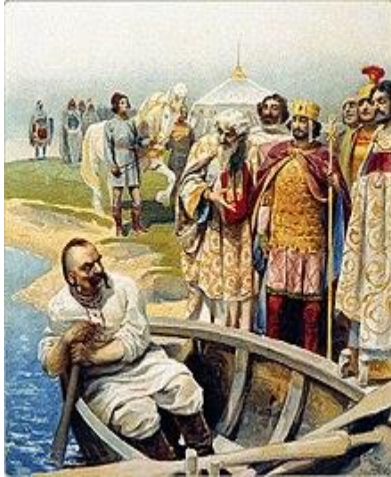


THE KHAZARS – Military

OVERVIEW



The Khazar empire dominated southern Russia for over three centuries owing to its political and military strength. With their mounted military formations and the types of weapons they used, the Khazars showed typical characteristics of nomadic tribes.

In the 8th century, The Khazars had a predominantly lightly armed cavalry. There were Russians, Butases, and Orsiyya warriors from Persia serving in the Khazar army. Some Khazar warriors also served as bodyguards for the Khazar khagan and even for the Byzantine emperors.

From the late 9th century, Khazaria had dual ruling system composed of a Khagan and a Beg. When the Khagan's status was reduced to a spiritual figurehead, his military responsibilities were transferred to the *Beg* who was the commander of the army, leading all military expeditions.

MILITARY

KHAZARS: From the 7th to the mid-8th century, the Khazar army was entirely mounted and the khagan had an army of 7,000–12,000 men, consisting of lightly armed cavalry.

The Khazar army was composed of well-trained, professional warriors and all military campaigns were led by the *Beg*. There were the *Tarkhans* (generals) who led single regiments and auxiliary troops. The border fortresses were controlled by *Tudun* (governors).

In the 8th century, the Khazar army was composed of ten thousand lightly armed cavalry. The spear was used by the Khazar warriors, and they wore coats of mail during their military expeditions.

After the 8th century, to defend their fortresses, the Khazar army began to train heavily armed soldiers who could serve as both cavalry and infantry. In this period the Khazar army consisted of the *Tarkhans* and lightly armed ordinary Khazar tribesmen. All were under the direct command of the Khagan. The *Tarkhans* also served as a bodyguard for the Khagan.

During the second half of the 9th century, the Khagan's status was reduced to a spiritual figurehead, and he did not have any responsibilities in state administration. His responsibilities were transferred over to the *Beg*, who handled secular state affairs and commanded the army and all military expeditions. He was chosen from among the nobility. However, the *Beg* was the second in command and the Khazar khagan had enough authority to order the *Beg* to be put to death.

By this time the Khazar army consisted not only of the standing army that was under the *Beg*'s authority, but, in times of increased danger, also included auxiliary forces from vassal states as well as levies from the Khazar tribes.

The Khazar army consisted of professional soldiers, skilled horseback archers who were Khwarazmian Muslim immigrants. These Muslim soldiers were originally Persians, known as *Orsiyya*, who also served as bodyguards for the Khazar khagan. They were separate units and were allowed to practice their own

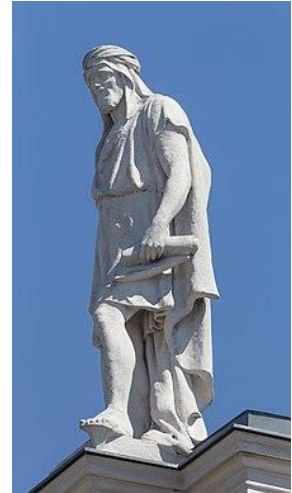
religion. There were also Russians and Burtases who served in the Khazar army. Al-Masudi in his *Meadows of Gold and Mines of Precious Stones* provided a description of these warriors riding with the Khagan.

The Khazar army took hostages and valuable treasures from enemy groups. All the booty collected after a victory was brought to the beg's camp where the beg took some of the most valuable items for himself. After the beg had taken his share, the remaining booty was divided among the cavalry.

The Khazar warriors also served for the Byzantine emperor Leo VI. During the reign of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, Khazar warriors were also hired as guards at the gates of the palace.

Discussion/Questions

1. Why was the Khazar Khagan's status reduced to that of a spiritual figurehead?
2. What factors made the Khazar army so effective?



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