

**THE STEPPE LANDS  
AND THE WORLD BEYOND THEM**  
Studies in honor of **Victor Spinei** on his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday

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# **THE STEPPE LANDS AND THE WORLD BEYOND THEM**

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on his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday

editors  
Florin Curta, Bogdan-Petru Maleon



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## ON THE ISSUE OF THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE NAMES OF PECHENEG RULERS IN THE NIKONIAN CHRONICLE

Mykola Melnyk

History cannot be anonymous. However, despite the long-term coexistence of Rus' with the Pecheneg tribes (first mentioned in the Primary Chronicle under the year 6423 [915 A.D.],<sup>1</sup> and last mentioned in the Kiev Chronicle under the year 6677 [1169 A.D.]),<sup>2</sup> the compilers of the chronicles of Rus' recorded the name of only one Pecheneg prince – Kurya. “When spring came, in 6480 (972), Svyatoslav approached the cataracts, where Kurya, Prince of the Pechenegs, attacked him; and Svyatoslav was killed. The nomads took his head, and made a cup out of his skull, overlaying it with gold, and they drank from it.”<sup>3</sup>

The only chronicle of Rus', containing much wider range of names of Pecheneg rulers, is the so called Nikonian Chronicle – the compilation of the chronicles of Rus' undertaken in the late 1520s at the Moscow metropolitan see.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the chronicle reports the following under the year 6487 (978):

“**The Pecheneg prince Ildeya** came into the service of Yaropolk. Yaropolk welcomed him and gave him cities and powers, and he [Ildeya] was in great honour.”<sup>5</sup>

6496 (988) “That was also when **came the Pecheneg prince Metigay** to Vladimir, and converted, and was baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisej*, vol. 2, *Letopis po Ipatskomu spisku* (St. Petersburg, 1871), p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> *Letopis po Ipatskomu spisku*, 365.

<sup>3</sup> *The Russian Primary Chronicle. Laurentian text*, transl. and ed. Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor (Cambridge, 1953), p. 90.

<sup>4</sup> Boris M. Kloss, *Nikonianovskij svod i russkije letopisi XVI-XVII vekov* (Moscow, 1980) is still the most comprehensive study of this chronicle.

<sup>5</sup> *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisej. Vol. 9. Letopisnyj sbornik, imienujemyj Patriarsheju ili Nikinovskoju letopisju*. (St. Petersburg, 1862), p. 39. The English translation of all passages from the Nikonian Chronicle is mine, as *The Nikonian Chronicle, 1: From the Beginning to the Year 1132; 2: From the Year 1132 to 1240; 3: From the Year 1241 to 1381*, ed. Serge A. Zenkovsky, transl. Serge A. Zenkovsky and Betty Jean Zenkovsky [Princeton, 1984-1986] was not available to me.

<sup>6</sup> *Letopisnyj sbornik, imienujemyj Patriarsheju ili Nikinovskoju letopisju*, 57.



6499 (991) “In the same year **came the Pecheneg prince Kuchüg**, [one of those that] are called Ishmaelites,<sup>7</sup> to Vladimir in Kiev, and adopted the Greek faith, and was baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and [he] served for Vladimir with pure heart and defeated a lot of pagans, and Vladimir loved him and held [him] in high respect, [as well as] all the princes and boyars held [him] in high respect and loved him”<sup>8</sup>.

6509 (1001) “In the year 6509 Alexandr Popovich and Yan Usmshvets, who killed the Pecheneg bogatyr, killed a lot of Pechenegs, and brought the [Pecheneg] Prince **Rodman** with his three sons to Kiev to see Vladimir.”<sup>9</sup>

6512 (1004) “That was also when the **Pecheneg Prince Temir** was killed by his relatives.”<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, apart from Kurya, the list of Pecheneg princes would contain at least five more names – Ildeya, Metigay, Kuchüg, Rodman and Temir.

The Russian school of source criticism (Nikolay Karamzin, Aleksey Shakhmatov, and Dmitry Likhachev) has reacted rather sceptically to these and other inclusions into the Primary Chronicle made by the author of the Nikonian Chronicle. Only Ivan Zabelin believed that the information in the Nikonian Chronicle relating to the period 864-867 was reliable.<sup>11</sup> Boris Rybakov, who was known to be prone to uncritical views on the majority of sources that could at least add something to terse chronicle reports (including the information presented by Vasily Tatishchev)<sup>12</sup>, was inclined to believe that the records contained in the Nikonian Chronicle under the years 978-1008, which were not confirmed in other manuscripts of the Primary Chronicle, indicate the existence of some ancient records pertaining to the times of Yaropolk and Vladimir Sviatoslavich that were supposedly discovered by the sixteenth-century chronicler in the Moscow archives.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Genesis* 16, 10-12; 21, 20.

