

Chapter 1

A History of Research

1.1 Introduction

Achaemenid military history has often been studied, but rarely for its own sake. Whereas Greek military history and Roman Army Studies have developed into their own fields since the 19th century, Achaemenid military history has usually been studied as part of research into Greek history, Iranian philology, or Babylonian economic history. This has several unfortunate effects. One is that work by scholars from all the different disciplines which touch on the Achaemenid army has not always been addressed in the same study. Whereas students of the Roman army are expected to combine art, documents, literature, experiment, comparative evidence, and material remains in making an argument, work on the Achaemenid army tends to focus on a single kind of evidence. Another is that there has been little reflection in writing about the general direction of research and the various methods and assumptions which are used. To my knowledge, the only published overviews of research on the Achaemenid army, as distinct from overviews of the results of that research, are chapter II.C of Stefan Bittner's PhD thesis and some short research notes in Pierre Briant's writing.¹ When a number of people work on similar problems, criticizing each other's work and suggesting their own favourite methods, research tends to progress. When such a scholarly community is absent, this does not always happen.

This chapter considers some of the most influential studies of the Achaemenid army published since the end of the 19th century. It does not claim to be comprehensive: for example, work on the wars in Ionia around 400 BCE and on the Macedonian conquest and succession struggles is neglected in favour of works on Xerxes' invasion of Greece. For the purpose of identifying themes and trends, studies of any one of these wars would be sufficient, but Herodotus' description of the Persian army has encouraged modern scholars to include their own description. Later chapters will discuss sources

1 Bittner 1987: 73–83 and Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 961 (*ad capitulum* 13/5 on Xerxes), 979, 980 (*ad capitulum* 14/7 on Darius II), 986–989 (*ad capitulum* 15/2 on Artaxerxes and Cyrus), 1034–1038 (*ad capitulum* 17/3 on Darius III); remarks on military affairs are scattered throughout Briant, *BHACH I* and *BHACH II*.

and scholarship for specific points in more detail. What this chapter does claim to be is an overview of how previous scholars have approached the Persian army, and what methods and assumptions they have used.

1.2 Early Classical Scholarship: Delbrück, Meyer, and the Specialists

Hans Delbrück's comparison of Herodotus on the vast Persian army to Swiss chroniclers on the vast Burgundian army has become part of the folklore of ancient military history.² He pointed out that Swiss chroniclers said that they had been outnumbered by the terrible Burgundian invaders, while documents implied that Swiss armies were larger than Burgundian ones. If the Swiss could distort the facts, then so could the Greeks. If documents on the size of the armies were not available, he suggested that a historian should consider the nature of the two armies, whether they were near to or far from home, and other practical factors to determine the likely size of each. While his specific points are not often accepted, later writers have accepted that Herodotus' figures for army size are doubtful, and most have estimated that the Persian army was much smaller than Herodotus claims. Delbrück had great influence on later researchers into military history, introducing methods such as population estimates and practical criticism (*Sachkritik*). Unfortunately I am not familiar with any systematic study of his influence on modern writing about ancient warfare.³

Delbrück chose to begin his *Geschichte der Kriegskunst* with the Persian Wars. In his preface he explained that while there were much earlier sources from Egypt and the neighbouring peoples, nevertheless these were not quite sufficient for a complete picture, and that while the stories about the Persian Wars preserved by Greek writers contained some legends, it was nevertheless possible to reconstruct the outline of events.⁴ According to the fashion of his time, Delbrück understood the art of war as something which was exemplified by great land battles in the open. He also assumed that he should tell a story which began with the Greeks, progressed through the Romans and Charlemagne and the medieval kingdoms, and culminated with war in Europe in his own day. Starting with the 5th century BCE was a reasonable choice when Delbrück wrote, since the study of ancient Near Eastern texts, art, and archaeology were at an early stage. Yet this choice cut the Achaemenids off from earlier Near Eastern history, and Delbrück was not very interested in their possible influence on later armies.

2 Delbrück 1887

3 Keegan 1976: 53, 55 has some casual but worthwhile remarks on Delbrück's influence on British and American writing about war. Konijnendijk 2015: ch. 1/2018: 7–12 argues that the standard English language view of Greek warfare into the 1990s was drawn from German, Austrian, and English theorists before the First World War.

4 Delbrück 1920 I, 1–2

Delbrück's vision of the Achaemenid army in the early 5th century BCE accepted the Greek tradition that Persian and Greek soldiers were equipped very differently, added the idea that Persian and Greek soldiers were arranged in combat very differently, and rejected the Greek tradition that Persian armies were tremendously large. For the first he appealed to Aeschylus' topos of "the battle of spear against bow" and Herodotus' descriptions of Persian soldiers and emphasis that the Persians had cavalry and archers while the Greeks had few or none. He believed that these different armaments suggested very different deployments on the battlefield, because spearmen are most effective in a deep, continuous line, while archers are naturally inclined to spread out and cannot shoot effectively when they are stationed in deep formations. He rejects the Greek tradition that the Persians recruited soldiers from their "unkriegerische" subject peoples in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Anatolia. Instead, he imagines the Persian army as composed of Iranian peoples who followed the teachings of Zoroaster, and emphasizes that much of Iran was desert or wasteland which could not support a large population. Garrisons of Iranians were stationed about the empire and supported by tribute and tax-in-kind. He also compares the Persian army to the Muslim armies which conquered much of the Roman and Sasanid empires, and suggests that both were "quality armies" recruited from nomads, and compares the Persians to the small number of Frankish warriors and German knights who dominated much of the former Roman empire in the early middle ages. In his view, the Persian army was a professional or knightly army, and such armies are always small relative to the population from which they come. In contrast, he saw Greek armies as militias and suggested that militia armies are large relative to the community to which they belong.

