

*The Origin of the Cumans in the Russian Primary Chronicle**

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On various occasions civilized people have found themselves living side by side with peoples at a different level of social and cultural development. In the Middle Ages the members of Christian civilization were accustomed to compare themselves with these barbarian neighbours, whom they viewed with varying degrees of disdain, suspicion and fear. The medievalist Robert Bartlett suggests that, for Latin Christians, the world could be divided into three concentric circles. In the middle was their own world which was familiar. Beyond that there was a second ring, i.e., the barbarian world. That circle included Christian peoples like the Slavic races, who lived on a lower level of cultural, technological and economic development.¹ It is important to mention that there were relations between these two worlds. But in the third ring lay a stranger world, where (in Bartlett's words) "the principles of order dissolve and all our fears, fantasies, and projections become real". That world is full of wonderful, strange and terrible monsters. The writers of this period, who had no direct experience of the outer world, in consequence placed vague geographical names like "India" and "Scythia" in this third ring.²

In the second half of the eleventh century there appeared in Eastern Europe a new, unknown people, the Turkic-speaking Cumans. To explain the devastation of the Rus' by this hitherto unknown people, the Russian chroniclers resorted to the Scriptures and to apocalyptic prophecy, notably the seventh-century Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius.³ The Cumans came from the outermost circle, the alien world of fantasy and terror, to the second ring, the world of barbarism.

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¹ According to the medieval English and French writers, the Christian Celts and Slavic people are included in this circle. P. Jackson, "Medieval Christendom's Encounter with the Alien," *Historical Research* 76/186 (November 2001), 347. On the alterations in the concept of barbarian in Middle Ages, see W. R. Jones, "The Image of the Barbarian in Medieval Europe," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 13 (1971) 367-407.

² R. Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales 1146-1223*. Oxford 1982, 174-175.

³ The Apocalypse was originally attributed to Methodius of Patara, a martyred bishop who died in the early fourth century. It was actually composed in the seventh century. The real author is unknown, but the original was written in Syriac in the wake of the

The origin of the Cumans traditionally has been reconstructed on the basis of the account of the Arabian writer al-Marwazi.⁴ However, there is also a passage in the Russian Primary Chronicle with a description of the Cumans' origin.⁵ Before analysing that section I will present and discuss those parts of the Russian Primary Chronicle in which there is information about the Cumans' customs,

Islamic conquests. It was translated into Greek, Latin and Slavic languages and represented a Byzantine apocalyptic tradition that continued to exercise an important influence on both Western and Eastern Christian thought in the Middle Ages. Moreover in the early nineteenth century many credulous Russian persons looked upon Napoleon as the Antichrist, and sought in his invasion the fulfilment of the prophecies of Methodius. (Н. С. Тихонравов, "Отреченныя книги древней России," in *Сочинения Николая Саввича Тихонравова*. Москва, 1898, 68). The Syriac title of this apocalyptic work was "The Discourse which was composed by the Blessed Mar Methodius, Bishop and Martyr, about the Succession of Kings and about the End Times" (M. Dickens, "Turkâyē: Turkic Peoples in Syriac Literature Prior to the Seljüks". Dissertation submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. University of Cambridge, 2008.) The original Syriac text was translated into Greek and Latin in the Middle Ages. From the Greek variants were made the Slavic translations. For the Latin text, see E. Sackur, *Sybillinische Texte und Forschungen*. Halle, 1898, 59–96. The critical edition of the Greek text with the Old Slavic and Russian translation and with a short Latin text may be found in В. М. Истрин, *Откровение Мефодія Патарского и апокрифическія виденія Даниила в византийской и славяно-русской литературах*. Москва, 1897. In the twentieth century Nau was the first to recognize that the Apocalypse was written originally in Syriac (F. Nau, "Révélation et légendes. Méthodius – Clément – Andronicus," *Journal Asiatique* 11:9 (1917), 415–471). Details and some other important information about the work and its writer in Hungarian could be found in M. Kmoskó, *Szír írók a steppe népeiről*. [Syriac writers about the people of the steppe] Magyar Őstörténeti Könyvtár 20, ed. Sz. Felföldi, Budapest 2004, 38–46, 94–96. (Unfortunately the section quoted by the Russian chronicler a propos of the Cumans is not translated in Kmoskó's Hungarian work). Kmoskó's contributions to the study of the Apocalypse are important. He called attention to the complete Syriac text in the Vatican MS, he stated that original language of the work was Syriac and he suggested that the author of the Apocalypse was a Melkite Christian, and his work has Persian origin. M. Kmoskó, "Das Rätsel des Pseudo-Methodius," *Byzantion* 6 (1931) 273–296. On the relationship between the Greek and Old Russian texts and the section in the Russian Primary Chronicle, see: S. H. Cross, "The Earliest Allusion in Slavic Literature to the Revelations of Pseudo-Methodius," *Speculum* 4:3 (1929), 329–339. For the English translation of the Syriac text, see P. J. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*. Ed. with an introduction Dorothy de F. Abrahamse, Berkeley CA, Los Angeles and London, 1985, 36–51.

