who was the first ruler of the Bulgars and the Kotrags (the latter

<sup>29</sup> Carl De Boor: "Nachträge zu den Notitiae Episcopatum 2," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 12 (1891): 519–34; its new edition in Jean Darrouzès, *Notitiae episcopatum ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, vol. 1, *Texte critique, introduction et notes* (Paris: Institut Français d'Études Byzantines, 1981), 242 (notitia 3, no. 615). See also George Vernadsky, "Byzantium and Southern Russia: Two Notes. 1. The Eparchy of Gothia," *Byzantion* 15 (1940–41): 67–76.

<sup>30</sup> The form *Unigur* probably stands here for *Onogur*; but there are scholars who thought rather of *Utigur*; another Ogur group (for the Utigurs and Kutrigurs see further below). Be that as it may, an Oguric group was evidently meant here.

<sup>31</sup> *The History of Menander*, 173–79 and 276–78, nn. 221–36. Cf. also Zieman, *Vom Wandervolk zur Großmacht*, 79.

<sup>32</sup> See *The History of Menander*, 125 and 266, n. 144.

<sup>33</sup> For this passage in Agathon, see Moravcsik, "Zur Geschichte der Onoguren," 67.

<sup>34</sup> Theophanis *Chronographia*, vol. 1, *Textum graecum continens*, ed. Carl de Boor (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1883), 382–83; Nicephori archiepiscopi Constantinopolitani, *Opuscula historica*, ed. Carl de Boor (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1880), 48–49.

<sup>35</sup> Nikephoros, Patriarch of Constantinople, *Short History*, ed., trans. and com. Cyrill Mango (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1990), 86–89.



stands for Kutrigur/Kuturgur, a tribal grouping of the Bulgars).<sup>36</sup> The appellation *Onogundur* and the former known forms *Onogur* are equivalent; *Onogundur* is a Turkic variant of *Onogur* with the Turkic suffix *+dur* (cf. also *Quman* → *Qumandur*). All this happened some time in the first quarter of the seventh century, when Kubrat Khan shook off the Avar yoke and became sovereign of the Bulgars. Theophanes' and Nicephorus' narratives go back to earlier sources, and, although they seem to be authentic, it is impossible to separate the historic and mythic element in them. This holds true especially for the story of Kubrat's five sons. After his death, his sons followed different paths: The eldest son, Bathayan, remained in the paternal lands in the Don-Kuban region. The second son, Kotragos, crossed the Don river and settled in the territories west of the Don. This must be a reference to the Kutrigur Bulgars, whose eponym is the fictitious person Kotragos. The third son, Asparuch, crossed the Dnieper and Dniester rivers, and settled in the Onglos, a territory bordered by the Bug, the Lower Danube, and the Black Sea, a safe territory for many nomads, later called Budjak by the Turks. In 679 the Bulgars of Asparuch moved forward, crossed the Lower Danube and conquered Thrace, thereby laying the ground for the future First Bulgarian Empire. The fourth son, whose name is not mentioned in the source, went to Pannonia where he became a subject of Avar rule. Finally the youngest son (name unknown) migrated to Pentapolis at Ravenna, where he settled. The Bulgar myth of origin as presented in the narrative of the two Byzantine historians is evidently construed, comprising earlier and later events of Bulgar history, displaying both historical and fictitious features, but their basic elements (the homeland at Maeotis and the disintegration of Great Bulgaria) cannot be questioned.<sup>37</sup>

## 1.4 Khazars

The Khazars, a Turkic tribe, were founders of the Khazar Empire, a state formation that for three hundred years (from the mid-seventh to the mid-tenth century) was the decisive factor and played a pivotal role in the history of Eastern Europe. Prior to the Mongol conquest in the thirteenth century, Khazaria was the mightiest state in Eastern Europe (see fig. 25). Its territory encompassed a vast area the nucleus of which lay within the ill-defined borders of the North Caucasian steppe lands, the lower and middle Volga region, the Don-Dnieper region and the northern coasts of the Black Sea (including Crimea). This unique empire founded by nomads and semi-nomads could incorporate and organize the agriculturalist settled population of the con-

<sup>36</sup> For the Kutrigurs and Utigurs, see Zieman, *Vom Wandervolk zur Großmacht*, 95–103, esp. 102–3.