Delbrück's next detailed comments on the Persian army appear in his discussion of Alexander's war with Darius III. He repeats that the sizes of Persian armies in the Greek sources are arbitrary, but sometimes speculates about the relative size of different armies based on geography, his knowledge of the Persian army, and the narratives in the Greek sources. He characterizes Darius' army as comprised of hoplites, bowmen, and horsemen and very similar to Alexander's, except that the ratios between the different types of soldiers may have been different.⁵ He is impressed by the tradition that Darius equipped his army at Gaugamela with new weapons, but thinks that the Persian soldiers did not have time to learn to use their new weapons effectively; in his view only Greeks and Macedonians could form a proper phalanx. Although he considered Arrian his best source, he did not accept Arrian's picture of Darius as a cowardly and incompetent leader. With Alexander's victory at Gaugamela, the Persians vanish from Delbrück's book except for a few comments in his chapter on the Parthians.⁶

5 Delbrück 1920: I, 179

6 Delbrück 1920: I, 475 ff.

Despite his best efforts, Delbrück's treatment of the Persian army was strongly shaped by his Greek and Latin sources. He concentrated on the aspects of the Persian army which they emphasized, ignored earlier armies in the same region, and ended his story with Darius III. On the other hand, his emphasis on comparative evidence, especially the practical difficulties of gathering hundreds of thousands of soldiers in one place, was a promising approach. While Delbrück insisted upon the difference between Greek and Persian armies, he also mentioned similarities and compared Persian armies to European ones. In principle, scholars could have further developed his approach, using evidence on other armies and Southwest Asian documents as they became available.

While Delbrück sought to reinterpret Persian history in light of later evidence, Eduard Meyer was trying to put Greek and Roman history into the long context which excavations in the Near East were revealing. His great *Geschichte des Altertums* sought to bring together Greek, Mesopotamian, Iranian, Jewish, and Egyptian sources to tell the story of the ancient world up to the 4th century BCE. His study of the Achaemenid empire includes eleven pages on the army.

Meyer's interests were broader than Delbrück's, and his discussion of the army reflects this. Where Delbrück is impressionistic, Meyer comments on many different areas and tries to reconcile his sources. Meyer discusses recruitment, the involvement of different peoples, musters, parades, pay and provisions, the appointment of leaders, the relationship between satraps and generals, weaponry and the relative importance of spear and bow, the role of nations such as the Lydians and Assyrians who fought as hoplites, cavalry in battle, the size and deployment of armies, and other forces such as scythed chariots, camel-riders, ships, and marines. Perhaps his boldest speculation is that the four contingents in Artaxerxes' army in 401 BCE corresponded to four military districts, which with the addition of rebel Egypt and Anatolia might relate to the six generals in Xerxes' army (Hdt. 7.82).⁷ He imagines that the Persian archers would barrage the enemy with arrows and then the cavalry would charge them, an idea which has been widely repeated despite a shortage of evidence (see § 6.4).⁸ He accepts the Greek tradition that Persian armies were too large to fight effectively while rejecting the specific numbers in Greek sources.⁹ He is not interested in the organization of Persian units, ignoring the documentary evidence from Elephantine and Herodotus' and Xenophon's statements about decimal organization and remarking that "the separation of the horsemen, bowmen, and spear-fighters into special divisions was already traced back to Cyaxares (Hdt. 1.103); however, as to a further organizational structure

7 Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums*, 4.1.I, p. 70

8 Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums*, 4.1.I, p. 71, 73

9 Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums*, 4.1.I, p. 353

one can say nothing.”¹⁰ Despite his knowledge of many ancient languages and monuments, the only sources which he cites are Greek and Latin literature and the Behistun inscription. He mentions the Elephantine papyri in a footnote. J.N. Strassmaier had already published a few tablets dealing with military matters in his *Inschriften von {Name}, König von Babylon* series in the 1890s, and a tablet dealing with the equipment of a cavalryman was first published a few years before Meyer’s death in 1930.¹¹

Meyer also described particular military operations as part of his general narrative. He does not devote many words to narrating Cyrus’ war with Lydia or Cambyses’ conquest of Egypt, although he does ponder how a king from the hills like Cyrus could conquer such a great kingdom as Lydia. His description of Marathon, Thermopylae, Plataea, and Mycale follows Herodotus without many general remarks beyond his dismissal of the Greek tradition about vast Persian armies. His account of the revolt of Cyrus the Younger and the Battle of Cunaxa is lengthy but also keeps close to the Greek sources.¹² Why did Cyrus think that his revolt could succeed?

Cyrus had seen the military superiority of the Greeks over the Asiatic troops with his own eyes: he was convinced for good reason that a reasonably strong Greek mercenary corps would also defeat the strongest army which his brother could call up.¹³

Why did Tissaphernes let the Greeks escape into Armenia? “Tissaphernes was too weak and cowardly to risk a decisive battle.”¹⁴ Although Meyer ends his project in the middle of the 4th century BCE, it is likely that his account of Alexander’s wars would have also summarized the Greek sources.

Meyer’s approach to the Achaemenid army as an institution was promising, and his study was thorough and fair-minded. Yet his account was almost entirely written on the basis of Greek and Latin literature. Despite his encyclopedic knowledge of the ancient Near East, he does not try to connect or compare the Achaemenid army to earlier armies in the same region. Given the state of the evidence and the shortage of secondary literature in his day, this would have been a formidable task, but it is to be regretted that he did not attempt it. Not all of his generalizations and conclusions are convincing. Meyer’s study provided a base from which other scholars could build.

In addition to these broad studies, many articles on specific questions were published at the beginning of the 20th century. Many of these studies, such as Whatley on

10 Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums*, 4.1.I, 72–73 “die Trennung der Reiter, Bogenschützen und Lanzenkämpfer in besondere Abteilungen wird bereits auf Kyaxares zurückgeführt (Herod. I 103); zu einer weiteren organischen Gliederung aber ist man nicht gelangt.”

11 For the other text, UCP 9/3 269 ff., see Lutz 1928 and § 4.3 below

12 Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums*, 5.4.IV pp. 171–179

13 “Die militärische Überlegenheit der Griechen über die asiatischen Truppen hatte Kyros mit eigenen Augen kennengelernt; mit Recht war er überzeugt, daß ein hinlänglich starkes griechisches Söldnerkorps auch die stärkste Armee besiegen werde, die sein Bruder aufbringen könne.”

