

# THE MILITARY FORCE AND ITS STRUCTURE DURING THE KARAKHANIDS PERIOD

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## Abstract

This article analyzes the formation, structure, and development stages of the military system of the Karakhanid State in the 9th–12th centuries. The study examines the composition of the army, hierarchy of military ranks, combat tactics, defensive structures, and the state's military-political strategy. The Karakhanids' military strength was formed through the integration of Turkic nomadic traditions with the military experience of settled regions, as evidenced by historical sources. The article highlights the role of the military system in ensuring state stability and territorial expansion, as well as its significance in the military history of Central Asia.

**Keywords:** Karakhanids, military system, combat tactics, hierarchy, defense, Central Asia.

## Introduction

The state of the Karakhanids, formed in the regions of Movarounnahr and Eastern Turkestan in the IX-XII centuries, is distinguished by important political and military processes in the history of Central Asia. The state administration, territorial expansion and internal stability of this dynasty relied mainly on a strong military system. The formation of the Karakhanid army was the result of a combination of Turkish nomadic military traditions, the needs of a settled city-culture, and the experiences of Islamic state administration. The military discipline, army structure, battle tactics and military-political campaigns used by them show a high level of organization for their time. Therefore, the study of the military system of the Karakhanid state is important not only in understanding the history of the dynasty, but also in understanding the political processes and defense strategies in the Turkic states of that time.

In the third quarter of the 11th century, the political unity of the Karakhanids split into two: the western and eastern khaganites. The Western Khaganate - the Karakhanids who ruled in Movarounnahr (Samarkand, Bukhara, Khuttalan, Chaganiyan) refused to submit to the center and began to practice independent politics. The political center located in the eastern regions (Yettisuv, East Turkestan) was powerless to subjugate them. In the Western Khaganate, the management system that existed during the Somanites period (prime minister, financial affairs, development of official documents of palace affairs, head of guards, correspondence, palace manager, adviser, waqfcar, qazikalon, etc.) was preserved. A specially selected military unit (guard) with the task of ensuring the safety of the supreme ruler was also included in the management system. In addition to the military unit, there was also a military force. Representatives of the Karakhanid dynasty and commanders whose loyalty is not in doubt were appointed to the most important military and administrative posts. In the army management

system, in addition to the chief of the army, there were also military positions such as junior officers (chavush), cavalry captain (hailboshi), centurion, thousandboshi<sup>1</sup>.

The third chapter of the work "Ancient Uyghurs and Karakhanids" by the Uyghur scientist Haji Nurhaji on the issue of the armed forces of the Karakhanids is called "Military forces during the Karakhanids". In writing the work, the author based the work of Mahmud Koshgari's "Devoni Lug'ati Turk" and Yusuf Hos Hajib's "Kutadgu Bilik", and it is written in the work that the Karakhanid dynasty paid close attention to the issue of strengthening the army, leading the nation, and studying the history and laws of war. At the same time, the requirements for the leaders of the military forces were developed. According to the requirements, the commanders were required to be highly disciplined, brave, strong, capable, well-educated and a master of military knowledge, in addition to having a good knowledge of weapons.

In the words of Yusuf Khos Hajib, it is not enough for a military commander to be agile, courageous, experienced, prudent, assertive, courageous, he should learn and know the enemy's situation, be fully aware of the political and military situation, be able to use the forces under his command wisely, know how to choose a good place to deploy the forces, and be kind to them. Qualities such as the ability to convince the troops, to be good-natured and gentle volunteers, to show bravery in war, to be able to use tricks when necessary, and not to sell the interests of the state and subordinates for the sake of the interests of one's family and children were required from the commanders of the army. In this regard, it is written in "Kutadgu bilik" that "a commander should not search for property and collect money. Then he can gather brave young men around him, and they will sacrifice their precious lives in the war. If the commander is proud, he will be defeated by the enemy<sup>2</sup>.

