

THE 10,000 PERSIAN IMMORTALS, A MODEL FOR THE SPECIAL INDO-EUROPEAN TROOPS

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Abstract: *The history of humanity got from the Persians the first imperial organization, the first process of integration of the conquered ones, the first postal service, the most effective means of communication at the dawn of Antiquity, and also the best organized militarized services.*

The most special of the Indo-European Antiquity troops was the Royal Guard, founded by Darius I, one of the great kings of humanity, a political titan, and equally an extraordinary general through his institutional creations of force. The Royal Guard of Darius I, known in history as the 10,000 immortals, is the subject of our study, as it is one of the most complex special militarized structures in human history of all time, inspiring the military structures of all the Indo-Europeans, whether the Hoplite revolution, the organization of the Macedonian phalanx or the Roman Praetorian Guard and more than that.

The 10,000 immortals combined not only the heroic character (while multiplying it), which appeared for the first time with the Greeks of the Homeric period, but also strict discipline, in the Spartan sense, contemporary with this troop, the organization and the well-developed logistics, which would inspire the Roman army, the military brotherhoods characteristic of all the Indo-Europeans, but this totally special troop, in particular, imposed the model of the educated (even intellectual) military man, a soldier of the supreme god of the Good, faithful first of all to the Good and to his king, a military man who used all the weapons of the time.

This special troop was a true institution that also provided information to the Persian king, information being one of the most effective weapons. Moreover, the Persians through this Royal Guard used for the first time psychological impact as a weapon, this being the first case of effective manipulation by the number that was kept constant, but also by name. Only the gods were immortal, and the very large number of soldiers who made up this special troop is impressive even today. The armament of this extraordinary troop comprised all the weapons of the time, the bow above all, which the Aryans considered the favourite weapon of Indra, the most warlike god of the Indo-European gods.

Keywords: Persians, special troop, psychological impact, armament, immortals.

1. Introduction

The 10,000 Persian immortals represent the first great special troop of Indo-European Antiquity, the perfect institution of military force, above all those following in Indo-European civilizations, such as the Greek, (Spartan), Roman ones and others. This military structure exceeded whatever had existed before, especially because it

combined both the features of the armed forces, the intelligence service, the personal guard of the king, and the state officials, even propaganda agents of Persianization. This extraordinary troop influenced all that would come later in the civilizations of the Indo-European area, such as: the Diadochi of Alexander the Great, or the Roman Praetorian Guard, or the Byzantine

administration, etc. The Persian troop relied on a religious ideology, it represented not only a military force of Persia, but also of the supreme god of the monotheistic religion promoted by Zoroastrianism, namely a religion of the Supreme Good, Ahura Mazda, and the 10,000 immortals were his soldiers. Ahura Mazda was the supreme god who patronized the new religion of the new empire reorganized and strengthened by Darius I (also called the Great, though a more appropriate epithet would be Darius I the Titan). Like the supreme god, Ahura Mazda, the god of the Good, Heaven and Earth, the immortal one, the 10,000 soldiers of the good on earth, under the subordination of the king of this god, could not die, hence the epithet of “immortal”.

Their creator, Darius the Great, wanted this troop of immortals to be not only his royal guard, but also the guardians of the entire Empire of the Persians, actually a creation of Ahura Mazda, who was constantly fighting the god of the Evil, Ahriman, therefore Darius’ soldiers were Ahura Mazda’s soldiers, too.

The 10,000 immortals were the ones who also controlled the Royal Road and the entire communication service of the Persian Empire (the creator of the post), as a fast communication service among the provinces of the empire and the capital, a service served by the military (the post being the creation of the titanic Darius I) as a revolutionary information service, later taken over by the whole world. This special troop transmitted the orders of Darius I and was concerned with the implementation of these orders by the satraps. The institution of the “king’s eye” consisted of secret agents who oversaw the satraps (governors) and informed the king directly, most likely they belonged to the 10,000 immortals. The easiest way to this military troop was part of the Persian army, a genuine secret service, an institution of royal rapporteurs, a group of officials of the imperial administration by serving the post and the

Royal Road, and equally propaganda agents of the new monotheistic religion founded by Zoroaster. In light of all these considerations, it can be said that Darius I, the gigantic visionary king of the Persian Empire, created the famous Immortals as a true system, not just as an elite troop. Although this special military troop is so important to the radiography of any militarized system, the bibliographic sources are quite poor about this military phenomenon, which we can place among the first revolutions of military affairs. Therefore, our study aims to draw attention to their importance for what the military phenomenon means, being ignored by military works, precisely because of the lack of information.