<sup>37</sup> On Great Bulgaria, Kubrat, and the foundation myth, cf. also Zieman, *Vom Wandervolk zur Großmacht*, 142–56.



Fig. 25: The Khazar Khaganate, c. 820 AD (area of direct Khazar control in dark blue, sphere of influence in purple).

quered territories and ensure and promote the activities of urban craftsmen and a variegated group of merchants, actors of international trade.<sup>38</sup>

After the disintegration of the Western Turkic Empire in the 630s, a western successor state of Khazaria emerged in its stead, some time between 630 and 650. The ruling house of the new confederation must have hailed from the Ashina clan, the ruling clan of the Turks from the inception of their empire in 552.<sup>39</sup> It secured the *Pax Khazarica*, which fostered international trading by an undisturbed flow of merchandise from East to West and back. One could say Khazaria was a real commercial empire. Like all former nomadic realms in Eurasia, the Khazar state was polyethnic and polyglot. The semi-nomadic conquerors made up the ruling elite, most of them speaking various Turkic tongues, Common Turkic languages, and Oguric or Bulgaric ones.

By the second half of the eighth century the Khazar Empire had reached the apex of its expansion from the lower Volga in the East to the area westwards between the Dnieper and the Danube. One of the most important moments in empire building was the subjugation of the Onogu(ndu)r-Bulgar realm of Kubrat in the 670s. After the intermezzo of half a century of Bulgar suzerainty (Magna Bulgaria) in North Caucasia, the Khazars took power and became the dominant force not only in the region but also expanding their jurisdiction throughout the Pontic steppes, Crimea, and the territory what

<sup>38</sup> Out of the plethora of excellent monographs on the Khazar Empire, I highlight only two: Douglas M. Dunlop, *The History of the Jewish Khazars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954); Mikhail I. Artamonov, *Istoriia khazar*. 2nd ed. (St. Petersburg: Filologicheskii fakultet Sankt-Peterburgskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 2002).

<sup>39</sup> Peter B. Golden, "Khazar Studies: Achievements and Perspectives," in *The World of the Khazars: New Perspectives*, ed. Peter B. Golden, Haggai Ben-Shammai, and András Róna-Tas (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 53.

is now Southern Russia and Ukraine. In addition to the main Turkic ethnic components, several ethnic groups were present in the Khazar Empire. The wide ethnic diversity of the Khazar realm comprised the Iranian Alans, the Crimean Goths, and the Greek colonies in Crimea. And we must not forget the ubiquitous Jewish and Armenian communities in Crimea and the Taman Peninsula.

The empire's main activity was collecting tribute from and levying taxes on the subjected population. The nomadic sector of the realm pursued traditional pastoralism while the ruling elite had a semi-nomadic way of life: From spring to autumn they nomadized outside the towns, living in their tents, and moved to the towns in the winter period.

In the mid-ninth century the Khazar Empire began to weaken on account of new nomadic attacks by the Pechenegs and Oguz, and the strengthening of Eastern Slavs and Hungarians. The final blow was dealt by Sviatoslav, prince of Kyiv (Kiev), and a former tax-payer to the Khazars, when he overwhelmed the Khazar fortresses Sarkel and Tamantarkhan (Russian: Tmutarakan), and finally in 968–69 the Rus forces plundered the Khazar capital Itil, at the Volga estuary. The new power center of Eastern Europe had shifted to Kyivan Rus.<sup>40</sup>

The subjected lands and settlements were governed by Khazar *tuduns*,<sup>41</sup> representatives of the central power, in charge of governing the towns and collecting the tribute. Let us have here a short overview of the major settlements that fell under Khazar rule.

