

Tactics of the Peoples of Central Asia in the Middle Ages

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Kalit so'zlar:

cavalry tactics of conducting fight of the people of the Central Asia, nomads ring-shaped order for conducting archer fighting on an middle and small distance, attack with feigned retreat and ambushes, «demountable fight»

Annotatsiya

In this article discloses tactical techniques at fight conducting in the horse order of nomads of Dashti Kipchak at the end of XV-XVI centuries, as well as given the short analysis of army formation of the people of Central Asia

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The military art of the peoples of Central Asia of the late Middle Ages and early modern times traditionally attracts the attention of domestic and foreign arms, archeologists and military historians. Increased interest in this topic is due to the specifics of the evolution of armaments and the military business of nomads (steppe people) in the final period of the existence of the nomadic world as an independent historical phenomenon. During the XV - first half of the XVIII century. Nomads of the peoples of Central Asia, on the one hand, continued to develop and improve the military techniques of their predecessors of the early and developed middle Ages, and on the other, actively assimilated the innovative elements of the military affairs of settled-agricultural peoples.

Particular interest in this issue is the theme of the evolution of the tactics of fighting in the fifteenth and mid-eighteenth centuries, which most clearly records the transformation of the traditional military affairs of nomads in the changing military and political conditions of the New Times.

The origin and evolution of the cavalry tactics of fighting the peoples of Central Asia is of particular interest to military historians, studying military art.

In this paper, the main tactical techniques of the steppe peoples of Central Asia of the late 15th and 18th centuries are analyzed and outlines the main directions of the evolution of cavalry tactics in the subsequent historical period.

Complex analysis of sources allows us to reconstruct the main tactical methods when conducting combat in the cavalry system, and also to trace their evolution throughout the period under review. The core of the study is information relating to the military art of the nomads of the Eastern Dasht-i Kipchak, that is,

the nomadic Uzbeks of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. And Kazakhs of the XV-XVI centuries. The main tactical methods of conducting cavalry combat by the nomads Dasht-i Kipchak of the late Middle Ages and early modern times are considered.

«**Round dance**». The original ring-shaped system of nomads for conducting a battle at medium and short distances (Figure 1; 2 A).

This military-historical phenomenon was first analyzed in detail by M.V. Gorelik in an article on the military affairs of the Tatar-Mongols¹. The most detailed description of the «round dance» of the first half of the 16th century, written down with the words of Russian soldiers, left the ambassador in Muscovy S. Gerbershtein: «When the Tatars have to fight in the open plain, and the enemies are away from them at a distance of the arrow's flight, they enter into battle not in line, but they bend the army and rush around in a circle, so that it will be more accurate and more convenient to shoot at the enemy». Thus in a circle the advancing and retreating are observed an amazing order.