⁴ *Sharaf al-Zamān Tāhir Marwāzī on China, the Turks and India*. Arabic text (circa A.D. 1120) with an English translation and commentary by V. Minorsky. London 1942, 29–30; H. Göckenjan and I. Zimonyi, *Orientalische Berichte über die Völker Osteuropas und Zentralasiens des Mittelalter. Die Čayhānī-Tradition*, Wiesbaden 2001, 244–246.

⁵ *Повесть временных лет. По Лаврентьевской летописи 1377 г.* Подготовка текста, перевод, статьи и комментарии Д. С. Лихачева, (henceforth: PVL) Под редак. В. П. Адриановой-Перец. Санкт-Петербург, 2000³, 98, 236; *The Russian Primary Chronicle. Laurentian Text*. Trans. and ed. S. H. Cross and O. P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, Cambridge 1953, 184.

their first appearance and first attack, the troubles caused by their raids, and where those problems are explained in an eschatological context. Finally, I will demonstrate that despite the apocalyptic explanations the Cumans did not have any eschatological significance for the writer of the Chronicle. Before anything else, it must be mentioned that the ethnonym *Cuman* was loan-translated into Eastern Slavic as *Polovcy*, so the Cumans appear as *Polovcy* in the Chronicle.

Let us begin with the description of the customs of the Cumans. According to this: "Just so, even in our day, the Polovcians maintain the customs of their ancestors in the shedding of blood and in glorifying themselves for such deeds, as well as in eating every dead or unclean thing, even hamsters and marmots. They marry their mothers-in-law [*i.e.* stepmothers – Sz. K.] and their sisters-in-law, and observe other usages of their ancestors."⁶ The passage does not contain much concrete information about the Cumans. In connection with most of pagan, barbaric peoples similar descriptions can be found in contemporary sources. The medieval writers describe the eating habits of pagan, non-Christian people in terms of them eating all kinds of unclean animals. Obviously, these descriptions have biblical antecedents, the prohibition of eating unclean animals appears in the Torah.⁷ This section may be based upon the Pseudo-Methodius, who wrote about the unclean peoples shut in the mountain by Alexander the Great: "they ate the vermin of the earth, mice and dogs and kittens".⁸ The last sentence of the section mentioned above may refer to levirate marriage customs, but a closer examination of the context shows that this part of the Chronicle is based upon a pagan-Christian opposition.

The chronicler mentions only the fact that the Cumans made their first appearance in the Dnieper region in 1054 or 1055: "In the same year, Bolush advanced with his Polovcians, but Vsevolod made peace with them, and they returned whence they had come".⁹ Vsevolod is Vsevolod Yaroslavič, who was prince of Pereyaslavl' at that time (1054–1073). Later he became prince of Černigov (1073–1078) and Grand Prince of Kiev (1078–1093).