14 “Tissaphernes war zu schwach und zu mutlos, um einen entscheidenden Kampf zu wagen.”

methodologies for reconstructing ancient battles (first delivered as a lecture in 1920 and circulated before its print publication in 1964), Kromayer and Veith with their studies of battlefields, W. W. How on arms and tactics in Xerxes' invasion, and Maurice on the water supply in the Hellespont, are still useful for understanding the Persian army. Most of these studies were conceived as part of Greek history, and they were often successful exegesis of their chosen authors. Yet they rarely used other kinds of ancient evidence, and tended to assume that their task was either to describe Greek history or to place it in context with more recent events. Several believed that events in recent wars and the professional knowledge of soldiers would help clarify the ancient sources, as when Whatley reminded his readers how difficult it had been to understand what was happening during the First World War or Major General Maurice used his training in logistics to decide what size of army the water and roads in the Hellespont would support.¹⁵

By the early 20th century, many studies on the Achaemenid army as presented in Greek literature had been published. Most were written by classicists and historians who were most comfortable with Greek and Latin literary evidence. The natural next step would have been to build on these studies, combining them with other kinds of evidence and acknowledging the purposes and perspectives of the main Greek sources. Unfortunately, in the next hundred years few scholars took this step.

1.3 Broad Works 1962–1983: Hignett, Burn, Green, Rahe

Between 1962 and 1970, three ancient historians published very influential books in English on Xerxes' invasion of Greece. These books serve as a good example of the knowledge of the early Achaemenid army amongst specialists in ancient Greek history. Each book reflects decades of thought about Greek history and Greek writers. These books both represent the views of classicists and have influenced them, since most people interested in Greek history read about Xerxes' invasion early in their education.

Charles Hignett's book *Xerxes' Invasion of Greece* was based upon 45 years of teaching the Persian Wars at Oxford.¹⁶ In his view, his basic methodology was fixed when he encountered the ideas of Whatley in 1919 and Kromayer in 1924, although his opinion on points of detail did change over time. Hignett strongly insists that comments on the Persian Wars based on ancient writers later than the 5th century BCE should be ignored, so his account is based upon Herodotus and ends where Herodotus' account

15 Whatley 1964: 121; Maurice 1930. Curiously, the 1932 paper by von Fischer, another retired general who considered the logistics of the whole route and decided that a much smaller army ("nicht viel über 40 000 Kombattanten") was plausible, is less often cited than Maurice's.

16 Hignett 1963 preface

does.¹⁷ His select bibliography is equally focused on the Greeks. He does cite A. T. Olmstead's book on the Achaemenid empire, but his short bibliography of about 100 items contains no other works by orientalists. His knowledge of Southwest Asian sources seems to come through modern writers such as Olmstead, How, and Wells.

A. R. Burn's book appeared slightly before Hignett's, but does not claim such an age for its ideas. Burn begins with the 8th century BCE and the Neo-Assyrians, reminding readers what a formidable army and organized empire they already had.¹⁸ He is more willing than Hignett to credit sources other than Aeschylus and Herodotus, whom he describes as a great storyteller and reporter with primitive, personal ideas of causation.¹⁹ Burn frequently compares modern and ancient Greeks.²⁰ He also quotes many texts from Southwest Asia. Unfortunately his remarks on the army are brief and focused on criticizing Herodotus' numbers and relating his "satrapy list" to his "catalogue of nations."²¹ He believes that all of Herodotus' nations participated, but that the worse-armed ones may have been brought in token numbers to plunder and burn.²² Burn is careful to put the Achaemenids in context with Southwest Asia in the 1st millennium BCE, and even imagines what the battles between Cyrus and Croesus might have been like. He makes it clear that armies in ancient Southwest Asia were no lightly-armed mobs of "unkriegerische" peasants. Yet his treatment of the Persian army does not go beyond a fair reading of Herodotus supplemented with later parallels, technical knowledge about logistics and camping, and experience with the unreliability of figures for the size of enemy armies. After sternly resisting the temptation to retell the myths of the Persian wars in the main part of his book, Burn ends his book with a meditation on what would have happened if the Persians had won, where he describes the later Achaemenid empire as economically depressed, ruled by a decadent aristocracy, and reliant on Greek mercenaries to replace the native infantry who had lost the wealth or moral qualities to be good soldiers.²³ This picture obviously owes a great deal to the moralistic Greek literature of the 4th century BCE, and has been the subject of heavy criticism since the 1980s.

Peter Green's book, first published in 1970, was aimed at a large audience, with enough research behind it to give it some scholarly weight. It is lightly referenced, con-

17 Hignett 1963: v, vi, 25

18 Burn 1962: 24–25.

19 Attitude to sources: Burn 1962: 1–17. Assessment of Herodotus: Burn 1962: 130 (but is Herodotus' idea that joining Europe and Asia went against the order of things and that great things always shrink and decline any more primitive than the modern idea that Greece was a bit too far from the centre of the empire to hold and that no empire lasts forever?), 193.

20 Greeks ancient and modern: Burn 1962: 132, 426, 552

21 Comments on the army: Burn 1962: 40 (reconstructed battle between Persians and Lydians), 84–86 (invasion of Egypt), 120–122 (satrapy list and catalogue of nations), 250 (Marathon), 322–332 (Xerxes' army), 411 (Thermopylae), 519 (Plataea). 548 (Mycalae).

22 Burn 1962: 326

23 Burn 1962: 565–567

fidant, and full of modern parallels. Green insists that Xerxes' invasion threatened to end political and intellectual liberty, not just in classical Greece but everywhere and for all time, and that defeat in Greece "rocked the empire of Darius and Xerxes to its very foundation."²⁴ Since he ends his history shortly after the battles of Plataea and Mycale, the reader is deprived of the chance to see Green justify this last statement. Like the other authors in this section, Green relies on Herodotus, although he is willing to use details from later sources which Hignett rejects. Amongst modern scholars he relies overwhelmingly upon specialists in Greek or military history. His original bibliography of about 200 entries has only half a dozen by specialists in Mesopotamia or Iran or scholars who try to ask questions from a Persian perspective rather than a Greek.²⁵ His book contains no systematic discussion of the Persian army, and his comments on it paraphrase Herodotus except in the matter of numbers.

Green's vocabulary reflects two inconsistent models of the Persian army. Sometimes he carefully chooses words with Persian connotations, rendering Greek *akinakes* as "scimitar." Having seen the reliefs at Persepolis, he surely knew that an *akinakes* is short, straight, and two-edged while a scimitar is long, curved, and single-edged, but he chose to suggest that ancient and modern Persians are more or less the same. Other times he picks words from modern military jargon, such as "commando," "to infiltrate" (in the sense "to send soldiers forward quietly in many small groups") and "pioneer corps" (soldiers who clear a path for the army to march over). This implies that the Persian army was something like a 20th century European army, and occasional words like "commissar" suggest that he has a particular army in mind.²⁶ While each of these strategies is powerful, they work against each other, for it is difficult to see how Xerxes' men could at the same time be medieval Persians and the Red Army.