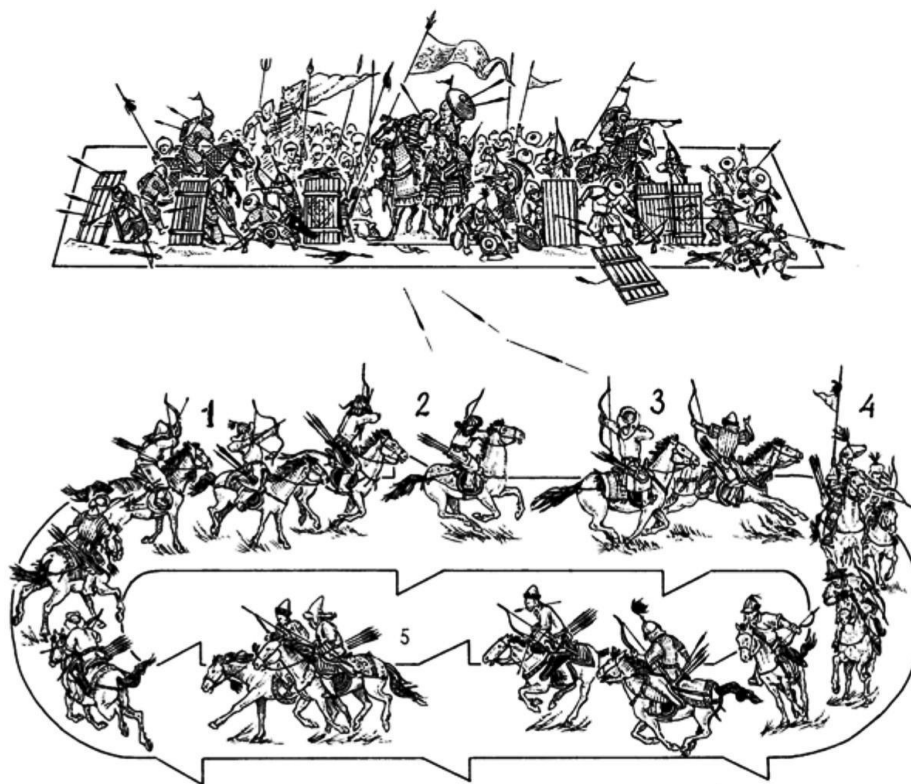


Fig. 1. «Round dance» of mounted archers, XVI century.

1. Shooting from the left to the forward position; 2. Shooting from the position to the left sideways; 3. Shooting from the position to the left back; 4. The commander of a group of mounted archers («counselor») stops the attempt to break the system; 5. During the movement on the outer side of the ring of "round dance", the riders adjust the equipment and remove the arrows from the quiver.

¹ Gorelik M.V. Steppe battle (from the history of the military affairs of the Tatar Mongols) // Military science of the ancient and medieval population of North and Central Asia. Novosibirsk, 1990. P. 155-160.

The truth is that they have experienced counselors in their affairs, for which they follow. But if these leaders die from enemy arrows, or if they suddenly become afraid of the fear of observing the system, then the whole army is seized with such confusion that they are no longer able to return to order and shoot at the enemy. This way of fighting for, similarity is called «dancing» (That is, «round dance»). They lead a «dance», as they call it the Muscovites; «The commander or counselor approaches his detachment to the enemy's army and, shooting arrows, drives off; Behind him is another detachment, and thus one unit after another, until the first one returns again after the last one. If they manage to arrange the case like this, then the advantage is on their side, but if the commanders in front of the detachments perish or become shy, they quickly become confused»².

Probably the same tactical reception performed by Dasht-i Kipchak warriors in the early 16th century. Described by Z. Babur: «Here is another way of attack: front and rear, beks and nukers, all together rush to the full breath, shooting arrows; They also do not retreat in disorder and skip back at full speed»³.

Thus, the «round dance» was a closed (probably elongated along the enemy system) ring of mounted archers, striking their enemies with arrows at full gallop (Fig. 1, 2 A). Given the speed of archery, it can be said with a high degree of certainty that the steppe warrior, sweeping along the enemy's structure, released not one but 2-3 or more arrows for the enemy. Of particular importance was the fact that each archer could choose for himself the most convenient distance and position for shooting: «left-forward» (Figure 1, 1), «left-sideways» (Figures 1, 2), «left- Back» (Fig. 1, 3). For the same reason, the rotating ring of riders could not be wide. In order not to interfere with each other's aim and shoot, the horsemen had to move in one or, at most, in two rows⁴. Despite the seeming simplicity, this tactical technique was quite complex in execution, requiring archers of high accuracy of movements, coordination and discipline, so the soldiers participating in the «dance» were divided into separate small detachments (dozens), Headed by «leaders» who know exactly the position of their unit in the ranks.

Along with the basic version of the «round dance», when the ring of archers was spinning directly in front of the enemy's structure, one can assume the presence in the military practice of nomads of a large (external) «round dance», when a chain of mounted archers covered the construction of the enemy from all sides, encasing him in a ring. This version of the «round dance» made it possible to further strengthen the effectiveness of the light battle, since the riders did not make a forced pause in the shooting while passing the outer arc of the ring (Figure 1).

However, this variant of the «round dance» carried additional risks, since the soldiers on one side could not know what was happening on the other side of the construction, closed from their eyes by rows of enemy soldiers.

The main task of the «round dance» was to inflict maximum damage to the enemy in a remote battle. The original system of sweeping mounted archers made it possible to provide a continuous «rain of arrows», which chroniclers of sedentary-agricultural peoples wrote with shudder (Fig. 2A).

