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Early Iranian Riders and Cavalry

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Abstract: *The expansion of the Iranian peoples in first centuries of the 1st millennium BCE coincides with the creation and further development of the cavalry warfare in western Eurasia, as well as with the creation of the pastoral nomadic life-style which dominated the Great Steppe for millennia to come. The mounted warriors replaced the light chariots which dominated the Bronze Age battlefields which required perfect horsemanship however application of the recurved, double reflex. composite bow for mounted combat seemed another important factor in development of the cavalry force. Mounted archery which doubled the fire power of the mobile troops, earlier dominated by the chariots triggered the evolution of the various forms of cavalry, both as a response to a threat of the horse archers and independent forces used by the sedentary societies. Iranian contribution in spreading (and most likely invention) of the new technology is undeniable. Although horse riding and recurved composite bows were known earlier they could not overcome the power of the chariot force separately. Only the combination of the factors allowed fielding large and efficient cavalry troops as was practiced by the Scythians and became the success factor for the Achaemenid Empire. Survival of the chariots as late as the Seleucid times was possible because of changing their tactical function from the highly mobile shooting platform to heavy, at least partially, armored terror and shock weapon.*

Key words: History, Iran, Military History, Scythians, Achaemenid Empire, Iranian Riders, Cavalry

The times when the first identifiable states of the Iranian speaking peoples entered the political stage coincides with the development of the cavalry force in military history. The first ages of the 1st millennium BCE, marking also introduction of iron, were pivotal in the course of history, in several ways. The institutions, technologies and skills developed at that time defined the directions of evolution for further millennia, with the radical, truly revolutionary change coming with the introduction of the gunpowder. The development of the Scythian cultural horizon changed the shape of

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steppe economies and pastoral nomadism and further the modes of sustaining cultures in Central Eurasia which survived their Iranian-speaking creators and were adopted and developed further by the waves subsequent waves of the Altaic-speaking ethnicities. Although Eurasian Great Steppe saw a number of great migrations and ethnic changes, the nomadic way of life, developed by the Iranian Scythians became a condition of survival in this demanding ecological zone. The way of life based on employment wagons, felt tents and requiring entire male (and often female as well) becoming skilled horse archers, who practiced their skill since childhood and were capable of creating all-cavalry armies able to pose a threat to even the strongest sedentary civilisations, from the Cimmerians and Scythians until the Mongols and Kazakhs. The ‘Scythian’ paradigm became the source of strategic arrangements which late Eduard Alocs defined as “Iranian” and “Turanian”.¹ Some ethnic-cultural aspects of the changes associated with the early 1st millenium BCE also proved long-lasting. Some of the territories acquired by the Iranian tribes remain in their possessions until now and became home of great Iranian civilisation. Naturally, the history of the Iranian and Persianate states was full of rapid changes, twists and turns, however cultural continuity of the Iranian civilisation may only be challenged by China.

It does not seem possible at the current stage of knowledge to determine when actual horse riding appeared and it seems even more difficult to find when horse riding gained value in combat. It must be emphasised that the advantages of employment horses in warfare are clear from modern perspective, after three millenia of the evolution of the cavalry force in various ecological conditions and mirroring developing technologies.² It must be remembered that the idea to mount and control an animal which, might follow its instinct rather than orders, which provided some velocity and mass but was difficult to train into being as nimble as a warrior on two legs carried great amount of risk. The difficulty must have been even greater considering that the weapons were all designed for use on foot, so not mounted wielder had an advantage. Possibly the initial function of horse-riding in warfare was communication and transport while the combat was carried on foot. Such practice did not require high level horsemanship skill and is represented throughout history with notable example of early modern dragoons and the cavalry forces of both world wars or American intervention in Afghanistan. This allowed quick delivering of the troops to the place of combat but did not allow using the advantages of the horse during the fight, as these come at the cost of perfected riding expertise. The discussions about the time of domestication of the equines must be left aside as domestication does not imply riding and riding does not imply combat function.³

¹ Alocs, 2014; 2015.

