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SOME ASPECTS OF MILITARY ADMINISTRATION IN THE TURKIC KHAGANATE

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Abstract

This article highlights the military campaigns carried out during the period of the Turkic Khaganate, as well as the strategies employed in these campaigns and their outcomes. In addition, the presence of horn-shaped or special acoustic elements in the structure of weapons indicates that they were designed not only for practical use but also for psychological impact. Sound-producing bows and arrows may have been used to intimidate the enemy. From this perspective, it can be understood that the Turks valued weaponry not only as a means of military effectiveness but also as a tool for achieving psychological superiority.

Introduction

A number of researchers emphasize that the rise of the Turkic Khaganate was significantly influenced by its economic and domestic foundations, particularly their specialization in metallurgy. They especially regard the advanced blacksmithing skills of the Ashina Turks as a decisive factor in the emergence of the Turks' political and military power. According to Chinese chronicles, during the period when the Ashina Turks lived under the rule of the Juan-Juan, they were engaged in mining and producing iron for their rulers. The fact that the Juan-Juan khagan referred to the Turks as "my blacksmiths" confirms this. Furthermore, information indicating that the ancient Turks offered iron products for sale to envoys from Byzantium also supports this view.

Research Methodology

This article is based on generally accepted methods, including historical, scientific, and objective approaches. It also examines how the influence of ancient Turkic weaponry was clearly felt in Sogdiana and other oasis regions, which were among the territories under the control of the Western Turkic Khaganate. V. I. Raspopova, who conducted archaeological excavations for many years in the ruins of Panjikent, analyzed findings dating back to the 7th–8th centuries and emphasized that the weapons used in Sogdiana were influenced in form and style by Turkic military traditions. This demonstrates that Turkic military culture found its place not only in steppe regions but also within urban civilizations.

Literature Review

Based on information from such written sources, researchers conclude that the founders of the Khaganate were closely associated with blacksmithing, which enabled them to acquire advanced technical skills in weapon production. This, in turn, gave them a significant military advantage over other peoples. In other words, the ancient Turks not only used iron effectively, but also demonstrated great mastery in producing durable and lightweight weapons such as swords, daggers, armor, and helmets.

Archaeological research conducted in Southern Siberia, Altai, and Mongolia further confirms this theory. In particular, the burial of a warrior discovered in the Balik Sook burial mound in the Altai region serves as a clear example. Among the findings were finely crafted swords, helmets, daggers, bows, arrows, and armor made of iron and silver, all produced with precise proportions. Their lightness and durability ensured mobility during combat.

From the above information, it is evident that the ancient Turks possessed advanced weapon-making technologies for their time, had well-developed military traditions, and actively used various types of weapons in their battle strategies. They skillfully employed not only defensive but also offensive weapons. In particular, alongside close-combat weapons such as spears and swords, they effectively used ranged weapons like bows and arrows, demonstrating a balanced approach in their military tactics.

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Moreover, the presence of horn-like or special acoustic elements in the structure of some weapons indicates that they were designed not only for practical use but also for psychological impact. Sound-producing bows and arrows may have been used to intimidate enemies. From this perspective, it can be understood that the Turks valued weapons not only as tools of military efficiency but also as means of achieving psychological superiority.

So, what kinds of weapons did the army of the Turkic Khaganate possess, and what information about them is found in written sources? One of the most prominent scholars of the Turkic world and an outstanding linguist of the 11th century, Mahmud Kashgari, provided reliable information about the weaponry of that period in his work *"Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk."*

In this work, the term "tulum" appears with a broad semantic scope. Primarily, it referred to a general set of weapons, but it was also used to denote "battle attire and military equipment." This indicates that the concept of "tulum" encompassed not just a specific type of weapon, but the entire material system of warfare preparation.

This term is also found in another important source of the same period, *"Kutadgu Bilig."* In this text as well, "tulum" is used in the sense of weapons and military equipment, confirming its firm place in the ancient Turkic military-political lexicon.

The Turkic army consisted of fully armed cavalry. Both the mounted warrior and his warhorse were protected with iron coverings and leather armor. The warrior wore armor covering his chest, back, arms, and legs, as well as a helmet protecting his head and neck. The horse was covered with protective gear shielding its neck, chest, sides, and back, while its muzzle was protected with an iron mask. Fragments of such armor have been found in burial mounds. Rock carvings also depict riders wearing full armor. These cavalry units fought in tight formations. When approaching the enemy, the ancient Turks would first shower them with arrows, then attack with spears, and finally engage in close combat using swords and axes.

In short, the ancient Turkic army consisted of professional, specially trained warriors.

