

Immortals and Archaic Rome

The Urth list — 8 messages, 7 voices, 16 Jun 2003

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4027>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

The Wynns — 16 Jun 2003, 20:06

Chris says:

re: Latro as an Immortal, I didn't actually know that foreigners were allowed in that unit - Herodotus didn't say an awful lot about it, and I haven't read other sources. But certainly that would help to explain things.

Though, I'm not so sure his entire unit would have been used that way. If they were, it seems more likely that they would have been caught in the later fighting around Thebes than to have gotten so far away.

Crush recants:

Hmmm. Herodotus 7:83 says that the Immortals were "all Persians". So either Latro was not an Immortal, or Wolfe is engaging in literary license in presuming that Latro somehow gained a special honor. There *were* 10,000 of them so I guess it is not inconceivable that a Latin slipped in.

Does identifying Latro as the killer of Leonidas reveal anything? Her. 7:218 seems to suggest Leonidas was assaulted by the Immortals commanded by Hydarnes. But Her. 7:223 says he was assaulted by the "barbarians under Xerxes". So it could go either way.

But Latro is clearly a seasoned tactician. I seem to recall someone saying he looked to be in his early twenties. This has always been difficult for me to rectify. When could he have had the opportunity to study war analytically? I can't remember where to find Latro's dream of him going into battle with his fellow soldiers -- perhaps some light could be shed from there. I remember it was from there that I got the idea he was some kind of officer.

It is true that Latium is not numbered among the armies of Xerxes. This is not surprising. In 478 BC, Rome's republic was about 30 years old -- Rome was only about 100 years beyond an age of legend. 150 years later, Rome was not even considered worth the trouble for Alexander the Great or his heirs to conquer. At the time of the Persian War, Rome was in precarious war with its neighbors Veii and the Aequi. It is interesting to me that Latro left his home to become a warrior when Rome was in nearly constant war from the late 6th century to the late 5th.

-- Crush

James Jordan — 17 Jun 2003, 20:24 · follows The Wynns

Crush recants:

Hmmm. Herodotus 7:83 says that the Immortals were "all Persians". So either Latro was not an Immortal, or Wolfe is engaging in literary license in presuming that Latro somehow gained a special honor. There *were* 10,000 of them so I guess it is not inconceivable that a Latin slipped in.

Or maybe that "Persian" does not refer to race per se, but to those considered part of Persia, which was pretty multifarious racially. Latro could have been an adopted "Persian," since

adoption of various kinds was quite common in the ancient world.

Nutria

matthew.malthouse — 18 Jun 2003, 07:29 · follows James Jordan

On 17/06/2003 21:24:23 James Jordan wrote:

Crush recants:

Hmmm. Herodotus 7:83 says that the Immortals were "all Persians". So either

Latro was not an Immortal, or Wolfe is engaging in literary license in presuming that Latro somehow gained a special honor. There **were** 10,000 of them so I guess it is not inconceivable that a Latin slipped in.

Or maybe that "Persian" does not refer to race per se, but to those considered part of Persia, which was pretty multifarious racially. Latro could have been an adopted "Persian," since adoption of various kinds was quite common in the ancient world.

The ancient historians had a pretty clear idea of what were Persians and what were other nations conquered by the Persian Empire. Just as they made the distinction between Romans by origin, Roman citizens and subjects of Roman Empire. I don't know but I suspect that Medes, Parthians, Assyrians etc in the Immortal Guard would have been worth of comment.

Of course I'm assuming that Herodotus didn't just make it up. ;-)

Matthew

Andrew Bollen — 18 Jun 2003, 08:27 · follows matthew.malthouse

Matthew says:

The ancient historians had a pretty clear idea of what were Persians and what were other nations conquered by the Persian Empire. Just as they made the distinction between Romans by origin, Roman citizens and subjects of Roman Empire. I don't know but I suspect that Medes, Parthians, Assyrians etc in the Immortal Guard would have been worth of comment.

Of course I'm assuming that Herodotus didn't just make it up. ;-)

Anyway, the relevant passage is Ch 37 of Mist for Thermopylae:

Latro addresses "the hundred" (I guess he is acting as centurion, if that term existed then): "While the Immortals are gone, we could have no higher honor than to be the protectors of the Universal King ...".

