

EVOLUTION OF ANCIENT WEAPONS OF CENTRAL ASIA

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Abstract: The article highlights the evolution of ancient weapons of Central Asia, the emergence of the earliest weapons, and the analysis of their development.

Key words: Central Asia, Bronze Age, hunting weapons, knives, spearheads, axes, spear tips, arrowheads, daggers, lances.

Introduction. The emergence and gradual development of ancient weapons are closely related to the development of labor tools used by our ancestors in their economic activity, in obtaining food through hunting, and in fishing. These include knives, spearheads, axes, and others made of stone. These tools were initially used only in labor processes and against hunted animals. Among hunting weapons, the bow and arrow became the most effective, and over time turned into the most terrifying weapon of mass destruction in ancient human history. Over thousands of years, this weapon not only left its mark on hunted animals and birds but also increasingly influenced human life. In Central Asia, even in the late Middle Ages, the bow and arrow retained its importance as an effective offensive weapon.

With the development of society, the types of weapons increased and were improved. The emergence of settled settlements, the formation of ancient states, and the establishment of a regular arled to a constant need for weapons. The emergence of copper and bronze metallurgy was an important stage in the evolution of weapons. In particular, during the Bronze Age, in the II half of the 2nd millennium BC – the 2nd millennium BC, among the settled farming and herding population of Central Asia, spearheads, arrowheads, daggers, lances, and other weapons made of bronze became widespread. The discovery of such weapons in many settlements belonging to the Bronze Age in Central Asia proves this.

Main part. The formation of ancient states in Central Asia began at the beginning of the 1st millennium BC. This also led to a certain improvement in the weapons and military art of the local population. It should be especially emphasized that in the formation of the first states, military leaders of tribes played a major role, and in the socio-political processes that formed the basis of the early states, military-political factors played a leading role in the formation of alliances of neighboring and related tribes.

In the 8th–7th centuries BC, with the emergence of iron metallurgy in Central Asia, people began to produce not only labor tools from it, but also weapons. From iron, first of all, daggers, swords, and battle axes were made. Sometimes spearheads and arrowheads were also made of iron. At the same time, until the 1st century BC, these weapons continued to be cast from bronze as well.

Information about the types of ancient weapons widespread in the territory of Central Asia can be found not only in archaeological sources, but also in many written sources of the ancient



period. In particular, such information can also be found in the most ancient written source related to the history of Central Asia - the "Avesta."

Due to the socio-political development of society, the desire to resolve conflicts arising between various tribes by military force also had an effective impact on the evolution of weapons. As a result, offensive and defensive weapons were improved, and their quality increased. Taking into account the importance of studying the history of military art of the peoples of Central Asia, as well as highlighting the emergence, development, and level of use of offensive and defensive weapons, it is appropriate to describe them in detail. Another important part of protective clothing is the helmet. Various archaeological sources confirm that in the 7th–6th centuries BC, Kuban-type helmets were widely распространены in territories from Yettisuv and Dzungaria to China. By the middle of the 1st millennium BC, this type of helmet spread widely from Scythia and Iran to southwestern Manchuria, which means that the Saka and Yuezhi tribes must also have used them.

The next type of helmets had a conical shape. Such helmets in the 2nd–1st centuries BC had a complex structure, that is, they were based on metal strips, which were reinforced by covering them with metal or leather layers. The open parts of these helmets were covered with metal and leather, and they had a distinctive shape. The helmet, in its first form, also existed, and it served not only for warriors but also for festive occasions. In ancient depictions, such helmets are clearly visible with their beautiful ornamentation. In modern military armies, helmets have been replaced by casques. This is a natural result of the development of military art and indicates the continuous evolution of weapons.

Shields played a major role in the protection of warriors. They are divided into several types according to their size and structure. Round-shaped shields were made from various metals. These relatively small shields protected the body from the shoulders to the waist. A handle protruded from the front side. Such shields were made of thin wood, covered with leather, or plated with metal. Such shields were widely used during the Middle Ages.

The second type of shields had a circular shape and were known by the name "kelt shield" or "clipeus," and were somewhat larger in size compared to the previous one. The base of this shield was formed from long and short wooden sticks. The long sticks along the length, the short sticks were placed crosswise and joined together. From the outside, they were covered with leather or metal. The third type of shields differs significantly from the above ones. These shields were not very large; their lower part was rectangular, while the upper part had a triangular or circular shape. This type of shield was first formed in Central Asia and later became widespread in India.