² Anthony, Telegin & Brown, 1991; Drews, 2002; Kelekina, 2009.

³ In general, Central Asia had been traditionally proposed as the birthplace of horse-riding technology in approximately 1500 BCE, however the origins of this invention have been traced to regions in

It must be stated though that the Late Bronze Age battlefields were dominated by the chariots and the levies of infantry.⁴ Had the horse riding been perfected sufficiently to allow participation in fighting while sitting astride the mount, the simple economy of the battle-field would enforce cavalry forces into the clashes. Chariot allows shooting a bow from fast moving platform thus being a difficult target which can manoeuvre rapidly, thus pose a threat even on spread ranks of infantry with limited possibility of counterstrike, or enables delivery of the combatants to the required places with possibility of immediate and speed escape in case things go wrong. In this way it could be compared to a combination of a fighter-plane and helicopter of the modern battle field, rather than tank or any other vehicle. It is true that the first known war vehicles were introduced by the Sumerians in the 3rd milenium BCE. The Summerian battle wagons were essentially constructed of planks fastened together with mortices, with the platform itself mounted onto four wheels (round discs with no swiveling axles or spokes). The wagon however was not pulled by the horse, but was propelled by another species of Equidae, the onager. The heavy mass and modest pace of the wild onagers made the Sumerian wagon a slow vehicle, capable of a maximum speed of just 12-15 kilometers an hour.⁵ This made the Summerian battle carts comparable to the modern tanks, however their employment was short-lived and they appear only seldom which allows hypothesis of their limited popularity.

A far more effective military vehicle, the combat chariot appeared sometime in the 2000s BCE (during the latter part of the 3rd millennium BCE). Propelled by the spoked wheel the lightweight combat chariot weighed in at a maximum of 25 kg (60 lbs).⁶ Like the Sumerian battle wagon, the chariot had a dedicated driver (for controlling the horse) and a warrior. Unlike the Sumerian war wagon, the origins of the combat chariot are less clear. One trend of scholarship accredits the war chariot's origins to the ancient Near/Middle East⁷ with another tracing its origins to Eurasia/the steppes⁸ notably the Sintasha-Petrovka region on the Eurasian steppe (bordering Eastern Europe and Central Asia). The latter paradigm has led into a school of thought suggesting that it was the Mittani (arriving from Central Asia) who first

the contemporary Ukraine. Archeological Studies by Anthony, Telegin and Brown (1991) indicate that the invention of equestrian technology originated in the Ukraine in approximately 4000 BCE, two and half millennia earlier than previously proposed with respect to Central Asia further to the east. Seminal to these discoveries was the archaeological find of a 6000-year old horse-tooth from the Dereivka region in the Ukraine. This tooth shows clear evidence of having been bitten as it displays chamfering, fractures and breaking. See also Gat, 2008: 184; Trimm, 2017: 231.

⁴ Littauer & Crouwel, 1979; 1996; Moorey, 1986; Crouwel, 2002; Crouwel & Tatton-Brown, 2002; Fields & Delf, 2006; Gökce, Isik & Degirmencioglu, 2013; Mazzu, *et al.*, 2016; Amelirad, 2019.

⁵ Littauer & Crouwel, 1979: 33.

⁶ Littauer & Crouwel, 1979; 1996; Moorey, 1986; Crouwel, 2002; Crouwel & Tatton-Brown, 2002; Fields & Delf, 2006; Gökce, Isik & Degirmencioglu, 2013; Mazzu, *et al.*, 2016; Amelirad, 2019.

⁷ Littauer & Crouwel, 1979: 24-5, 67, 95; 1996: 934-9.