Thanks to the fact that the steppe generals unrolled the ring of mounted archers in the immediate vicinity from the enemy's system, the shooting was fought from a minimum distance and led to monstrous losses among the defending soldiers and their fighting horses. The deadly «downpour» literally mowed the

² Gerberstein S. Notes on Muscovy. M., 1988. P. 168.

³ Babur Nama. Notes of Babur. Tashkent: Academy of Sciences of the Uzbek SSR, 1958. P. 107.

⁴ Otherwise, shooting from the inner rows of the «round dance» could only be hinged.

enemy's construction, made him panic, provoked an unprepared attack, or fled. The more passively the enemy troops behaved, the more there was in their ranks infantry, equipped with only a melee weapon, the greater the danger for them was the «round dance».

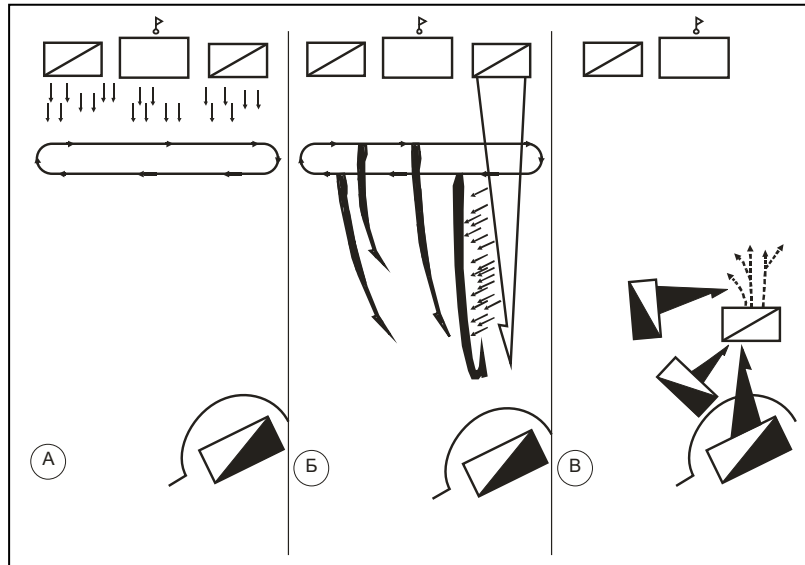


Fig. 2. Tactical methods of the nomads Dasht-i Kipchak at the end of the XV-XVI centuries:
 A – «round dance» of mounted archers. Shelling of enemy constructions; B - attack of enemy cavalry, feigned retreat of the riders of the «round dance» with the conduct of a fierce attack on the pursuers; B - counterattack of nomads with the participation of the ambush regiment.

However, even the presence of in the infantry formation of a number of archers and crossbowmen did not solve the problem, since the frequency of firing rushing along the line and quickly replacing each other mounted archers was significantly higher than the infantry shooters who were yet to recharge their crossbows. In the case of a counterattack of the heavy cavalry of the enemy, the archers who formed the «round dance» could sharply turn the horses and, taking advantage of in speed, away from the enemy (Figure 2 B). At the same time, they continued to hit the pursuing warriors and their horses with arrows from the «left backward» position and often wound them into the impact of ambush squads (Figure 2 B). Modern researchers, as a rule, speak about this nomadic system exclusively in an excellent degree. However, noting the undoubted effectiveness of the «round dance», it is necessary to point out the weaknesses of this construction. These include the vulnerability of the «round dance» to the unexpected and rapid counterattack of the enemy, conducted by large masses of cavalry, as well as

the uncontrollability of the ring of archers in case of death or mistakes of «leaders».

Attack with feigned retreat and ambush. This tactical technique was a provocative attack followed by a controlled (feigned) retreat (accompanied by a firing on the pursuers), ending with a massive counterblow (Fig. 2B, B). Throughout the era of the late Middle Ages and early modern times, this tactic was actively used by the nomadic peoples of Central Asia. Its most detailed description in the first half of the XVI century. S. Gerberstein: «The battle with the enemy from afar (firing arrows) and fight very bravely, although they (Tatars) do not stand for long, but turn the arrows into a feigned escape. When the enemy begins to pursue them, then (at the first opportunity) the Tatars launch back arrows into them (causing great damage to them ...); Then, suddenly turning the horses, they again rush to the upset rows enemies»⁵.