<sup>8</sup> *Letopisnyj sbornik, imienujemyj Patriarsheju ili Nikinovskoju letopisju*, 64.

<sup>9</sup> *Letopisnyj sbornik, imienujemyj Patriarsheju ili Nikinovskoju letopisju*, 68.

<sup>10</sup> *Letopisnyj sbornik, imienujemyj Patriarsheju ili Nikinovskoju letopisju*, 68.

<sup>11</sup> Ivan E. Zabelin, *Istorija russkoj zhizni s drevnejshykh vremen*, I (Moscow, 1876), p. 475.

<sup>12</sup> Alexei Tolochko, “*Istorija Rossijskaja*” *Vasilija Tatishcheva: istochniki i izvjestija* (Kiev, 2005), p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> Boris A. Rybakov, *Drevnija Rus: skazanija, byliny, letopisi* (Moscow, 1963), p. 183.

The names of the Pecheneg princes mentioned in the Nikonian Chronicle were included in a number of serious scientific studies, both historical<sup>14</sup> and linguistic.<sup>15</sup>

Such ambiguity in the use of information on Pechenegs found in the Nikonian Chronicle invites a closer look, in an attempt to establish whether this source should be trusted in terms of our knowledge of the Pechenegs in Eastern Europe at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> and in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century.

From the point of view of the historical context, the information about the Pecheneg prince Ildeya entering the service of Yaropolk Sviatoslavich may relate to the record made in the Primary Chronicle under the year 980 about events taking place before the death of the prince, when he was advised by his voyvode (warlord) Varyazhko to flee to the Pechenegs, and how after the death of the prince, Varyazhko fought against Vladimir together with the Pechenegs: “Yaropolk thus went in person to Vladimir, though he had been previously warned by Varyazhko not to go. “My Prince,” said he, “they will kill you. Flee rather to the Pechenegs and collect an army.”<sup>16</sup> However, the same record suggests that Metigay and Kuchüg did voluntarily side with Prince Vladimir. In addition, the Primary Chronicle contains records on the war of Vladimir with the Pechenegs (in 988, 993, 996, 997, and 1015). The far from peaceful relations of Vladimir with the Pechenegs are confirmed by another source, namely the letter of Bruno of Querfurt to the German Emperor Henry II, in which he described the events in 1008.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Mytrofan V. Levchenko, “Vzaimootnosheniya Vizantiji i Rusi pri Vladimire,” *VizVrem* 7 (1953): 217; György Györfy, “Monuments du lexique pechénegue,” *ActaOrHung* 18 (1965), nos. 1-2: 78-79; German A. Fedorov-Davydov, *Kochevnikhi Vostochnoj Evropy pod vlastju zolotoordynskikh khanov. Arkheologicheskie pamjatniki* (Moscow, 1966), p. 219; Dosmuhammed Kshybekov, *Kochevoje obshchestvo: genesis, razvitije, upadok* (Almaty, 1984), p. 40; Peter B. Golden, “Religion among the Qipčaq of medieval Eurasia,” *CAJ* 42 (1998), no. 2: 236 (Golden, however, notes that this source should be used with caution).

<sup>15</sup> Alexandr M. Shcherbak, “Znaki na keramike i kirpichakh iz Sarkela-Beloj Vezhi (K voprosu o jazykie i pismennosti pechenegov),” in *Trudy Volgo-Donskoj arkheologicheskoj ekspedicii*, edited by Mikhail I. Artamonov, vol. 2 (Moscow 1959), pp. 362-89; Alexandr M. Shcherbak, “Pechenezhskij jazyk,” in *Jazyki mira: Tjurkskije jazyki*, edited by Edkham R. Tenishev (Moscow, 1997), pp. 107-10; Nikolaj A. Baskakov, “Etnonimy i antroponimy pechenegov,” in *Studia turcologica memoriae Alexii Bombaci dicata*, edited by Aldo Gallotta and Ugo Marazzi (Naples, 1982), p. 22; Irina N. Lezina and Alexandra V. Superanskaja, *Onomastika: slovar-spravochnik tjurkskikh rodoplemennykh nazvanij*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 1994), p. 297.

<sup>16</sup> *Russian Primary Chronicle*, 93.

<sup>17</sup> *List Ś. Brunona do Henryka II Cesarza in Monumenta Poloniae historica*, ed. By August Bielowski, vol. I (Lwów, 1864), p. 224-25.