⁸ Anthony, Telegin & Brown, 1991: 98, 100; Gening, Zdanovic, & Gening, 1992; Di Cosmo, 1999: 903; Jones-Bley, 2000.

introduced this war vehicle into the ancient Near/Middle East⁹ however another factor to be considered is the role of the Hittites (arriving into Anatolia from the Aegean region) as another ancient people introducing this technology to the region.¹⁰ It is just as likely however that the evolution of chariot warfare technology was the result of contacts and mutual influences between the Steppes/Eurasia and the Near/Middle East that have been in place for millennia.¹¹

Naturally, with growing role of actual cavalry the heavier, chariots designed to protect their crew were developed, making them closed in function tanks, however original function of chariot was providing velocity and manoeuvrability. Over millennium of chariot warfare and the survival of the chariots well into actual cavalry era, is clear evidence of their efficiency and deep cultural appreciation. It must be pointed, however, that the chariot, being expensive device in itself, required at least two horses and two men, of whom only one was an actual combatant. Had the skill of horse riding been mastered sufficiently each horse would carry a combatant and device was idle, which means that similar efficiency could be achieved at the much lower expenditure.¹² The killing capacity could be doubled with the twice as low assets. Naturally, such mechanistic, purely transactional economy might seem anachronistic when applied to the Bronze Age when social differentiation played much more important role, however battlefield reality was perennially about defeating the enemy and a matter of life and death, so even among the most rigid social prejudices, efficiency must have remained valid temptation. The problem here might be the simple fact that mounted combat requires far greater skill than mere ability to stay mounted. The difficulty in coordination of operating weapons, especially bows, from horseback may be easily illustrated by the relief of Neo-Assyrian Ashurbanipal, where the mounted archers operate in pairs, where one of the riders holds the reins of the horse of the shooter. Such solution still reminded the chariot where one of the crew was the driver while the other could shoot, with economically positive effect being resignation from the cart and possibility that both riders would participate in close combat but the shooting took place from stationary, unlike on chariots, position.¹³ The fact that in 9th century BC Assyria, the world's most efficient army, shooting from horseback could not be carried while moving proves that developing the necessary skill was far more difficult than it seems from reversed perspective. Appearance of the galloping horse archers on Assyrian reliefs only few decades later show that the new technique was keenly adopted and should be associated with greater ability of horse riding. It must be also pointed out that the Assyrians developed large chariots manned by crew of four, which provided

⁹ Gat, 2008: 326, 344, 377.

¹⁰ Howard, 2011: 59.

¹¹ Mallory, 1989: 41-2.

¹² On the possible the Bronze Age mounted warriors see: Kelder, 2012.

¹³ Healy, 1991; Poisel, 2009; Nadali, 2010; 2019.

greater protective qualities while the speed might have remained comparable because of increased number of horses. Development of Assyrian horse bowmen units illustrates that in first centuries of the 1st millennium BC, cavalry force was still a powerful novelty and its basic tactical functions were only evolving.

First two centuries of the 1st millennium BC mark also creation of pastoral-nomadic cultural horizon in the vast steppe zone of Eurasia.¹⁴ Such shift would not be possible without mastering horse riding which allowed control over the flocks of cattle and sheep. It was this horse riding that allowed creation new kind of economy related to nomadic life-style. Riding as a crucial skill in this environment was practiced from early childhood, so unsurprisingly, the Eurasian steppe produced fine all-cavalry armies in next three millennia.¹⁵ This resulted in creation of the empires of unique size which interacted with the sedentary counterparts, often conquering them. The dual skills of horse control and weapons bearing from horseback are understood to have appeared by the 1st millennium BCE within the regional arc encompassing eastern Europe/Ukraine region to Central Asia.¹⁶ By this time this large swathe of territory would have been dominated primarily by nomadic Iranian speakers such as the Scythians¹⁷ who had expanded westwards into Eastern Europe and southeastwards into Central Asia out of their original homelands in the Andronovo region. First, like the chariot, warrior horsemen wielded two significant advantages against non-equestrian opponents on the battlefield. First, the warrior on horseback had rapid ingress or egress to or from the battlefield. Second, the warrior horseman was able to hurl spears and discharge arrows from a relatively safe distance – and simply retire if enemy infantry charged towards him. While contemporary Near/Middle Eastern armies did have sophisticated forces of chariots, the equestrian warrior essentially combined the functions of both vehicle and driver in one person. In addition, the single horseman was more maneuverable and fluid on the battlefield than the chariot which was more limited (than the individual horse) by the local terrain. These factors enabled nomadic warrior horsemen to effectively raid and attack urbanized centers situated in prosperous territories. Initially these nomadic horsemen most likely were challenging to counteract effectively, but this changed relatively rapidly as the (non-equestrian) societies developed their own countermeasures, especially with respect to mounted forces. This scenario demonstrably occurred with respect to the Neo-Assyrian army's military encounters against incoming Iranian peoples, particularly the Medes and the Persians.