The military weapons of the army of the Turkic Khaganate were designed for two types of warfare: first, ranged combat weapons intended for fighting from a distance, and second, weapons for close and hand-to-hand combat.

1. Ranged Combat Weapons

At the beginning of the early Middle Ages, the main types of weapons used by ancient Turkic warriors to defeat the enemy from a distance were composite bows reinforced with bone and horn plates, and iron-tipped arrows. In ancient times, bows and arrows were considered hunting tools in all societies. First, it is appropriate to focus on bows.

Analysis and Results

Bows

Among long-range weapons of the ancient world, the "Scythian bow," created at the end of the Bronze Age, stands out in particular. Historical sources highly praised the marksmanship of the Scythians who lived along the Yaksart (Syr Darya). This bow, which had a complex structure, consisted of several wooden parts: its tips and central grip were rigid, while its limbs were flexible. Compact in size (60–80 cm), the arrows used with it did not exceed 80 cm either. The Scythian bow was one of the most favored weapons among nomadic tribes.

The primary weapon of ancient Turkic warriors for long-distance combat was a complex bow with a wooden base reinforced by overlays of animal horn. Arrows consisted of a wooden shaft, a bone nock for holding the bowstring, and an iron tip. Arrowheads varied in type: three-bladed heads for striking larger areas of the body, perforated heads for causing severe wounds, and pointed heads for piercing enemy armor. Some arrowheads were equipped with bone whistles that produced noise during flight to frighten enemy horses. Warriors carried arrows in quivers made of birch bark, and bows in leather cases, both of which were hung on their belts. These items are often depicted in stone and bone carvings, although only bow grips, arrowheads, and occasionally quivers have been preserved in burial mounds. Iron spearheads have also been discovered. Images show that they had long wooden shafts (2.5–4 meters).

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According to archaeological excavations and rock carvings, ancient Turkic warriors in the Tien Shan region were armed with composite bows made of several glued wooden parts, equipped with bone or horn grips. Based on the number and placement of the grips, military historians have classified these bows into several types.

The first type of bow had end and central side plates and was identified in the Altai mountainous region at sites such as Kudyrge, Katanda, Kurota, Tuekta, Aymirlyg, as well as Kokel and Mongun-Taiga in Tuva. Their length was usually around 134–148 cm, and some central plates were decorated with ornaments or images.

The second type of bow was characterized by one end and two central side plates. Examples of this type were found at the Argaliqti and Kokel sites in Tuva, with an approximate length of 146 cm. Their end plates had grooves for the string.

The third type had one end and one central side plate and was discovered at the Katanda site in Altai. These bows featured an additional thin overlay in the central part.

The fourth type was distinguished by the attachment of the bow ends to the grip and the presence of counter plates. Such bows were found at the Borotal and Yakonur sites in the Altai region and were highly flexible.

The fifth type had central side and counter plates; its only example was identified at the Uzuntol site in Altai and lacked end plates.

The sixth type was limited to central side and counter plates and was found at the Argaliqti and Aymirlyg sites in Tuva. This type was the most widespread among Turkic-speaking nomads in the 7th–9th centuries.

The seventh type had only central side plates and was found in the Altai and Tuva regions, particularly at the Qural site, with arrows approximately 110 cm long.

The widespread use of this type of weapon among ancient Turks is reflected in written sources and visual art. According to the Chinese chronicle *Xin Tang Shu*, ancient Turks “used horn bows as weapons” and “were skilled at shooting arrows while riding.” Engravings from the Kudyrge site in Altai depict Turkic horsemen shooting arrows from composite bows at full gallop.

In general, the evolution of ancient Turkic bows has been studied in specialized literature. Among them are the works of A.A. Gavrilova, D.G. Savinov, S.I. Vainshtein, and L.R. Kyzlasov. Gavrilova dated the first type of bows to the 4th–5th centuries, the second and third types to the 6th–7th centuries, and others to the 7th–10th centuries. Savinov noted that in the second half of the first millennium, the first (“Hun”), third (“Uyghur”), and seventh (“Turkic”) types coexisted, while the fifth type, associated with various ethnic groups such as the Kyrgyz, Quriqans, and Teles, was also widespread.

However, all researchers agree that the origin of ancient Turkic bows traces back to the Hun bows, characterized by paired end and central plates, as well as side and front plates. Indeed, Hun bows have been identified in sites from the first half of the first millennium in the Sayan-Altai region.

If we consider the territories under the Western Turkic Khaganate—such as Choch, Fergana, Ustrushana, Sogd, Tokharistan, and Khorezm—in the 6th–8th centuries, it is also important to examine military equipment.