In 1013, the Pechenegs helped Bolesław Chrobry during his first intervention in the Kievan succession crisis, but instead of being rewarded, they were eventually killed.<sup>18</sup> In 1018, during Bolesław's campaign to Rus', the Pechenegs are again mentioned among his allies, carrying out attacks on Kiev at his request, as well as being present among his troops with 1,000 men.<sup>19</sup> However, according to Gallus Anonymus, the Pechenegs (together with Cumans) were on the side of Bolesław's enemy (Yaroslav Vladimirovich?) at the battle of the River Bug.<sup>20</sup>

The circumstances in which the Nikonian Chronicle was compiled do not recommend it as a reliable source for the events in 978-1004. It is believed that the Chronicle was edited by Daniel, the Metropolitan of Moscow (1522-1539), as the text of the manuscript vividly reflects his views on major issues of the domestic and foreign policy of the Russian state in the 1520s. They can be grouped into the following areas: protection of property interests of the metropolitan see, the relationship between secular and spiritual powers, the struggle against heresy, interest in the history of the Duchy of Ryazan', Russian-Lithuanian relations, the struggle of Rus' with the Kazan' Khanate.<sup>21</sup>

Particularly significant for our topic is the latter area. In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, there was great concern in Moscow with the Kazan' Tatars. In 1524, Khan Sahib Giray (a Jochid of the Crimean Giray dynasty) became a nominal vassal of the Ottomans. Kloss believed that in order to highlight the primordial affiliations of Kazan' to the Grand Principality of Moscow, entries were introduced into the Nikonian Chronicle that cannot be found in other known sources; these include the story about the legendary Kyi supposedly campaigning against the Volga and Kama Bulgarians and defeating, and that of Prince Vladimir supposedly doing the same in 6505 (997). Kloss offered the same explanation for the constant reminder in the Chronicle that "Bulgarians" were those that "nowadays are called the Kazans." Identification of Bulgarians with the Kazan Tatars was supposed to prove that Kazan' was part of Muscovy (Russia).<sup>22</sup> The compiler of the Nikonian Chronicle pursued a similar goal, reporting on alleged events in the year 990, claiming that Prince Vladimir had sent a preacher named

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<sup>18</sup> Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon*, transl. Igor V. Djakonov (Moscow, 2009), p. 128.

<sup>19</sup> Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon*, pp. 177-78.

<sup>20</sup> *Galla Kronika in Monumenta Poloniae historica*, edited by August Bielowski, vol. 1 (Lwów, 1864), p. 403.

<sup>21</sup> Kloss, *Nikonianovskij svod i russkije letopisi XVI-XVII vekov*, pp. 96-102.

<sup>22</sup> Kloss, *Nikonianovskij svod i russkije letopisi XVI-XVII vekov*, p. 101.

Marko from Macedonia to the Volga Bulgars, a mission which supposedly resulted in the conversion of four Bulghar princes.<sup>23</sup>

Thus as convincingly shown by Boris Kloss and Bulat Khamidullin, the compiler of the Nikonian Chronicle deliberately introduced into those parts of the text relating to ancient history bits of information not known from other sources in order to fulfil the political and philosophical goals he had set at that time. Does this also apply to the records concerning the Pechenegs? It is certainly worth testing that hypothesis.

***“The Pecheneg prince Ildeya came into the service of Yaropolk. Yaropolk welcomed him and gave him cities and powers, and he [Ildeya] was in great honour”***

In the 1480s, the ruling elite of the Kazan' Khanate could not reach a consensus on the nomination of the next Khan. The right to the throne belonged to the sons of Ibrahim Khan (deceased in 1479) from his two wives – Fatima (Ali, Cala Hudaj and Melik-Tagir) and Nur-Saltan (Muhammad-Emin and Abdul-Latif). Two opposing parties supported Ali and Muhammad-Emin, respectively. According to M. Khudiakov, the first group was indeed set against Moscow and relied upon the Nogai Tatars, while their rivals looked up to Moscow.<sup>24</sup> The Muhammad Emin-party was eventually defeated and sent a ten-year old Kazan Prince to Moscow where Ivan III (sic!) granted him the town of Kashira.<sup>25</sup> It was not the first time that the absence of clear succession rules in Kazan gave Muscovy an excuse to intervene in the affairs of its eastern neighbour. In 1467, for example, Moscow has tried to place Prince Qasim on the throne. Qasim also received from the Grand Prince the cities of Zvenigorod (now in the Moscow region, Russia), and then Gorodets Meshchyorsky (now Kasimov, in the Ryazan' region of Russia) under his rule, but the fact of governing over the cities was part of a peace treaty between Vasily II and Ulu Muhammad.<sup>26</sup>

Sultan Abdul-Latif, who was born in 1475 in Kazan, spent his childhood and youth at the court of his stepfather, the Crimean Khan Mengli, but in his middle age, and given the close relations between Crimea and Muscovy at the time, he entered the service of the Grand Prince of Moscow, and was granted the city of Zvenigorod.<sup>27</sup> With Muscovite support, he later became Khan in Kazan'.