¹⁴ Chernenko, 1983; Kubczak, 1995; Kuzmina, 2000; Yablonsky, 2000; Baumer, 2012; Cunliffe, 2019; Chugunov, Rjabkova & Simpson, 2019; Beckwith, 2023.

¹⁵ Chernenko, 1983; Hildinger, 1997; Karasulas, 2004; Kelekina, 2009; Alofs, 2014; 2015; Cunliffe, 2019; Chugunov, Rjabkova & Simpson, 2019.

¹⁶ Gat, 2008: 190, 192.

¹⁷ Mallory, 1989: 48-56; Kuzmina, 2000; Yablonsky, 2000; Cunliffe, 2019.

The other invention which enhanced creation of the pastoral nomadism was recurved composite bow.¹⁸ As the Assyrian and Urartian relics evidence, the mounted archery was possible with single curved bow, however common adoption of the recurved bows, whenever the shooting was to be performed from horseback, prove that the recurved variety was better suited for mounted use.¹⁹ Another device which came together with the recurved bow, was an integrated case for bow and arrows carried on the left hip, in Greek named *gorytos*, replacing the quiver hung at the shoulder, typical for archery on foot. As much as recurved bow could be adopted to both foot or mounted use just because its greater efficiency, the *gorytos* was a device maximising benefits in mounted use.²⁰

9th century BC was thus, seemingly, the pivotal time in development of cavalry forces. Although great deal of scholarly attention was placed on nomadic cultures and their entry onto the scene of global history where they remained important factor until early modern times, mostly, due to their constant mastery of horsemanship and archery, it must be emphasised that about that time cavalry was introduced to sedentary populations and basic functions, models of armament of mounted warriors started being developed.

Some emphasise was place above on horse archery, which seems extension of one of the Mose efficient Bronze Age chariot tactics, but about that time close-combat and hurled missiles cavalry was developed.

Scythian cultural horizon.

The Scythian cultural horizon is most often associated with the great wave of the Iranian-speaking nomads who flooded the Eurasian steppes pushing out the Tocharian speakers in Xinjiang and probably Thracian/Anatolian-related speaking Cimmerians to Anatolia. It is suggested that the Cimmerians were also Iranian speakers, marking the first wave of the great Iranian migrations, however lack of any Iranian stratum in Anatolia of the time supports the view that they would rather belong to another group of Indo-Europeans.²¹ The artefacts associated with the Cimmerians reveal elements typical for the later Scythian cultural horizon, however it must be borne in mind that the pastoral-nomadic lifestyle could be adopted by various ethnic groups belonging to variety of language groups. Identification of the Scythian type of culture with specific linguistic group might be misleading as the Scythian expansion marks the first of multi-ethnic confederacies which dominated the Great Steppe in course of history. The common features within the culture of the early nomads are

¹⁸ Pullyblank, 1983: 451-2; Insulander, 2002: 49-73; Bersenev, Epimakhov & Zdanovich, 2011: 176, 181, 184, 185; Benjamin, 2018: 30.

¹⁹ Meljukova, 1964; Chernenko 1981; 1983; Chugunov, 2013; Loades, 2016; 2020.

²⁰ Meljukova, 1964; Chernenko 1981; 1983; Bittner, 1987; Chugunov, 2013; Loades, 2016; 2020; Daragan, 2020.