The Byzantine city of Cherson (Old East Slavic: Korsun) was subjected to the Khazars in the 690s, and retaken by Byzantium in 838. On the same western coast of Crimea Kerkinitis also became a Khazar town, under the name Közliev (Crimean Tatar: *Kezlev*, Ottoman: *Gözleve*, renamed *Evpatoriia* after the Russian annexation). The central city of Crimean Gothia, Doros, also fell under long Khazarian rule, with the governor (*tudun*) at its head.

On the eastern shores of Crimea lay the ancient sea port Theodosia, devastated by the Huns in the fourth century AD. The Khazars extended their influence several times, but the swift development of the city began only after the Mongol invasion, with the advent of Genoese colonialists, who called the city Caffa (Crimean Tatar/Turkish: Kefe). To the west of Caffa lay the town of Sudak (Sugdaia), founded by the Alans and from 787 onward an episcopal see.<sup>42</sup>

40 On the Khazar-Rus interrelations, see Sergei P. Shchavlev, "Slavic Tribute to Khazaria: New Materials for Interpretation," *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 57, no. 4 (2018): 282–93.

41 *Tudun* was already a dignitary in the Türk, Avar, and Bulgar Empires. For *tudun*, see Peter B. Golden, *Khazar Studies: An Historico-Philological Inquiry into the Origins of the Khazars* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1980), 1:215–16.

42 On Sudak, see Maria G. Nystazopulu-Pelekidu, *Hé en té Tauriké Khersonésó polis Sougdaia apo 13 mekhri tou 15 aiónos* (Athens: Hyperesia Archaioeteton kai Anastoloseos, 1965); Omeljan Pritsak, "Sougdaia," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Alexander Kazhdan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1931.

On the easternmost, strategic point of the Kerch Peninsula stood Panticapaeum. The city was subject to the influx of the Goths, then the Huns in 375 AD. Later it fell under Byzantine rule under the name Bosporos. In the seventh century the city came under Khazarian suzerainty<sup>43</sup> and was named Karcha (an antecedent of present-day Kerch). With the decay of the Khazar realm, Kyivan Rus rose to power, and the city (its Old East Slavic name was *K“rch”v*) belonged to the Tmutarakan Principality.

Opposite Bosporos (today: Kerch), in the Taman Peninsula lay the small settlement Hermonassa, founded by the Greeks. Following Bulgar rule the settlement fell into Khazarian hands in the late seventh century, and the new lords of the town built a fortress and gave it the name Taman-tarkhan (in Byzantine sources *Tamatarkha*). Lying on the Silk Road, it was an important hub of international commerce; accordingly, its inhabitants encompassed a wide variety of ethnic and religious groups (Khazars, Greeks, Armenians, Georgians, Jews, Alans, Lezgins, and Circassians). When it came under Rus control in the tenth century, Old East Slavic sources called the city *Tmutarakan*,<sup>44</sup> while in Arabic sources it features as *Samkarsh al-Yahūd*, with reference to the heavy Jewish presence in the city's trade.<sup>45</sup>

The role of Judaism and the Jews in the Khazar realm lies beyond the scope of this paper; similarly to the history of both the Rabbinic and the Karaite Jewish settlements in Crimea.<sup>46</sup>

## 1.5 Pechenegs and Oguz (Uz)

The Pechenegs were a nomadic tribal confederation whose roots go back to Central Asia. Their basic layer was the Kangars, an Iranian population living in the Aral-Syr Darya region, who later became Turkicized by the Pechenegs, presumably a Kipchak group of Turks.<sup>47</sup> The first massive migration by the Pechenegs took place from ca. 830–40, when they were ousted from their own territory by a concerted attack by the Oguz, allied with the Qarluqs and the Kimeks.<sup>48</sup> The Pechenegs had to leave

<sup>43</sup> As attested in the sources, in 698, a Khazar governor stood at the head of Bosporus and Phanagoria; see Moravcsik, “Zur Geschichte der Onoguren,” 83.

