

BOOK SIXTEEN: about the description of the method of arraying the soldiers when they are mobilized for battle. In it are three chapters.

Chapter One : about that which [should obtain] if the opposing army [arrayed for battle] were small and this is related to a difference of degree of smallness [of numbers on both sides].

Should there be but one person girding for war, one engages his adversary [face to face] in battle, and no other action but this is possible for him. If two combine against one, he draws to one side and tries to defend himself against each of them. If the opponent [girded] for war be three, one of them will be in the center, one of them on the left flank and one of them on the right flank. Some maintain [however] that when there are three gathered [to fight], they are not arranged in this manner, but rather each of them protects the back of his companion. This is a great chapter in war; [only] those experienced in wars have practiced it.

If the persons girded for war be nine, three are in the center, three on the right flank, and three on the left flank.

If there be but two readied for battle, the back of each is placed to that of his companion [if] the enemy separates to strike against them. Otherwise they can face him if he comes from one direction.

If there are four poised for battle, three array themselves as center, right flank and left flank as has been explained, and one of them retires to the side, so that if an opportunity [to attack] the enemy appears, he can seize it; or if his companions need help, he can assist them. This is preferable to mixing with them, except when they are mounted as a cavalry squadron, [in which case] the four should attack *en masse*.

If there are six poised for battle, they should be arrayed according to what has preceded: two in the center, two on the right flank and two on the left flank. If there are eight, it is best to arrange six in the manner described above, and employ the remaining two in ambush, because springing unexpectedly from concealment while the battle is taking place can cause a great tumult.

Some warriors hold the opinion that, if the opposing enemy's battle strength be generally small, the army should not array themselves [as has been described], but rather should attack the enemy as a single cavalry division. Massing is better for them. In general, the procedure for this is dependent upon the diligence of the combatant to the degree that the situation demands.¹

Chapter Two : about that which [should be done] if the [numerical strength] of the enemy, poised for battle, were great.

[The experts] have judged it proper, if the [numerical strength] of the enemy were great, such as that of the great army, to put the army in five lines. The first line will be the vanguard of the army and [much] depends upon it. It is necessary that the cavalymen in it be outstanding for strength and courage and conquering spirit and experience in war, for they will be at the throat of the enemy, and those behind them of the [other] lines depend upon them.

[The experts] judged it proper to divide the vanguard into three parts: a center, a right flank and a left flank. The center is the one which is in the middle and they mean by it the center of the [entire (?)] army. The right flank is that which is to the right of the center and the left flank is that which is to its left. And to each of the three is a role special to it. They call the right and left flanks *al-mujannabatain*, "the two advanced guards", and the right and left flanks are [also] called *al-janāḥain*, "the two wings". Thus one says "the wing of the right flank" and "the wing of the left flank". Perhaps each [part] of the

(1) There is an ambiguous quality in this entire chapter insofar as the numbers indicated do refer to individual combatants. It seems highly unlikely that an entire army would be poised for battle simply to engage anywhere from one to nine combatants. Further, where single combat is referred to in the text, the more technical term *mubārakah* is employed. It might be that our author was thinking of ranks or squadrons of combatants, each acting as a unit and to be opposed by a comparable unit. It is the lack of any noun, e.g., *mubāriz*, *kurdūs* or 'askar, associated with the given number which causes the ambiguity.

For the fighting arrangements of a massed battalion in Roman military theory, see, Machiavelli, *op. cit.* Book II, *passim* and the accompanying sketches of the arrangements.

right flank and of the left flank is called *janāh*, "wing".

All of the center and of the right flank and of the left flank are divided into three parts according to what has preceded. Thus one arranges the center [of this vanguard] as a center, a right flank and a left flank. The same is done to the [vanguard's] right and left flanks. Over each of these sections one places a general, *al-muqaddam*, making nine such in the vanguard of the army, so that there will be close supervision of their (i.e., the sections') activity. Verily, the great number of the generals of the cavalry in the sections of the army is among that which strengthens the sections and prolongs their steadfastness, especially if with each general there is a section of the army [under his direct command].² [Experts] say it is necessary to place between the [various] wings of the center and of the right and left flanks a clear path, sufficiently wide between [any] two of them to permit the easy passage of the horses and officers [bound] for single combat (*al-mubārazah*).