The Cumans reappear as invaders on the pages of the Russian Primary Chronicle in the year 1061 when they attack the Rus' for the first time. According to the source, "The Polovcians invaded Rus' to make war for the first time. On February 2, Vsevolod went forth against them. When they met in battle, the Polovcians defeated Vsevolod, but after the combat they retired. This was the first evil done by these pagan and godless foes. Their prince was Iskal."¹⁰

⁶ PVL 11, 147; Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *Primary*, 58.

⁷ Leviticus 11.5; Deuteronomy 14.5.

⁸ Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic*, 49. It should be noted that the meat of the ground-squirrel was consumed in the Ukrainian plain and on the territory of Hungary and Romania. See "Űrgeöntés," in *Magyar néprajzi lexikon*, <http://mek.niif.hu/02100/02115/html/5-1055.html> (accessed February 8, 2011).

⁹ PVL 70, 208; Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *Primary*, 143.

¹⁰ PVL 71, 208; Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *Primary*, 143.

Although the name of the Cumans/Polovcians is not used, in the year 1065 our source mentions barbarian attacks against the land of Rus. Presumably these barbarians were the Cumans. According to the chronicler, who in this passage recounts an episode in the first person, strange events occurred:

"At the time, there was a portent in the west in the form of an exceedingly large star with bloody rays, which rose out of the west after sunset. It was visible for a week and appeared with no good presage. Much internal strife occurred thereafter, as well as many barbarian incursions into the land of Rus', for this star appeared as if it were made of blood, and therefore portended bloodshed.

At this time, a child was cast into Setoml'¹¹. [...] it was malformed; indeed, it had its privates upon its face, and for reasons of modesty no further account need be given regarding it.

Somewhat before this moment, the sun also suffered alteration, and instead of being bright, became rather like the moon."¹²

The star, which "appeared as if it were made of blood", the child, who "had its privates upon its face" and the Sun which was like the Moon were portents. We do not know when the historical events recorded in this part of the Chronicle occurred exactly. The "portent in the west", according to Vyssotsky, has "the same appearance of Halley's comet which is associated with the Norman invasion of England" in 1066.¹³ The Sun like the Moon refers to a partial solar eclipse that occurred on 19 April 1064.¹⁴ In my opinion, the narrator emphasizes the occurrence of evil with the accumulation of these unfavorable signs, as the chronicler himself wrote: "Such signs are [...] of evil significance, presaging the appearance of war, famine, or death".¹⁵

The next Cuman campaign to the land of Rus, which occurred in 1068, appears in the Chronicle as an attack that was God's punishment for the sins of the Christians:

¹¹ Setoml' was a small river near Kiev which formerly flowed into the Počajna was. The Počajna is a tributary of the river Dnieper.

¹² PVL 71, 209; Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *Primary*, 144.

¹³ On the identification of the comet, see A. N. Vyssotsky, "Astronomical Records in the Russian Chronicles from 1000 to 1600 A.D. (as collected by D. O. Sviatsky)," *Historical Notes and Papers* 22 (1949), 33; W. W. Dodd and B. E. Schaefer, "An Introduction to Astronomical Events Recorded in the Russian Chronicles," *The Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada* 9/6 (697) (2002) 236-249. On the astronomical records in the Russian Chronicles, see <http://hbar.phys.msu.ru/gorm/atext/russian.htm>. We have some other written accounts of the appearance of Halley's Comet in A.D. 1066, and in the Bayeux tapestry can be found a pictorial record of the comet.

¹⁴ Vyssotsky, *Astronomical Records*, 7; Dodd and Schaefer, *An Introduction*, 237.

¹⁵ PVL 72, 209; Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *Primary*, 145. In order to support his statement the chronicler culled some other portents from Georgius Hamartolus (PVL 72, 209; Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *Primary*, 145).

"6576 (1068). A multitude of those nomads known as the Polovcians attacked the land of Rus' [...] but since God had let loose the pagans upon us because of our transgressions, the Russian princess fled and the Polovcians were victorious.