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<sup>23</sup> *Letopisnyj sbornik, imienujemyj Patriarsheju ili Nikinovskoj letopisju*, pp. 58-9. See also Bulat Khamidullin, “Otrazhenije istorii Kazanskogo khanstva v Nikonianovskoj (Patriarshej) letopisi,” *Gasyrlar avazy* 1-2 (1999): 62-77.

<sup>24</sup> Mikhail G. Khudjakov, *Očerki po istorii Kazanskogo khanstva* (Moscow, 1991), p. 44.

<sup>25</sup> Khudjakov, *Očerki*, p. 45.

<sup>26</sup> Farida Sharifullina, *Kasimovskije Tatary* (Kazan, 1991), p. 16.

<sup>27</sup> Khudjakov, *Očerki*, p. 55.

**“... killed a lot of Pechenegs, and brought the [Pecheneg] Prince Rodman with his three sons to Kiev to see Vladimir.”**

In 1488, following his defeat by the Muscovite army, Ali Khan, his wife, mother and brothers – Melik-Tagir and Hudaj-Kul – were all captured and transported to Moscow. Ali later found himself in exile in Vologda, and his relatives – in the Belozersk region.<sup>28</sup> Ulu Mohammed, the founder of the Kazan’ Khanate, had three sons – Mahmoud, Qasim and Jakub.<sup>29</sup>

**“and converted, and was baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit;” “and adopted the Greek faith, and was baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit and [he] served for Vladimir with pure heart and defeated a lot of pagans, and Vladimir loved him and held [him] in high respect, [as well as] all the princes and boyars held [him] in high respect and loved him.”**

The sons of Melik-Tegir, who was captured in 1487, were baptized under the names Vasily and Fedor, respectively. Fedor even became governor of Novgorod in 1531. Prince (Sultan) Hudaj-Kul also was baptized in 1505, taking the name of Petr Ibragimovich, and married Evdokia Ivanovna, the sister of Grand Prince Vasily.<sup>30</sup> By her, he had two daughters, both named Anastasia. One of them married Prince Fedor Mikhailovich Mstislavsky, another – Vasily Vasilievich Shuysky. Anastasia Shuyskaya’s daughter married Dmitry Fedorovich Belsky, who participated in numerous military clashes with the Crimea and Kazan’. And was a contemporary of the compiler of the Nikonian Chronicle, when the *oprichnina* was established the descendants of Petr Ibragimovich – Simeon Bekbulatovich, Ivan Fyodorovich Mstislavsky and Ivan Dmitrievich Belsky – were especially honoured by Ivan IV.<sup>31</sup>

It is worth mentioning that the baptism of the descendants of Kazan’ khans had another important effect: by means of receiving baptism, they lost all their rights to the throne in Kazan’; Petr Ibragimovich, who was the apparent heir after the death of Muhammad-Emin, the last member of Ulu

<sup>28</sup> Khudjakov, *Ocherki*, p. 47.

<sup>29</sup> Khudjakov, *Ocherki*, p. 31.

<sup>30</sup> The Kazan Chronicle reports: “And the Grand Prince [of Moscow] incarcerated Tsar Aleham and his Tsaritsa in Vologda, and the mother of the Tsar and two princes incarcerated in Beloozero. The Tsar died in the confinement there, along with his mother and brother Prince Malendar. Another Prince survived, he [the Grand Prince] released him and baptized him and married his daughter to him”. (*Kazanskaja istorija*, ed. and transl. Tayjana F. Volkova, comment. Tayjana F. Volkova and Irina A. Lobakova (Institut Russkoj Kultury (Pushkinskogo Doma) RAN, 2006-2011), accessed January, 12, 2012, [http://www.pushkinskijdom.ru/Default.aspx?tabid=5148#\\_edn60](http://www.pushkinskijdom.ru/Default.aspx?tabid=5148#_edn60).)

<sup>31</sup> Khudjakov, *Ocherki*, pp. 47-49.