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2. Darius I the Immortal

Darius I is the creator of the 10,000 Persian immortals, being himself the first of the immortals, because he was their supreme commander. This gigantic politician for the whole world, not only for Indo-European Antiquity, invented not only a special perfect troop, but a perfect military system,

thus revolutionizing military affairs, as he was the first to rule with the army, a fact which happened again during the Roman Empire, but after almost half a millennium. He was an unparalleled leader, he surpassed all the great leaders of human history through his vision, creation and conception of government, but especially through the means of administering a huge state. Darius I, the Titan, did not have a royal descent, but remained the best known king of ancient Persia, surpassing Cyrus the Great by his reforms. The son of a satrap, Darius imposed himself as king by proclaiming himself the king chosen by the god Ahura Mazda, the god who became the head of the Persian pantheon, thus solving forever the problem of those who protested against him. His royal descent was a choice of the god of the good, not of a family. That is why he was a gigantic politician, he managed to get the farthest in the politics of the world, without the support of a dynastic family, the dynasty was created by him through the choice of the God of the Supreme Good. As Ahura Mazda was the ruler of the whole world, celestial and terrestrial, Darius I was the delegate of his power on the land of the Aryans, and whoever challenged his power brought an affront to the god and his choice. We can say that Darius I was the first great political leader of the whole world, who fully used manipulation, but achieved what no one had achieved before him, and after him no one rose so much by his ability as did the son of a satrap named Darius.

In fact, his military creations began the history of intelligence services [1] and of all the structures that collect, interpret and transmit information, therefore the 10,000 immortals exceed by their abilities and functions the simple Royal Guard service, they were constituted like a true divine Guard of Ahura Mazda, controlled by Ahura Mazda's general, the Great Darius. As Proto-Indo-Europeans, the Persians were masters of war, no matter that they were part of the area of the Medes, Persians

or Aryans, all were practically the inventors of the art of Mars. As a result, the name of warriors in the world of the Indo-Europeans was closely related to the occupations of driving chariots in battles, a revolution of military affairs invented by this ancient civilization, hence the phrase "those who stood in the chariots"[2]. These chariots were usually drawn by two horses carrying two warriors: one was a driver and drove the chariot, carrying a spear, and the other warrior was an archer, aiming at enemies from a distance and very fast. The Indo-Europeans thus turned the horse into a fighting platform and quickened the pace of the war.

Being devoid of the tradition and importance of a dynasty, Darius I himself creates an imperial ideology and a justification for power, as no one had done before. He considered himself the delegate of Ahura Mazda, who entrusted him with the leadership of the entire world, not only of Persia. Darius the Titan created the 10,000 immortals as an army of the supreme god Ahura Mazda, who gave him command of this land force in the battle with the god of the Evil, Ahriman, for controlling the world. So Darius I was a general of the supreme Good, who, by his imperial creation, ensured the stability and the good of the whole world, which is why the enemies of the king were the enemies of the god and they were to be punished without delay. Ahura Mazda, the god of Heaven and Earth, of the Good and of Life, enthroned Darius as a "judge and warrior" to create an "ideal state" in which the Good would reign in the form of *Pax Persica* [3]. *Pax Persica* involved some agents, promoters and guardians, so Darius I set up the Royal Guard, the 10,000 immortals, who were meant to implement, control and secure this "ideal state", but also to demonstrate Darius' military grandeur, the one who received the "divine mandate"[4] from the most powerful god. The Royal Guard would travel on the Royal Road throughout the empire, carrying

information, orders, and thus achieving Persianization as a policy of the Supreme Good, being in fact the army of the Good. The enemies of the god were also the enemies of the Persians, and the enemies of the Persians were the enemies of the god. From this perspective, the 10,000 immortals were peacekeepers. Peace was the goal of Ahura Mazda, *raman* = peace, which also had to exist in the kingdom of Ahura Mazda [5], ie in Persia, where King Darius I received the delegation to rule it.

Darius I thus found the ideological and religious justification for his reign in the holy writing called *Avesta*, of the new religion he promoted, namely Zoroastrianism, which states: "*Ahura Mazda made Darius king just as he made the earth, heaven, man, the happiness of man, who is the great god*"[6]. *Avesta* also contains the model of the ideal military man, from the kingdom of Ahura Mazda, in other words how an immortal had to be: "*To be self-confident as an infantryman and on horseback, to be the best as an archer, to be the best at carrying and handling a spear while riding a horse and walking... he has to be self-confident and master his own mind...*"[7]. So Darius created a totally special troop of intellectuals, thorough military men, who were able to use all existing weapons, who were also psychologically prepared, capable of self-control and animated by the "doctrine of Zoroastrianism as an ideological foundation"[8].

