

## **Shashka in late XIX – XX c.: Outline of Russian Combat Techniques**

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**Abstract:** In the late XIX c., when most Western European armies in the discussion about cut and thrust strikes finally gave priority to a thrust, Russian Imperial Army adopted Eastern weapon – shashka, with Caucasian and Asian origins. Despite its late adoption and not Russian origins, shashka quickly became a national weapon. It transformed a lot under the influence of Western European saber. It dislodged all other long-bladed weapons in Russian army and even in the national memory so that nowadays average Russian calls all curved blades “shashka”. This weapon became a symbol of Russian Cossacks and all late Russian cavalry, almost the last long-bladed weapon used at war. This article is aimed to study techniques of fencing on shashkas of Russian Cossacks and soldiers in XIX – XX c., well-preserved in fencing and cutting manuals, as well as army statutes of this period. The author makes an attempt to verify the popular idea that shashka was not used for fencing at all, that it was designed only for cutting and smashing, without any parades, thrusts, feints, tactics. At the beginning of the article a weaponological review of shashka is done. Its distinctive features, origins, types, characteristics are considered.

**Keywords:** shashka, saber, Russia, Caucasus, Cossacks.

### **I. RUSSIAN COMBAT TECHNIQUES ON SHASHKAS IN LATE XIX - XX C**

Shashka is almost the most famous Caucasian weapon, and one of the most famous Russian weapons. Despite the fact that Russian army adopted it rather late shashka started to play a great role in Russian culture. Many people call “shashkas” other edged weapons, especially sabers. Shashka became the symbol of cossacks and wars of Russia of two eras’ crossroad. Therefore, there are a lot of legends and even myths about shashka and especially about how people fought with it. The most popular is the idea that shashka was not for fencing but only for cutting. At the same time, we have several manuals on combat with shashkas written by Russian militaries. In this article we would like to consider this question particularly since having sources we have not rather serious historical researches about fencing on shashkas.

But before that it is necessary to consider what shashka is, what its distinctive characteristics are, what makes shashka different from saber, why it looks like it looks,

where and when it appeared. Fortunately, Russian historians-weaponologists have studied this weapon a lot.

On the one hand, this is an elementary-level article, adumbrating the shashka as a weapon, on the other hand, we would like to go into some details, e.g. give the characteristics of basic models adopted by the Russian Imperial Army (RIA), including the balance (this is especially interesting for historical fencers) if possible, and also describe the basic techniques of using the shashka that we have found in Russian XIX-XX c. manuals.

### **I.1. What is shashka? Appearing and features**

Shashka is a traditional long-blade weapon of Caucasian nations and Russian Cossacks. It was common in XVIII-XX c. It is used to differ shashka from saber though sometimes it is not easy, especially with late dragoon patterns. Weaponologists highlight next distinctive characteristics of shashka:

- 1) A slightly curved blade.  
With one edge (two in the last third) and one wide or some narrow fullers. Rather short – total length was about 80-100 cm.
- 2) Very specific hilt without any protective guard (with the exception of late Russian dragoon shashkas with one protective knuckle bow)...
- 3) ...and with hook-shaped pommel divided into two “ears”.
- 4) Scabbards, worn with the edge facing back.
- 5) Often hilt immersed in scabbards with only pommel out (Fig. 1).

There are several concepts of “shashka’s” etymology. According to the most common one, this Russian word comes from Circassian “Sash-ho” – “A long knife”. Modern researchers suppose that shashkas came from Circassian combat knives. We can confidently say that shashkas appeared in the early XVIII century. The oldest sample dates to the 1713 <sup>1</sup>.

Researchers link spread of shashka with two factors. On the one hand, the Caucasus mountains and forests allowed setting ambushes, so there was a need for a blade, which one can quickly unsheathe, and a short shashka with hook pommel was ideal for it. On the other hand, firearm development led to rejection of armor, and Caucasian sabers with bayonet-like point designed against chain mails became useless, light shashka was better against unarmored enemy than heavy saber <sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Борис Фролов, *Холодное оружие кубанских казаков* (Краснодар: Диапазон-В, 2009), с. 91.

<sup>2</sup> Эмма Аствацатурян, *Оружие народов Кавказа*, 2-ое изд. (Санкт-Петербург: Антлант, 2004), с. 52.

Otherwise, to the mid-XVIII c. shashka completely replaced saber in the Caucasus.

As modern Caucasian scholar P. R. Nakov thinks, the specific form of shashka's hilt comes from a bone. Initially the Caucasians used to make their knives' hilts from animal bones, cutting way a half of one of the bone heads. The bone's inner groove was a place for a tang. Bone head didn't let wrist slip from rather smooth bone grip <sup>3</sup>.

Later the hilt changed, but insignificantly. For grips they started to use horn, wood, metal. The lower end (former epiphysis) became smaller, the grip take an oval section, and the upper epiphysis (the pommel) became a hook-like – for fast unsheathing, as well as comfort holding and cutting with guardless blade (Fig. 2).

We do not know the reasons for dividing shashka's pommel into two “ears”. One of popular versions is that this slit was used for firing from muskets, when shashka was served as forked rest. But, as B. E. Frolov convincingly claims, it is improbable: shashkas were too short, slits could be too small, and what is more, the Caucasians had real forked rests <sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, we do not know, when such slit appeared, we can find it in many other weapons in many other regions, so we can not claim it was used for firing. There are theories about sacral origins of this slit too <sup>5</sup>.

Embending Caucasian shashka's hilt is linked with the knife origin of this weapon. Like at the knife, the width of shashka's blade is equal to the width of a guardless hilt, and grip is embedded to the scabbards to avoid gaps and provide better protection of the blade from moisture <sup>6</sup>. V. g. Fedorov claims that such hilt and scabbards are more convenient in wearing – they do not cling to anything <sup>7</sup>.

The manner of wearing scabbard with the edge facing back is linked with the necessity of fast unsheathing from the scabbard <sup>8</sup>. An edge of the hand catches shashka for it's hook pommel, unsheathes it forward (not up, as with saber) and strikes by the same tempo.

B. E. Frolov nominates other versions of such specific manner of wearing scabbards with the edge facing back. Firstly, with this method scabbards do not interfere when moving, do not cling to anything, which is important in forests, and all parts fit snugly to the body.

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<sup>3</sup> Феликс Након, ‘Черкесское (адыгское) клинковое оружие’ (Автореферат диссертация на соискание ученой степени кандидата исторических наук, Кабардино-Балкарский государственный университет им. Х. М. Бербекова, 2004), с. 14-15

<sup>4</sup> Фролов, с. 90, 93-94.

<sup>5</sup> Фролов, с. 90.

<sup>6</sup> Након, с. 14.

<sup>7</sup> Владимир Федоров, *Холодное оружие*, оформление С. Курбатова (2008. Москва: Яуза: ЭСМО, 2010), с. 38.

<sup>8</sup> Аствацатурян, с. 49-51.

Secondly, when on horse, there is not any danger of cutting its ears, because the edge is directed from the horse's head, which is important in bustle of sudden fight<sup>9</sup>.

Some other characteristic features of Caucasian shashka are highlighted too:

- Low weight;
- Short length;
- Smooth grip.

Traditionally, Caucasian shashkas were rather light and with the point of balance far from the hilt. Later Russian shashkas became heavier and with the balance nearer.

Most scabbards for shashka were wooden with leather. However, in Russia there were some discussions concerning this issue<sup>10</sup>, and Soviet P1940 General's shashka had metal ones.

## I.2. Main types

They consider 4 different types of shashka:

- Caucasian;
- Central Asian;
- Cossack;
- Dragoon.

The main distinction is the hilt.

### I.2.1. Caucasian shashkas



*Fig. 1. Caucasian shashka. Mid. XIX c.*  
Metropolitan Museum of Art. Licensed under CCO 1.0<sup>11</sup>

The most ancient type. The hilt has only a grip of wood, horn, bone or metal, sometimes precious. It was made like a knife – of solid piece or two halves with two or three rivets. Some rich samples have silver lining. The end of the grip is issued in the form of a hook pommel divided in two. Eventually this pommel became longer. A hole for a knot is not

<sup>9</sup> Фролов, с. 95.

<sup>10</sup> Федоров, с. 39-40.

<sup>11</sup> 'Sword with scabbard', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York) <<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/32186>> [14.08.2018]

provided (in contrast with Cossack shashkas) despite the guardless hilt. The hilt is often embedded into the scabbard (Fig. 3).



Fig. 2 Caucasian shashka. Mid. XIX c. Livrustkammaren.  
Photo by Jenny Bergensten. Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0<sup>12</sup>



Fig. 3 Caucasian shashka with grip embedded into scabbards.  
Mid. XIX c. Metropolitan Museum of Art. Licensed under CCO 1.0<sup>13</sup>.

The blade was slightly curved though we know very curves samples converted from sabers.

Caucasian shashka was rather short and light weapon. In Kostroma museum there are several Caucasian shashkas, manufactured in XIX c. Their lengths vary from 790 mm to 990 mm and weights – from 658,2 g to 928,3 g<sup>14</sup>. In Russian Museum of Ethnography we can see even shorter shashka – 733 mm<sup>15</sup> and longer – 1040 mm<sup>16</sup>.

Accordingly, cutting function of this weapon obviously prevailed, but sharp point and upper third of back were used for thrusts too.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Sabel’, *Livrustkammaren och Skoklosters slott med Stiftelsen Halvhylska museet* <<http://emuseumplus.lsh.se/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface&module=collection&objectId=43925&viewType=detailView>> [14.08.2018]

<sup>13</sup> ‘Sword with scabbard’.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Холодное оружие’, *Костромской музей-заповедник*, (Кострома, Костромской историко-культурный и художественный музей-заповедник, 2011) <<http://kostromamuseum.ru/gallery/collections/weapon/blades/1-21-236/>> [16 июня 2018]

<sup>15</sup> Александр Лютов и другие, *Холодное оружие в собрании Российского этнографического музея* (Санкт-Петербург: Академический проект, 2006), с. 129.

<sup>16</sup> Там же. С. 140.

Though locally manufactured blade existed, import blades were also popular. They came from Europe, even from Solingen <sup>17</sup>.

### I.2.2. Asian shashkas

They were similar to Caucasian samples but with some distinctions:

- More square pommel;
- Five rivets instead of Caucasian three;
- They did not embed into the scabbard (Fig. 4).

This type of shashka is also called *Bukbarian*. They had 1-2 narrow fullers and a bit widened back of blade.

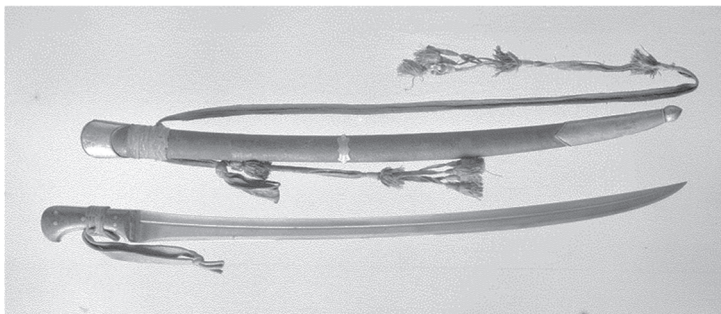


Fig. 4. Asian (Bukbarian) shashka.  
*Livrustkammaren. Licensed under CCO 1.0* <sup>18</sup>

### I.2.3. Afghani shashkas

Concerning another one type of Central Asian shashka there are debates, whether it is shashka or not. Some experts call it “*Afghani shashka*” (Fig. 5), the others – pseudo-shashka <sup>19</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> Аствацатурян, с. 54-60; Е. Петрова. Пашки конца XIX – начала XX в. в оружейной коллекции Государственного владимиро-суздальского музея-заповедника. Каталог (Владимир, 2016). с. 5.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Sabel’, *Livrustkammaren och Skoklosters slott med Stiftelsen Hallwylska museet* <<http://emuseumplus.lsh.se/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface&module=literature&objectId=51712&viewType=detailView>> [14.08.2018]

<sup>19</sup> Дмитрий Миросердов, ‘Афганская пашка’, *Историческое оружиеведение*, №3 (2016), с. 6.; Он же. ‘К вопросу о типологии афганских «уставных» пашках’, *Война и оружие. Новые исследования и материалы. Труды пятой международной научно-практической конференции*, Часть III (2015), с. 148.