<sup>44</sup> Igor Georgievich Dobrodomov, “Tmutorokan i Taman,” *Russkaia rech* 5 (1973): 129–33; Karl G. Menges, *Vostochnye elementy v “Slove o polku Igoreve”* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1979), 150–56.

<sup>45</sup> See Joseph Marquart, *Osteuropäische und ostasiatische Streifzüge: Ethnologische und historisch-topographische Studien zur Geschichte des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts (ca. 840–940)* (Leipzig: Theodor Weicher, 1903), 163–64, 203, 336, 351.

<sup>46</sup> There is extensive literature on the conversion of the Khazar elite and the history of Judaism in Khazaria; here allow me to refer only to Peter B. Golden, “Khazaria and Judaism,” *Archivum Europae Medii Aevi* 3 (1983): 127–56.

<sup>47</sup> On the Pechenegs, see Omeljan Pritsak, “The Pečenegs,” *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 1 (1975): 211–35; Akdes Nimet Kurat, *Peçenek tarihi* (Istanbul: Devlet Basımevi, 1937).

<sup>48</sup> Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Kitāb al-tanbīh wa’l-ishrāf*, ed. Michael J. de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1894), 180–81.

their age-old homeland on the Syr Darya and moved westward, south of the Ural Mountains, to the steppe region along the Emba, Yayik (Ural), and Volga rivers.<sup>49</sup> But a contingent of the Pechenegs remained in their old habitat and accepted the new overlordship of the Oguz, and, moreover, became integrated into the tribal system of the Oguz (as one of their subclans), preserving their own self-appellation *Becheneg*.<sup>50</sup>

The second exodus of the Pechenegs occurred in 889–94. This time it was again the Oguz (called *Guzz* in Arabic sources, *Uzoi* in Byzantine sources, *Torki* in Old East Slavic sources),<sup>51</sup> in alliance with the Khazars, who attacked the Pechenegs, whose only escape route was to the west, since in the north the Volga Bulgarian state, and in the south the Khazar Empire, stood in their way. They attacked the Hungarians in the Southern Russian steppe region and expelled them westward. The Hungarian tribes ousted by the Pechenegs occupied the Carpathian Basin in 895/96.<sup>52</sup> Thereafter, the Pechenegs became the masters and new lords of the northern and western Pontic region, the steppe zone from the Don to the Lower Danube, including Crimea (see fig. 26).



Fig. 26: The Pechenegs, c. 1030 AD.

Fifty years after their settling in the Pontic region, Constantine Porphyrogenetos, in § 37 of his work, composed a splendid description of the Pecheneg polity in the mid-

49 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, ed. Gyula Moravcsik, trans. Romilly J. H. Jenkins (Dumbarton Oaks: Center for Byzantine Studies, 2008), 166–67.

50 Maḥmūd al-Kāšyarī, *Compendium of the Turkic Dialects (Diwān Lugāt at-Turk)*, ed. and trans. Robert Dankoff and James Kelly (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Printing Office, 1982) 1:362.

51 For the early Oguz history, see Peter B. Golden, “The Migrations of the Oğuz,” *Archivum Ottomanicum* 4 (1972): 45–84.

52 There is extensive literature on the history of the Hungarian conquest of the land (the so-called “honfoglalás” in Hungarian and “Landnahme” in German); suffice it to refer here to one of the latest, the foundational study by István Zimonyi, *Muslim Sources on the Magyars in the Second Half of the 9th Century: The Magyar Chapter of the Jayhānī Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

tenth century.<sup>53</sup> He described the land of the Pechenegs as consisting of eight provinces (tribes or groups). The learned emperor gave the names of the tribes and their leaders and their geographical situation. In his account, the land of the Pechenegs (Patzinakia) is very close to Cherson, and even nearer to Bosporos.<sup>54</sup> Their main military actions against Byzantium, Kyivan Rus, Khazaria, the Hungarians, and the Danube Bulgarians did not have a lasting impact on the region.