Her 8.210-224 gives the background. The Medes go in on the first day, failing & making it plain to the King "that although he had plenty of troops, he did not have many men." The Immortals are then sent in, but they do no better - fighting in a restricted area, with spears shorter than the Greeks'. Then Ephialtes the traitor reveals a path thru the mountains, allowing the Persians to attack from a more favorable position. The engagement takes place outside the narrows; Persian conscripts whipped on by their officers die like flies (as in Latro's account); but in the end appear to overwhelm the Spartans by weight of numbers. The Spartans fight with swords, their spears broken, their spears broken, and Leonidas falls but with no deaths given. The Immortals are not mentioned.

So there's a blank space here concerning the Immortals, and the precise details of Leonidas' death, which GW has painted in. I think his premiss is that the light infantry Medes and bowmen, not just the conscripts but probably the Immortals also, have shown themselves inferior to the hoplite & the phalanx, and Latro's heavy-armed, disciplined Romans are recognized as being a better "force-on-force" solution. This of course makes sense historically, since the Roman tactical organization which GW describes (the two pila, the short stabbing sword etc) was to prove superior to the hoplite/phalanx combination, but maybe anachronistic?

For Plataea, the passage is Ch 24 of Mist:

Latro sees the red cloaks of the Spartiates in their falling-back manouevre. He sees Mardonius on his white stallion in the midst of the Immortals - so presumably the Roman unit is somewhere close by, I imagine for the reason I give above. The lightly-armed Medes and bowmen charge ahead, totally disrupting Latro's formation, and smash themselves up on the reformed Spartan shield wall. The Persian forces are completely disorganized during this charge, and are routed by the counter-attack.

"We broke ... Even when they made a new shield-wall we were only a mob behind it. The Medes took the spears in their hands and broke them, died. The arrows were no good ..."

This all squares reasonably well with Her 9.59-9.63. The "shield-wall" is the wall of the Persians' wickerwork shields mentioned in 9.61. The Lacedaemonians attack this in 9.62, knocking it down, and the battle moves to around the temple of Demeter. The Persians grapple their spears & break them, but are defeated due to their lack of body armor.

For whatever reason, it's clear that Latro's Romans have been given a place of honor, with the Persians, against the Spartans. Her 9.31 gives the disposition of his army, mentioning "only the most important ones by name - the ones which were particularly prominent and famous ...". The Romans

should be included in this list, but of course they're not - hey, it's a novel.

Her 9.65 is interesting. "I find it surprising that although the battle took place by the grove of Demeter, not a single Persian either entered the precinct or died there ... I think the goddess kept them away because they had burnt her temple at Eleusis." Somewhere in that, I suppose, is the story of what happened between Latro, "bearer of the wolf's tooth", and the Goddess, which I hope we'll someday get to hear.

Josh Geller — 18 Jun 2003, 13:24 · follows Andrew Bollen

The Persians generally lacked infantry to match the Greeks. Before, during and after the war they went to some efforts to hire Greek infantry. They would have definitely found a use for a cohort or two of Roman infantry.

J.

On Wed, 2003-06-18 at 01:27, Andrew Bollen wrote:
Matthew says:

The ancient historians had a pretty clear idea of what were Persians and what were other nations conquered by the Persian Empire. Just as they made the distinction between Romans by origin, Roman citizens and subjects

of Roman Empire. I don't know but I suspect that Medes, Parthians, Assyrians etc in the Immortal Guard would have been worth of comment.

Of course I'm assuming that Herodotus didn't just make it up. ;-)

Anyway, the relevant passage is Ch 37 of Mist for Thermopylae:

Latro addresses "the hundred" (I guess he is acting as centurion, if that term existed then): "While the Immortals are gone, we could have no higher honor than to be the protectors of the Universal King ...".

Her 8.210-224 gives the background. The Medes go in on the first day, failing & making it plain to the King "that although he had plenty of troops, he did not have many men." The Immortals are then sent in, but they do no better - fighting in a restricted area, with spears shorter than the Greeks'. Then Ephialtes the traitor reveals a path thru the mountains, allowing the Persians to attack from a more favorable position. The engagement takes place outside the narrows; Persian conscripts whipped on by their officers die like flies (as in Latro's account); but in the end appear to overwhelm the Spartans by weight of numbers. The Spartans fight with swords, their spears broken, their spears broken, and Leonidas falls but with no details given. The Immortals are not mentioned.

So there's a blank space here concerning the Immortals, and the precise details of Leonidas' death, which GW has painted in. I think his premiss is that the light infantry Medes and bowmen, not just the conscripts but probably the Immortals also, have shown themselves inferior to the hoplite & the phalanx, and Latro's heavy-armed, disciplined Romans are recognized as being a better "force-on-force" solution. This of course makes sense historically, since the Roman tactical organization which GW describes (the two pila, the short stabbing sword etc) was to prove superior to the hoplite/phalanx combination, but maybe anachronistic?

