

*Rustam A. Mamedov***DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF CENTRAL ASIAN PEOPLES' STRUGGLE AGAINST THE GRECO-MACEDONIAN CONQUERERS**

Аннотация: В статье раскрываются вопросы военного искусства, которыми пользовались народы Центральной Азии в своей освободительной борьбе против войск Александра Македонского. В частности, данная статья освещает тактику борьбы в сражениях выдающегося сатрапа и талантливого военачальника Спитамена, возглавившего упорное сопротивление местного населения против македонских завоевателей, с использованием военных хитростей в ходе внезапных регулярных набегов на гарнизоны завоевателей.

Annotation: This article looks at the issues describing military art used by Central Asian people in their struggle against Alexander the Great. In particular, the article deals with the local population led by their talented military satrap Spitamenus, who organized persistent resistance and fought bravely for their regional independence against the Macedonian conquerors using stratagems during their constant unexpected raids on the invaders' garrisons.

Ключевые слова: военный поход в Центральную Азию, греко-македонская армия, Бактрия и Согдиана, река Окс (Аму-Дарья), сатрап Спитамен, Мараканда, подавлять упорное сопротивление, вооруженные восстания местного населения, мобильная конница, неожиданные ночные набеги, всадники и лучники, борьба за независимость, македонские завоеватели, военная хитрость, гарнизоны захватчиков.

Key words: military campaign to Central Asia, mainly Greco-Macedonian army, Bactria and Sogdiana, the Oxus River (Amu-Darya), satrap Spitamenes, Maracanda, to suppress persistent resistance, local armed uprisings, mobile cavalry, unexpected night raids, horsemen and archers, fight for independence, the Macadonian conqueres, stratagems, invaders' garrisons.

After the murder of Darius III by Bessus (who at that period of time was the governor and satrap of Bactria and Sogdiana), Alexander the Great started pursuing Bessus, who had declared himself the heir of the Achaemenids.

In 329 BC, the Macedonian army began its invasion of Bactria and Sogdiana.

The official purpose of Alexander's campaign to Central Asia was to take revenge (up)on Bessus. The Macedonians approached the territory of Sogdiana and in five days crossed the Oxus (present-day Amu-Darya) River.

The local rulers, having guessed the intentions of Alexander the Great captured Bessus and sent him to the Macedonian ruler. Alexander punished Bessus, but did not stop his campaign to Central Asia.

As a result, the Macedonians invaded Nautaka (the area of modern Kitab) and then, seized Maracanda (present-day city of Samarkand). Sometime later Alexander's army reached the banks of the Yaxartes (present-day Syr-Darya) River, where they founded and built strongly fortified city of Alexandria Marginal (modern Khodzhen). But in order to strengthen his power in Sogdiana, Alexander the Great had to stay and deploy his army in Bactria and Sogdiana for three years for the

purpose of suppressing persistent struggle of local rebellious cities and tribes who bravely fought for their regional independence against Alexander the Great.

The fight against the Macedonian conquerors in Sogdiana was led by Spitamenes, a talented military leader who relied on the alliance with the Saka tribes. Historical manuscripts mention that people of Sogdiana resisted fiercely, attacking small (in number) Macedonian detachments and their garrisons.

The rebellious inhabitants of seven cities located in the valley of the Jaxartes River seized and destroyed the Macedonian garrisons. Alexander had to besiege those cities again. One of the detachments under the command of Spitamenes besieged the Macedonian garrison in Maracanda. The Sakas concentrated their forces on the right bank of the Jaxartes River. The Macedonian army found itself in the difficult situation. After the fierce battles behind the Jaxartes River banks, the Sakas retreated deep inside their territory. But Alexander the Great did not risk following and pursuing them into the desert.

Alexander's army moved towards Maracanda. Spitamenes, having correctly assessed the situation, did not go into the battle.

He raised the siege of Maracanda and withdrew

his warriors from the city to join the Sakas. Spitamenes' warriors were pursued by a large Macedonian detachment. Spitamenes began to attack the Macedonians without engaging into serious battles. However, he forced the Macedonian detachment to start retreating. In

order to decrease the damage from the enemy's arrows, the Macedonian detachment stopped at the thickets of the Politimet (Zerafshan) River