God in his wrath causes foreigners to attack a nation, and then, when its inhabitants are thus crushed by the invaders, they remember God. Intestine strife is incited by the craft of the evil."¹⁶

The chronicler in this passage quotes from the Bible (Joel, Amos, Isaiah, Malachi and Proverbs) and from the Sermon on Divine Chastisements.¹⁷ With these accounts he tries to warn the Rurikid princes, who fought against each other for power. The explication of these extracts can be read later, whereas after the Rurikids' defeat by the Cuman forces in 1068 at the Battle of the Alta River an uprising took place in Kiev, bringing Vseslav of Polotsk to power.¹⁸

Hereafter, the Cumans appear more frequently on the pages of the *Chronicle*. Sometimes they raided the land of Rus, but they also supported the Rurikid princes who fought each other. The next interesting information can be read under the year 1092:

"6600 (1092). An extraordinary event occurred at Polotsk. At night there was heard a clatter and groaning in the streets, and *demons ran about like men*. [...] The demons later began to appear on horseback during the day. They were not visible themselves but the hoofs of their horses could be seen. Thus they did injury to the people of Polotsk and the vicinity, so that it was commonly said that ghosts were killing the people of Polotsk. [...] At this time, a *sign appeared in the heavens like a huge circle* in the midst of the sky. There was a drought in this year, so that the earth was burned over, and many pine forests and peat-bogs were consumed. There were many portents in various localities, and incursions of the Polovcians were reported from all quarters."¹⁹

Therefore, in addition to the Cuman attack, the chronicler reports a number of portents such as the appearance of demons and drought. According to the popular belief of the eastern Slavs, the plague mentioned below in the *Chronicle* is the manifestation of the activities of the diabolic spirits. The drought and the epidem-

¹⁶ PVL 73, 210; Cross and Sherbovitz-Wetzor, *Primary*, 146.

¹⁷ This Sermon is attributed to Theodosius (Феодосий Печерский), who was one of the founders of the Kiev Monastery of the Caves (Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *Primary*, 265).

¹⁸ S. Franklin and J. Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus 750-1200*, London and New York 1996, 253; M. Font, *Oroszország, Ukrajna, Rusz. Fejezetek a keleti szlávok történetéből* [Russia, Ukraine, Rus'. Chapters from the history of East Slavic People] Pécs 1995, 46.

¹⁹ PVL 91, 229; Cross and Sherbovitz-Wetzor, *Primary*, 173-174.

ic may well have been related.²⁰ There is another scientific explanation. According to this interpretation the devils that were invisible and injured the peoples and hoofs of their horses “were a broken meteor that scattered many fragments over Polotsk”.²¹ The “huge circle in the midst of the sky” could be an atmospheric halo around the sun. There was a guest star reported in the east in Orion on January 8, 1092.²²

When describing the Cuman invasion in 1093, the chronicler writes about the reason for the raid. The Cuman onslaught was God’s chastisement for the sins of the Christians: “God sent the pagans upon us, not because he held them dear, but to chastise us that we might abstain from evil deeds”.²³ At the same time the chronicler seems to favor the equation of the Cumans with the Ishmaelites for the first time in the Chronicle: “For the malignant sons of Ishmael burned villages and granges, and consumed many churches with fire”.²⁴ Some observers adopted what might be called a broadly apocalyptic tone.

Special mention must be made of the various types of crisis situations caused by natural hazards that are recorded in the Chronicle. Some of them, for example, the locust invasions, appear in the same years when the Cumans raided the land of Rus, i.e., 1094, 1095 and 1103.²⁵ Thus, the damage caused by locusts refers figuratively to the Cumans’ devastations,²⁶ especially because the chronicler did not write about any other locust invasions in the Rus’ lands. The relation between the invasions of the Mongols, who are also named as sons of Ishmael, and the plague of locusts is more conspicuous in the First Novgorod Chronicle.²⁷

We can read about the Cumans’ origin under the year 1096, a passage that is very interesting in many respects, not least for being one of the first eschatological visions of Russian literature. In addition to this, it contains some remarkable details in ethnographical and ethnogeneological aspects.²⁸ In that year occurred

²⁰ В. Й. Манси́кка, *Религия восточных славян*, Москва, 2005, 104; Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *Primary*, 275.