For Plataea, the passage is Ch 24 of Mist:

Latro sees the red cloaks of the Spartiates in their falling-back manoeuvre. He sees Mardonius on his white stallion in the midst of the Immortals - so presumably the Roman unit is somewhere close by, I imagine for the reason I give above. The lightly-armed Medes and bowmen charge ahead, totally disrupting Latro's formation, and smash themselves up on the reformed Spartan shield wall. The Persian forces are completely disorganized during this charge, and are routed by the counter-attack.

"We broke ... Even when they made a new shield-wall we were only a mob behind it. The Medes took the spears in their hands and broke them, died. The arrows were no good ..."

This all squares reasonably well with Her 9.59-9.63. The "shield-wall" is the wall of the Persians' wickerwork shields mentioned in 9.61. The Lacedaemonians attack this in 9.62, knocking it down, and the battle moves to around the temple of Demeter. The Persians grapple their spears & break them, but are defeated due to their lack of body armor.

For whatever reason, it's clear that Latro's Romans have been given a place of honor, with the Persians, against the Spartans. Her 9.31 gives the disposition of his army, mentioning "only the most important ones by name - the ones which were particularly prominent and famous ...". The Romans *should* be included in this list, but of course they're not - hey, it's a

novel.

Her 9.65 is interesting. "I find it surprising that although the battle took place by the gove of Demeter, not a single Persian either entered the precinct or died there ... I think the goddess kept them away because they ahd burnt her temple at Eleusis." Somewhere in that, I suppose, is the story of what happened between Latro, "bearer of the wolf's tooth", and the Goddess, which I hope we'll someday get to hear.

--

Che Monro — 19 Jun 2003, 02:06 · follows Josh Geller

Her 9.65 is interesting. "I find it surprising that although the battle took place by the gove of Demeter, not a single Persian either entered the precinct or died there ... I think the goddess kept them away because they ahd burnt her temple at Eleusis." Somewhere in that, I suppose, is the story of what happened between Latro, "bearer of the wolf's tooth", and the Goddess, which I hope we'll someday get to hear.

"Look lady, I don't care who you are, I've got orders to burn this temple like we did with the other one at Eleusis so either get out or I'll carry you out..."

Che

Ché Franz Joseph Monro -- <http://www.chemonro.com>
che at chemonro.com -- flirt at technologist.com

Chris — 19 Jun 2003, 04:16 · follows Che Monro

Hmm. This, combined with some other posts, made me wonder about languages. Our Lucius was fairly fluent in Greek (even if his memory problem leads to some strange interpretation). IIRC he also was able to talk to Persians and Phoenicians in languages other than Greek. Perhaps he was simply very learned, but I tend to think that he had lived for quite some time in a culturally diverse environment. If Lucius and his contingent had been living amidst the Persian court for a fair amount of time, this makes it much more likely that they'd be exiles rather than mercenaries. Certainly the Persian kings were fairly generous to other exiles.

And now that I think about it, given the numerical advantage the Persians had and the obvious problems with keeping them supplied, it would seem odd that they would scrounge so far afield for mercenaries anyway.

The Persians generally lacked infantry to match the Greeks. Before, during and after the war they went to some efforts to hire Greek infantry. They would have definitely found a use for a cohort or two of Roman infantry.

J.

Josh Geller — 19 Jun 2003, 14:58 · follows Chris

I believe that somewhere in there it says that Latro and his people went to Egypt for some reason. Egypt was then a Persian province.

J.

On Wed, 2003-06-18 at 21:16, Chris wrote:

Hmm. This, combined with some other posts, made me wonder about languages. Our Lucius was fairly fluent in Greek (even if his memory problem leads to some strange interpretation). IIRC he also was able to talk to Persians and Phoenicians in languages other than Greek. Perhaps he was simply very learned, but I tend to think that he had lived for quite some time in a culturally diverse environment. If Lucius and his contingent had been living amidst the Persian court for a fair amount of time, this makes it much more likely that they'd be exiles rather than mercenaries. Certainly the Persian kings were fairly generous to other exiles.

And now that I think about it, given the numerical advantage the Persians had and the obvious problems with keeping them supplied, it would seem odd that they would scrounge so far afield for mercenaries anyway.

The Persians generally lacked infantry to match the Greeks. Before, during and after the war they went to some efforts to hire Greek infantry. They would have definitely found a use for a cohort or two of Roman infantry.

J.

MSN 8 with e-mail virus protection service: 2 months FREE*
<http://join.msn.com/?page=features/virus>

--