Thus, the essence of this tactical method was to disrupt the enemy's fighting orders by shooting with fire, to provoke him to an unprepared attack, to inflict maximum losses during the «controlled flight» (hitting the enemy with arrows from the left-back position) and, finally, structure and stretched pursuers. To effectively use this method, the steppe people had to attack the enemy in a stretched, shallow formation, so as not to interfere with each other during the subsequent «flight».

Quite often an integral part of the pretended retreat was ambush, which was a reserve, hidden from the enemy's eyes, which served to enhance the effect of an unexpected counterattack against the pursuers. Ambush could also be the main component of tactical reception. In this case, the main part of the troops was placed in an ambush, and a small detachment (the avant-garde) provoked an enemy attack, bringing it under attack of the main forces of the steppe inhabitants.

Tactical technique, which included an attack on the enemy, feigned retreat and ambushes, was applied by nomads of Central Asia and later.

Pretended retreat and ambushes are among the traditional tactical methods of nomads. They were extremely popular already in the era of Antiquity, the early and developed Middle Ages. Especially often and with tremendous effect it was applied by the steppe commanders of the Great Mongol invasion⁶. Most often on the tricks of the steppe came across the troops of sedentary-agricultural peoples. It was much more difficult to deceive and bring under the blow the fresh forces of the nomadic neighbors, experienced in the art of the steppe war. It should not be forgotten that the tactics of controlled retreat and ambushes also had its weak points. If the enemy began a massive pursuit of large forces of fresh cavalry, the feigned retreat could develop into a real flight. As for the ambushes, the effect of their use could be leveled if the enemy has a strong equestrian reserve capable of reversing the course of the battle (see above).

«Launch» with cold steel and «removable fight». Attack with the use of melee weapons in order to break through the enemy's constructions. If the three tactics described above were based on the massive use of bow and arrow, the main content of the «the saber-fence» was a melee («removable fight»). The first method is typical for the military art of the nomads of the Eastern Dasht-i Kipchak second half XV-XVI centuries. It represented the logical conclusion of a massive beam attack conducted in the framework of «round dance», «Tulgama» or feigned retreat. After the enemy suffered significant losses, and the ranks of enemy soldiers mingled under a hail of arrows, they were attacked by riders armed with cold weapons. In the XV-XVI centuries in such an attack usually involved only

⁵ Gerberstein S. Notes on Muscovy. M., 1988. P. 168.

⁶ Gorelik M.V. Pointed composition. P. 155-160.

horsebacks, which for this purpose were reduced to special shock detachments. Judging from the written sources, most of the shells at the time of the attack operated long-liners.

Very popular were clubs and maces. Part of the warriors fought battle axes, spears and knives. At the same time at any time the shell could change the melee weapon to the bow and arrows. Due to representatives of the steppe military and the political elite, the Central Asian chroniclers paid disproportionate attention to this tactical device in their works. The attacking detachment of the shells was compared (because of the glitter of the armor) with the Nile River, the «iron sea» or the «iron mountain», and under the hoofs of the horses the soldiers allegedly bent the ground: «From the clusters of clad in the iron riders the earth acquired the property of a magnet. The waves went through the air reflected from the armor, the earth was submerged under the load of iron ... Then, when the sahibikran rushed forward, the enemy set out for flight before his sharp sword. They scattered like ants under the feet of an elephant, they became straw on the surface of the Nile River. «Such magnificent descriptions should not mislead the modern reader. Warriors, equipped with metal defensive weapons, in the troops of nomads Dasht-i Kipchak late XV-XVI centuries. There were few, so the number of shock armor units rarely exceeded several tens or hundreds of riders.

Independently to defeat the numerous mounted archers of the enemy such a detachment could not, but it was quite suitable for drawing the final blow against the demoralized enemy. During the attack, both dense woolen and sparse structures were used, and during the «demountable battle» the battle often broke up into many fights.