As an independent nomadic entity, the Pechenegs ceased to exist in 1091 after their crushing defeat in Lebounion (Thrace) at the hands of the Byzantine emperor Alexios I Komnenos, who was supported by Cuman and Vlakh warriors. The Battle of Lebounion was mild consolation for Byzantium in view of the heavy losses the Seljuk Turks inflicted in 1071 at the Battle of Manzikert. Most of the defeated Pechenegs were settled on Byzantine territory in Moglena (Macedonia), but a few independent Pecheneg groups that remained on the Pontic steppes revived and invaded Byzantium in 1122. The Pecheneg army was defeated again, this time for good, at the Battle of Beroia (near Stara Zagora in today's Bulgaria), recorded by John Cinnamus and other sources,<sup>55</sup> and the Pechenegs were dissipated throughout the Balkans and in the Hungarian Kingdom. Their further fate was total assimilation into the neighboring Slavic, Greek, and Hungarian populations.

Although in the tenth century the Pechenegs were the main actors of the Pontic steppe region, the Oguz tribes were gradually pushed to the west by a new confederation of Turkic nomads, the Cuman-Kipchaks, and appeared west of the Volga. Their role and number were incomparably less than the Pechenegs but were constantly involved in the power struggles in both Rus and Byzantium. After the dissipation of the Pecheneg tribal groups only a small contingent remained in their former Pontic homeland, and there they were easily absorbed by the Cuman-Kipchak newcomers, close relatives and new lords of the region.

## 1.6 Cumans or Kipchaks

After the Khazars' defeat by Sviatoslav in 965, in the mid-eleventh century a massive nomadic migration wave was set in motion which again rearranged the ethnic map of the Pontic steppes. This migration can be reconstructed on the basis of two narrative

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53 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, 167–69. For the occurrences of the Pechenegs (Patzinakoi, Patzinakitai in Greek sources), see Gyula Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, vol. 2, *Sprachreste der Türkvolker in den byzantinischen Quellen* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1958), 247–49.

54 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, § 37, ll. 48–49. For the Muslim sources, especially the anonymous geography of the ninth century, see *Ḥudūd al-'Ālam: The Regions of the World. A Persian Geography, 372 A.H.–982 A.D.*, trans. and expl. Vladimir Minorsky (London: Luzac & Co., 1937), 312–15.

55 See Sergei A. Kozlov, “Vizantiiskaia traditsiia o poslednei vizantino-pechenezhskoi voine,” *Evropa. Mezhdunarodnyi Almanakh (Tiumen)* 10 (2011): 7–22.



sources, Marvazī's work in Arabic and Matthew of Edessa's Armenian chronicle.<sup>56</sup> Marvazī reports that the *Qūns* were Nestorian Christian Turks who fled from the east from the Khitay territories. Expelled by the *Qāys*, the *Qūns* moved on to the territory of the *Shārīs*, then the latter migrated to the land of the *Türkmen*s, who in their turn shifted to the *Guzz* country. The *Guzz* Turks then moved to the territory of the *Bajānaks* (Pechenegs) near the sea.<sup>57</sup> The same event is related by Matthew of Edessa in his chronicle under the year 1051(?), according to which the people of the pale (Armenian: *xartešk'*; -k' is the Armenian plural form) expelled the Uz and the Pechenegs from their habitats.<sup>58</sup>

For our purposes, the most important participants in this migration wave are the *Qūns* (at Marvazī) and the *Xartešk's*, "the pale" (at Matthew of Edessa). The same people is designated in the Byzantine sources from the eleventh to the thirteenth century as *Kumanoi/Komanoi*,<sup>59</sup> in Latin sources as *Cumani/Comani*,<sup>60</sup> in the German sources as *Valwen*,<sup>61</sup> and in the contemporary Old East Slavic sources as *Polovtsy*.<sup>62</sup> The Old East Slavic and Armenian words undoubtedly mean "pale," and the ethnonyms *koman/kuman* and *kun* must have had the same meaning, "pale, sallow," in Turkic. All in all, a Turkic ethnonym meaning "pale" was translated into the languages of different sources.