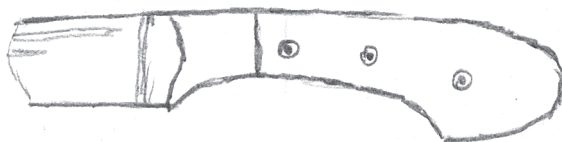


Fig. 5 Afghani shashka. The author's drawing.

Such weapons had one narrow or wide fuller, wooden of horn handle with three rivets. Ears of pommel, as well as slit and hook, are small. The lower part of a handle was of metal, soldered or forge welded to the blade.

That weapons were common only in Afghanistan that is why D. U. Miloserdov calls them “Afghani type”<sup>20</sup>.

#### I.2.4. Cossack shashkas

During the Caucasian war (1817-1864) and even before serving in the North Caucasus cossacks adopted many elements of highlanders’ munition, including shashka. Later shashka was adopted by most cavalry troops of the Russian Imperial army. Shashka became a symbol of cossacks.

Since 1834 the Russian government tried to regulate cossacks’ weapons. In 1838 a principally new type of shashka was invented. Its hilt consisted of three parts – brass ferrule, wooden grip and brass pommel (Fig. 6). This extremely recognizable hilt style stayed in use until the end of edged weapons active using on the battlefield.

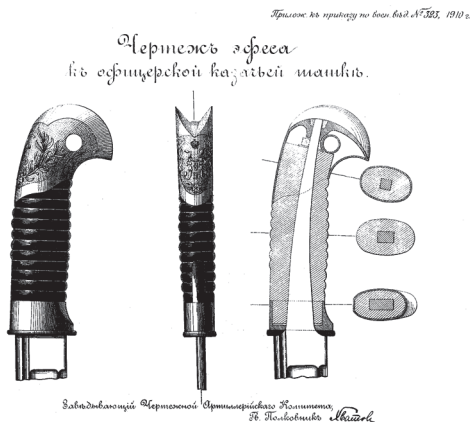


Fig.6 Technical drawing of cossack P1910 shashka<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Там же.

<sup>21</sup> *Военное министерство Российской империи*. Приказы по Военному ведомству ... [по годам] (Санкт-Петербург, 1853-1917), с. 509.

Cossack shashkas were not so short as early Caucasian ones, and not so light. They were more similar to sabers.

In contrast with the Caucasian shashkas with obligatory smooth grip, grips of some cossack models had notches or even wire and leather covering. Hilt was assembled by a screw or – more seldom – by rivets as Caucasian shashkas. It never embedded into scabbard. The pommel could have a hole for a knot.

But it had the same hook shape of pommel, the same bifurcated pommel with ears, the same way of wearing scabbards – with edge facing back, on shoulder belt, and the same slightly curved blade in Caucasian style.

Some patterns of Russian army's shashkas had a hilt of Caucasian or Asian (without embedded grip) type. They were rather light and with far point of balance like their prototypes. B. E. Frolov describes some such shashkas with weight of 745 g and balance 23 cm <sup>22</sup>.

Below we are going to speak about concrete models of Russian Imperial and Red Army shashkas.

Despite some recognizable and well studied regulation patterns a huge variety of arbitrary samples existed. We know a lot of shashkas converted from Eastern and Western sabers, Caucasian and Central Asian shashkas and so on. Blades were made in Zlatoust, Tula, Warsaw, and also Solingen <sup>23</sup>.

### **I.2.5. Dragoon shashkas**

As it was already mentioned, since 1830s many Russian cavalry troops adopted shashka. In 1881 for dragoons a special model with brass knuckle bow was designed, because inexperienced soldiers were in need of a better hand protection. But a big cup hilt was too heavy and uncomfortable in wearing. Lighter asymmetrical guards could take a blade to the side when cutting and cause a weak hit. So a single knuckle bar was chosen <sup>24</sup> (Fig. 7).

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<sup>22</sup> Там же.

<sup>23</sup> Аствацатурян, с. 54-60; Петрова, с. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Владимир Федоров, *Оружейное дело на грани двух эпох. Ч. 1. Оружейное дело в начале XX столетия* (Ленинград: Артиллерийская ордена Ленина академия РККА им. Дзержинского, 1938), с. 167.





Fig. 7 P1881 dragoon's shashka

Also this shashka had a bayonet mounts on the scabbard bands. A ring for knot was on the end of a knuckle bow.

Also there were particular models for artillery, police etc <sup>25</sup>.

There is a great question why dragoon patterns are called “shashkas”: they have a saber guard, they were deprived of a smooth handle, a hook or bifurcated pommel. But historically they were called “shashkas”, they were designed as “shashkas”, they had a blade in Caucasian tradition, and scabbards were worn with the edge facing back as well.

Now we are going to consider the characteristics of shashka patterns, adopted in Russian Imperial Army and later in Red Army. We would like to note that that are statute parameters. In practice there were significant deviations from them <sup>26</sup>.

### **P1834 shashka – “Nizhegorodka” (Fig. 8, 15a)**

Shashka came to the Russian Imperial army through served in Caucasus cossacks and became popular due to its extreme cutting characteristics. 1834 was the first time when shashka was officially adopted by regular troops. It was lower ranks of the Nizhegorodsky (Nizhny Novgorod) dragoon regiment <sup>27</sup>, so this pattern started to be called “Nizhegorodka”. These shashkas were still very similar to traditional Caucasian samples with the hilt of two wooden pieces. A steel or brass ring was added to protect the grip.

<sup>25</sup> Кулинский, с. 150.

<sup>26</sup> Александр Кулинский, *Русское холодное оружие XVIII-XX вв.* Т. 1. (Санкт-Петербург: ТПП «Атлант», 2001), с. 66.

<sup>27</sup> Там же С. 145.

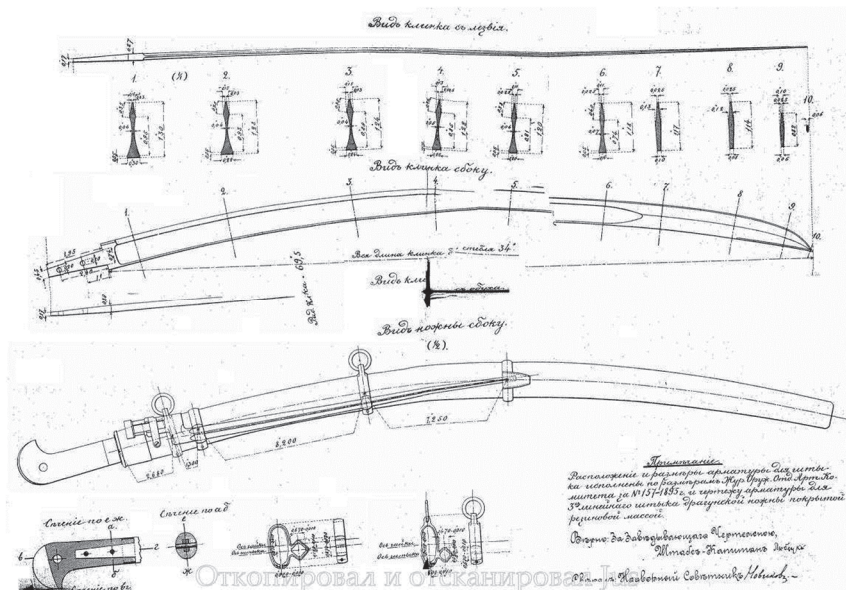


Fig. 8 P1834 cossacks' shashka.

The hilt was not embedded into the scabbards, so it was called “Asian” pattern, while those shashkas, popular among irregular Caucasian cossacks, which hilts embedded, were called “the Caucasian pattern”.

Note that there is a hole for a knot – unlike traditional Caucasian shashkas. Scabbard is wooden, covered with leather, with a brass mouth, two scabbard bands with loose rings for a belt and two bands with mounts for bayonet. Initially there were no a chape on the scabbards, later it was decided to install it.

Later some other regiments and units adopted it. This pattern was used till 1917. It was rather successful and popular pattern. So much so that when in 1881 a new shashka pattern replaced the P1834 in Nizhegorodsky and Seversky dragoon regiments, the soldiers disliked it, resented, and soon P1834 was returned them<sup>28</sup>.

Officer pattern had custom décor of hilt and scabbard.

- Total length – 1000 mm;
- Blade length – 880 mm;
- Blade width – 34 mm;
- Blade curvature – 70/395 mm;
- Weight – 877-939 g<sup>29</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Федоров, с. 15

<sup>29</sup> Федоров, *Холодное оружие*. с. 70-71.

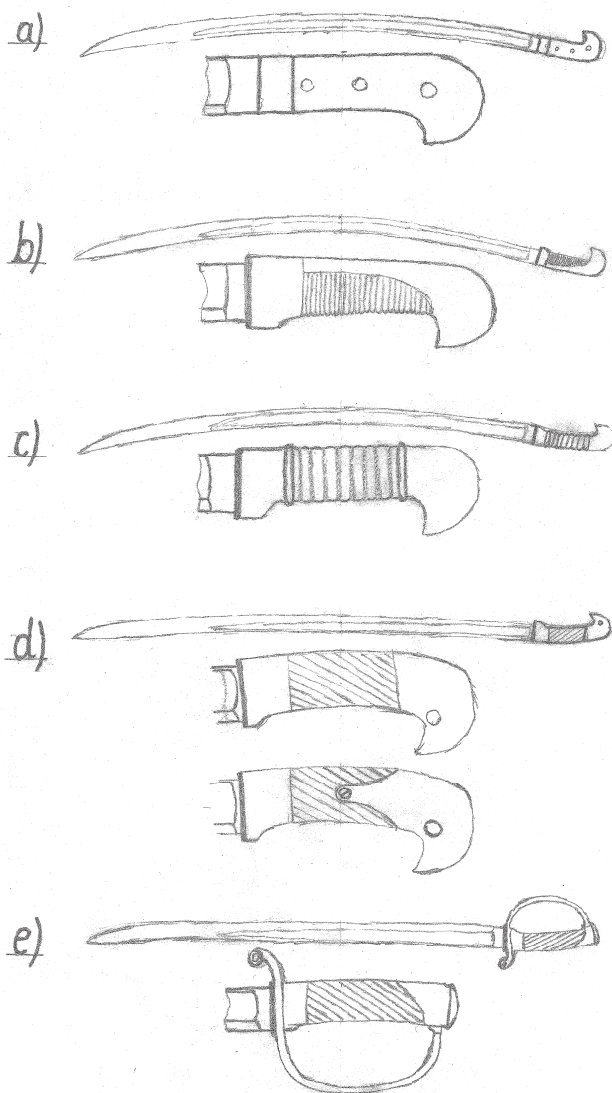


Fig. 15 Russian shashkas 1834-1881: a) P1834 "Asian" type; b) P1838 cossack lower ranks'; c) P1838 cossack officer's; d) P1881 cossack lower ranks'; e) P1881 dragoon lower ranks'.