According to the custom of the Karakhanid khagan, the khagan himself or his son was appointed to the position of commander-in-chief. The army was called "water", and the commander-in-chief was called "water head". Every 4,000 people was called "one army", 12,000 people were called "three troops" (big army). It was considered one of the important tasks for the commander-in-chief to be able to choose a convenient place for bringing and dispersing the troops when choosing a residence for himself, i.e. "ordagoh". The Karakhanid dynasty paid close attention to the issue of order and discipline of the troops. Especially in the appointment of commanders, it was necessary to proceed from the qualities mentioned above. According to the laws introduced in the country, the number of the army in regular service was not large during peacetime, but attention was paid to increasing its combat effectiveness. During the war, the size of the army was increased, and after the end of the war, the extra mobilized soldiers were sent home<sup>3</sup>.

The regular army consisted of such units as those protecting fortresses, protecting the khagan (yirtq), attacking the enemy at night (aqichi), observing the internal situation of the enemy

1 Азамат Зиё. Ўзбек давлатчилиги тарихи. –Т.: “Шарқ нашриёти”, 2001. –Б.108-109.

2 Аскарлов А., Мақсудов Ф.А., Пидоев Ш.Р. ва бошқ. Ўзбекистон тарихи. VIII-қисм. –Т.: “Маънавият”, 2023. –Б.161-162.

3 Ўша асар, –Б.338.

(jizak) and capturing enemy people for the purpose of obtaining information (tuktok), guarding at night (bed), and guarding during the day (turgaq)<sup>4</sup>.

The armed forces protect the central army, the regular army at the disposal of the state, the troops belonging to the members of the Karakhanid dynasty, governors (governors) and other high-ranking officials, and the military units under the control of the head of the tribes are divided into tribes. For example, the smallest unit among them was called "otoq", it consisted of 10 people and was placed in one tent, and the head of this part was called "otoqboshi". A person who led several achievements was called a "dreamer". In most cases, 10 units formed a part, and the number of soldiers in it was determined to be no less than 80 people and no more than 100 people. The official who led such a part was called "on otok boshi" and under his care were those who served in the titles of "yuzboshi" and "yuzlar amir boshi".

During the war, the troops were divided into such parts as "right-hand army", "left-hand army", "middle line" and "rear line". They acted in a certain order and in a clearly defined place. Special units were engaged in their food supply, and the good performance of this matter was recognized as the basis of victory<sup>5</sup>.

Karakhanid khagans who showed heroism in the war or achieved a great victory were given the titles of "bugrokhan", "bugro-karakhan" or "tunga-khan", and khagans who served to strengthen the power of the Karakhanid dynasty or actively and victoriously acted in foreign policy, economic and cultural affairs were given the titles "kadir-khan". People who served in public affairs were awarded the title of "kul-bilgaxan", and those who served in the khan's army were awarded the title of "chief hajib". All officials, including military officials, were required to wear uniforms designated for their positions, and to stamp their signatures on the text when sending a letter. The name and position of the owner are written on the stamps and they were presented by the Khagan<sup>6</sup>.

The salary of all military officials, like other officials, is determined on the basis of certain laws and regulations, and its increase or decrease depends on the change of rank and position, the service rendered. In the state of the Karakhanids, a special cabinet dealing with military affairs was established, and it was called the "Military Cabinet". The Karakhanids paid great attention to the communication between the military units deployed in different places. In this regard, communication was carried out in two different ways. One of them was carried out with the help of fast running horses, and the other was carried out by lighting fire on high mountain tops and towers built on hills (kurguy, kargu). In terms of military tactics, great attention was paid to ambushing (bisdi), delivering false information to the enemy, surrounding the places where military units are located with high walls (ukakli sipil), and building observation towers (ugak) on the walls. The weapons used in the Karakhanid state consisted mainly of arrows, swords, axes, spears, iron clubs (basu gurza), and daggers, which were considered offensive weapons.

4 Хўжаев А., Турдиева Д. Қорахонийлар хоқонлиги тарихи: Хитой Халқ Республикаси олимлари тадқиқотларида. – Т.: “Фан зиёси”, 2021. – Б.71.