3. The Military and Militarized System of Darius I

The great politician and complete military man Darius I had to face an unprecedented challenge, namely the numerous riots in various Persian provinces, which took advantage of the fact that Darius "was not a direct member of the royal family"[9]. Thus, the Persian Empire founded by Cyrus the Great was overwhelmed with riots in almost every corner, which is why Darius I the Great had to establish new institutions

and reform the old ones, in order to create a system which was easy to control directly, and also effective in combating all the riots and in reunifying all those who were under the rule of the Persians.

In the first seven years of his reign, Darius I had 19 confrontations with the rebels in the Persian Empire, but he managed to restore Persian unity and preserve the Empire built by Cyrus the Great [10]. On this occasion of re-establishing *raman*= Persian *peace* in the empire he took, he proclaimed himself the supreme commander of the army (which he reformed from its very foundation) and began the creation of the institutional system. He started the pacification of the former territories of the Persians like Elam, Media, followed by Armenia and Babylon [11]. The fall of Babylon put an end to the years of rebellion and challenge of the reign of the great king.

The creation of the military and militarized system at the top of which lay its elite, namely the 10,000 immortals, took place in a relatively short time, but founded a system out of several systems, dominated by the military system, the key to the functioning of Darius' whole of systems. This Persian central system created by Darius I began with his major reforms, such as those concerning:

1. administration. Thus, the king chosen by Ahura Mazda set up the administrative units, the satrapies, delegating his power through a collegial system of officials comprising the following: a. a civil administrator, the satrap, (*khshatrapa*) [12] (the word that designated the function of satrap includes a noun that designated the military force which would also be part of the notion denoting the caste of the Aryan warriors, namely *khshatrarya* = the armed forces of the Aryans in translation, so the satrap was also a kind of military man disguised in civilian, like an administrator in the army) the governor; b. a military commander; c. a secretary of the king who supervised the other two [13]. In fact, the military commander and the king's

secretary (*karanos* = the king's eye) [14] were militarized forces, the latter being a true secret agent of the king; d. each city in the satrapies had a military commander *arga-pat* [15].

2. economy. Darius I is the first major initiator of economic and financial infrastructure. Thus he built the *Royal Road*, a true highway at that time, covering over 2700 km and starting from Susa and reaching Sardis, connecting the parts of the Persian Empire and practically inventing a phenomenon, namely communication by the Royal Post Office, *Angareion*, a militarized service, served by knights. The royal post carried the king's direct orders in the satrapies, being in fact the central pillar in the Persian intelligence service, because through it the king sent orders to the provinces, received information from every corner of his empire and could thus have any viable solution based on this information. This service that revolutionized the process of communication was run by *pirradazziish* = the fast courier [16]. In addition to this extraordinary invention of the information transmission/transfer service, Darius I invented the coin as a standard commodity, the *daric* [17]. Darius I also established taxes in his empire to be paid in metals: gold, silver, copper, other metals, jewellery, horses, other animals [18]. Consequently, in all the 33 satrapies the taxes were collected by the satraps, all for the needs of the militarized system. Moreover, the satraps also had to deal with the recruitment of the military, maintaining order in the satrapy and recording all the events, being also the keepers of the imperial archive. The king's inspectors, those *king's eyes*, collected the necessary information from the satrapies and sent it to the king [19].

Economic security was maintained by the military commander of the provinces, namely the *arga – pat* who, besides maintaining order, had to ensure the safety of the roads and agriculture [20]. Food security was very important in Darius I's

brilliant vision, so it had to be provided by a militarized service. Finances were also an integral part of the Persian economy, therefore Darius I invented the coin, but he also reformed the units of measure by inventing new measures for weight: *karsha*, *mana* [21] and *parasang* for distance [22]. Trade also experienced an unprecedented development due to these new parts of the imperial system. Through the Royal Road, Persian trade had become globalized. Darius I wanted to develop trade on all routes not only on land, but also the maritime ones, being the first to try to build the canal that would be built much later, the Suez Canal [23]. Moreover, the trade designed by Darius I was the trade of a true "common market" [24] due to the *daric* as well.

3. legislation. Darius I founded a true legal system through which he laid the foundations of his vast imperial system, all his institutions could be created due to the laws. The law in Persian was called *dat* [25]. It seems that the inspiration for Darius' Code was Hammurabi's Code which he adapted to the needs of Persia and its realities, it became an original *Code of Darius* [26]. The supreme law in whose name Darius I ruled was the law of the Supreme Good, ie the law of the one who delegated him as king of the land of the Aryans, Ahura Mazda.

4. religion. The religious reform was very important, giving an ideology to his system, so Zoroastrianism was adopted as a monotheistic religion of the Persian Empire, but the other religions existing in the empire were tolerated, allowing the worship of various deities, concurrently with Zoroastrianism [27]. This new religion became the religious basis of the Persian Empire and implicitly of the 10,000 immortals [28].