The Cumans or *Qūns* and the *Shārīs*, who can be identified with a Uygur group, the Sary-yugurs ('yellow Uygers;'), arrived in southwestern Siberia, the homeland of the Kipchak (Qipchag) tribal confederation, around the middle of the eleventh century. On the basis of Marvazī's text we may claim that the Kipchaks and Cumans were originally two separate peoples but had merged by the twelfth century.<sup>63</sup> The best example to demonstrate this fusion of different names can be found in William of Rubruck's travel account (1253–54). After leaving Crimea for the East, he writes as follows: "This used to be the grazing ground of the Comans, who are known as the Capchac [Kipchak] [...]. This territory stretches in longitude from the Danube to the Tanais, the border between Asia and Europe, which is a journey of two months if one rides

56 Sharaf al-Zamān Ṭāhir Marvazī, *On China, the Turks and India*, transl. and com. Vladimir Minorsky (London: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1942), 18, 29–30. – For the sources as well as a detailed history of the Cumans, see Joseph Marquart, "Über das Volkstum der Komanen," in *Osttürkische Dialektstudien*, ed. Willy Bang and Joseph Marquart (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1914), 25–238, esp. 54–55.

57 For a commentary of Marvazī's text with a detailed explanation of the ethnonyms occurring therein, see Marvazī, *On China, the Turks and India*, 95–103.

58 For the digital critical edition of Matthew of Edessa's *Chronicle*, see <https://editions.byzantini.st/ChronicleME/#/Edition>.

59 For the Greek data, see Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, 2:167–68.

60 For the Latin data, see Albin F. Gombos, *Catalogus fontium historiae Hungaricae aevo ducum et regum ex stirpe Arpad descenduntium ab anno Christi DCCC usque ad annum MCCCC* (Budapest: Szent István Akadémia, 1937–43), 4:46–47.

61 Gombos, *Catalogus* I, 23, 171, etc.; II, 852, 880, etc.; III, 1732–35, 1740, etc.

62 For all the occurrences of *Polovtsy* in the Russian Annals, see *Ukazatel k pervym osmi tomam Polnogo sobraniia russkikh letopisei: Otdel vtoroi. Ukazatel geograficheskii* (St. Petersburg: Arkheologicheskaiia komissiiia, 1907), 345–51.

63 Marquart, *Komanen*, 140, see also 78–79.

swiftly, at the Tartars' speed. All of it used to be inhabited by the Capchac [Kipchak] Comans [...]."<sup>64</sup> At another place: "Beyond these two rivers [i. e. the Don and the Volga], in the territory we crossed, used to live the Capchac [Kipchak] Comans before they were overwhelmed by the Tatars."<sup>65</sup> In the twelfth century and at the beginning of the thirteenth, the Kipchak-Cuman confederacy occupied an immense territory stretching from the middle reaches of the Irtysh as far as the Lower Danube. There existed no Kipchak or Cuman empire, but different Cuman groups under independent rulers or khans who acted on their own initiatives.<sup>66</sup> The politically strongest Cuman alliance was situated between the Volga and Dnieper rivers.