²¹ Dodd and Schaefer, *An Introduction*, 238.

²² Ho Peng Yoke, “Ancient and Medieval Observations of Comets and Novae in Chinese Sources”, *Vistas in Astronomy* 5 (1962) 186.

²³ PVL 93, 231; Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *Primary*, 177.

²⁴ PVL 94, 232; Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *Primary*, 178.

²⁵ PVL 95, 96, 119, 233, 234, 257; Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *Primary*, 180, 181, 202.

²⁶ “On August 26 of the same year, a plague of locusts attacked Rus’, and ate up all the grass and much grain. Such a visitation was unheard of in the early days of Rus’, but in consequence of our sins, our eyes beheld it.” Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *Primary*, 180; PVL 95, 233.

²⁷ *Новгородская первая летопись, Старшего и младшего изводов*. Москва-Ленинград, 1950, 286; *The Chronicle of Novgorod 1016–1471* (Camden Third Series, 25.) Translated from the Russian by R. Michell and N. Forbes, with an Introduction by C. R. Beazley and an Account of the Text by A. A. Shakhmatov, London 1914, 133.

²⁸ The section is unique as the Biblical and Pseudo-Methodian peoples and scenes were modified by the chroniclers according to the eastern European situation. А. Ю. Карпов, *Эсхатологические ожидания в Киевской Руси в конце XI – начале XII века*. <http://www.portal-slovo.ru/history/35247.php>. [accessed December 10, 2010].

the great Cuman attacks against Pereyeslavl' and Kiev led by Bonyak and Tugorkan. According to the Chronicle, "Bonyak, that godless, mangy thief and bandit" appeared before Kiev, "burned the suburbs about the town" and then attacked the Crypt monastery.²⁹ The chronicler himself lived through the ransacking of the monastery. This is demonstrated by the events described in the first-person singular.

Let us examine this passage of the Chronicle. There is a larger *excursus*, after the Cumans' attack, on the Cumans' origins. "They came forth from the desert of Yathrib in the northeast. Four races of them issued forth: Torkmens, Pechenegs, Torks, and Polovcians. Methodius relates concerning them that eight nations fled when Gideon massacred them [...] Ishmael begot twelve sons, from whom are descended the Torkmens, the Pechenegs, the Torks, and the Cumans or Polovcians, who came from the desert. After these eight races, at the end of the world, shall come forth the unclean people shut in the mountain by Alexander of Macedon."³⁰ The desert of Yathrib from where came the seeds of Ishmael is the town of Yathrib, today Medina. The appearance of the descendants of Ishmael is clearly a biblical³¹ and Pseudo-Methodian tradition and can be connected to the Cumans. The chronicler enumerates some Turkic people here. Between the sons of Ishmael there are Torkmens. This name rarely appears in the Chronicle, perhaps they are identical with the Seljuks.³² The Pechenegs need no explication. The Torks are Uzes. Gideon is a hero of the Book of Judges and he delivered Israel from the armies of the Midianites and Amalekites.³³ He was chosen by God to free the people of Israel and condemn their worshipping of idols. The compiler of the Chronicle is citing by memory from the Revelations of Pseudo-Methodius, who is named here. The Turkic people enumerated in this passage (the Pechenegs, the Uzes, the Cumans) were culturally alien and meant danger for the Rus. Among them the last mentioned Cumans caused the most trouble for the Rus' Principalities.

After this passage the chronicler recounts an episode which he says he heard from a man named Gyuryata Rogovich of Novgorod, who told him about the peoples shut up by Alexander the Great. Although the chronicler refers to Gyuryata as the source, this story about the enclosed nations is from the work of Pseudo-Methodius.

Hence this section does not make any real suggestion about the origins of the Cumans. In fact, this excursion can be explained by the exaggerated apocalyptic feeling of the chronicler. That fear could have been generated by several factors. The christianization of the Rus' dates from the year 6496 (A.D. 988), that is, in the

²⁹ PVL 97, 235; Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *Primary*, 182-183.

³⁰ PVL 98, 236; Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, *Primary*, 184.