These three books differ in methodology and interpretation, but their approach to the Persian army is similar. They rely on Herodotus, supplemented with contemporary art, later Greek or Latin writers, and commentaries to Herodotus. If they use other kinds of evidence for the army, it is only to supplement the father of history. While Burn was scrupulous about reading the most important sources from outside the Greek world himself and finding experts in other fields for advice, neither Green nor Hignett made much use of scholarship on Egypt and Southwest Asia, let alone of sources from those areas.

24 Xerxes' threat to freedom: Green 1996: 4–5; quote, Green 1996: 10. This idea had of course been refuted in the famous debate between Max Weber and Eduard Meyer before the First World War.

25 Eleven pages of bibliography at 18 entries per page gives about 198 entries. The original bibliography consists of works by classicists on traditional classical-philological topics, plus a 1946 French dissertation on Iran by Mortéza Ehtésham, four books on pre-Islamic Iran by W. Culican, Roman Ghirshman, Ernst Herzfeld, and A. T. Olmstead, and a 1946 article by Gisela Richter on the Greek contribution to Achaemenid sculpture. In 1970, Green recommends 29 studies on a single inscription which claims to record a decree of Themistocles, but only six on the whole Persian empire.

26 King's Eye as commissar: Green 1996: 8

In 1980 Paul Rahe published an article which has been widely cited since.²⁷ Rahe proposed that at the end of the 5th century BCE, the Persians lacked good heavy infantry but had plenty of cavalry and light-armed troops. Western governors began to combine their own troops with Greek hoplites and acquired military power out of proportion to their wealth. Furthermore, soldier land in Babylonia had become partitioned and divided, so that the occupiers could not afford the time and equipment to practice military skills. Cyrus the Younger therefore realized that if he rushed into Babylonia with “a Greek hoplite army” and “a corps of barbarian cavalry” he might force his brother to fight with poorly trained local soldiers, or at least seize control of Babylonia and raise a larger army there. Cyrus failed, but Spartans and Macedonians later combined cavalry and hoplites and imitated his march inland.

Rahe’s thesis is not built on the strongest evidence. His Greek literary sources naturally emphasize the deeds and prowess of Greek soldiers, and Persian infantry at the end of the 5th century BCE usually stood up to Greek hoplites. It is not clear that the troubles of the debtors of the Murašû meant that all the soldiers in Babylonia were poorly armed and trained: as we will see in chapter 4, bow estates were only one source of soldiers. Cyrus had only three thousand cavalry against 13,000 Greeks and a similarly-sized force of infantry from Anatolia, and he told his governors to hire “Peloponnesian men” not “Peloponnesian hoplites.”²⁸ Yet because of the scarcity of other broad theories, because it calls on both indigenous and classical texts, and because the theory seemed reasonable to readers raised on the Greek sources, Rahe’s article has been often cited with approval. Sekunda specifically cites it as an example of recent research at the beginning of his book, Briant refers readers to it with some warnings about details, and other writers often refer readers to it as a source of facts.²⁹ The strongest criticism is by Philip Sabin, who remarks that as Cyrus’ cavalry were few and outmatched, Rahe’s idea that Cyrus combined powerful infantry and effective cavalry is “perhaps a little premature.”³⁰

In 1983, most writing on the Achaemenid army by classicists and military historians was centred on Greek and Latin literary sources and the events, processes, and institutions which they highlighted. Much was by writers who were not mainly interested in the Achaemenid empire or ancient warfare, but who touched on the subject because of their interest in classical Greece. Broad statements about the Achaemenid army were

27 Rahe 1980

28 Xen. Anab. 1.1.6 ὅποσας εἶχε φυλακὰς ἐν ταῖς πόλεσι παρήγγειλε τοῖς φρουράρχοις ἑκάστοις λαμβάνειν ἄνδρας Πελοποννησίους ὅτι πλείστους καὶ βελτίστους, ὡς ἐπιβουλεύοντος Τισσαφέρνους ταῖς πόλεσι. On the size of Cyrus’ army see Manning 2013:118–130 with reference to earlier literature and methodological problems. Rey 2012: 297–298 argues that “men” implies “hoplites,” but Cyrus recruited other kinds of Greek soldiers.

29 Citations: Sekunda 1992: 1; Briant *Cyrus to Alexander*: 961 “Arms and Tactics”, 980 line 6; Lincoln 2009 n. 1; Christensen 2006: n. 32, 39; Gaebel 2002: 55, 156, 307

30 Sabin 2007: 108

seldom criticized in print, except where they touched on accepted debates such as the size of Xerxes' army.³¹

1.4 Alternatives to the Classical Tradition

In parallel to this classical tradition, at least three families of postwar scholarship touched on military questions. One was the study of early Iran, with the Swedish polyglot Geo Widengren being especially prolific. Widengren worked within the frameworks of *Indogermanistik* and the idea of eternal national character, happily citing classical writers, the Old Testament, and Middle Persian romances next to one another. In his view, ancient Iranian armies were feudal, and the documents from Achaemenid Babylonia reflected this:

In principle, one could say that in Iranian society during the Achaemenid period the fiefs were examples of tribute in exchange for the delivery of soldiers of different types, horsemen, bowmen, and charioteers . . . It also seems that the holder of the fief had always possessed the right to use his fief as collateral . . . We have here, evidently, a heritage from the days of Mitanni and for that reason we can find it again in the (Late Bronze Age) documents from Nuzi (fig. 2-1).³²

Widengren's understanding of "Iran" was obviously a wide one. A review of one of Widengren's later books expressed respect for Widengren's knowledge of so many languages and texts, but serious doubts about his methods and his confident statements based on very limited sources scattered across a long stretch of time and space.³³ While Widengren's writing on warfare seems to have had little influence, Pierre Briant cited one of his lists of sources in 1996, and works with similar methods continue to appear on the fringes of academe.³⁴

A number of studies on Old Iranian vocabulary as attested in names and loan-words (*Nebenüberlieferungen*) appeared in the postwar era. Walther Hinz published a new vocabulary in 1975 which took advantage of the archives from Persepolis and Akkadian

31 Eg. was Egypt a land whose inhabitants "neither form good military material nor can be trusted to fight for their masters" (Olmstead 1948: 244) or one which contained "the difficult delta country with its warlike inhabitants" (*Cambridge History of Iran* ii.335)?