The territory of this Kipchak-Cuman realm consisting of loosely connected tribal units was called *Dasht-i Kipchak* (Kipchak Steppes) by the Muslim historiographers and geographers, *Zemlia Polovetskaia* (Polovtsian land) or *Pole Polovetskoe* (Polovtsian Plain) in the Rus sources, and *Cumania* in the Latin sources.<sup>67</sup>

## 2 The Southern Pontic Region

This region can be defined as the northern littoral of Anatolia. The first Greek colonists from the Ionian town Miletus appeared in this territory in the eighth century BC, and in the subsequent centuries settled all over the northern littoral of Anatolia. The most important settlements (from west to east) were Sinope (today: Sinop), Amisos (today: Samsun), Kotyora (today: Ordu), Cerasus (Ancient Greek: Kerasous, today: Giresun), and Trebizond (Ancient Greek: Trapezos/Trapezunda, today: Trabzon). In examining the history of these settlements one must not forget about the presence of a massive pre-Greek substrate as elsewhere in Anatolia. These so-called Pontic Greeks preserved their presence and significance on the shores of the Black Sea and in the Pontic Mountains of northeastern Anatolia, until their expulsion from Turkey as part of the Turkish-Greek population exchange in 1923. From the fourth century onward the entire area was Christianized, and in the important urban centers such as Amisos, Cerasus, and Trebizond Christian bishoprics were established that had an active role in Byzantine church history in the fifth to tenth centuries.

During the Byzantine era, the Greek population of Anatolia, including the southern Pontic region, lived in relative peace until the eleventh century. The vicissitudes of the Eastern Roman territories began with the appearance of the Seljuks on the eastern bor-

<sup>64</sup> Rubruck, "Itinerarium XII.6," in *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck*, trans. Peter Jackson (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1990), 105–6.

<sup>65</sup> Rubruck, "Itinerarium XIV.3," in *The Mission of Rubruck*, 113.

<sup>66</sup> For the tribes of the Cuman-Kipchaks, see the survey by Peter B. Golden, "Cumanica IV: The Tribes of the Cuman-Qipčaq," *Archivum Europae Medii Aevi* 9 (1995–97): 99–122.

<sup>67</sup> For occurrences in the Greek sources, see Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, 2:167; in the Latin sources, see Gombos, *Catalogus*, 2:47. Practically all the data for *Cumania* relate to the thirteenth century.

ders of Anatolia.<sup>68</sup> In 1071, in the Battle of Manzikert (today: Malazgirt), the army of the Byzantine emperor Romanus Diogenes suffered a decisive defeat at the hands of the Seljuk sultan Alp-Arslan, the emperor himself being captured. It was the starting point of a centuries-long process during which the majority of the populace of Anatolia became Muslim and Turkicized. The factual and symbolic end of this process was the fall of Constantinople in 1453.

After the Battle of Manzikert, the Seljuk forces pushed forward in Anatolia under the leadership of the Seljuk commander Sulayman ibn Qutulmish, and in 1075 they captured the Byzantine cities of Nicaea (today: İznik) and Nicomedia (today: İzmit). By declaring himself sultan, Sulayman established a new independent independent Seljuk state with İznik as its capital. Later, in 1096, under the pressure of the forces of the First Crusade, the capital of the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum was transferred to Konya (former Iconium).

In the thirteenth century there were two interesting episodes in the history of the Rum Seljuks as a result of which they came into contact with Crimea. In the 1220s, Kayqubad sent an expeditionary force on the Black Sea to Crimea,<sup>69</sup> and in 1260 Kaykā'ūs II fled from Konya to Crimea, where he died in 1279.<sup>70</sup>

In the twelfth century the settlements of the southern Pontic littoral were saved from the further advance of Seljuk expansion. After the capture of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204, the Empire of Trebizond emerged as a successor state of Byzantium in the Pontus region. Its first ruler was Alexios I Komnenos. The small realm of Trebizond encapsulated the settlements of the eastern zone of the northern Anatolian littoral, from Sinope to Trebizond and further east. Parts of the Byzantine territories of the northern Pontic region in Crimea such as Kerch and Doros (Theodoro/Mangup) were also connected to the Trebizond Empire as parts of its overseas province (*perateia*).<sup>71</sup> It survived, with an ever-shrinking territory (e.g., Sinope was taken by the Seljuks in 1204, and after 1244 the Seljuks appeared in the region of Cerasus too) for more than two centuries; finally it was taken by Sultan Mehmed II in 1461 and incorporated into the Ottoman Empire. Although after the capture of Constantinople (1453) and Trebizond (1461) the Greek-speaking Christian population became a minority in the Ottoman Empire, in Pontus, on the Black Sea coast, the Greek presence remained very strong: They formed the majority of the population until the seventeenth century.