**P1838 cossack lower ranks' shashka (Fig. 15b)**

In 1838 this new pattern was given all Cossack troops except Caucasian and Siberian. It had a brass pommel with the backpiece. The wooden grip had grooves and was covered with leather.

Total length – 1030 mm  
 Blade length – 875 mm  
 Blade width – 36 mm  
 Blade curvature – 62/375 mm  
 Point of balance – 170-180 mm <sup>30</sup>.  
 Weight – 1067 g <sup>31</sup>.  
 One wide fuller. Ricasso is very short.

Note that unlike traditional Caucasian sashkas with obligatory smooth grip this pattern had leather cover and grooves. Scabbards had two ring for a belt, the upper one was on the inner side.

This pattern was in service until 1881.

### ***P1838 Cossack officer's sashbka (Fig. 9, 15c)***

The officer's pattern did not have a backpiece, but its grip was wound by brass wire. It could have a voluntary décor and even a voluntary blade.



*Fig. 9 General V. A. Perovsky with P1838 cossack officer's sashbka.  
 Karl Brulov, late 1830s*

<sup>30</sup> Фролов, С. 101.

<sup>31</sup> Федоров, *Холодное оружие*. с. 93.

Total length – 960 mm;  
Blade length – 820 mm;  
Blade width – 35 mm;  
Blade curvature – 60/360 mm  
Point of balance 160 mm <sup>32</sup>.  
One wide fuller, short ricasso.

### ***P1841 and P1850 dragoon's sabers***

In 1841 a new saber pattern was adopted by Russian dragoons. It had a hilt very similar to later dragoon shashkas. And what is more, its scabbards had rings on the convex side to wear edge facing back. Nevertheless it was called “saber”. However, Russian arms designer V. g. Fedorov in his 1905 book called it “P1842 dragoons’ shashka” <sup>33</sup>.

In 1850 the blade of this pattern was replaced by P1838 cossack one due to its good cutting capabilities.

In 1868 a shorter version of P1850 was adopted in artillery as a “P1868 artillery’s shashka”. Such a game of names.

In 1870s in Russian army the question of cold steel reform aroused. The Command sought to elaborate a one unified weapon for all types of cavalry, which would be equally excellent for cutting as well as for thrusting. As is known, in XIX c. in European armies there was a wide discussion, what strike is more effective, a cut or a thrust. In Russia proponents of a cut had a strong argument represented by the Caucasians with their shashkas, recognized by their extreme cutting capabilities.

A new weapon was being elaborated by lead constructors of Russian army, the European and oriental experience was respected. They considered the question scientifically.

Russian military attaché in London general A. P. Gorlov, inspired by contemporain English military swords, designed for thrusting, and Caucasian shashkas, effective in cutting, developed three types of blade. Wilkinson company produced the samples, which were presented to the Special Commission, and after several years of discussion new P1881 were designed.

Eventually it was refused to make a one unified but two traditional patterns – dragoon’s and cossack’s. They blades were virtually identical, but the hilts were different. It was decided to leave traditional guards: with one knuckle bar for dragoon and other line cavalry and without any guard hook-shaped hilt for Cossacks. Cup-hilts were discussed but due to their weight and nuisance when wearing it was refused to adopt them. Asymmetrical hilts were out of consideration because they can turn the blade while cutting and cause a weak hit. The grip became curved in comparison with P1834 and P1838 in order to reconcile the point and

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<sup>32</sup> Фролов, с. 104.

<sup>33</sup> Федоров, *Холодное оружие*. с. 71.

the median line of the grip<sup>34</sup>. Russian weapon designer V. g. Fedorov later criticized this decision. According to him, it worsened cutting characteristics of the pattern because the point of balance was in front of the median line of the grip, while for good cutting it should be behind, like in axes with curved handles (Fig. 10)<sup>35</sup>.

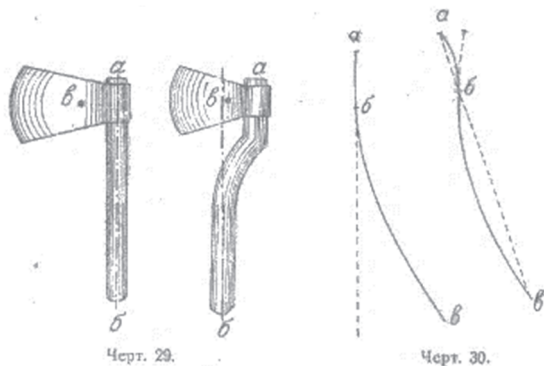


Fig. 10 V. g. Fedorov's drawing of edged weapons' median line.

Dragoon hilt consisted of:

- A brass guard with a knuckle bow and a ring for a knot, which was made in the end of a crossguard so it did not bother;
- A wooden grip with diagonal grooves. Without any leather cover or a wrap, the grip was made of lignum vitae, an excellent hardwood;
- Brass ferrule and pommel, where a knuckle bar ended (Fig. 12).

Tang of the blade had a thread, and the hilt attached with two nuts: one under the pommel and one above it. In fact both of them were inside the pommel.

### ***P1881 dragoon soldier's sashbka (Fig. 7, 15e)***

Total length – 1050 mm;

Blade length – 870 mm;

Blade width – 33 mm;

Weight – 1025 g<sup>36</sup>.

Point of balance – 200 mm – 215 mm<sup>37</sup>.

One wide fuller, ricasso. The grooves are diagonal.

This pattern changed backwards and sabers in all Russian cavalry regiments (except Cossack hosts, of course).

<sup>34</sup> Федоров, *Оружейное дело на грани двух эпох*. с. 163.

<sup>35</sup> Федоров, *Оружейное дело на грани двух эпох*. с. 163.

<sup>36</sup> Он же, *Холодное оружие*. с. 165-166.

<sup>37</sup> Там же. с. 165.

**P1881 dragoon officer's shashka**

Total length – 890 mm;

Blade length – 810 mm;

Blade width – 23 mm <sup>38</sup>;

The guard and pommel had engraving and were gilded. This pattern was used by officers of the same units as the soldier pattern.

Cossack hilt was initially designed as Caucasian shashkas' hilts, with two plates on three rivets. But finally it was decided to use hilt on thread and nuts. It consisted of three details:

- Lower brass ferrule;
- Wooden grip with diagonal (since 1910 – transversal) grooves (Fig. 6);

Brass hook-shaped pommel with a hole for a knot. It could have two “ears”, which covered the sides of a grip, but there was a variation without them too.

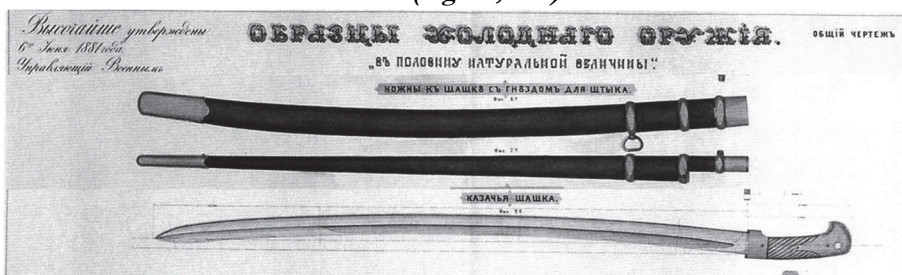
**P1881 cossack lower ranks' shashka (Fig. 11, 15d)**

Fig. 11 P1881 cossack's shashka

Total length – 1020 mm;

Blade length – 870 mm;

Blade width – 33 mm <sup>39</sup>.

The hilt could be assembled on two nuts inside the pommel (above and below it) or on 1-3 rivets. In this case pommel was a quite different.

**P1881 cossack officer's shashka**

Slightly curved blade with one wide or one wide and two narrow fullers. One edge, the point is two-edged. The pommel and ferrule could be voluntarily decorated.

<sup>38</sup> Кулинский, с. 153.

<sup>39</sup> Там же. с. 157.

Total length – 960 mm;  
 Blade length – 810 mm;  
 Blade width – 33 mm <sup>40</sup>;

In contradiction to all diligence P1881 were widely criticized. Cut proponents disliked their cutting characteristics, thrust adepts scolded trust capabilities.

For example, Russian weapon designer V. g. Fedorov in early XX c. criticized P1881 in such way:

- The blade is slightly curved. It impeded an accurate thrust and simultaneously was not curved enough for good cutting. Perfect it would be if the blade would be absolutely straight for thrusting of curved a lot for cutting. So the choice should be made. But it is not the main problem, the curvature can be remained unchanged if other deficiencies of P1881 would be corrected;
- The grip is curved. As we have already mentioned, V. g. Fedorov stressed that for good cutting the grip should be straight in order to keep the point of balance behind the median line of the grip, like in axes with curved handles.
- The weapon was too heavy;
- For such a heavy blade the point of balance should be nearer to the hilt <sup>41</sup>.

“The golden mean” appeared to be too unachievable.

Therefore, P1881 became one of the most criticized weapon. However, new such broad researches like in 1870s were not started. The importance of cold steel on battlefield of late XIX c. was consistently declining, so P1881 stayed serving until Revolution of 1917 and even later. All subsequent models were on the base of P1881. It became the most famous model of shashka and the whole Russian cold steel, the symbol of Russian cavalry and courage of this age.

In 1909-1910 the shashkas were a bit reformed. The new grip was in more complex shape, with thickening in the middle. The grooves became transverse (remember the P1838) and deeper. No leather or wire was still used on the grip. The pommel was at an angle to the grip, became longer and more figured, and vegetative ornament appeared on it, as well as a monogram of the Emperor, during reign of whom the weapon’s owner achieved his first officer’s rank.

### ***P1881/1909 dragoon officer’s shashka (Fig. 12, 16b)***

Overall length 890 mm;  
 Blade length 810 mm;  
 Blade width 23 mm <sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>40</sup> Кулинский. с. 160.

<sup>41</sup> Федоров, *Оружейное дело*. с. 165.

<sup>42</sup> Кулинский. с. 156.



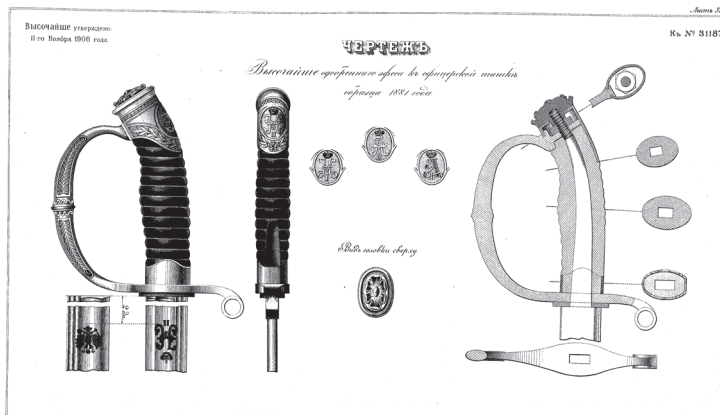


Fig. 12 P1881/1909 dragoon officer's shashka <sup>43</sup>.

### **P1881/1910 cossack officer's shashka (Fig. 6, 16c)**

Overall length 960 mm;

Blade length 810 mm;

Blade width 33 mm <sup>44</sup>.

### **P1904 cossack lower ranks' shashka (Fig. 16a)**

During the whole XIX c. Kuban and Caucasian (since 1860 – Terek) Cossack hosts were using voluntary weapons. In 1904 a regular pattern was adopted for them. Such weapons were already being used for a long time by Cossacks, and at this time they were just regulated.