Speaking in general about protective equipment, it should be especially noted that there were many types of them. Here we have only looked at some examples. The earliest protective equipment in Central Asia dates back to the 8th–7th centuries BCE, and over time they developed and improved. Under the influence of Hellenistic elements, the improvement of protective elements led to the emergence of more advanced types of protective equipment. Many of them were used by the Romans, Parthians, European peoples, and Greeks to protect their troops. In the military art of the peoples of Central Asia, offensive weapons also held an important place. The ancient peoples of Central Asia used various types of offensive weapons in wars. One of the most widespread weapons since ancient times was the bow. Approximately 12 thousand years ago, arrows with stone tips were invented, and this event contributed to the development of human society and economic activity. The bow, invented as a weapon, became



the most lethal military weapon in ancient times and the Middle Ages until firearms were invented. The bows and arrows used by ancient tribes improved over time. The Bactrians, Parthians. The Khorezmians and other settled peoples were initially armed with bows made of reed and short spears. However, bows made of reed have not been preserved. According to sources from later periods, such bows were made by gluing layers of wood and reed together. In ancient times, the most advanced weapon invented for fighting from a distance was the “Scythian bow,” which appeared at the end of the Bronze Age.

In sources, the Saka people who lived along the Yaksart (the ancient name of the Syr Darya) are not described in vain as “the most skilled archers who never miss their target.” This complex bow was made from several pieces of wood. Its two ends and middle grip did not bend, while the parts resting on the shoulders were flexible. When strung, it resembled the Greek letter “sigma.” Such bows were not very large (60–80 cm), and their arrows did not exceed 80 cm either. This light bow was highly valued by nomads as a weapon that was easy to use while shooting from horseback. Because of the convenience of shooting and the long range of the arrow, it was also highly appreciated by the settled peoples of the East, including the Chinese. Due to its convenience, this type of weapon became widespread in Central Asia, Iran, and the Ancient East. During excavations carried out in various regions of Uzbekistan, arrowheads of different shapes belonging to such bows have been found. They were mainly double-pointed, with a socket for attaching to the wooden shaft of the arrow; in addition, triangular, rounded, and later perforated types of heads were also used.

This type of bow, initially formed in Central Asia, was considered the main weapon in the army of the Achaemenids. Researchers who studied the development of this type of complex bow have proven that it spread from Central Asia to Iran and several other regions. By the end of the 4th century BC, Central Asian bows were also used in China. In the territory of Central Asia, alongside small, complexly structured bows, large bows with a simpler structure were also widespread. The peoples of Central Asia, especially the Saka, were highly skilled in archery. Herodotus reported that the bows of the Bactrians, Parthians, Khorezmians, and Sogdians were very similar to one another. There were also several types of bows. Their production, like that of bows, required great skill, because if the iron tip of an arrow was slightly heavier or lighter than the norm, it would affect its flight distance.

In addition to short bows, in Central Asia long bows that could also be used by infantry in battle were employed. These bows, reaching up to 180 cm in length, were also complex in structure, with their middle and tips reinforced with bone plates. They were quite flexible and capable of shooting over long distances. Such bows began to be used in the last centuries BC. These bows have been found in Khorezm, as well as in other regions of Central Asia. The bow and arrow were an important element in fighting from a distance, while for engaging in close combat the spear was equally significant. In our region, several types of spears existed; in particular, long and short spears were widespread, and they are considered among the most ancient weapons.

Types of the most ancient weapons. For the peoples of Central Asia-Bactrians, Parthians, Khorezmians, Sogdians, and Hyrcanians-“short spears” were especially characteristic. Arrian, when writing that these peoples would throw their own spears against the long spears of the Greco-Macedonian armies, likely had this type of spear in mind. The offensive and defensive weapons discussed above continued to be widely used in the Middle Ages as well. Even in the later periods, when firearms appeared, they retained their place in the armies of the Uzbek khanates. In Central Asia, during the period we are considering, mangonels, slings, and other



weapons were also used. They were employed in the siege of cities and fortresses. The mangonel was an Asian form of the catapult known in ancient Rome, and this weapon was large stones, boulders, and barrels filled with mercury and other incendiary substances were used to breach walls

Conclusion. The earliest weapons primarily consisted of wooden spears with fire-hardened tips. Approximately 100,000 years ago, flint and bone-tipped spears, as well as short spears that were easier to throw, appeared. People launched them using spear-throwing devices made of bone. During archaeological excavations in Central Asia, particularly while uncovering graves and mounds, numerous daggers and swords belonging to ancient nomadic tribes have been found. As society progressed, types of weaponry increased and were further refined. The emergence of settled communities, the formation of ancient states, and the establishment of regular armies created a constant demand for military equipment.

Since ancient times, Central Asia has been known for specific defensive means and weapon types. Many varieties of armor and helmets, which were the primary defensive weapons, are well-known. Most of them first appeared in the East and the Eurasian steppes and later spread to other regions. The bronze breastplate found at the Sopollitepa settlement is of great significance in determining the period when personal defensive shields and armor began to be used in this territory.

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