32 Widengren 1956a: 108 "En principe, on peut dire que dans la société iranienne, pendant l'époque des Achéménides, les fiefs étaient exempts de tribut en revanche de la livraison des soldats de différentes catégories, cavaliers, archers et conducteurs de chars . . . Il semble aussi que l'inféodé ait toujours possédé le droit d'engager son fief . . . Nous avons là, évidemment, un héritage des jours de Mitanni et pour cette raison nous pouvons renvoyer aux documents de Nuzi."

33 Schlerath 1976

34 eg. Farrokh 2007. Widengren is cited at Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 979

texts from Babylonia.³⁵ This contained a reasonable number of reconstructed military terms, such as words for commanders of ten, one hundred, one thousand, and ten thousand men. Most of these terms had been mentioned in earlier books and articles, but Hinz gathered them in one place. An *Iranisches Personennamenbuch* meant to cover onomastics as preserved in all ancient languages was launched in Vienna in the 1970s. This led to a number of studies by Rüdiger Schmitt and other scholars on Iranian names in classical texts. This kind of research had a long history, but beginning in the 1980s it became increasingly widely cited by researchers interested in armies and force.

Another body of scholarship focused on the plentiful documents which survive from the Neo-Babylonian, Teispid, and Achaemenid periods. In the early 20th century and into the postwar period, this research was part of a broader Assyriological project to map Mesopotamian history and culture from the invention of writing to the abandonment of cuneiform under the Parthians. Many famous Assyriologists wrote something on military matters in the 7th, 6th, and 5th centuries, including Guillaume Cardascia, E. Ebeling, and A. Leo Oppenheim. The postwar period saw the publication of the first comprehensive dictionaries of Akkadian, Wolfram von Soden's *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* and the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*, and the systematic gathering and analysis of terms for types of soldier, *Realien*, and military operations. Another popular area of research was identifying foreigners in Babylonia through onomastics and the rare use of ethnic terms to describe individuals. Many of these individuals seem to have served in the army. Ran Zadok and Muhammad Dandamayev were two especially prolific researchers. Specialists in Jewish history or Egyptology touched on the archives from Elephantine on the Nile which have been discussed above, as well as other Aramaic texts from Egypt. The garrison archive contains many details of social history and community organization but less about equipment or military activity.

However, this kind of research tended to address armies and warfare in brief specialized studies, rather than writing syntheses or engaging with works in the classical-ancient historical tradition. Guillaume Cardascia's series of papers on the Murašû archive from Nippur brought order to this large body of texts and was framed within a French tradition of comparative historical research and the idea of feudalism. (He also published the first reasonably accurate translation of the "Gadal-Jâma contract," UCP 9/3 269 ff., a text which we will encounter again). Matthew Stolper's study of the same archive, first published in 1985, focused on the social and economic aspects.

Archaeologists also made important discoveries. While the Achaemenid period was difficult to identify at many sites, the excavations at Sardis, Deve Hüyük (not a controlled excavation), Pasargadae, and Persepolis revealed many remains of weapons. Sardis was one of several fortified sites where destruction layers seem to correspond to campaigns described by Herodotus. Tombs in western Anatolia contained many

spectacular carvings and paintings of soldiers, and cylinder seals or seal impressions continued to appear in excavations and on the art market. Postwar prosperity and improvements in photography and printing made it easier to share artwork. The discovery of two archives at Persepolis, the Persepolis Fortification and Persepolis Treasury Texts, created a new field specialized in interpreting these mainly Elamite texts, and suggested to many readers that Widengren's picture of a feudal, rural empire was insufficient. However, these archives contained little which was directly relevant to military matters, and after an initial group of publications in the 1950s and 1960s publication of the remaining texts slowed.

These traditions of research provided sources and interpretation which were very relevant to the kinds of questions posed by classicists and military historians, and a few classicists responded eagerly: David M. Lewis' study *Sparta and Persia* (1977) emphasizes the importance of the Persepolis texts as a side of the empire which readers of the classical literary sources would never have imagined.³⁶ Yet as we have seen, in the early 1980s, broad works on Achaemenid warfare kept them on the margins. J. M. Cook was an archaeologist who worked in Turkey, but his 1983 survey of the Achaemenid empire relies upon the works of classicists and philologists to describe armies and warfare.³⁷ He apologizes for being unable to read Russian or Akkadian, then brings various kinds of evidence together on topics such as the organization of the army, the Immortals, and the relative importance of the spear and the bow. In the last case he notes that the royal inscriptions do not seem to support Aeschylus and Herodotus' contrast of the Greek spear and the Persian bow, but generally he addresses topics covered by Eduard Meyer and aims at synthesis and harmonization of sources. In particular, he does not question the picture in Herodotus and Aeschylus of 480 BCE as a turning point, after which the empire transformed from a dangerous menace into a decadent empire which survived by "intrigue and bribery" rather than "vigour."³⁸ This kind of language leaned heavily upon broader ideologies and stereotypes about the east, and after decolonization these ideas were becoming harder to justify.

The volumes of the *Cambridge History of Iran* dealing with the ancient world also appeared between 1983 and 1985. The *History* was envisioned as a thorough and scholarly but compact study of Iranian history and culture from the earliest times to the present (it also brought scholars from both sides of the Iron Curtain together). Each volume has a special editor and is divided into chapters written by specialists, and the project resembles the more famous *Cambridge Ancient History*. Like many edited collections, the volume on early Iran is uneven. Most of the authors took a conservative approach, with painstaking studies of topics like weights and measures which assume that ancient currencies worked like the "gold standard" of the early 20th century. The narrative

36 Lewis 1977: 4–5; he returns to this theme later in the book

37 Cook 1983: 101–113

38 Cook 1983: 107

sections were written by scholars with a classical orientation such as J. M. Cook, A. R. Burn, and Ernst Badian, while the sections on Egypt and Babylonia pay more attention to Scythian arrowheads, documents from Memphis and Elephantine, and tablets from Babylonia.