So called 'Asian-style' shashka was more similar to traditional Caucasian weapons than models of system 1881.

Wooden or horn hilt, sometimes – with metal ornamented onlay on pommel. The pommel itself became longer and more massive to the late XIX c. (compare with P1834). The grip was straight. The hilt was embedded into the scabbard. Wooden scabbard was covered with leather upwards the upper band and with waxed canvas downwards.

Total length – 920 mm;

Blade length – 740 mm;

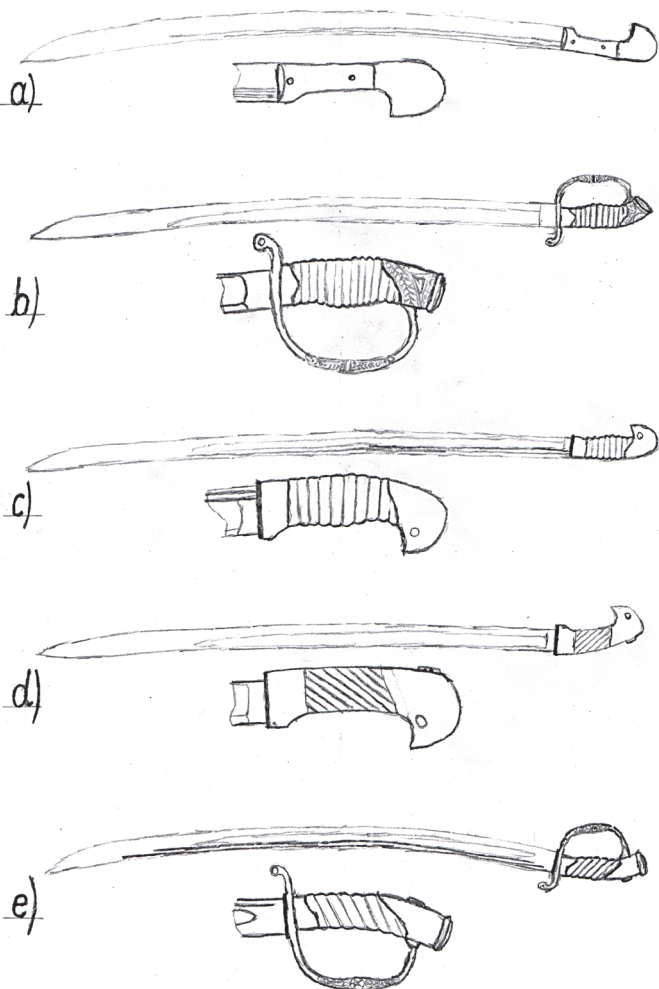
Blade width – 35 mm;

Weight – 695 g (without metal onlay on pommel) – 755 g <sup>45</sup>.

<sup>43</sup> Приказы по Военному ведомству 1853-1917', с. 509.

<sup>44</sup> Там же. с. 161.

<sup>45</sup> Фролов, с. 144.



*Fig. 16. Russian shashkas 1904-1940:*  
 a) P1904 Caucasian cossack's; b) P1881/1909 dragoon officer's;  
 c) P1881/1910 cossack officer's; d) P1927 Red cavalrymen's;  
 e) P1940 line commanding personnel's.

### ***P1913 Cossack officers' shashka (Fig. 13, 14)***

In 1913 arms of Kuban and Terek cossack officers were regulated too. As with P1904 lower rank's shashka, such weapons were already used by Cossacks and at this time were just regulated. The blade was the same as in P1904, as well as the shape of the straight hilt, but it consisted of three parts: horn grip, brass or steel pommel and ferrule with

regulated decoration and monogram of the Emperor during the reign of whom officer achieved his first officer's rank.

Чертеж эфеса  
к офицерской казачьей шабле  
азиатского образца



Fig. 13 P1913 Caucasian Cossack officers' shashka.

There were two types: "Caucasian", with hilt embedding into the scabbards, and "Asian", where the hilt did not embed, and the scabbards had usual locket.

However, very few shashkas of this pattern were produced, and nowadays remained samples of P1913 are very rare.

Overall length – 910 mm;

Blade length – 760 mm;

Blade width – 35 mm<sup>46</sup>.

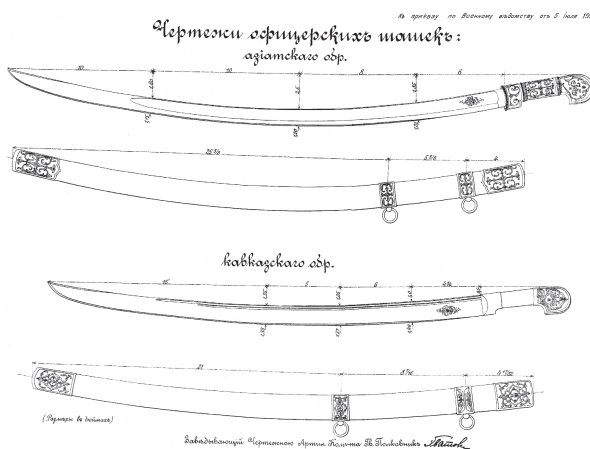


Fig. 14. P1913 Caucasian Cossack officers' shashka

<sup>46</sup> Там же. с. 163.

### ***Sashkas of the Red Army***

In 1917 the Great Revolution took place in Russia, in February the monarchy was overthrown, in October communists came to power and next year Civil war broke out. A new age of Russian history started. Despite sashka was a symbol of cossacks, the enemy of the new government, it was in service of both the reds and the whites. In maneuver Civil war the role of cavalry had unexpectedly increased in comparison with the WWI. And sashka, along with Mosin rifle and Maxim gun, became associated in historical memory with this very painful conflict.

In appeared in 1918 Red Army we could find great diversity of hilted weapons. Substantially Imperial army sashkas with sawed Royal symbols were used <sup>47</sup>. Until 1927 Russian weapons factories were producing P1881/1909 dragoon's and P1881/1910 Cossack's sashkas, but with Soviet symbols – the pentacle star and the hammer-and-sickle.

### ***P1927 sashka***

In 1927 a new pattern of sashka was adopted <sup>48</sup>. It was similar to Cossack's pattern of the Russian Imperial army, without knuckle bar. The back of the blade became thinner, the curved wooden grip had diagonal grooves like in P1881 and unlike P1881/1910. On hook-shaped brass pommel there were soviet symbols: the pentacle star, the hammer-and-sickle and the letters “СССР”, which mean “the USSR”. Also, there were such sashkas with ferrule and pommel of white metal. The decoration of the pommel was steadily simplifying and in 1942 all symbols except the star were deleted <sup>49</sup>. In 1931 the grip length was increased by 1,3 cm <sup>50</sup>.

The scabbards of lower rank's sashkas were with a bayonet socket, of commander's pattern – without.

This pattern was in use even during the WWII, and its production was stopped only in 1946. It was also supplied to other countries – Lithuania, Afghanistan and Mongolia. The pommels were decorated with respectively “Pahonia” symbol and bitmap <sup>51</sup>.

Overall length – 945 g;

Blade length – 810 g;

Blade width – 330 mm <sup>52</sup>.

<sup>47</sup> Игорь Здобнов, *Холодное оружие Красной армии 1918-1940* (Киев: КАТР-13068, 2005). с. 22.

<sup>48</sup> Игорь Гусев, *Холодное оружие страны советов* (Минск: Харвест, 2011), с. 3.

<sup>49</sup> Сергей Самгин, ‘Краткий обзор советской пашки образца 1927 г.’, *Историческое оружиеведение*, №4 (2017)

<sup>50</sup> Там же.

<sup>51</sup> Там же.

<sup>52</sup> Кулинский. Т. 2. с. 10.

***P1940 line commanding personnel's shashka***

In 1940 cavalry line commanding personnel adopted new shashka pattern. It had a brass guard with an engraved knuckle bar, curved black wooden grip with diagonal grooves and rather long figured brass pommel with convex image of a pentacle star.

This shashka was also adopted by all commanding personnel in different arms of service who were prescribed to have a horse. It was used until 1945 and in cavalry – even until 1955.

Overall length – 960 mm;

Blade length – 815 mm;

Blade width – 30 mm.

***P1940 general's shashka***

In 1940 general officer ranks in the Red army were introduced, so hew shashka pattern was adopted for the cavalry, infantry and artillery generals, while others had dirks. It was similar to P1940 line commanding personnel's shashka, but the guard was of white metal and the grip was of orange plastic. The long curved pommel had a convex image of a pentacle star and engraved image of a wreath, beams and letters “СССР” – “the USSR”. The bar had engraved weave. The blade had one wide and two narrow fullers. The chromated metal scabbards unconventionally had rings on the concave side instead of convex. Therefore, this parade pattern was a saber rather than a shashka despite its official name <sup>53</sup>.

There were three blades of different length: for generals of different height.

Overall length 970, 1020, 1090 mm

Blade length 820, 870, 940 mm

Blade width 30 mm <sup>54</sup>.

***Summary***

We have described only those models of shashka, which were officially adopted by Russian army. But it should be understood that there were a great diversity of weapons.

First of all, there were a lot of non-statutory models, especially among Cuban and Caucasian (Terek) cossacks, which shashkas were tried to be regulated only in 1904. Line army officers had voluntary arms too <sup>55</sup>. Weapons produced by Caucasian smiths were rather popular.

Statutory hilts could be combined with voluntary blades, which were often remade from sabers. In peacetime it was popular to wear weapons with light blades, they were called “mousethrusters”. Shashkas of different arms factories or of different batches of the same

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<sup>53</sup> Кулинский, Т. 2. с. 14.

<sup>54</sup> Там же. С. 14.

<sup>55</sup> Петрова, с. 5.

factory could differ a bit too. Also we can find special patterns outside the army – for police, gendarmerie, prison guards etc.

Summing up the first part of article, we would like to repeat that shashka is descended from a knife long-bladed edged weapon, emerged in early XVIII c. Subsequently, it spread in Russian Empire and Central Asia.

Russians, using Caucasian-style shashkas, also developed two new types of this weapon: “cossack’s” and “dragoon’s”. Asian shashkas differed from Caucasians too: weaponologists speak about two types: Bukharin and Afghani, or psevdoshashka.

The construction of different types changed, but the design stayed the same. The distinctive characteristics of shashka are:

- Slightly curved blade;
- Guardless hilt, even without a crossguard (except for dragoon’s patterns with a knuckle bar);
- Hook-shaped pommel;
- Scabbards with rings on the convex side for wearing edge facing back.

Caucasian shashkas are rather light and short. Their weight varies from 600 to 850 g, length – 80-90 cm. Later Russian patterns are longer and heavier, 90-100 cm and 800-900 g. Despite in most European countries saber were becoming more and more thrusting to the late XIX c., shashka stayed to be mostly cutting weapon.

And now we are going to talk about techniques of fencing with this weapon.

### **I.3. Fencing on shashkas**

Unfortunately, we know very little about wielding shashka among Caucasian warriors. This is a topic for a separate large research. In the present article we would like to describe techniques with shashka that we have found in Russian manuals of the late-XIX – first half of the XX centuries.

As we have already mentioned, there are a lot of myths about shashka. One of them is that shashka was developed only for rough chopping, not for fencing. The main argument of this idea is that the point of shashka’s balance was very far from a hilt so it was impossible to do complex techniques with this weapon <sup>56</sup>.

The point of balance was really rather far, as we have already seen, but shashkas were rather light weapon. In addition, we have several manuals about this weapon called like “Fencing on shashkas” or something like this. We can find such techniques as parade-riposte, feints, disengagements, lunges etc., as well as fencing postures. That is why, to our mind, we can speak about fencing on shashkas. At least in Russian army.