<sup>68</sup> There exist plenty of works dealing with the Seljuks in Anatolia. Suffice it to mention here two important works: Claude Cahen, *The Formation of Turkey: The Seljukid Sultanate of Rūm. Eleventh to Fourteenth Century*, trans. and ed. Peter M. Holt (Harlow: Longman, 2001); Andrew C. S. Peacock and Sara Nur Yıldız, eds., *The Seljuks of Anatolia: Court and Society in the Medieval Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013).

<sup>69</sup> Andrew C. S. Peacock, "The Saljūk Campaign against the Crimea and the Expansionist Policy of the Early Reign of 'Alā' al-Dīn Kayqubād," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 16 (2006): 133–49.

<sup>70</sup> István Vásáry, *Cumans and Tatars: Oriental Military in the Pre-Ottoman Balkans, 1185–1365* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 72–9; Rustam Shukurov, *The Byzantine Turks, 1204–1461* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 99–105.

<sup>71</sup> Vasiliev, *The Goths*, 159.

### 3 Closing Remarks

The entire Pontic region was an area long inhabited by populations of ancient cultures. From the eighth century BC onward, both the northern and the southern Pontic coastal areas were colonized by Greek settlers. From then on, Greek culture and language played a dominant role in the region, both in the Roman and in the Byzantine eras. The most important changes in the long-term history of the Pontic region were caused by the waves of nomadic migrations from the east that affected both the northern and the southern Pontic littorals. The most essential difference in the history of the northern and southern regions is that in the north the nomadic waves flowed incessantly from the fourth century AD onward, while in the south, in what is now northern Anatolia, the Greek population and culture were able to retain their hegemonic role until the eleventh century, when the first waves of Seljuk-Turkish conquerors appeared. Even afterwards, until the fifteenth century, when the whole area finally fell into the hands of the Ottoman Empire, the Greek participation in the political and cultural life of the area cannot be neglected. In both the north and the south, the usual protagonists of the invasions were various Turkic peoples and tribal groups, the only exception being the Mongols in the thirteenth century.

The Mongols first appeared in the Dniester region in 1223. Their arrival and the beginning of a new political era was heralded by the crushing defeat at the Kalka River of the allied Cuman and Rus forces at the hands of the new nomadic power of the Mongols, marking the beginning of a period of more than five-hundred years in the history of the northern Pontic region. In the timespan between ca. 350 and 1250 examined in this essay, the Pontic region was never under the rule of a single overall state organization. The two decisive state powers were the Byzantine and the Khazar Empires which, for almost a millenium, had to face the recurrent attacks of nomadic waves of Goths, Alans, Huns, Ogurs, Bulgars, Onogurs, Pechenegs, Oguz (Uz), Cumans, and Kipchaks, to mention only the most influential. One may raise the question whether, in addition to constantly influencing the political power relations and economic situation in the northern Pontus region, these nomadic influxes had a lasting impact on the historical fate of the region. Arguably their most important impact was that by establishing political control over the indigenous inhabitants of an area, they settled among them and gradually changed the ethnic picture of the region. They left an indelible imprint on the region which indisputably originated from Turkic ethnic groups and with the Mongol/Tatar conquest in the thirteenth century the influx of Turkic elements continued unabatedly. The majority of the Tatars of the Golden Horde, then of the Crimean Khanate were Mongol conquerors in Turkic ethnic garb. Hence the Turkicization of the northern Pontic region, which proceeded at a slower pace in the years 350–1250, accelerated after the Mongol/Tatar conquest. It was mainly the Turks who entailed real ethnic changes: By the fifteenth century, in both the northern Pontic and southern Pontic regions the Turkic ethnic elements had become predominant.