The late 1970s and early 1980s were the time of the overthrow of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1979) and the establishment of an Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran. The first volume of the *Cambridge History of Iran* (1968) contains a fawning acknowledgement of the Shah whose National Iranian Oil Company paid half the costs of production. Many educated Iranians fled the country after the revolution, and since then Iranian expats have been important readers and sponsors of work on early Iran.

1.5 The Achaemenid History Workshops and the Encyclopaedia Iranica

Several projects in the 1980s lead to the establishment of Achaemenid history as a distinct field with its own tools, assumptions, and methods. Scholars in this period greatly expanded our knowledge of the Achaemenid empire and created an outline for further work. The study of the Achaemenid army was not unaffected by these changes.

Between 1980 and 1990, a series of annual conferences on Achaemenid history were held at Groningen, London, and Ann Arbor Michigan.³⁹ Organized by Heleen Sancisi-Verdenburg, each workshop gathered about thirty scholars to reconsider Achaemenid history in light of Greek and modern ideology. It is difficult to overstate the influence of these workshops. They lead to the recognition of Achaemenid studies as a distinct specialty, to increased contacts between researchers working on different aspects of the Achaemenid empire, and to the reconsideration of established verities, such as the existence of a powerful Median Empire which Cyrus the Great conquered. It is to be doubted whether Pierre Briant's very influential and wide-ranging book, *Histoire de l'Empire Perse*, would have been written without the workshops. Many of the papers from the conference were published in the eight volumes of conference proceedings, which have been followed by seven more volumes on different aspects of Teispid and Achaemenid history.

Several participants in the Achaemenid history workshops contributed papers on military matters. The most important include Sekunda's three articles on evidence for military settlements in western Anatolia, Tuplin's very long and thorough study of evidence for garrisons around the empire, and Wallinga's analysis of the origins of the Persian navy.⁴⁰ Sekunda's and Tuplin's articles are built around dense catalogues of literary, epigraphic, onomastic, documentary, and archaeological evidence. While Se-

39 For a summary see Kuhrt 2009 (note that the third workshop of 1983 was the first to receive a conference proceedings)

40 Sekunda 1985, 1988, 1991, Tuplin 1987, Wallinga 1987 (later expanded as Wallinga 1993)

kunda seems to have found less evidence than he hoped for, and Tuplin was impressed with the difficulty of reconciling other sources with the literary ones, both accepted the premise that one should begin by systematically gathering all kinds of evidence rather than picking and choosing from Greek literary sources. Not all of these articles were lucky in their publishers; Sekunda's articles appeared spread across different venues, and Tuplin's was printed as a jumble of place names, numbered lists, and abbreviated references with some paragraphs which stretch across three pages.⁴¹ The difficulty of reading it, and of tracking down the diverse sources and research which it cites, may have discouraged other scholars from imitating him. In addition to his conference papers, Sekunda also published other studies, including an analysis of Old Persian military jargon and a study of the career of the Persian general Datames. The former seems to be the only study of specifically military terms in Old Persian, although Sekunda modestly states that most of the contents of the article are known to specialists.⁴² Although the works of Sekunda, Tuplin, and Wallinga are important, military topics were not central to the Achaemenid History workshops. Rather than being the focus of an article, military events and institutions tended to be mentioned in studies which focused on cuneiform sources, political history, or the problem of separating facts from literary conventions and ethnic stereotypes.

In 1986, the first volume of the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* appeared. The *Encyclopaedia Iranica* project meant to provide a comprehensive encyclopedia in many volumes for all aspects of Iranian history, culture, and languages. An especially important decision was the creation of the *Encyclopaedia Iranica Online* in 1996, which hosts all of the printed articles (and some unprinted ones) and is accessible without a subscription. *Encyclopaedia Iranica* is a very valuable resource, with bibliographies which cover sources in many languages and many specialties. While the quality and scope of individual articles naturally varies, they usually have extensive bibliographies which draw together works published in many languages by scholars in different specialties. Articles are also rewritten as the printed volumes are published, and this helps to keep the content up to date. It is perhaps unfortunate that the entry for "ARMY i. Pre-Islamic Iran" was published in the first volume, before the new approach championed by the Achaemenid History Workshops had spread. The article, written by A. Shapour Shahbazi, a well known historian of early Iran, was organized into chapters on the Avestan period, the early 1st millennium BCE, the Achaemenid period, the Parthian period, and the Sassanian period.⁴³ Alexander and the Seleucids are absent, which implies that Seleucid armies were "Greek" or "Macedonian" but not "Iranian." Shahbazi discusses all the topics commonly discussed by classicists with the exception of specif-

41 Eg. Tuplin 1987: 201–203

42 Sekunda 1988a: 69 (Tavernier 2007 has a short section on Iranian military terms attested in languages other than Greek and Latin)

43 Shahbazi 1986

ic battles and campaigns. He discussed terms in Old Persian, the evidence of Greek art, sculpture from Iran, remains of weapons, and one cuneiform document. Shahbazi's article is a good short overview with a sympathetic approach to the Persian army, and uses a broader range of evidence than many studies, but because it is a short overview it closely reflects scholarship by classicists and the Greek and Latin literary sources.

Like many other new and insecure groups, participants in the Achaemenid History Workshops looked for a constitutive other against which to define themselves and their project. For many participants, this was credulous, Hellenocentric scholarship by classicists, who supposedly presented a negative view of Persian decadence based on superficial readings of part of the evidence. In many ways the workshops were a post-colonial project, but with a twist: since the Achaemenids could not speak for themselves, some participants in the workshops took it upon themselves to defend them (the fact that the Achaemenid empire was itself an imperialistic great power loomed in the background). Research coming out of the workshops increasingly focused on topics like kingship and ideology, and on thematic studies over chronological narratives.