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<sup>56</sup> Наталья Курсанина, ‘Не рубиться, а рубить’ *Клинок – традиции и современность*, 33 (2017).

### I.3.1. Sources

We do not know any Caucasian treatises concerning shashka, but we know Russian fencing manuals. Those which are about shashka are mostly army statutes than treatises but they content techniques of fencing with shashka.

- Krestovskiy L. V. *The book for recruits of cavalry*. Saint-Petersburg, 1881. Since the second edition the title – “The book for young soldiers of cavalry and cossacks”.
- Gladkov A. N. *Fencing with shashkas and pikes*. Saint-Petersburg, 1893.
- Olsufiev V. A. *Manual on teaching fencing and using it on horseback*. Saint-Petersburg, 1896.
- *Statute of Cossack troop service*. Saint-Petersburg, 1899.
- Olsufiev V. A. *Cutting and fencing*. Saint-Petersburg, 1904.
- Olsufiev V. A. *Manual on teaching swordsmanship in our cavalry*. Saint-Petersburg, 1904.
- Grekov A. K. *Cutting and thrusting training*. Textbook for officers of the General school of fencing and gymnastics. Saint-Petersburg, 1912.
- Domnin N. *Cutting and applied fencing in cavalry*. Modcow-Leningrad, 1927.
- Brimmer K. *Shashka fencing manual for convoy guards of the USSR*. Moscow, 1928.
- *Red Army cavalry's statute*. Moscow, 1938.
- Efremov g. M., Nevolin V. g. *Hory training*. Manual. Moscow, 1950.

### I.3.2. Holding shashka

In sources we find only two manners of holding this weapon (Fig. 17). They are similar to the European saber school: all fingers enfold the handle or thumb placed on the back of a grip. In most manuals the second manner is considered to be better, at least for thrusts but in some sources – for strikes too. A. I. Grekov advises to use both manners – depending on your strength and weapon's weight <sup>57</sup>.

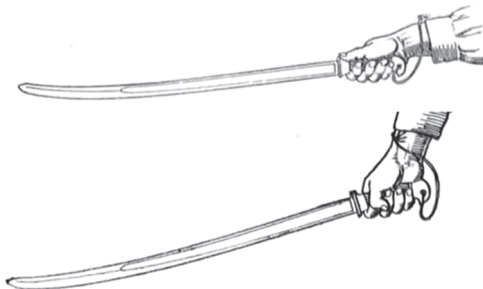
Furthermore, we can see a special flat platform for a thumb on the back of a grip of such shashkas as P1881/1909 dragoon's and P1881/1910 cossack's.

In a lot of texts published in the Internet we see another manners of holding a shashka – keeping the pommel, the ferrule (“Circassian” manner) and reverse grip <sup>58</sup>. However, we do not find this manners in the manuals of XIX-XX c.

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<sup>57</sup> А. Греков, *Обучение рубке и уколам* (Санкт-Петербург: Женская тип. т-ва „Печ. станка“, 1912), с. 6.

<sup>58</sup> ‘Всё о шашке’, *Усадьба Демьяново г. Клин* <<http://klin-demianovo.ru/kazachja-obschina/kazache-oruzhie/vse-o-shashke/>> [01.10.2018]



*Fig. 17 Holding shashka according to K. Brimmer's book.*

### I.3.3. Fighting on horseback

#### *Effective hit*

Effective cut is described in shashkas textbooks in details. We find four requirements for it. An effective cut is defined as immediately denying adversary the ability to resist <sup>59</sup>. The effective cut should be:

- 1) True.
- 2) Hard.
- 3) Accurate.
- 4) Incising.

The “**true blow**” mean that in the moment of cutting the trajectory of the blade movement (“the strike plane”) and the blade plane must absolutely coincide, so the matter of the target does not put pressure on the blade plane and does not cause an additional resistance, reducing the depth of the wound <sup>60</sup>.

For this, postulate the authors, in the moment of swing and hit your wrist and blade must be in the same plane as your forearm; wrist must not bend, especially to the right or left <sup>61</sup>, it should be strongly fixed. The authors pay a lot of attention to this moment.

**Hardness** is the second requirement for a blow. Most authors speak about a large swing from a shoulder, circle or straight. For example, A. I. Grekov claims that for a hard circle blow it would be better if the swing will start at the opposite to the target point of a circle’s diameter <sup>62</sup>. Though the authors advise not to make a too large swing, just optimal to

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<sup>59</sup> Греков, с. 3.

<sup>60</sup> Там же, с. 4.

<sup>61</sup> Там же.

<sup>62</sup> Там же, с. 9.



deliver a hard cut without being open. In later books we can find straight cuts without swing too.

Also several manuals speak about torso turn in the direction a strike to make it harder <sup>63</sup>.

**Accurate blow** should be accurate, nothing specific here.

**Incising.** Incising is an important category in the sources on shashka. Incising is necessary for delivering a remarkable damage because clothing and equipment could extinguish a power of strike. To get such effect your blade should arrive the target at an acute angle, not right. It can be done by keeping the obtuse angle between a forearm and a weapon in the moment of a strike, wrist must be fixed strongly.

And what is more, nowadays they speak a lot about “*ottajka*” (from ‘*tyanut*’ – “to pull” in Russian) – specific for shashka technique, when after delivering a strike a swordsman continue to move a blade. It is performed by using a hook-shape pommel of shashka. It seems to be something like a legend nowadays, allegedly with such technique a cossack could deepen his strike and chop up his adversary in two. Though some modern books on shashka claim that it is just a mistake, a myth and unreal uneffective technique. Was the incising “*ottajka*” be really used in XIX-XX c.? Let’s consult the sources.

We can find this word in some sources – Cossack 1899 Statute <sup>64</sup>, N. Domnin 1927 <sup>65</sup>., K. Brimmer 1928 <sup>66</sup> and Red Army Cavalry Statute 1938 <sup>67</sup>. And by it they understood the incising movement after delivering a strike, and they advise to do it. However, V. A. Olsufiev in his manuals and A. I. Grekov in his 1912 book find such technique harmful because it make your strike shorter and weaker – trying to incise after a strike you can start doing it when the strike is not finished yet and its energy is not out <sup>68</sup>. It would be better to concentrate on a true blow.

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<sup>63</sup> Н. Домнин, *Рубка и прикладное фехтование в коннице* (Москва-Ленинград: Государственное издательство, отдел военной литературы, 1927), с. 4; Народный Комиссариат Обороны Союза ССР, ‘Строевой устав конницы РККА 1938 г.’ (Москва: Государственное военное издательство Наркомата обороны Союза ССР, 1939), с. 148; Ефремов, Георгий, В. Г. Неволлин, *Конная подготовка. Учебник*, под ред. И. У. Тутарникова (Москва, 1950)

<sup>64</sup> Российская империя, *Устав строевой казачьей службы. Ч. 1. Одиночное, взводное и пешие ученье* 1899, с. 51.

<sup>65</sup> Домнин, Народный Комиссариат Обороны Союза ССР, ‘, с. 18.

<sup>66</sup> Константин Бриммер., *Руководство по владению шашкой в войсках конной стражи СССР, под ред. К. Калнина* (Москва-Ленинград: Государственное издательство, отдел военной литературы, 1928), с. 21.

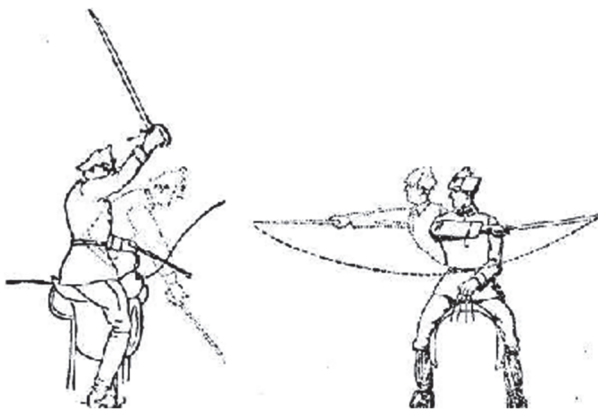
<sup>67</sup> Строевой устав конницы РККА 1938 г., с. 149.

<sup>68</sup> Владимир Олсуфьев, *Рубка и фехтование* (Санкт-Петербург: В. Березовский, 1904); Он же, *Наставление для обучения владению оружием в нашей кавалерии* (Санкт-Петербург: тип. Тренке и Фюсно, 1904), с. 17.; Греков, с.6.

The other sources do not mention such technique, describing just striking action in cuts. But we can find advances to continue circle movement of the blade after a hit to return it to the initial defensive position, to make a recovery faster. Therefore it seems like this technique really existed but was not totally common due to its complexity.

### *Cuts*

As already mentioned, most cuts are delivered with a good swing. Rider should bend his weapon-arm to the shoulder, right or left, and stand up on stirrups. Some sources recommend to lean a torso a bit back in a swing. Then rider should make a strike by throwing his weapon-arm towards the target. The arm should be straightened by the mid-way point and then should go straight. The wrist is strongly fixed to make a true and incising cut. And torso should be also thrown forward a bit to make a long and hard attack (Fig. 18).



*Fig. 18 The rider throw his torso during a cut  
in N. Domin's 1927 manual<sup>69</sup>*

Cuts, as well as positions, are not numbered in the shashka manuals. We find next trajectories of cutting:

- Horizontals – to the left and to the right, where to the right is more effective due to the shoulder anatomy;
- Vertical – downward, from right and from left shoulder;
- Diagonal to the right;
- Diagonal to the left

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<sup>69</sup> Там же, сс. 1181-1189.

Both diagonal cuts are downward. We found only one description of upward cuts in the manuals – V. M. Gladkov describes a cut to the forearm from below <sup>70</sup> for fencing on foot. Also there are cuts to the torso under the adversary's arm, but they are horizontal. To our mind, such neglect of upward cuts related to their complexity and weakness on horse combat.

But it is not the only one classification of cuts in the sources. Some authors divide them into:

- to the right;
- to the right-and-forward (or to the right half-turn in some books);
- to the right-and-down;
- to the left;
- to-the-left-and-forward (to the left half-turn);
- to the left-and-down <sup>71</sup>.

The strikes down are vertical, while the others are horizontal (Fig. 18-21).

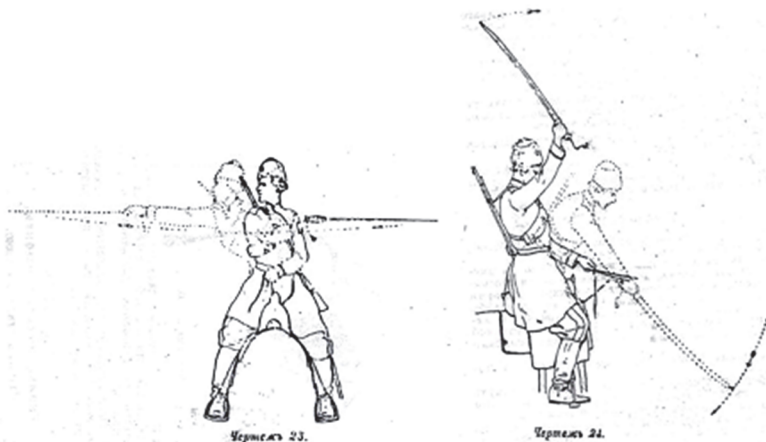
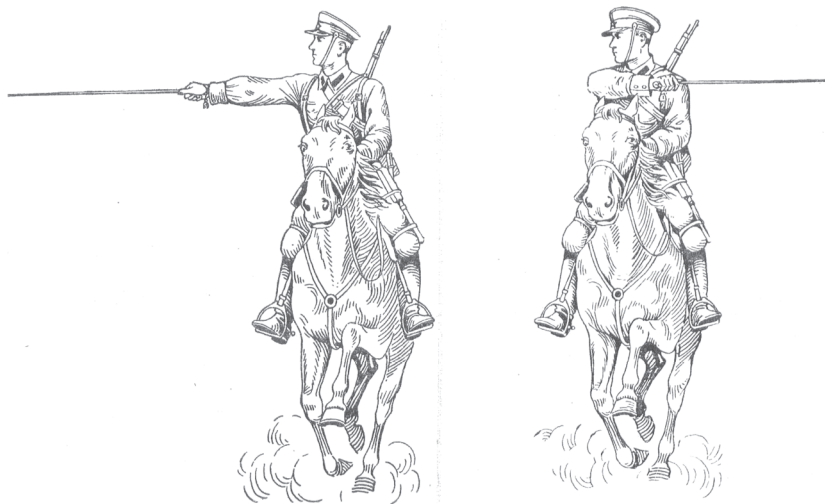


Fig. 19 Strikes to the right and to the right-and-down in Cossack statute 1899 <sup>72</sup>.