5 Ўша асар, –Б.342.

6 Хўжаев А ва Турдиева Д. Қорахонийлар хоқонлиги тарихи: Хитой Халқ Республикаси олимлари тадқиқотларида. — Тошкент.: ” Фан зиёси ” 2021. – Б.72-73.

Metal shield (crack), helmet (metal cap) and shield were used as protective weapons. Among these weapons, sword and ax are given great importance. A person who wears a helmet is sometimes called "yashuk", and before wearing it, a cap made of wool is put on the head so that the wearer's head crawls. Such a woolen cap was called "kaduk". The armor worn by warriors and commanders during the war has a different shape and is made of small rings, chains, and coin-like metal parts. Depending on the shape of such cracks, they are called halka crack, chain crack (percussion crack), coin crack (flow crack). A warrior who wears armor is called "labels", and a person who does not wear it is called "boshnak ar".

The arrow used for the bow and arrow was made flat and smooth with the help of a special tool. A traditional metal and special wooden arrowhead is attached to the arrowhead (head). Soundless and soundless bullets were produced by attaching a bird's feather to the end of the bullet. Sound bullets were used to scare or panic the enemy, and silent bullets were used to hit the enemy suddenly and not notice where the bullet came from. The tip (bashaq) of the spears is made of steel with a long point. The sword used by the Karakhanids was made of high-quality steel and in a form traditional to the Turkic peoples. In some cases, the hilt of the sword is decorated with gold. It was an honor for its owner to keep the sword and keep it shining all the time. Polishing of swords is done using a special substance. It is known that another weapon called "sword and whip" was used during the Karakhanids. But the exact form of this weapon has not been preserved. According to existing assumptions, a sharp blade was placed at the tip of the whip.

In the military units of the Karakhanid dynasty, great attention was paid to the issue of passwords to keep secrets, to prevent enemy spies from sneaking in, to recognize one's own people in the enemy's territory, and not to recognize one's own people while preparing for war, and this is also known as a weapon to some extent. The password is called "who". The name changed frequently and was kept extremely secret. Based on the above, it can be concluded that the military force of the Karakhanid khanate was formed on the basis of recruitment. At the same time, they have preserved the traditions of Turkic peoples for centuries. Great attention was paid to training the fighters in the spirit of patriotism, not being addicted to wealth and not being prone to betrayal. The main weapons used were swords, axes, daggers, spears, bows and arrows, and shields, helmets, and helmets (steel caps). Khakan was considered the commander-in-chief. In addition to the regular army of the state, there were military units engaged in protection at the disposal of the descendants of the khagans, governors, high officials and tribal chiefs<sup>7</sup>.

Thus, the military army of the Karakhanid state was one of the most important and influential military systems formed in Central Asia in the Middle Ages. This army was formed on the basis of the combat experience of nomadic Turkic tribes and the traditions of settled state administration, and played an important role in ensuring the political stability of the centralized state. The basis of the military structure was the cavalry, which was distinguished by speed, maneuverability and combat discipline. The Karakhanid army performed an important task not

<sup>7</sup> Хўжаев А ва Турдиева Д. Қорахонийлар ҳоконлиги тарихи: Хитой Халқ Республикаси олимлари тадқиқотларида. – Тошкент.: “Фан зиёси” 2021. — Б.77.



only in the fight against external enemies, but also in maintaining internal order, strengthening territorial integrity, and strengthening state power.

The connection of the military service with the iqto system stabilized the supply of the army and created a foundation for the formation of a loyal and professional military stratum. This situation directly affected the economic and political stability of the country. Also, in the military art of the Karakhanids, it can be seen that the elements of military management and strategy specific to Islamic states are combined with traditional Turkish fighting methods. As a result, the Karakhanid state had a strong military potential in its time and took a leading place in the political processes in the region. This military system is of particular importance as a historical experience that had a significant impact on the formation of the military structures of later Turkic-Islamic states.

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