5. army. The military reform was the most important for the reign of Darius I, practically all other reforms derived from this one. Darius' army was a perfect system, which had infrastructure, resources,

functions in the state and thus social status, ideology, laws. Therefore the Persian name of Darius the Great was “Darayavahush imposed his empire with the army”[29]. The army created by Darius had to be worthy of the Great Persia, considered by the great king the land of the Aryans, the country “with good horses and good warriors”[30]. The army of Darius was truly one of the most effective and intellectual armies, a complex one, possessing all the weapons of the time: infantry, cavalry, fleet, communications - Post, intelligence agents - the *king's eye*, agents of influence - through the Zoroastrian cult, special troops, the army elite, the 10,000 immortals.

4. The 10,000 Immortals, the Peak of the Persian Military System

This extraordinary military troop was created by the Great Darius, the first in his name, to paraphrase a famous TV series, as the king's Guard in order to ensure the security of the king and of his family, but it surpassed a simple group of royal guards through structure, as well as through duties and education. Initially, the Royal Guard was divided into three bodies of knights and pedestrians. The favourite weapons were the spears, so they were named *melophoroi* by the Greeks [31]. The 10,000 immortals were later structured into 10 battalions of 1000 people, receiving this name from the Persian phrase *a mereta* = deathless [32]. They became a permanent structure led directly by the king, and in case of riots in the satrapies of the empire they were sent as intervention troops (we can consider them assault troops, but also the gendarmerie as they were sent there to restore order) placed under the command of the satrap in the satrapy where the riot took place [33].

The military rank that ensured the frequent command of the effective forces of immortals, Persians and Aryans, was called *hazarapatish* [34]. For the name of the army the Persians used several names such as *karanos* = army [35], (we notice that the *king's eye* bears the same name, from which

we deduce that he was also a military man), *kara* = army at war [36], but also *spada* = army [37]. The first terms would have referred to the army on a combat mission, and *spada* would have denoted the army in peacetime. The favourite weapons of the immortals were all weapons of the time, as they were at the same time archers = *anuvaniya*, spear bearers = *rsika*, infantrymen = *pasti*, but also knights = *asabari* [38]. In representations, the 10,000 immortals were pedestrians armed to the teeth with all the weapons of that time, also having a kind of yatagans, very similar to the Dacian swords. The 10,000 immortals were a quite small special force in the Persian military system, which had a large force in the fleet, around 80,000 fighters [39]. An impressive number to which we must add the regular infantry and cavalry troops, so it seems that the army of Darius I had over 100,000 soldiers, an army that was meant to defend the empire = *khshassa* [40]. The 10,000 immortals were the heart of a professional army created by Ahura Mazda's king, who established by a *dat* that all Persians would serve in the army for 10 years, from 20 (when they were likely to become of age) to 30 years (when they probably could deal with the militarized administrative services). The instruction of this perfect army, a model for other Indo-European armies, was very strict, but paid. This regular and professional army was meant to defend, but also to oversee the administration, benefiting from the king's confidence [41], like a kind of economic police in particular. The 10,000 immortals were the general staff not only of the army, but also of the Persian government/administration, so they were directly subordinated to Darius I, as the first force institution, having the role of intelligence service, but also of commando. It is interesting that the totem of the Immortals was, most probably, the pomegranate, which they had as a symbol on their spears, some with spikes made from precious metals, gold and silver

(perhaps to express the military rank of the carriers; most likely gold was for high-ranking officers, silver for non-commissioned officers). It is true that the pomegranate is a fruit endemic to Iran, a totem chosen in the Indo-European tradition of military brotherhoods, a manner in which this extraordinary troop also acted. It is known that all the military brotherhoods of the Indo-Europeans, especially the Aryans, had, in order to enter into *furorbellicus* = the warlike force, most of the times, a drink which the Aryans called *soma*, a gift from the god of war, Indra, in the case of the Persians we have the sacred drink called *haoma* that appears in the Zoroastrian conception [42]. Certainly, this beverage was made of pomegranates. Thus, there are many similarities between the 10,000 immortals and the Dacians, both in terms of weapons and the importance of knights in the army, but also in other areas. Both the Persians and the Dacians believed in a

monotheistic religion, both peoples honoured the reformers of these monotheistic religions, the Persians had the 10,000 immortals as an elite troop dedicated to the God of the Supreme Good, the Dacians had the Messengers of Zamolxis, special soldiers, a kind of kamikaze, also on a religious basis. It is certain that all Indo-European civilizations owe the Aryans and the Persians their militaristic tradition.

6. Conclusion

The 10,000 immortals and their creator were, are and will be *a mereta* = 'deathless' in the history of the art of Mars, an art that Indo-European civilizations, such as the Greek (Spartan) and Roman ones continued to perfection, following the model of this super-special troop invented and organized by its creative titan from the land of the Aryans, Darius I.

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