<sup>70</sup> Василий Гладков, *Фехтование на шашках и пиках. Для занятий в стрелковых частях* (Санкт-Петербург: Типография воен.-книж. Магазина Н. В. Васильева, 1893), с. 20.

<sup>71</sup> Строевой устав конницы РККА 1938, с. 148.

<sup>72</sup> *Устав строевой казачьей службы 1899*



*Fig. 20 Strike to the right in the Red cavalry 1938 statute*



*Fig. 21 Strike to the right-and-down in the Red cavalry 1938 statute.*

What the sources advise to strike to? V. A. Olsufiev claims it would be better to hit the head <sup>73</sup>. The others do not allocate something as a preferable target, but describes cuts to the forearm and elbow, head (vertically downward) and cheeks, shoulders (vertically downward) and flanks. N. Domnin also speaks about strikes below the waist. And, of course, strikes could be done against a horse – to the head or to the back, and cavalrymen should be able to parade them also.

### *Thrusts*

Despite shashka was considered as a cutting weapon, thrusts were possible too because its straightness. V. A. Olsufiev claims the thrust even more effective than a cut <sup>74</sup>.

N. Domnin gives three requirements for an effective thrust. It should be:

- True;
- Accurate;
- Hard.

The true thrust is delivered at a right angle to the target.

We can find two types of thrust in the sources (Fig. 22). N. Domnin divides them into active and passive. Active is delivering by straightening the arm while passive – on galloping horse with the arm straightened.

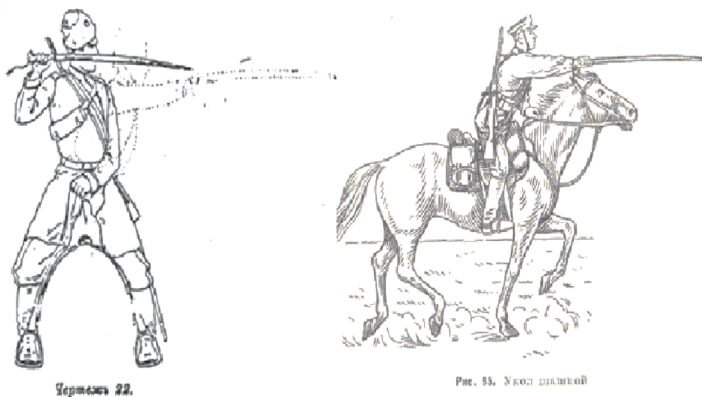


Fig. 22 Active thrust according to Cossack 1899 statute <sup>75</sup>  
and passive thrust on running horse  
according to Red cavalry 1938 statute

<sup>73</sup> Олсуфьев В. А., *Наставление для обучения владению оружием в нашей кавалерии*, с. 16.

<sup>74</sup> Олсуфьев В. А., *Наставление для обучения владению оружием в нашей кавалерии*, с. 18.

<sup>75</sup> *Устав строевой казачьей службы 1899.*

According to Cossack 1899 statute to deliver a thrust on horse rider should turn to the target, lean back on the opposite stirrup, swing the arm to the right ear, direct the point to the target and the edge – back <sup>76</sup>. After such swing the rider should throw his arm towards to target and lean his torso a bit forward.

A. I. Grekov advises to direct the edge to the right-and-up because the thrust with a curved blade will be more accurate and its penetration abilities increase due to convergence of the blade plane and a slope of interval between ribs <sup>77</sup>. The manuals tell us to put a thumb on a back of a grip.

Also thrusts are divided according to their directions. In most books we can find next possible directions:

- to the left;
- to the left half-turn;
- to the right half-turn.

But N. Domnin add also forward thrust <sup>78</sup> and V. A. Olsufiev – thrust bottom-up, which is however seldom used <sup>79</sup>.

And, of course, the thrusts can also be directed downwards – against adversaries on foot.

### ***Parades***

There is a myth that shashka is not for fencing or even for parades. Even some memoirists note that Caucasians didn't parry adversaries' strikes <sup>80</sup>. May be that is why they lost the war to Russians? It is probably referred to armored warriors.

Anyway, in Russian manuals there are parades. Not all of the authors number them, but we can easily recognize numbered parries from synchronous saber school. You can see the first, second, third, fourth and fifth parades in different manuals.

### **Left flank parry**

It is similar to the first parade in saber (Fig. 23). Something like the forth parade is also described, but not in all books. Generally the first parry is preferred to protect the left flank on horse. It seems to be because in this option it is easier to move a blade over the horse's neck. And there are now illustrations of this parade in shashka literature. N. Domnin even gives it the forth number, but leave without a visual clarification <sup>81</sup>. V. M.

<sup>76</sup> *Устав строевой казачьей службы 1899*, с. 50-51.

<sup>77</sup> Греков, с. 34.

<sup>78</sup> Домнин, с. 21.

<sup>79</sup> Олсуфьев, *Наставление для обучения владению оружием в нашей кавалерии*.

<sup>80</sup> Федор Торнау, *Воспоминания Кавказского офицера* (Москва: «ЛИРО-XXI», 2008), с. 297.

<sup>81</sup> Домнин, с. 32.

Gladkov and G. M. Efremov also show us how to perform the right flank parry moving the blade over horse's neck (Fig. 24) <sup>82</sup>.



*Fig. 23 Left flank parries in V. M. Gladkov's 1893 <sup>83</sup>and N. Domin's 1927 manuals*



*Рис. 111*

*Fig. 24 Left parry in G. M. Efremov's 1950 manual.*

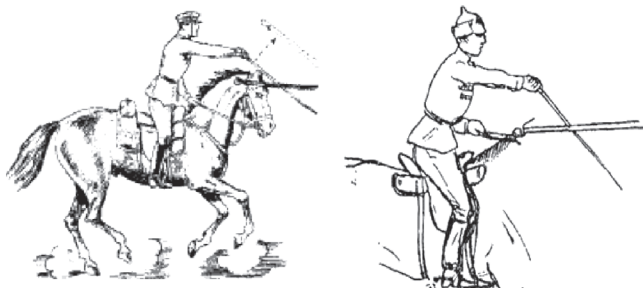
### **Right flank parade**

Here we have two variations – like the second (Fig. 25) and third parries (Fig. 26). The second may be also used to protect legs and horse.

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<sup>82</sup> ГЛАДКОВ, с. 51; ЕФРЕМОВ.

<sup>83</sup> ГЛАДКОВ, с. 43.



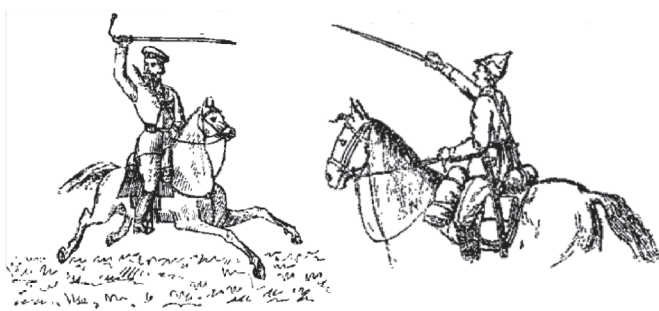
*Fig. 25 Second parry  
in N. Domin's 1927<sup>84</sup> and G. M. Efremov's 1950 manuals.*



Фиг. 45.

*Fig. 26 Right flank parry  
according to V. M. Gladkov<sup>85</sup> and second parade in N. Domin's 1927 manuals<sup>86</sup>.*

Parries against horizontal hits from above are similar to the fifth or Hutton's St. George parade. This way thrusts can also be parried to the up (Fig. 27).



*Fig. 27 Head protection in V. M. Gladkov's 1893<sup>87</sup> and N. Domin's 1927 manuals.*

<sup>84</sup> Домнин, с. 10.

<sup>85</sup> Гладков, с. 43.

<sup>86</sup> Домнин, с. 11.

<sup>87</sup> Гладков, с. 42.



The authors note that in case of attacks from the side or from behind the rider must turn to the adversary and use one of the usual parries. As on Fig. 28.

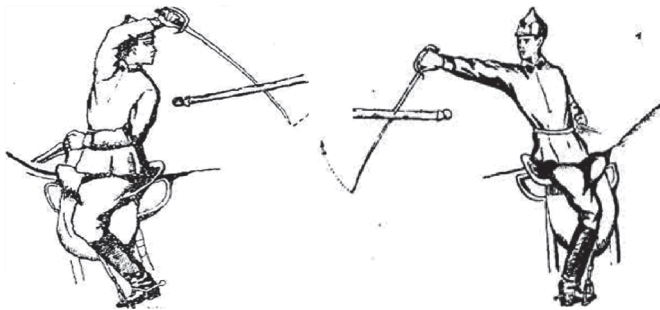


Fig. 28 *Domnin's parries of blows from behind: left and right.*

And what is more, in some manuals we can find additional parries. N. Domnin describes something like Hutton's "octave" as an option to protect back and horse (Fig. 29).

V. M. Gladkov gives us another parry. It is against thrusts from the left, similar to Hutton's septime. It should be performed as a quick strike to the opponent's blade when he is thrusting (Fig. 30) <sup>88</sup>.



Fig. 29 *N. Domnin's back parade.*



Fig. 30 *V. M. Gladkov's back parade.*

When parrying, it would be better to lean back a bit, on the contrary if you are defending your horse, lean farther to the protected area. One should parry only with forte and edge <sup>89</sup>. V. M. Gladkov notes that parade should not be performed earlier than adversary's hit be clear because he can perform a feint.

<sup>88</sup> Гладков, с. 46.

<sup>89</sup> Леонтий Крестовский, *Книжка для новобранцев кавалерии* (Санкт-Петербург: Типография И. Н. Скороходова, 1881)

After a parry a rider should deliver a quick riposte by cut of thrust, for which he should stand on stirrups to make a blow harder.