The second line will be behind the first, and will be arranged in three parts: a center, a right flank and a left flank, corresponding to the ranking of the first: center behind center, right flank behind right flank and left flank behind left flank. [The experts] have stipulated that this line should contain celebrated cavaliers, sufficiently comparable to those who are cognizant of the management of war and the execution of its important affairs, patient about its events and clear-headed when its difficulties are manifested.

The third line will be behind the second and it is placed for the

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- (2) Cf. Machiavelli on the need of many supervisory officers, *op. cit.*, p. 101 f.: "Gosimo. Though I believe all the officers in your battalion may be necessary, yet I should be afraid that so many would create confusion.

"Fabrizio. That might be the case, if they were not all under the command of one person; but as they are, they rather serve to preserve and promote good order; and indeed, it would be impossible to keep it up without them; for a wall that is weak and tottering in every part, may be better supported by many props and buttresses, though they are but feeble ones, than by a few, be they ever so substantial; because their strength cannot be of much service at any considerable distance. For this reason there ought to be a corporal over every ten soldiers in all armies, who should be a man of more spirit and courage, at least of greater authority, than the rest, in order to animate them both by his words and example, and exhort them continually to keep firm in their ranks, and behave themselves like men."

protection of the baggage. It has been explained that there can be no operation of the army without its baggage. The baggage must be encompassed by those who fear the stain of running away more than they fear death, for there is no sustenance possible for the army without its baggage.

The fourth line will be behind the third, and its role is to protect the rear of the baggage. It has been stipulated that the horsemen of this line be light troops, *khifāf anjād*, from among the people of exploits on battle fields, [who are capable of quick support].

The fifth line will be behind the fourth line, and it constitutes the rear guard of the army. [The experts] have stipulated that this line should have men of boldness and intrepidity, upon whose sufficiency [the commander] can rely, should he need them. Upon this line and the fourth depends the protection of the rear section of the army and the prevention of predatory incursions against the rear of the army insofar as they are able, for the enemy will be emboldened [to strike] against the extremities of the army.

Chapter Three : about the description of the forms of the rankings [should] the enemy be of great numerical strength.

[Experts] have differed about this. Most of those versed in military affairs hold that the best ranking is that of the straight line, whose parts are joined to each other. It is reported that this was the conventional [method] of the Persians in ancient times. God had commended this method in His Honored Book [when] He said, exalted be His power, "God loves those who fight in His way in ranks, as though they were a building well-compacted." (61:4)³.

Some of those experienced in war prefer the ranks to curve out from

(3) This is the famous "closed formation" which Ibn Khaldūn praises, *The Muqaddimah*, vol. II, p. 74 :

"Fighting in closed formation is more steady and fierce than fighting with the technique of attack and withdrawal. That is because in fighting in closed formation, the lines are orderly and evenly arranged, like arrows or like rows of worshipers at prayer. People advance in closed lines against the enemy. This makes for greater steadiness in assault and for better use of the proper tactics. It frightens the enemy more. A closed formation is like a long wall or a well-built castle which no one could hope to move ... A tradition says: 'One believer is to another believer like a building of which every part supports the rest.'"

the wings and in towards the center; thus strengthening the center of the rankings and weakening the wings. He who does this will delegate for each of the wings a squadron of supporting cavalry as compensation for the bending in towards the center.

They disapprove the curving out of the rankings from the center and in towards the wings, for this weakens the center and strengthens the wings. Thus he who arranges his ranks like this, will station people of bravery and valor on the right and left flanks so as to strengthen the center.⁴

The Mongols from among the Turkish people accustomed their people [to fight as] a single squadron of cavalry, so that they struggled together against the enemy. Retiring [from the battle] and returning [to it] was denied to each of them. They gained from this great experience which was not [duplicated] by others.

(4) These are no doubt the two variations of the crescent formation, *hilālī*. For this and other battle formations, see *MF*, pp. 70-72; *Nihāyat al-su'ul*, Lesson XI, *passim*; and Wüstenfeld, "Das Heerwesen der Muhammadaner", pp. 29-39 and text. In the first case, when supporting cavalry are sent to strengthen the wings, we have a formation termed *al-mujannah*.