Throughout many centuries strike spears and peaks played an important role in a complex of arms of nomads of this region. However during an early epoch and developed Middle Ages long javelin shaft weapon was applied mainly armoured horse warriors while light armed nomads used spears only incidentally. The situation has essentially changed during an epoch of the late Middle Ages and early New time. In XVI-XVII centuries Mongolian and ojrat warlords, aspiring to strengthen attacking power of the cavalries, have started to supply in large quantities with spears and peaks not only armour-clad warriors, but unprotected archers. Finally, it has led to appearance of a new version of the cavalry that consist of light armed spears warriors⁷.

The fusion of hundreds and thousands of spearmen literally took the enemy from the battlefield. As the military conflicts of the XVII - XVIII centuries showed, the decision to equip equestrian shooters with long-arm weapons, for all its simplicity, proved to be very effective. Light lancecarriers were mobile, stable in close combat, could quickly attack, overturn and pursue the enemy's mounted archers.

It is not surprising that many steppe peoples, having experienced the power of spearhead Oirat attacks, hurried to follow the example of their Mongol-speaking neighbors. One of the first to adopt a new tactical device was the nomads of Central Asia.

Evolution of the equestrian fight of nomads in Central Asia at the end of XV-XVI centuries. For most of the period under review the arming of the nomads Dasht-i Kipchak was dominated by the saadak (arch), and the main method of fighting was a remote battle using bow and arrows. It is characteristic that for the designation of the word «warrior», the Central Asian authors of the 16th century Used the term «quiver». So, for example, when Khan Burunduk sent out an order: «Sit on

⁷ Bobrov LA, Khudyakov Yu.S. Arms and tactics of nomads of Central Asia and Southern Siberia in the late Middle Ages and New Times (XV - first half of the XVIII century). St. Petersburg: Faculty of Philology and Arts of St. Petersburg State University, 2008. P. 538, 567; Bobrov LA, Borisenko A.Yu., Khudyakov Yu.S. The interaction of the Turkic and Mongolian peoples with the Russians in Siberia in military affairs in the late Middle Ages and New Times: Allowance. Novosibirsk: Novosib. State. Univ., 2010. P. 126-129, 166.

the horses for a raid,» then «four hundred thousand quivers» responded to his call⁸. In many respects, thanks to the skilful use of light cavalry and the corresponding tactical techniques («round dance», «Tulgama», etc.), nomadic people won brilliant victories over Timurid armies in field battles.

Peculiarity of the tactical art of nomads Dasht-i Kipchak XV-XVI centuries. was the division of the army on the battlefield into several parts (the «regiments»). The simplest unfolded construction was a three-part system consisting of a «center» and a pair of «wings» (Figure 3A). Judging by the descriptions, it was usually used when the number of soldiers did not exceed several hundred horsemen. So, for example, he used Mohammed Sheibani Khan in battle with the army Burunduk Khan: «At that time there were no more than three hundred people under the Khan, but in spite of this he immediately set up the center, the right and left wing of the army, and put the ranks in order».

In the second option of the construction, the rear guard was added to the center and the wings, («ambush»): «Both troops became face to face. When the order set up an ambush, the center and wings, the dust from the copies rose from the battlefield».

In practice, the rearguard of the steppe army was a reserve that could be hidden from the enemy's eyes (actually, an ambush), but could and located immediately after the center of the army (Figure 3 B). Such a reserve was often allocated even with the presence of the steppe commander only a few hundred soldiers. In some cases, the rear guard could consist of reserve and ambush.

In the third option of the construction, the vanguard was added to the center, flanks and the reserve (Fig. 3B). Interestingly, even at the end of the XVI century the nomads this option of building troops for the military practice use according of the Genghis Khan epoch: «In accordance with the way it was accepted by Genghis Khan, they identified the right wing, the left wing, the center, the rear guard and the part that should be in ambush»⁹.

In modern scientific literature, the opinion has taken root that the vanguard of the nomadic army consisted exclusively of lightly armed archers, the tasks of which were only to tie the fight and retreat to the main positions, dragging the enemy behind him and bringing him under the blow of the flanks and the center of the army.