### **I.3.4. Foot fencing**

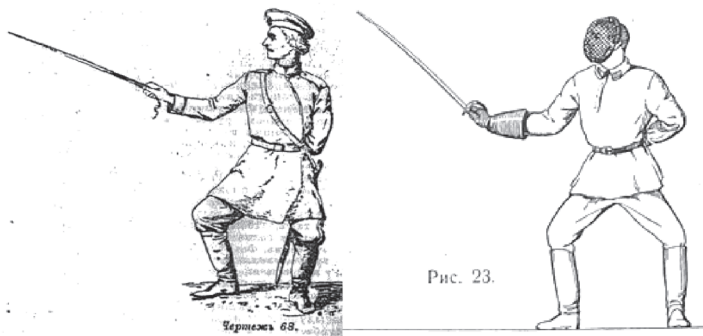
Unfortunately we know almost nothing about how Caucasian highlanders handled shashka. But Russian manuals for Cossacks and soldiers tell us something about Russian way of handling this weapon. Foot fencing was generally considered as a first step training for further mounted training. But infantry officers also adopted shashkas soon, and what is more Russia had foot units armed with such blade like foot artillery, police or prison convoy. Officers and even privates could also participate in cutting competitions. Duels, however, were not meaningful area for shashka using on foot because most duels in Russia at that time were held on firearms<sup>90</sup>.

The authors of manuals notes the influence of saber fencing: Russian<sup>91</sup>, Italian<sup>92</sup> and French schools<sup>93</sup>.

### **Posture**

All postures we find in the sources are very similar to saber ones. They are right foot forward.

All authors tell us to keep torso upright, front foot faces forward, feet at a 90 degree, distance between heel is equal to 2 feet, knees should be above toes or, according to Cossack 1899 statute – above the midpoint of feet. K. Brimmer advises to keep knees differently: the front one – above the center, and the back one – above the toe (Fig. 31). The weight should be distributed on a left leg or 50-50 in different sources.



*Fig. 31 Third guards in Cossack 1899 statute and K. Brimmer's manual.*

<sup>90</sup> Востриков А. В., *Книга о русской дуэли* (Санкт-Петербург: Издательство Ивана Лимбаха, 1998), сс. 206-207.

<sup>91</sup> Олсуфьев, *Рубка и фехтование*. с. 4.

<sup>92</sup> Олсуфьев, *Наставление для обучения владению оружием в нашей кавалерии*; Домнин, с. 70.

<sup>93</sup> Бриммер, с. 6; Домнин, с. 70.

Keeping the left shoulder and arm behind to reduce the target area is also recommended. In the third guard the right elbow should be a bit forward from the torso and should not be turned to the right but down. The right wrist with a weapon is at the height of the elbow or a bit higher. The edge of the shashka is turned right-and-down, the point is aimed to adversary's eyes or, according to Red Cavalry 1938 statute – to the neck <sup>94</sup> (Fig. 32).



Fig. 32. Third guard in Red Cavalry 1938 statute.

As you can see, nothing changed due to the open hilt of shashka. Before studying sources we assumed that the wrist position would differ from saber one where the weapon has a good guard, and in fact it appeared exact opposite. The wrist should be protected not by changing the posture in advance but by parries.

Some authors also give us the second position (and they call it so). The wrist is a bit lower than a shoulder, the edge is turned to the right-and-up, the point is aimed to adversary's thigh. The arm should be extended but not tight (Fig. 33).

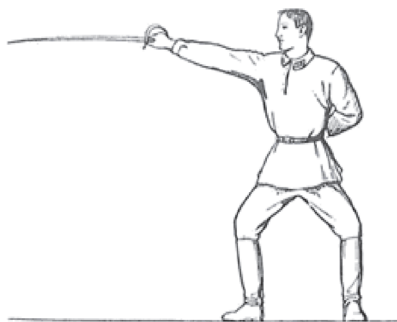


Fig. 33. K. Brimmer's second guard.

<sup>94</sup> Строевой устав конницы РККА 1938, с. 50.

### ***Moving***

All moving is only forward and back, like in saber fencing. The sources describe single and double steps. Single step forward starts with the forward foot and then the back one follow. In double step forward back foot stands near the forward one or in front of it in some manuals, which then moves forward. V. M. Gladkov advises to start moving forward by raising the toe of the forward foot up and then putting its heel a bit forward <sup>95</sup>.

Furthermore, we can see also jumps, which should be made by strong both legs push. K. Brimmer describes jump back like crossover when fencer pushes by right leg, then cross legs, lands with right leg first and retakes the posture <sup>96</sup>.

As side moving V. M. Gladkov gives voltes, which are side jumps to the left and right. They must be continued by quick lunge attacks <sup>97</sup>.

### ***Lunges***

Lunges are also described in all shashka manuals which concern fencing on foot. Among features we would like to note that the authors except V. M. Gladkov tell to lend a torso a bit forward and the back foot does not move at all. N. Domnin highlights that arm should start first and lunge is need only is the distance is too large to reach adversary with a single thrust or cut <sup>98</sup>. Half-lunge is also described in the sources. Note that in all books back arm rest behind without straightening (Fig. 34-35).



*Fig 34. Lunge in Cossack 1899 statute and M. Gladkov's manual.*

Lunges should be as quicke and sharp as possible. They could be preceded but steps or jums forward. V. g. Gladkov describes also an option with stepping back feet near the forward one and then lunging. Every lunge should be followed by quicke recovery.

<sup>95</sup> ГЛАДКОВ, с. 14-15.

<sup>96</sup> БРИММЕР, с. 26.

<sup>97</sup> ГЛАДКОВ, с. 17-18.

<sup>98</sup> ДОМНИН, с. 24.

The authors say nothing about flash attacks though they describe quick crossed steps forward as we have already mentioned above.

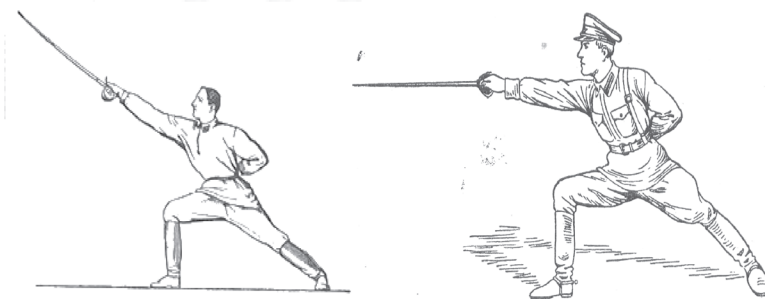


Fig. 35 Lunge in K. Brimmer's book and Red Cavalry 1938 statute.

### Cuts

The authors divide cuts on straight and with swings, which themselves are divided on straight and circle. Straight cuts are more seldom, e.x. V. M. Gladkov, A. I. Grekov and Red cavalry 1938 statute do not mention them at all. To our mind, it is due to horsey combat focusing of this manuals. However N. Domnin in his "Cutting and applied fencing in cavalry" gives straight cuts. Ascending cuts are not very common too.

All four requirements for an effective cut described above are valid for foot fencing too.

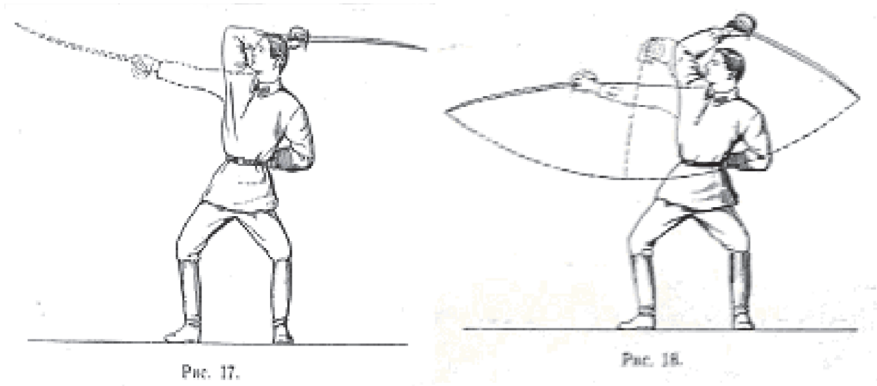
The authors give us

- vertical cuts to the head and shoulders (Fig. 36-37);
- diagonal downward cuts to the cheeks (Fig. 37);
- horizontal cuts to the flanks (Fig. 38),
- diagonal ascending cuts to the flanks – they are described only by N. Domnin<sup>99</sup>, K. Brimmer<sup>100</sup> and Red Cavalry 1938 statute<sup>101</sup> (Fig. 39);
- horizontal cuts to the legs (Fig. 40);
- circle cuts to the forearm: from the right, left and below (Fig. 40).

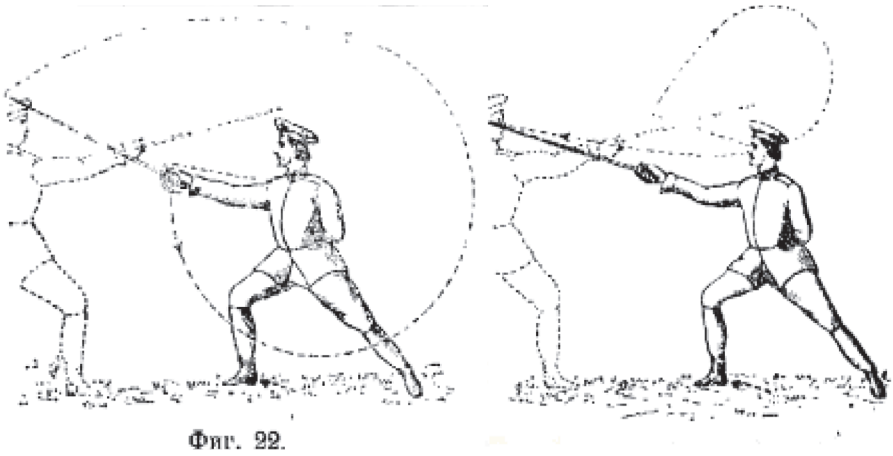
<sup>99</sup> Домнин, с. 28.

<sup>100</sup> Бриммер, с. 32-33.

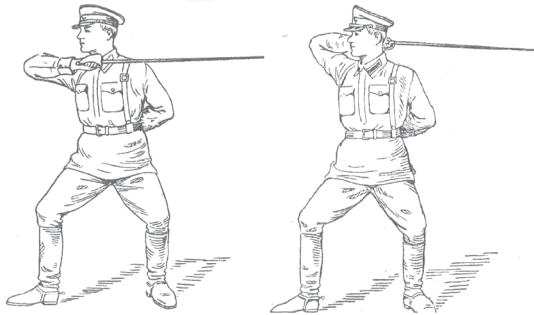
<sup>101</sup> Строевой устав конницы РККА, с. 57.



*Fig. 36 Cuts to the head according to K. Brimmer: with straight and circle swings.*



*Fig. 37 M. Gladkov's cuts to the head, shoulders or cheeks with a circle swing.*



*Fig. 38 Swing for cuts to left and right flanks in Red cavalry 1938 Statute.*

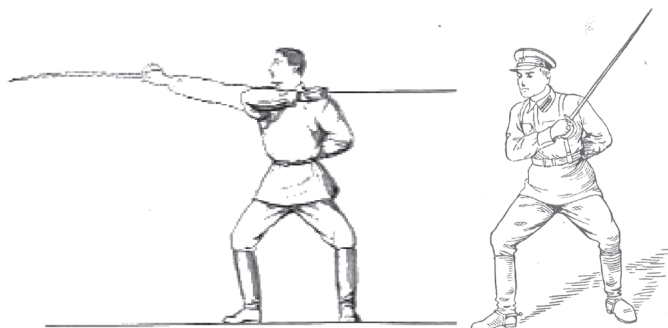


Fig. 39 K. Brimmer's ascending cuts to the right flank<sup>102</sup> and a swing in Red Cavalry 1938 statute for it<sup>103</sup>

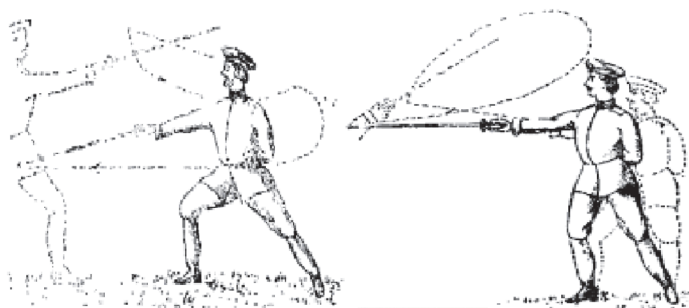


Fig. 40 Cut to the leg and vertical cut to the forearm according to V. M. Gladkov<sup>104</sup>. The second one is through the left side.