1.6 Western and Eastern Ways of War

At about the same time as the Achaemenid History Workshops, but quite independent from them, another perspective on the Achaemenid army was crystallizing. This was the "Western Way of War" theory, exemplified by Victor Davis Hanson's book of the same name.⁴⁴

At its simplest, the Western Way of War theory states that Greek culture led to a unique and effective way of war which later European countries and their colonies inherited. This way of war was based upon great battles between dense formations of heavily armed infantry who were politically free. Thus war is important to the study of ancient Greece because it was central to their culture, and studying ancient Greece is important to us because we inherited their culture and, in particular, their way of war. Hanson popularized this idea, and John Keegan, another historian who wrote for a large audience, enthusiastically accepted it.⁴⁵ A group of famous military historians published the *Cambridge Illustrated History of Warfare: The Triumph of the West* which also accepted this theory as a basic framework. Hints of these ideas can be found much earlier: Aeschylus and Herodotus contrasted the free Greek with his spear and the slavish Persian with his bow. W.W. How saw Xerxes' invasion of Greece, the Roman

44 Hanson 2000 (first edition 1989, and continually in print since; WorldCat lists 885 catalogue entries in July 2019)

45 Eg. Keegan 1994: 244 ff. (Hanson is "the foremost historian of the tactics of the Greek city states" and knows from experience that it would be hard to permanently damage Greek farmland); compare Keegan 1987 chapter 1 which follows Arrian in portraying Darius as a helpless coward.

invasions of Parthia, and the Crusades to the Levant as examples of struggles between the cavalry of the East and the infantry of the West, and Paul Rahe's article contrasts "the infantry of the West" and "the cavalry of the east."⁴⁶ Yet Hanson and Keegan developed these ideas at length with great rhetorical art, and in the heady atmosphere of the late Cold War and the following decade of peace their ideas found a large audience in the United States.

The Achaemenid army appears in two contexts in *The Western Way of War*. The first is embroidered, emotive passages full of words like "always" and "never" which contrast the Greeks or the West with everyone else. Hanson repeatedly cites the description of how the Greeks fight which Herodotus attributes to Mardonius (Hdt. 7.9β) as saying something profound about Greek and Persian warfare. Early in the book he glosses Mardonius' words as follows:

Herodotus' account suggests awe, or perhaps fear, in this man's dismissal of the Greek manner of battle and the Greek desire to inflict damage whatever the costs. Perhaps he is suggesting that Mardonius knew well that these men of the West, for all their ordered squares, careful armament, and deliberate drill, were really quite irrational and therefore quite dangerous. All the various contingents of the Grand Army of Persia, with their threatening looks and noise, had a very different and predictable outlook on battle. In Herodotus' view here, the Persians suffered from that most dangerous tendency in war: a wish to kill but not to die in the process.⁴⁷

Hanson also agrees with the Greek sources that Greek armies were usually outnumbered by foreign enemies, and he sees them sharing this disadvantage with many other "western" armies. In his view, Greeks, Romans, crusaders, *conquistadores*, and European colonial troops all faced much more numerous enemies. "Outnumbered Western commanders have never been dismayed by the opportunity to achieve an incredible victory through the use of superior weapons, tactics, and cohesion amongst men."⁴⁸ His discussion of the paradox of a rational, organized Apollonian army which must commit wild acts of Dionysian violence in combat leads to another contrast of Greeks and Persians. "To the Persians, who reversed these concepts – their disordered, moblike frightening hordes had no fondness for methodical killing – the approach of a Greek column was especially unsettling."⁴⁹ Hanson's logic is difficult to follow (which army is supposed to kill with Dionysiac frenzy, and which with Apollonian coolness?) but perhaps the real point is that whatever the Greeks did, the Persians must have done the opposite. He also quotes with approval a story that Antiochus the Arcadian ambassador told the Arcadians that he had not found any men who could stand up to Greeks

46 How 1923: 118, Rahe 1980: 88

47 Hanson 2000: 10

48 Hanson 2000: 15

49 Hanson 2000: 16

at the Persian court.⁵⁰ In this context, the Persians serve as a symbol of all foreigners who dared to stand up to “Westerners” in battle, and their gruesome deaths are used to glorify the heroes.

The second context where Hanson mentions the Persians is in discussions of specific problems in Greek battle, where Persian *exempla* are used alongside Greek, Macedonian, and Roman ones. Thus he wonders why outnumbered Greek armies did not plant the butts of their spears in the ground to receive a charge as the Persians at Mycale did; when considering whether or not Greek soldiers literally pushed their enemies he quotes Xenophon’s description of how Egyptians used their tall shields to push; he mentions Napoleonic and Persian parallels for the practice of viewing the bodies of dead enemies after the battle.⁵¹ These passages are written in a cool, objective style and assume that all ancient armies are comparable. Yet Hanson is not interested in going beyond Greek and Latin *sources* for ancient armies. The body of his book does not cite a single text or artifact from the Ancient Near East. His condensed bibliography of 120 items cites only three which concentrate on warfare in the ancient Near East: Yigael Yadin’s *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands*, a book by Arthur Ferrill which will be discussed below, and Jacques Harmand’s *La Guerre Antique de Sumer à Rome*.⁵² His bibliographical essay to the 2000 edition adds an article comparing New Kingdom Egyptian and Hippocratic Greek texts on skull surgery, a report on weapons excavated at Sardis as proof that Greek equipment was distinctive, an article on greaves in the ancient world to show that Greek equipment was widely imitated, a book by Gabriel and Metz which tries to quantify ancient military history, an edited volume which contains a single chapter on battle in New Kingdom Egypt, and some works of world history.⁵³ Almost all of these were published after the first edition of his book, so they illustrate conclusions which he had reached before he read them. Although he cites new translations of important Greek texts, he does not cite a single edition of any text in an ancient language other than Greek or Latin. While Hanson’s comments on the Greeks are backed by precise citation of sources and a thorough knowledge of modern research, he relies on loose references to Greek literature and introductory works by modern scholars to support his views on other cultures.

In his introduction to *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Warfare*, Geoffrey Parker excused the authors’ “Eurocentric approach” on the grounds that there was insufficient space to cover more cultures properly, and that “over the past two centuries the west-

50 Hanson 2000: 17 (= Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.38, where the ambassador goes on to make a childish joke that the King is not rich because his golden plane tree is too small to shade a grasshopper. Xenophon is reporting abusive rhetoric not sober observation).

