

## MILITARY TRAINING AND EXERCISES IN THE BUKHARA KHANATE

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**Abstract.** This article explores the military training and exercises conducted in the Bukhara Khanate based on historical sources and scholarly literature.

**Keywords:** soldier, training, skill, hunting, combat, archers, Abdullah Khan, rulers, weapons, bow and arrow, sword, mace, daggers, crescent axes, battle axes, armor, helmets, shields, Astrakhan, commander, Genghis Khan.

During the period of the Bukhara Khanate, as in earlier times, special attention was given to conducting military exercises through hunting (shikar). This activity held significant value in the lives of nomadic peoples and was referred to by Genghis Khan as a "school of war" [2]. Animal hunting served as a form of military preparedness. During hunts, soldiers were required to march in formation and surround the game according to established rules. Commanders and soldiers were encouraged to spend their leisure time hunting — not merely for sport, but as a way to keep the troops in combat readiness, improve their marksmanship, and harden them for difficult conditions. Selecting and supplying the appropriate weapons suited to the nature of the terrain, as well as organizing the left and right wings and the central position (the qalb), was the duty of the official holding the position of qushchi [1].

Depending on whether the hunt lasted one, two, or three months, the hunting ring was carefully arranged. The animals were driven toward the center of the circle, and no animal was allowed to escape [2]. Inside the ring, the Khan would hunt first, then ascend a hill to observe the princes, emirs, and the army as they conducted the hunt. These specially organized hunting circles were called charga [3].

The Abdullanoma recounts that Iskandar Khan (1561–1583) would, without fail, go bird hunting every day after the morning prayer with his personal guards to a distance of one farsakh from Bukhara [4]. Abdullah Khan also held hunting expeditions annually in the winter and early spring in favorable regions [5], most often in Qarshi. Muhammad Shaybani and Ubaydullah Khan also frequently used the areas of Kasbi or Qarshi [6] as winter camps or “qishlamishiy” before their campaigns toward Khorasan and organized hunts there.

Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur emphasized the area's suitability for hunting, noting the abundance of birds called qilquyruq, and the ability to hold regular hunts in all four seasons [3]. Bird hunting helped sharpen the skills of archers, enabling them to better aim at specific targets.

In conclusion, the army of the Bukhara Khanate was not haphazardly assembled, nor did any passerby serve as a soldier. From the highest commander to the ordinary soldier, sapper, or

oarsman — all underwent special military training and were kept in constant combat readiness. Regularly organized hunts served to maintain fighting spirit and test certain types of weaponry.

Hunting served not only as a military drill to keep troops in readiness but also functioned as a means of food supply when necessary. Rulers took the provision of their armies seriously and considered it one of the most important military responsibilities. Any shortcomings in supply led to a decrease in the number and effectiveness of the army.

One key aspect of military affairs is the successful conduct of various levels of battles, skirmishes, and major wars. The types and quality of weapons, along with skillful use, played a vital role. As in other states and dynasties of the past, the Shaybanid era gave serious attention to the provision of arms. Victory in war often depended on the variety and quality of weaponry. The diversity of military equipment often determined the winning side. An abundance of weapons reflected both a strong military industry and deep knowledge of maneuvering during combat.

The weaponry used by soldiers was an indicator of the economic, social, and cultural development of the state and society to which they belonged. These weapons were produced and supplied mainly by artisan workshops. In the 16th century, cities like Samarkand, Bukhara, Tashkent, Kesh, and Qarshi were major centers of craftsmanship. Artisans made up a significant portion of the population in these cities, and some specialized in arms production. Samarkand, the initial capital of the Shaybanid state, saw significant growth in arms manufacturing during the first half of the 16th century. Weapons such as swords, daggers, crescent axes, battle axes, armor, helmets, and shields were produced for the army.

After the rise of the Shaybanids, nomadic military elements began to dominate the army structure, as they formed its core. Cavalry forces were required to arrive armed. Chroniclers from both the Timurid and Shaybanid sides, who described early 16th-century conflicts, did not note significant differences in weaponry between the two armies. Both forces used bows and arrows, swords, maces (shashpar), ox-headed maces (govsar), daggers, spears, axes, cannons, firearms, and round shields (tora). Body protection included armor, helmets, and chainmail.