Weapons discovered in a temple located in the first shahristan of Kharashkat (Kanka site), the capital of Choch during the early Middle Ages, were classified by G.I. Bogomolov into three groups:

1. arrowheads and other objects thrown into sacrificial fire;
2. military gifts such as swords and armor hung on temple walls;
3. traces of military conflict during an attack on the city (a killed warrior and camel, and an arrow embedded in a burnt piece of wood).

The bow and arrow were the main long-range weapons and an essential part of armament for both nomadic and urban populations in the Choch region. The intensification of military

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conflicts and improvements in armor required enhancing the combat effectiveness of bows and developing various types of arrowheads for different purposes.

Some parts of the discovered bow are missing, suggesting that a broken or damaged bow may have been placed in the grave. Nevertheless, based on the preserved parts, it is possible to reconstruct the bow from Munchoqtepa. It is very similar to the bow found at the Karabulak site in the Fergana region, both in structure and in the number of bone and wooden overlays. In both cases, numerous bone plates were attached to a wooden base.

However, there are also certain differences. For instance, the length of the lateral and central bone reinforcements found at Munchoqtepa (up to 22 cm) is shorter compared to those from Qorabuloq (up to 26 cm). This indicates that the bow from Munchoqtepa was smaller than that of Qorabuloq. According to researchers, the length of the Qorabuloq bow ranged between 140–165 cm. Taking this into account, it can be concluded that the approximate length of the Munchoqtepa bow was around 120–140 cm.

Alongside the bows, combat arrows as well as wooden and reed shafts of arrows were also discovered. In total, six iron arrowheads were identified, which are classified into triangular, quadrangular, and three-bladed types (Fig. 148: 1–5). Six wooden and reed shafts corresponding to these arrowheads were also found. Their good state of preservation made it possible to fully reconstruct the Munchoqtepa bow and arrow set. In addition, seven samples of the wooden “tail” (fletching base) parts of the arrows were identified.

Among the Turks, various types of three-bladed arrowheads were widely used. All of them were intended for shooting lightly armed enemies. Later, two- and four-bladed, as well as flat arrowheads, also appeared. Arrowheads were sometimes made of bone; however, such examples are quite rare. Most arrows were made of iron, and bone was likely used only in regions where iron was scarce. For long-distance combat, Turkic archers used arrows with three-bladed or flat tips made of iron or bone.

Mahmud al-Kashgari, in his dictionary, cites the following ancient verse about an arrowhead:

“The iron of the arrow wounds my hand, staining it with blood.
I was passing through grasses grown by the waters of springs.”

In the early Middle Ages, the Western Turks and the Türgesh used various types of iron arrowheads. Ancient Turkic archers used arrows designed to strike both lightly armed and armored opponents, engaging enemies from a distance. These included arrows with two, three, and four blades, as well as flat-tipped arrows. Armor-piercing arrowheads were crafted in triangular, pointed triangular, quadrangular, rhombic, and rounded shapes.

The wide variety of arrow forms indicates a high level of military development. For example, in one of the ancient Turkic burial mounds in the Tien Shan, dozens of iron arrowheads with different cross-sections and blade shapes were discovered. In their classification, these arrowheads were divided into four main groups based on cross-section and blade form, with each group containing several types. Among the arrows intended for striking enemies not protected by metal armor, three-bladed arrowheads stand out in particular. These include elongated rhombic, elongated hexagonal, elongated pentagonal, and elongated triangular forms.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Three-bladed iron arrowheads were widely распространены (widely used) among the nomadic cultures of Central Asia during the Xiongnu–Sarmatian period. In the first half of the 1st millennium CE, such arrowheads in the Tien Shan region formed an essential part of the combat equipment of warriors belonging to the Kenkol culture. In the early Middle Ages, they became the primary means of defeating the enemy in long-range combat among many nomadic peoples, including the ancient Turks.

Triangular, finned-section arrowheads were distinguished by their excellent ballistic properties, high efficiency, long flight range, and accuracy in hitting targets. Such arrows dominated among long-range weapons used by the ancient Turks. Eastern Turkic weaponry included ten types of trihedral arrowheads, among which the most common were elongated

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hexagonal and elongated pentagonal forms. Similar arrowheads were also found in the sets of Western Turks and the Turgesh; however, they preferred arrows with elongated rhomboid-shaped heads.

In general, the shape and typology of the discovered arrowheads clearly demonstrate the advanced development of military practices within the Turkic Khaganate and its territories. They reflect the creation of weapons adapted to various combat tasks, as well as the strong influence of the broader Eurasian nomadic military culture alongside local traditions.