However, in written sources of the XVI century. It is emphasized that the vanguard of the steppe army was formed from a select «squad of brave men and bakhadurs», while in the armies of Timurid Z. Babur, the best fighters of his army were all attributed to the vanguard, «all yigits (fighters) who saw battle and were cut with a sword».

⁸ Klyashtorny SG, Sultanov TI Kazakhstan ... C. 340. Similar examples can be given concerning the soldiers of Central Asia and Southern Siberia. For example, kyshtyms of the Yenisei Kyrgyz were often referred to as «bows», and Oirat and Mongolian horsemen as «shells» («hujag»). (Bobrov LA, Khudyakov Yu.S. Arms and tactics of nomads ... P. 363, 640).

⁹ Hafiz-i Tanysh ibn Mir Muhammad Bukhari. Sharaf-nama-yi shahi (Book of Shah's Glory). Part 1. Moscow: Nauka, 1983. P. 235.

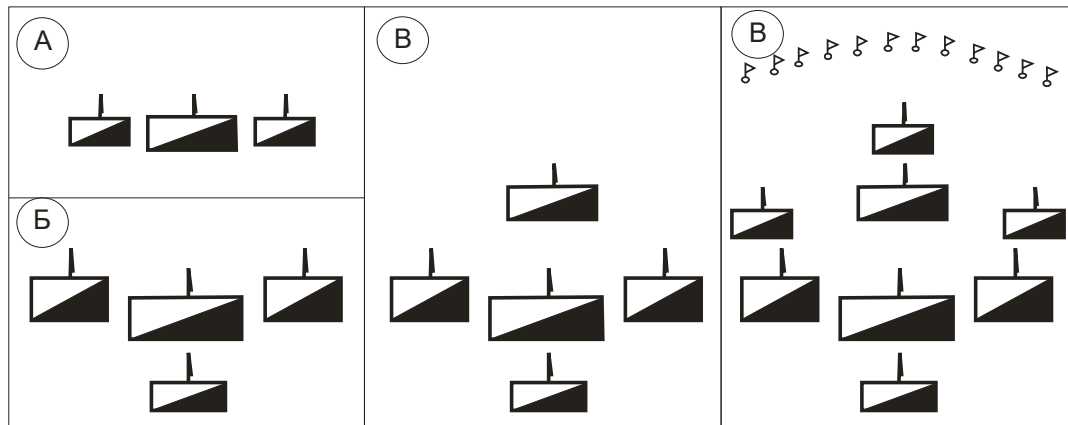


Fig. 3. The troops building options of nomads Dasht-i Kipchak XVI century:

A is a construction from the center («Orta»), the left («Sol kol», «Myssara») and the right flank («on kol», «Maimane»); B - construction from the center, the left («Sol kol») and the right flank («on kol»), reserves / ambushes («butirma»); B - construction from the center, left and right flank, reserve / ambush and vanguard («alginshi», «mangalay»); D - construction from the center, left and right flank, reserve / ambush, left-flank and right flank guard («Sol kol», «on kanat»), two-part vanguard («karaul» and «ertaul»), skirmishers.

Finally, the most fractional construction of the steppe armies draws in description the battles of the armies of Mohammed Sheibani Khan and Mahmud-sultan (the second son of the Džhanibek Khan) on the Sogunluk pass: «Both huge forces came together from all sides to the Sogunluk pass. Build against the order, like mountains, from both sides, sent forward guard from both troops. In each army, the right and left hands, the place of the ambush, the center, the wings were precisely installed».

Thus, in this system, each flank consisted of two parts – «hands» and «wing». Most likely, we are talking about the presence in the construction of «kanbula» - a special detachment, which was a flank guard and used to prevent the enemy from reaching the army's wing. «Kanbulos» were widely used by Timur and proved themselves well during the battles with the steppe armies of Tokhtamysh.

Thus, in conclusion it should be notice that the tactics of the nomadic people of the Middle Ages changed and developed under the influence of changes in the composition of the tribal detachments, the methods of their manning, the improvement of armament. A great place in the tactics was assigned to maneuvering by units and divisions before the battle, the art of the most complete use of the capabilities of the throwing and cold weapons (bow, spears, swords, etc.), and with the appearance of gunpowder - firearms.