³¹ Genesis 25, 12-16.

³² И. В. Николаева, "Семантика «этнических» указаний «Повести временных лет»: образ «чужого»", *Знание. Понимание. Умение* 2010. № 9.

³³ The Ishmaelites are identified with the Midianites of the Old Testament. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic*, 24.

seventh millennium. According to Pseudo-Methodius' Apocalypse, the end of the world will occur in the seventh millennium. The coming of the end of the world was expected in the year 7000 (5508+1492=7000). The eschatological aspect appeared somewhat differently in the Old Russian literature. Namely the apocalyptic expectations were not based on concrete calculations, but different celestial and terrestrial occurrences, astronomical phenomena, drought, famines and wars were interpreted as signs of the second coming of Christ in the Rus' lands. According to the chroniclers of the Rus, the surest sign of the end of the world was the assaults of unknown people. This is in accordance with the conception of the Pseudo-Methodian Apocalypse and with Byzantine tradition. Attacks by unknown peoples have always been interpreted as tokens of the end of the world in medieval Christendom. The Byzantine authors saw the Antichrist and his soldiers at first in Muhammad, the founder of Islam, and in his followers, then in the Saracens (i.e., the Seljuks), the conquerors of the Holy Land. These apocalyptic expectations were somewhat different than in the Byzantine Empire, where the prophecies of Pseudo-Methodius were modified according to the eastern European situation. The desert of Yathrib, the homeland of the Ishmaelites, was moved by the Russian chroniclers from Arabia to the northeast, where the Rus' was located. The sons of Ishmael, who "came forth from the desert of Yathrib" were identified with a people (i.e., the Polovcians) who appeared in the neighborhood of the Rus' in the second half of the eleventh century. Thus the intentions of the chronicler become clear: he quoted the work of Pseudo-Methodius by reason of the Polovcians' attacks in the 1090s. Moreover, the chronicler's fear perhaps was strengthened by the rare concurrence of the Feast of the Annunciation (March 25) with Easter in 1095. Namely, March 25, 1095 was Kyriopascha. Furthermore, according to Alexandrian chronology, the beginning of Creation happened on March 25.³⁴ In addition, the First Crusade, which also had an apocalyptic premise, contributed to the intensity of the apocalyptic fear of the chronicler.³⁵ On the way to the Holy Land the crusaders attacked Jewish communities. Consequently the messianic ferment and movements of immigration to the land of Israel among the Jews were amplified in the wake of the Crusades. It is assumed that the persecution of Jews in western Europe and in the Byzantine Empire during the First Crusade led to their migration, among others, to the territory of the Rus. All those

³⁴ The calendar system created by Annianus (fifth century A.D.) represents a mystical coincidence of three main dates of world history: the beginning of Creation, the Incarnation and the Resurrection of Christ. All these events happened, according to the Alexandrian chronology, on 25 March. Byzantine chronicles combine the Byzantine chronology with Alexandrian mystical symbolism. P. Kuzenkov, *How old is the World? The Byzantine Era κατά Ῥωμαίους and its Rivals. in 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies. London, 2006. Communication. I. 2 Theories of Empire.* http://www.wra1th.plus.com/byzcong/comms/Kuzenkov_paper.pdf. [accessed February 10, 2011]. That combined chronology was presumably known by the Russian chronicles too.

³⁵ The apocalyptic expectations and fears associated with the First Crusade become more intense because the latter could be connected with a prophecy that the Christians had to win back the Holy Land before the second coming of Christ.

phenomena could be interpreted by the Russian chronicles as the sign of the Antichrist's activity or a foretoken of his actions.³⁶

At the same time if we examine the last sentence of the passage it turns out that the Cumans will not cause the end of the world. They will be followed by the peoples shut up by Alexander the Great. Although it is debated whether the sons of Ishmael carry an apocalyptic association,³⁷ according to the Chronicle, their empire will be followed by the power of the "nations shut up". The rule of the seeds of Ishmael will be put down by the king of the Greeks in the Revelations of Pseudo-Methodius too. The earth will then be at peace. The "Gates of the North" will be opened and the nations shut up by Alexander will come forth after this period of peace. In my opinion, the Polovcians (Cumans) did not carry any apocalyptic significance for the writer of the Chronicle based on our source.