### Parades

As we have already mentioned in the paragraph about mounted fencing, contrary to the popular myth shashka was used for parings too. In the Russian sources we see five parades similar to the saber ones (Fig. 41). Some authors even number them, the others say the head, left and right flanks parries.

<sup>102</sup> Бриммер.

<sup>103</sup> Строевой устав конницы РККА 1938 г., с. 57.

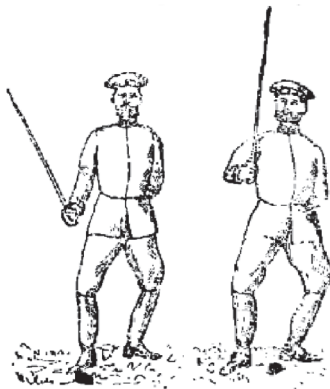
<sup>104</sup> Гладков, с. 20; Там же, с. 25.



*Fig. 41 Cossack 1899 statute parades.*

For parades the fencer bend the elbow a bit more than in posture and raise or lower the point, the blade is vertical (horizontal in the fifth parry):

Also we some variations of that parades due to the open hilt of sashka. The fencer should raise or delete the wrist depending on the height of adversary's attack. E. x. compare that illustrations of right flank and cheek parries (Fig. 42)



*Fig. 42 V. M. Gladkov's right flank and right cheek parries.*

Open wrist should be protected in the same way – by taking appropriate parade with the hilt upper or lower, in other words the fencer must change the height of his wrist. In this case adversary will face your forte or air. To parry the cut to a wrist from below V. M. Gladkov describes a parade like A. Hutton's horizontal quarte, when the point of lowered blade is aimed to the left and edge is turned down <sup>105</sup>.

<sup>105</sup> Там же, с. 29.



Red cavalry 1938 statute suggests us the sixths parade as well <sup>106</sup> (Fig. 43).



*Fig. 43 The sixth parade in Red Cavalry 1938 statute.*

V. M. Gladkov recommends also to protect the forward leg remove it behind the back one instead of parrying with the blade.

On what part of a blade should parades be taken? It differs. 1899 statute prescribes to do it on the center of a blade <sup>107</sup>, while K. Brimmers – on the forte <sup>108</sup>.

The authors advise not to move a blade too far when parrying in order to escape adversary's feints. With the same aime one should not take parades too early.

After a successful parry a quick riposte should be performed followed by recovery.

The authors describe such techniques as feints, ripostes and remises. Remises must be done if adversary does not make a riposte after his successful parry. Also we can see counterattacks on preparation and even attacks with the opposition despite the guardless hilt <sup>109</sup>.

As we have already mentioned, the sources recommend their readers not to take parades too early in case of adversary's feints. So you can see the sense of timing though it is not much considered in that manuals. Timing is valid in mounted combat too – instructors complain that young cavalrymen start hits too late, when the target is already near their horse head. In this case when blade reaches the target, it is, due to the high speed of horse, already behind the soldier. The cut becomes too weak.

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<sup>106</sup> *Строевой устав конницы РККА*, с. 61.

<sup>107</sup> *Устав строевой казачьей службы 1899*, с. 136.

<sup>108</sup> Бриммер, с. 33.

<sup>109</sup> ГЛАДКОВ, с. 13.

We can find sense of distance too, as we considered in the paragraph about lunges and moving, the authors describe retreat a lot, as well as attacks without lunges and with half-lunge.

So we can conclude that, despite the fact that we can say very little about Caucasian shashka fencing, Russian one was rather modern for the late XIX-early XX c., though the manuals are not so detailed to consider tactics and advanced techniques a lot.

#### **I.4. Differences between shashka and European saber fencing**

As we can see, fencing on shashka in Russian Imperial and Red armies was rather similar to the European military saber fencing. The more interesting the differences are.

First of all, we have noticed that postures with a straight arm like in Italian saber school are not used. In our opinion, it relates to the guardless hilt of shashka.

Also, we find two manner of parrying hits to the hand: or by lower third and fourth parades, or by higher first and second ones.

Furthermore, cuts with a swing are more common than straight ones. We suppose it is due to military focus of shashka fencing and rather far point of balance at this weapon.

Of course, slicing continuation of a cut – “ottajka” – is a very interesting technique, although it is described not in all sources.

When in other European armies in late XIX c. thrust started to prevail over cuts, Russian shashka stayed to be mostly cutting weapon.

Finally, we have not seen description of any corps-à-corps techniques like left hand grasps or pommel strikes in the manuals.

#### **I.5. Training methodology**

This topic is described by the authors too. They advise to move from simple to complex, firstly showing the technique. Foot training is going first.

A coach explains how to hold a shashka, then young soldiers do single exercises. Twisting wrist circles was used to warm up.

Cutting targets was one of the principal exercises. They used tatami, clay or rope, as well as different dummies, e. x. burlap sack with straw. For thrusting balls of rope, rings and dummies were used (Fig. 44).

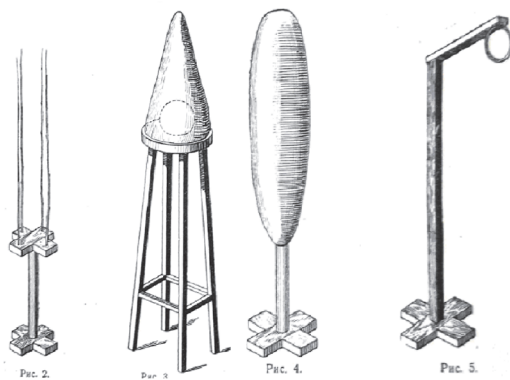


Fig. 44 K. Brimmer gives us excellent images of such equipment<sup>110</sup>. From the left to the right: platform for tatami or rope, platform for clay or rope balls, dummy and gallons for rings.

For pair exercises with other pupils or a coach special gear was used: masks, jackets, gloves, joint protectors and light blunt spadroons (Fig. 45-46).

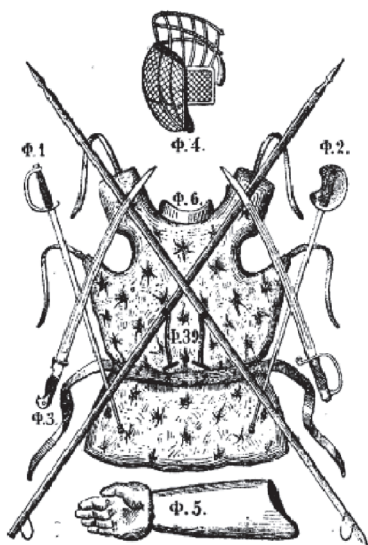


Fig. 45 Training gear from V. M. Gladkov 1893 manual.

<sup>110</sup> Бриммер.

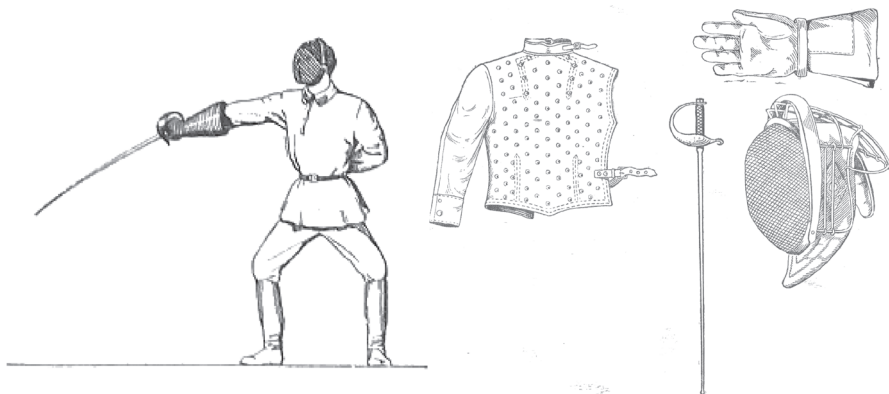
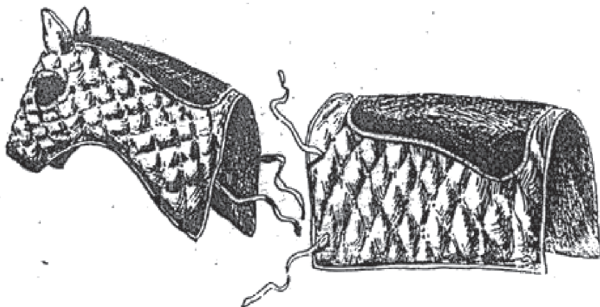


Fig. 46 Gear from soviet manuals: K. Brimmer and Red Cavalry 1938 statute.

Horsy training started on foot. When cutting soldier kept his lags like riding a horse, not in fencing posture. Then he became cutting on wooden training horses. Then he started cutting on real horses and then – sparring. Special gear for horses existed too (Fig. 47) <sup>111</sup>.



Чертеж 84.

Fig 47 Practical wooden sticks in K. Brimmer's book.

The authors wrights about competitions. E. x. A. I. Grekov gives one option of rules for them <sup>112</sup>. They can be individual and team, on foot or on horse, staying or moving. For moving competitions several targets are used. They should be installed in a chess order.

Quality of cuts and thrusts were judged: zero points for an excellent hit, one for satisfying, two for uncut or thrust-passé and three for misses.

Target are could be reduced by chalk marks, or it could be covered by cloth.

<sup>111</sup> Там же.

<sup>112</sup> Греков.

Summing up, we would like to underline again that, despite the popular myth, fencing on shashkas existed. Unfortunately, we can not say anything about how the Caucasians fought with their arms. But the authors of Russian manuals speak about parades, different cuts and thrusts in mass mounted combat, where, of course, range of techniques was not so broad. Foot fencing was influenced by European saber schools very much, it differed much less than we expected though hand is not protected at all. Generally the system of foot fencing was similar to saber. We can find such terms as “parades”, “feints”, “lunge”, “measure”, postures and moving are the same like in saber. Consequently, shashka is surely not an axe, as a popular myth claim.

And what is more, none of the authors of Russian manuals mention the cut which a lot of modern texts about shashka speak, when warrior catches the hook of the pommel with his edge of his hand, unsheathes the shashka and cuts with the same tempo. Even if the Caucasians used such strike, Russian soldiers were not been taught it.

## **I.6. Shashka in modern world**

In modern Russia shashka is a symbol, a legend weapon. Almost an idol for modern cossacks, a symbol of national valor and glory for Caucasians.

They even hold cutting competitions nowadays. And we have excellent smiths who make shashkas-masterpieces.

It is the heritage.

The most famous weapon of Caucasian and Civil wars. The symbol of prowess and courage. Of national military history. It is surrounded by myths and we hope this article had dispelled some of them.

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<sup>113</sup> 'Sword with scabbard', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York) <<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/32186>> [14.08.2018]

<sup>114</sup> 'Sabel', *Livruskammaren och Skoklosters slott med Stiftelsen Hallnyska museet* <<http://emuseumplus.lsh.se/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface&module=collection&objectId=43925&viewType=detailView>> [14.08.2018]

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