²¹ Yablonsky, 2000; Kuzmina, 2000; Cunliffe, 2019; Beckwith, 2023.

remarkable. The most renown is, of course, ‘Scythian triad’ i.e. (1) weapons including archery equipment with tri-edged arrows, short re-curved bow, specific type of short-sword or *akinakes* and chekan-klevets type of battle axes, (2) analogical horse harness and (3) decorations in ‘animal style’, and it may adopt specific forms which can, occasionally, be attributed to specific tribes, however this very wide-spread popularity of the cultural markers makes it more reliable to consider early nomadic culture an archaeological horizon rather than ethnic denomination.²² It needs to be emphasised that the available onomastics concerning European/Western Scythian groups/tribes identifies them as Iranians. In terms of military organisation, this culture type was rather homogenous, after all two of its defining features – arms and harness are foundations of the cavalry force. What defined Scythian culture in its tribal versions was, first of all, cavalry warfare with domination of the long range weapons. Lethal efficiency of Scythian arrows is well known and attested in the tracks of the Scythian raids into Europe but it the threat of nomadic incursions terrorised Ancient Near East, was mentioned in Assyrian sources and even ended in the Bible.²³ Clear advantage of mobility, manoeuvrability in combination with strategical opportunism which allowed changing allies depending on current fortunes which offended sedentary sense of loyalty, made the Scythians formidable, well remembered, force. Easy swapping sides and loot-oriented sense of loyalty are not the only tactical/strategical differences between the Scythians and sedentary peoples. As was evidenced in the course of Scytho-Achaemenid wars or wars between Chinese Han empire with Xiong Nu, the Nomads felt no objections against constant withdrawing and harassing advancing enemy without engaging in a pitched battle, constantly inflicting losses and aiming in leading the opponent to exhaustion and gradual destruction. The Nomads could prove their efficiency in battle if they chose to do so.

The pastoral nomads were the expert horse-archers. Their primary, ‘default’, opponents were, in the vast majority, their alike. The raids into the lands occupied by the sedentary cultures must have aimed in avoiding military confrontation and returning with as much loot as possible. Also, peaceful exchange, structurally crucial for nomadic life-style, was far too important for the rulers and was surely limited unless prohibited on selected fronts. The steppe kingdoms were usually encircled by the sedentary states/cultures, of which some were subdued and some involved in exchange. Also, given the tactics which allowed entire tribes to escape the confrontation which were not found an act of cowardice and did not affect the warriors’ morale, the only truly significant wars could be waged between the nomads. Even in case of lost battle with the sedentary army which employed unusual technological means like Alexander’s victory at Jaxartes assured by the employment of ballistae and

²² Yablonsky, 2000; Cunliffe, 2019; Beckwith, 2023.

²³ Chernenko, 1981; Chugunov, 2013; Loades, 2016; 2020.

cavalry, the nomads could escape, regroup and either change the tactics or set another clash. It is noticeable that in course of history of Eurasian steppe, the nomadic kingdoms posed serious threats to the sedentary states but nomadic kingdoms fell only to other nomadic groups, sometimes being driven to the farther regions of the steppe, sometimes being absorbed by the victors. These were the other nomads who could not be simply showered with arrows from the distance and escaped easily in case of ammunition shortage or sudden counter-strike, as their ‘fire’-power, speed and agility were next to equal. That is why the gradual increase in close combat weapons and armour among the Scythians must be explained through need to counter the very same tactics under protection of shields, armour and occasionally horse armour, which is attested both in iconography of the Pontic Scythians and already mentioned by Herodotus in regard of Massagetae.²⁴ The elements of armament were manufactured locally but also keenly imported and adopted from the sedentary infantry kit. Swift attack under protection of shields and armour and getting to hand-to-hand combat with unarmored and unprepared enemy, under protection of own archers provided enhanced chance of success. It is probably the reason of increasing volume of armour in Scythian warrior graves and probable extension of the length of the lance-shafts which allowed further reach. The advantage of the shorter spears was that they could be hurled at the enemy or could be used in close-quarter fighting. Longer shaft made throwing more difficult but allowed hand-to-hand fight from further away. What can be also observed is gradual extension of the blade length of the nomadic swords which marks significant change in their employment which now allowed powerful cuts instead of thrust-centred *akinakai*. Metallurgical limitations allowed extending length of the blade only at the cost of thickening it and thus, increasing weight of the weapon but that obstacle in fancier fencing, did not interrupt powerful cuts made from galloping horse, while in really thick melee elaborated techniques were inefficient anyway.