Muhammad's family on the throne of Kazan', was thus deprived of his right to succession.<sup>32</sup>

**“That was also when the Pecheneg Prince Temir was killed by his relatives”.** Bek Kel-Ahmed of Kazan' was killed at the order of Muhammad-Emin, even though (or perhaps, because) the latter owed to the former his ascent to power.<sup>33</sup> It should also be noted in this context that the author of the Kazan' Chronicle made up a story according to which Ulu Mohammed had been killed by his son.<sup>34</sup>

Let us turn our attention to the issue of the names. The author of those inclusions into the Nikonian Chronicle had to take the names of the Pecheneg Princes and of their opponents from somewhere. Even a cursory analysis shows that the editor or the compilers of the Nikonian Chronicle could take these names from real history, contemporary to them. Thus, the names Kuchüg<sup>35</sup> (Kuchüg Mohammad or Kiči Mohammad) and Temir<sup>36</sup> (Timur) appear in the history of the Golden Horde.<sup>37</sup> The name Ildeya appears in the Chronicle of Novgorod (Boris Ildyatinich, the Novgorodian, and his brother Lazar Ildyatinich), which is one of the sources of the Nikonian Chronicle.<sup>38</sup> As for Rodman, the aforementioned Kazan Chronicle mentions the death of the “great voyvodes ... Karamysh and his brother Rodoman,” which refers to Mikhail Fedorovich Kurbsky-Karamysh and his brother Roman.<sup>39</sup> Of the five names of Pecheneg princes, only Metigay is nowhere to be found in the sources of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. According to Nikolai Baskakov, the name derives from the Turkic word for wonderful, “maty”.<sup>40</sup> We can assume that the compiler of the Nikonian Chronicle knew someone with the same name, given that Muscovy had constant contacts with Turkic peoples – Kazan, Astrakhan and Crimean Tatars, Nogais, etc. Finally two other names of Pecheneg conquerors mentioned in the Nikonian Chronicle, Yan Usmshvets and Aleksandr Popovich, appear only in folklore.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Khudjakov, *Ocherki*, p. 75.

<sup>33</sup> Wiljam V. Pokhlobkin, *Tatary i Rus. 360 let otnoshenij Rusi s tatarskimi gosudarstvami v XIII-XVI vv.* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyje otnoshenija, 2000), pp. 94-5.

<sup>34</sup> Khudjakov, *Ocherki*, p. 32.

<sup>35</sup> Kuchüg > kičig (small) (*Drevnjetjurkskij slovar*, edited by Vladimir M. Nadyelyaev *et al.* [Leningrad, 1969]).

<sup>36</sup> Temir=temir (iron) (*Drevnjetjurkskij slovar*, p. 551).

<sup>37</sup> Khudjakov, *Ocherki*, p. 21.

<sup>38</sup> Kloss, *Nikonianovskij svod*, p. 148.

<sup>39</sup> *Polnoe sobranie russkich letopisej*, vol. 19, *Istorija o Kazanskom tsarstve* (St. Petersburg, 1903), p. 236.

<sup>40</sup> Baskakov, “Etnonimy,” p. 22.

<sup>41</sup> See: “Letopisnyje izvjestija o bohatyrjakh Dobrynie i Alexandre Popoviche,” in *Dobrynia Nikitych i Aleksandr Popovich*, ed. Erna V. Pomerantseva (Moscow: Nauka, 1974), pp. 336-42.

Having compared episodes in the history of Muscovite-Kazan' relations in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries with the notes included into the part of the Nikonian Chronicle pertaining to Pecheneg-Rus' relations in the late 10<sup>th</sup> and early 11<sup>th</sup> century, one can easily notice the similarity of plots. This suggests that the episodes of the Pecheneg-Rus' relations not found in the Primary Chronicle are the inclusions made by Metropolitan Daniel, the editor of the Nikonian Chronicle, in order to prove that the fall of the Kazan Khanate had long been prepared in history.

Thus, there are good reasons to believe that the records of the Nikonian Chronicle on the five Pecheneg princes, three of whom voluntarily came into the service of the Rus' princes Yaropolk and Vladimir (two of them being baptized), one of whom was killed by his relatives, and one captured along with his sons by Alexandr Popovich and Yan Usmshvets, are questionable given both the inconsistency of those records with the historic context known from the Primary Chronicle and Bruno of Querfurt's letter, and the obviously ideologically driven, anti-Kazan' and anti-Islam focus of the Nikonian Chronicle's editor. The latter was most likely Metropolitan Daniel.

Unfortunately, therefore, the Nikonian Chronicle offers no genuine information on the history of the Pechenegs in Eastern Europe, and no trust can be placed in the authenticity of the names of the Pecheneg princes which it contains.