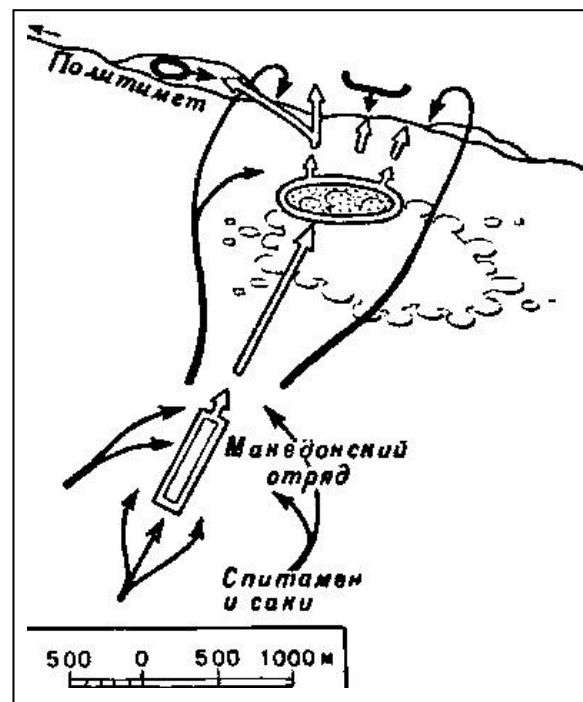
bank, where later the historical battle took place.

The Macedonians started crossing the river. Spitamenes' archers defeated those who had already crossed the river shooting arrows from

the front. At the same time, Spitamenes' horsemen rushed into the river from the flanks in order to attack those enemy warriors, who were trying to rescue on one of the closest islands.

In that battle Spitamen's detachment struck the Macedonians mainly with arrows. Some of the Macedonians were caught in the ambush set up by the Sakas. With all this going on, the majority of the Macedonian military leaders were killed, only 40 horsemen and 300 infantrymen managed to escape.

Thus, Spitamenes' mobile cavalry, without engaging into the active battle, deceived the enemy, extensively drawing the Macedonians into ambushes, where they destroyed a large number of Alexander's army.



Battle on the Politimet River in 329 BC

That crushing defeat forced Alexander the Great to send numerous forces to help his prostrate detachment. But those forces were late, although they managed to cover 280 km in three days.

Having buried the dead, the Macedonian army did not risk going deep into the Saka territory and returned to Bactra. Preparing for a new campaign and simultaneously continuing to fight against the local uprisings, the Macedonian army spent the entire winter in Bactria and Sogdiana.

When Alexander began his campaign to the East, he still believed in Aristotle's teachings that say "by nature a barbarian and a slave coincide, practically they are identical concepts". But the reality faced by Alexander in distant and unknown lands turned his idea of "barbarians" upside down. In Bactria and Sogdiana, Alexander found neither slavish obedience nor lack of will, as well as neither barbarism nor ignorance, but courage and high human dignity.

Spitamenes did not leave the enemy alone or in perfect security for a single day. His flying cavalry units cruelly attacked the invaders and regularly inflicted heavy losses on them.

In the spring of 328 BC, Alexander divided his army into 5 parts, passed across Sogd from one end to the other, fighting and killing more than 120 thousand people. The last battle at Maracanda between Spitamenes and Alexander took place in the autumn of the same year. In that battle, both sides suffered heavy losses. Spitamenes again retreated into the desert. There, the nomadic tribes' leaders treacherously attacked him and, as the ancient historian Arrian writes, "cut off his head and sent it to Alexander, in order to thus divert the danger from themselves."

Alexander, who had conquered the world power of the Achaemenids, was unable to suppress the rebellion in Sogdiana. Only due to the betrayal of the local nobility and military superiority of the Greco-Macedonian army, heroic resistance of Sogdiana population was finally suppressed.

Alexander spent almost 3 years conquering lands of Central Asian, but despite that fact, he managed to subjugate only a relatively small territory that included Sogd, Bactria and a small part of the mountainous regions. Khorezm and the nomadic tribes remained independent.

In order to persuade and win over the local aristocracy to his side, Alexander the Great married Rakhshanak (Roxana), the daughter of Sogd mountainous regions ruler.

Spitamen's rebellion was suppressed, but Paretaken (the country of the Paretaks - a historical region located in the (nowadays) northern Surkhandarya) still resisted. There, the Bactrians led by their leaders Avstan and Katan fought heroically. That rebellion was completely drowned in blood. For Alexander the Great, the victory he gained in Sogdiana was equal to a defeat. Having reached the Syr-Darya River, he did not risk fighting with the Sakas.

Stubborn struggle of our ancestors, who had such talented leaders as Spitamen, Avstan, Katan and good combat-ready cavalry, forced the Macedonians to spend a lot of time conquering Bactria and Sogdiana. The Macedonian army suffered significant losses in that campaign. During those historical events Alexander the Great personally was wounded several times.

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