Although the paradigm of employment in battle of mounted archers as well as armoured lancers is attested in Neo-Assyrian iconography, the idea might already originated in the Great Steppe. It must be noted that the Neo-Assyrian reliefs show the lancers chasing fleeing enemy light infantry which superficially differs from confronting light horse archers, however represents the same principle of armoured cavalry facing rather mobile enemy, using advantage of armour and high speed charge. This way, the enemy, whose value would be possibility to escape direct engagement of heavy infantry, could not avoid the lancers in armour which reduced significantly efficiency of fighting back.²⁵

The records of Scythian, and Scythian-type tribes like Dahae and Massagetae, infantry may refer to the contingents of the sedentary vassals of the nomadic overlords.

²⁴ Chernenko, 1981; 1983; Gorelik, 1982; Cunliffe, 2019.

²⁵ De Backer, 2007; Barron, 2010; Dezsö, 2012; Nadali, 2018.

The practice which reminds later relation between the Avars and the Slavs. It is also possible that the view of purely nomadic existence of the steppe dwellers, especially in its earliest forms, is over-simplified and the life models were more complicated. Herodotean description of Scythia strongly suggests so, especially when compared with the ecological zones it embraced. Again, in later analogies, the steppe dwellers, occasionally, allowed construction of city-like structures as exemplified by Khazars. Also, the lands occupied by the nations known as nomadic were often capable of sustaining sedentary agriculture, and were in fact becoming sedentary lands in course of later history, which allows to suspect wider variety of life-styles wherever conditions allowed that.

The nomadic tradition lived on in its further stages, with evolved arms, armour, horse-kit (the early forms of saddles are clearly associated with the nomadic burials so the development of the very idea of the saddle seems deriving from the Scythian horizon however the invention of stirrups, greatly disputed, might be of Chinese origin), however the main principle of mounted tribe/confederacy-army consisting of horse archers of whom small elite part was equipped to come to close combat remained relatively unchanged well into gun-powder era. The steppe principle was defined by Eduard Alofs as “Turanian”.²⁶ Ability to recruit easily well trained, already equipped, mounted warriors allowed fielding of substantial armies hard to match by any sedentary population. This doctrine, in course of history, stemmed its ‘bastardised’ forms which aimed in preserving combat abilities of the Steppe-dwellers with functioning of organised structured armies able to take fortifications and occupy territories.

Pre-Achaemanid and Achaemenid Iran

Achaemenid dynasty came to power when cavalry already well established its important role on the battlefields.²⁷ Already the grandfather of Cyrus the Great used the image of the galloping lancer defeating his infantry foe. The skill of lance wielding and shooting the bow both on horseback and on foot are the skills Darius the Great himself boasts of. The riders are plentiful in Achaemenid iconography throughout the era. It must be emphasised that the royal ‘guards’ in Persepolis are depicted wearing two types of dress-long, poncho-like robe of probably Elamite origin and tunic and trousers associated with the Medes.²⁸ The dress code is connected with the archery equipment – the warriors in ‘Elamite’ robes carry usually the quivers on their backs with the older ‘Assyrian’ type of bow, while the personages in ‘Median’ dress have the *gorytoi* attached to the belt on the left hip with the ‘Scythian’ recurved bow.²⁹ Such

²⁶ Alofs, 2014; 2015.

²⁷ Farrokh, 2007.

²⁸ Bittner, 1987; Head, 1992; Sekunda, 1992; Garrison, 2013.