51 Hanson 2000: 136 (Mycale), 174 (pushing), 202 (viewing the enemy dead)

52 Size of bibliography: Four pages at thirty items per page

53 Hanson cites general works by Geoffrey Parker, John Keegan, Samuel P. Huntington, and Jared Diamond. Specific works include three articles, Proreschi 1993, Greenewalt Jr. 1997, and Knauer 1993: 235–254, and two books, Gabriel and Metz 1991 and Lloyd (ed.) 1996.

ern way of war has become dominant all over the world” so “the rise and development of this dominant tradition, together with the secrets of its success, therefore seem worthy of examination and analysis.”⁵⁴ Yet unless one studies a range of cultures, how can one tell what made a particular culture or group of cultures distinct?

The Western Way of War theory is colourful, but has many limitations as a serious model. In particular, theorists are often vague about which societies are “western” and on exactly how this Greek military tradition was passed down to them.⁵⁵ Not all European warfare in the past three thousand years has the characteristics which Hanson considers to define western warfare, and some warfare outside of Europe has most of these characteristics. Antithesis is attractive, but it is much too simple for a rigorous academic model. Because of these weaknesses, most ancient historians had very little to say about a “Western Way of War” in public.⁵⁶ They were much more excited by Hanson’s vision of a new program of research into Greek warfare. Both supporters and critics of the theory tend to be modern historians.⁵⁷ For the purpose of this study, however, it is more important to consider what this theory meant for the study of the Achaemenid army. Theorists often had occasion to speak about the Achaemenid army, and they typically used it as an example of un-Western warfare. All whom I have read seem to rely on Greek literature and the sort of scholarship discussed above. Keegan had already been entranced by Arrian’s picture of a cowardly, ineffective Darius, and in *A History of Warfare* (1994) he paraphrased Hanson’s view of Greek warfare in approving terms and called Persia “an empire whose style of warmaking contained elements

54 Parker, G. 1995: viii

55 Thus Western Way of War theorists tend to pay little attention to the middle ages, where armies of free farmers fighting on foot are scarce, and where several distinct civilizations all inherited the Roman military tradition. Hanson’s *Carnage and Culture* only includes one battle between Cannae (216 BCE) and Tenochtitlan (1521), so that Charles Martel’s victory at Tours has to represent 1,700 years of warfare, while the authors of the *Cambridge Illustrated History of Warfare* avoided this difficulty by working with Bernard Bachrach, who sees early medieval warfare as a continuation of that described by Ammianus Marcellinus and proscribed by Vegetius.

56 The preface to Sidebottom 2004 is the longest printed response by an ancient historian I have read; a blog post “A Western Way of War?” by archaeologist Josho Brouwers from 2013 is also worth reading <https://www.ancientworldmagazine.com/articles/western-way-war/> González García and de Quiroga 2012 provide more of a political criticism of Hanson’s use of a view of the ancient world to support a political program today; they study ancient Iberia at the University of Santiago de Compostela. Roel Konijnendijk informs me that the introduction to Wheeler (ed.) 2007 also criticizes the Western Way of War, but I do not have access to this expensive volume.

57 Printed criticisms include Willett 2002, Lynn 2003, and Turchin 2013; Dawson, D. 1996 proposes his own version (but skips from St. Augustine to 15th century Florence in three pages, 173–176!) Carman 1999 engages with the idea *sed non vidi*. Dawson received a PhD in ancient history from Princeton and had a varied career; Willett is an independent scholar based in Japan (PhD in medieval and renaissance English, University of California San Diego 1972), Lynn is a specialist in 17th century France who spent most of his career at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Turchin is a biologist who thinks he has discovered mathematical laws of history, and Carman is a specialist in battlefield archaeology and antiquities law at the University of Birmingham. Teachers and colleagues have been much more willing to criticize the idea orally.

both of primitive ritual and of the horse warrior's evasiveness" and which relied on obsolete chariots instead of modern infantry and cavalry.⁵⁸ Most were specialists in European history of the last few hundred years, and relied on broad works by other scholars for their understanding of war in other places and times.

Western Way of War theory popularized a negative view of the Achaemenid army, and it sparked a lively if narrow-visioned scholarship on Greek military history before Alexander. As the original example of the barbarian 'other,' the Achaemenid army was used to symbolize the "eastern way of war" rather than being studied independently. Since the theory depended on Greek warfare being distinctive, it was naturally tempting to emphasize the contrast between Greek and Achaemenid armies. Believers in the theory saw the Achaemenids as rhetorical foils rather than an independent object of study. Skeptics focused their attention on the details of Greek warfare before Alexander, on warfare in India or China or medieval Europe, on almost every imaginable topic except warfare in Thrace or Lydia or Egypt in the time of the Achaemenids. Hanson stressed the relevance of his work to American politicians and soldiers, and many in the public agree. T. C. McCaskie put it well:

Pressfield's best-selling *Gates of Fire* is a novel about Thermopylae, but the Spartans in it talk like U. S. Marines. This seems relatively harmless if mindless until one looks at Pressfield's busy website "Agora." This used to be called "It's the Tribes, Stupid" and it was created to increase awareness of "the tribal mind-set in Afghanistan.' These claim that "Agora" and *Gates of Fire* furnish insights into the Eastern (and undifferentiated), barbarian (and now Islamic) enemy.⁵⁹

Similarly, Peter Green assures his readers that "Modern Europe owes nothing to the Achaemenids. The civilization . . . is almost as alien to us as that of the Aztecs . . . fundamentally static . . . theocratic . . . hostile (where not blindly indifferent) to original creativity . . . the Greek achievement . . . inexplicable miracle . . . democratic institutions . . . free scientific inquiry, free political debate . . . all these things ran flat counter to the whole pattern of thought in any major civilization with which the Greeks had to deal."⁶⁰ After reading such things, it should be no surprise that people in the wider culture use the Persian Wars to rally their countrymen against the latest frightening foreigners who cover too much of their bodies with clothing. While it is useful to separate the history of research from the history of reception, some scholars write for both worlds.

58 Already entranced: Keegan 1987 chapter 1 and Keegan 1994: 389 (Alexander's career is real history "as narrated by Arrian"); ritual and evasiveness, Keegan 1994: 389; based on chariots, Keegan 1994: 178

59 McCaskie 2012: 167

60 Green 1996: 5 (hopefully most readers of Herodotus can agree that in his world all leaders pay close attention to the will of the gods if they know what is good for them, and that his despots often sponsor great works of scientific inquiry such as the circumnavigation of Africa and Psammetichus' search for the oldest language?)