Weaponsmiths typically specialized in a particular type of weapon, and their workshops were often located within market rows. In Bukhara and Samarkand, specialized bazaars for armorers, fletchers, bowmakers, and other craftsmen existed.

Until the early 16th century, Samarkand was the primary center for arms manufacturing. Swords, blades, knives, various types of bows and arrows, and spears were crafted there for sale or custom orders. After the capital was moved to Bukhara in the second quarter of the 16th century, weaponsmiths gathered there. The majority of the army's weaponry was subsequently produced in Bukhara. One source notes that, during Abdullah Khan ibn Iskandar's campaign, a large quantity of arms was transported from Bukhara for his army [5].

Weapons manufactured in Transoxiana cities or imported from abroad were often known by their place of origin. For example, Zahiriddin Babur mentions a "Qalmaq" (Kalmyk) armor [3]. Other sources refer to Derbend weaponry, Mongol shields and armor, saddles made

from yellow shagreen, Indian spears and swords, Circassian swords, and cube-shaped explosives [4]. The 1661 order by the Russian Tsar to find “the best Circassian armorers” in Astrakhan and the mention of Khorasani swords among gifts to the Khan of Bukhara [8] support these references. According to a list preserved in the State Museum of the History of Uzbekistan, weapons were the third most exported item from Russia to Central Asia in the 16th century (after leather and furs), and the fourth most imported item (after textiles, fabrics, and dyes) [9].

Swords played a crucial role in warfare. Babur considered them superior to all other weapons of his time and described them as follows: “The shashpar, club, kestan, battle axe (tabarzin), and regular axe strike only one spot; but a sword, when it strikes, cuts from head to toe” [3]. According to Fazlullah ibn Ruzbihan, Babur always carried a sword and shield [10]. Nearly all of the Bukhara army was equipped with swords and daggers. The swords were curved and their length matched the height of the wielder’s waist [3]. Hafiz Tanish Bukhari notes that most of Abdullah Khan ibn Iskandar’s soldiers were armed with Yemeni swords [4].

Battle axes were also widely used in close combat. The Tarikh-i Guzida-yi Nusrat-nama records that Shaybani Khan ordered his son, Muhammad Timur, to take a battle axe and fight the enemy [11]. These axes were also used during sieges to break castle gates [5]. Known as tabarzin, battle axes differed from regular ones in their longer handles.

Spears were another essential weapon in the army. Over time, their shapes evolved and improved. They were primarily used in face-to-face combat on open terrain. These spears were taller than a man, with shafts made from birchwood and tips (sinon) made from iron or steel. In the Bukhara army, a type called Khatti spear was widespread. These were long, straight-shafted spears, named after the Khatti region of the Arabian Peninsula, where they originated [5].

Archery weapons — namely bows and arrows — are frequently mentioned in written sources as the primary weapons of the time. These bows had wooden bases with outer layers of sinew and inner layers of polished horn. Sometimes, the handle’s center and ends were covered with bone [8]. These composite weapons, known as hard bows [5], could shoot arrows over long distances. Babur described one of Sultan Husayn’s amirs, Muhammad Sayyid Urus, as having a “hard bow and long arrows” [3].

Various types of bows were used for hunting and combat. Some sources distinguish between the arrows used for each purpose [5]. Archery remained a central method of distance combat in Central Asia even after the introduction of firearms.

Bows and arrows continued to play a significant role in military confrontations even after the widespread adoption of muskets (tufang). For mounted warriors, they remained practical and effective weapons up until the 18th century — and in some cases, even into the 19th century.

In conclusion analyzing the military art of the Shaybanid period enables a deeper understanding of the changing military-political environment in the khanate. It also sheds light on the role and status of administrative-military officials in state governance and military

development, the structure and management of the army, its equipment, supply systems, deployment, and military tactics and strategies. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the development of educational literature. Further studies within this field will allow for broader exploration of the Shaybanid dynasty's role in the history of Uzbek statehood and the region as a whole.

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