The Chronicle does not tell anything about the end of the world. *Nota bene*, the time of the end of the world is not relevant in the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius, either. Indeed, the Syrian author's work is not intended to predict the end of the world. So, as Kmoskó also claims, the Revelations is only pseudo in this sense. It is not a real apocalyptic work, but a political pamphlet, which encourages indirect resistance (i.e., penitence and the true Christian life) and the fight against pagans.³⁸ I suggest that for the writer of the Chronicle the Cumans were like the locusts.³⁹ The plague of the locusts is harmful, but can be lived through. The Cuman attacks, as the plague of the locusts, were occasioned by the Christians' sins because their transgressions and their unrighteousness had increased. According to the chronicler, by repenting and renouncing sin and envy these problems could be resolved.

To conclude, the Cumans belonged to two of the three concentric circles mentioned above. They came from the outermost circle to the second ring, the world of the Rus. The chronicler or chroniclers had first-hand experience of the Cumans. They knew that the Cumans were not Cynocephali or Blemmyae or Monopods, in generally were not monstrous or bestial races. But, when the chronicler describes the Cumans as seeds of Ishmael or when he writes about the Cumans "eating every dead or unclean thing, even hamsters and marmots" - that is the alien world of fantasy and terror.

Finally, I would like to draw the attention to two aspects. Firstly, it is obvious that the chronicler was not motivated by the desire for knowledge when he wrote

³⁶ Карпов, *Эсхатологические*.

³⁷ Jackson, *Medieval*, 353.

³⁸ Kmoskó, *Szír írók*, 42-43. The popularity of the Apocalypse was due to its prophecy of eventual Christian victory over the various Oriental barbarians who threatened Christian civilization (Sackur, *Sibyllinische*, 5; Cross, *The Earliest*, 329).

³⁹ The Russian eschatology is active and optimistic, its intention is the improvement of ordinary people's lives. („Az Orosz Egyház és az orosz állam. Beszélgetés Lepahin Valerijjel.” [The Russian Church and State. An interview with Valery Lepahin] *Aetas* 13:1 (1998), 127-144.

about the origin of the Cumans, but with his knowledge obtained from the Bible and from works of Christian authorities he wanted to demonstrate that the Cumans were sent by God to chastise Christian society. According to him, the incursions of the pagans is a divine punishment. Thus, we can not find anything about the Cumans' origin. Nevertheless, some researchers have tried to include this detail in the explanation of the etymology of *Polovci*.⁴⁰ The term *Polovci* does not go back to the Russian word *поле* "field" but to *половый* which means "colorless, pale, pale yellow".⁴¹

Secondly, it is remarkable that despite the sometimes apocalyptic descriptions of the Cuman attacks, they were not destroyers of the world. The Cumans themselves had no eschatological significance. Reading the section of the Russian chronicle about the Cumans' attacks we cannot feel the fear or panic. (On the contrary, in the western sources about the Hungarians we have: "ab Ungerorum nos defendas iaculis".⁴² Not incidentally, the popularity of the Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius arose from its promise of Christian victory over barbarian invaders. However, although the Cumans were the most dangerous foes to threaten the Rus' prior to the Mongol incursions, the considerations mentioned above confirm that the Cuman attacks were not a real threat to the Rus' state.

⁴⁰ O. Pritsak: "The Polovcians and Rus", *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 2 (1982), 325–326. Pritsak connects the name *Polovci* with the Slavic word for desert "поле".

⁴¹ М. Фасмер: *Этимологический словарь русского языка* (онлайн версия). <http://www.classes.ru/all-russian/russian-dictionary-Vasmer-term-9957.htm>. [accessed July 13, 2011], 12²¹.

⁴² "Carmina Mutinensia," in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Antiquitates, Poetae Latini aevi Carolini*. III. Berolini, 1896. Recensuit L. Traube, 706.