²⁹ Farrokh, *et al.*, 2022.

distinction may mark ethnic origin or administrative function or grade. The personages in the 'Elamite' robe are often depicted by themselves in victorious combat or other noble activities which suggests that the type of dress was found more official and associated with the royal court or displays of royal power. What is unsurprising, if the personages in 'Elamite' robes are shown while shooting (and they are more frequently depicted wielding swords or spears), they are usually shooting on foot, sometimes standing on the chariot. The personages in 'Median' dress or its derivatives are usually shown using the bows from horseback. In this sense the illustration on the wooden beams of the tomb in Tatarlı³⁰ is of outmost significance as it shows the combatants in 'Elamite' robe in the centre which marks their leading, symbolic position, and they are followed by the ranks of galloping horse archers in tunics and trousers. The riding dress became general Persian dress and 'Elamite' robe almost disappeared by the fall of the dynasty. This illustrates how originally elite infantry combat units dress turned to official and then was generally replaced by the dress suitable for riding.

It is important to note that in heroic stylisations of the riders a preference to show them using hand to hand weapons can be observed. This should be associated with depictions of the armoured Achaemenid riders who are usually shown in cuirasses, reminding the Greek *linothorakoi*, with extended back of the neck protection.³¹ This contradicts the literary sources depicting Persian body-armour as made of scales. The discrepancy might result from the differences between the parts of the empire and local preferences of kind of semantic content attached to the cuirass as similarly a meaning was earlier associated with the 'Elamite' robe. The exact decipherment of this artistic preference does not seem possible at the time. It is clear however that in late 5th and 4th century, Achaemenid army had the units of both horse archers, as well as impressive force of armoured riders wielding two short *palta* spears. At the same time it must be stated that a scene on the golden pectoral in Miho Museum collection shows the Persian armoured rider with a bow which might evidence employment of the bows by the armoured troops.³²

It must be emphasised here that the bow, together with spear, was an esteemed weapon associated with royal power and personages carrying both of them might illustrate completeness of the military might however it was bow which, by itself, could symbolise king's control over institutional violence.

Achaemenid kingdom was in constant violent interaction with Eurasian nomads who were the 'default' enemies in Achaemenid art, together with Greek-style hoplites appearing in Anatolian iconography. Defeating them was a heroic deed of

³⁰ Summerer, 2007a; 2007b; Summerer & Lukpanova, 2020.

³¹ Gorelik, 1982; Bittner, 1987; Benzel, 1996; Bernard & Inagaki, 2000; Boardman, 2001; Casabonne & Gabrielli, 2006; Ma, 2008; Woźniak, 2010; Tuplin, 2020.

³² Gorelik, 1982; Benzel, 1996; Bernard & Inagaki, 2000; Casabonne & Gabrielli, 2006; Woźniak, 2010.

Persian warriors fixed in Iranian imagery. It is possible that the contrast was enhanced by already Avestan polarisation between the righteous Aryans and wicked Touranians. Persian armies suffered significant defeats from the hands of the nomads, at least twice, in early Achaemenid period. Once under Cyrus the Great who was said to be killed in battle with Tomyris and second time in the course of Darius' the Great disastrous invasion of Pontic Scythia. Another mode of interaction between Achaemenid Persia and the Eurasian nomads was their employment in the armies of Iran either as subdued tribes or mercenaries. Functioning of the Scythian type tribal warriors in Near Eastern warfare had its tradition reaching Neo-Assyrian empire and it seems that the nomads were recruited both as the war bands and tribal contingents. As was stated above, being hired as a mercenary was an opportunity to get richer and did not contradict the nomadic code of ethics. Quite contrary, war bands of young warriors who only wanted to distinguish themselves in the combat, must have been encouraged to do so outside of the tribal territory.

The army of the sedentary empire of Achaemenid Iran consisted mainly of infantry but employed cavalry units of great tactical importance. The units consisted of horse archers and armoured lance-armed warriors. This model derived from earlier Mesopotamian patterns but was constantly adopting nomadic impulses, either from the enemies or from allied tribes.

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