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The Iranian Army: Its Formations, Types, and Leadership in the Sassanian Era

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Abstract

Ardashir I (224-240 CE), the founder of the Sassanian dynasty, revived the ancient Persian customs and traditions, where warriors in the Sassanian army occupied the second rank within the social hierarchy of Sassanian society. This army comprised various formations and types ranging from cavalry, infantry, and navy and some supportive types for each category. The mission of the Sassanian army was summarized as safeguarding the integrity of the governance system and the borders of the Sassanian state. Initially, the soldiers' leadership in the Sassanian military was in the hands of the army's overall commander (Iran Spahbod). Still, during the reign of Qubad and his son Khosrow I, significant changes were witnessed in the formations and leadership of the Sassanian army, which was under the command of four leaders (Spahbods) in four parts of the borders of the Sassanian state.

Keywords: Sassanian Army, Sassanian Dynasty.

1. Introduction

In all its formations and types, the Iranian army received special attention from the kings of the Sassanian state, especially Ardashir I (224-240 CE), the founder of the Sassanian dynasty. The Sassanian society at that time was known for its martial inclination. The Sassanian kings and military commanders made diligent efforts to transfer military knowledge and skills from other countries to their own lands to ensure that their commanders and soldiers became formidable fighters to defend their homeland [1]. The Sassanians paid great attention to the education of their sons and taught them the best types of education in various fields of knowledge, especially military education. The efforts made by the kings to develop the Sassanian army reflected positively on their personal character and were added to their other achievements in political and administrative fields.

The study comprised five chapters in addition to the introduction and conclusions. The first chapter discussed the position of the warrior class among other classes in the Sassanian era, while the second chapter addressed military education in the Sassanian era. The third chapter dealt with the types and formations of the Sassanian army, while the leadership of the Sassanian army was the focus of the fourth chapter. The fifth and final chapter detailed the military strategies of the Sassanian army. The researcher relied on historical sources in Persian, Arabic, and English related to the ancient history of Iran, especially those about the Sassanian era, to extract information to the best of their ability, and success is from God.

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2. The Status of the Warrior Class Among Other Classes in the Sassanian Era

The Sassanian era is considered one of the most flourishing periods in Iran's ancient and late history. In addition to the Sassanian kings' efforts to solidify the foundations of the Zoroastrian religion, they sought to develop the Sassanian army, its formations, and its types to enable it to defend the borders of the Sassanian state for more than four centuries [2]. The warriors were second among the social classes in the Sassanian era. Their task was to preserve the stability and continuity of the ruling system, the state's borders, and the people's security under their authority [3]. Initially, the army's leadership was under the command of the Iranian Spahbed. However, during the reign of Kavadh I (498-531 AD) and his son Khosrow I (531-579 AD), the formations of the Sassanian army changed. The leadership was entrusted to four commanders (Spahbed) in four regions of the Sassanian state [4].

The warriors were considered among the important classes in Sassanian society, enjoying special privileges. The book "Shakand Kamaniyk Wa Yajar" clarified the status of each class in Sassanian society as follows: "The creation of the small world, meaning humans, was connected to the four worldly classes: men of religion, warriors, farmers, and artisans[5]." Additionally, the book "Minuy Khard" mentions the role of warriors: "A wise man asked Minuy Khard about the function of each class of warriors and farmers. Minuy Khard replied: The function of warriors is to confront enemies and spread security and safety in cities and society [6]." The term "Spah" (army) was mentioned frequently in Zoroastrian writings, Middle Persian, and Parthian (Arsacid) writings, said in the form of "Gund" (Gond), meaning a group of fighters. In Pahlavi's writings, this term refers to the army or soldiers. In the book "Denkard," it is explained that the term "Gund" means soldiers or the army: "If there are no soldiers, there is no king, no religion, no ancient traditions, and no...[7]".

3. Military Education in the Sassanian Era

The military was considered the highest ideal among the Iranians, and children were trained to become strong soldiers in the future [8]. They were taught military arts and tactics[9]. From the age of five to fifteen, children were trained in horseback riding and horsemanship, and then they would join the army to fulfil their role practically in the military aspect[10]. Strabo and some historical sources mentioned that military training and service in the Sassanian era continued until twenty-four [11]. On the other hand, Zenofon noted that Sassanian youth would join the army at seventeen and continue training for ten years [12]. Herodotus mentioned that it was unreasonable for young men to remain without military training until later, as they were enlisted in the army at the peak of their youth. The Sassanian army was divided into groups, each consisting of 50 fighters led by a noble leader. Service in the Sassanian army was mandatory and included every physically fit male, starting from the age of fifteen and continuing until the age of fifty. Based on this, it can be said that military service in the Sassanian era was one of the critical and beloved matters among the Sassanians. As soldiers went out to battle, their families bid them farewell with music and cheers. This indicates that the Sassanian state was warring, as its kings sought to prioritize the warrior class and the army over other classes in Sassanian society. This led to an emphasis on military training and preparation, which is unsurprising.

The Sassanian state was always exposed to threats from the Roman Empire and the attacks of Bedouin tribes from the direction of Arabia Minor. Therefore, it consistently reinforced its army and trained them in all combat techniques to withstand and counter those threats. Greek

and Egyptian narratives recall that Sassanian kings, upon achieving victories, honoured their fighters and commanders and presented them with numerous gifts. Religious books and treatises also emphasized the supreme status of the army and underscored military education and related qualities such as bravery and valour. The Tansar Book concerning military education and martial arts among the Sassanians states: "It is a known fact that every nation in any region of the world is distinguished by a virtue and honour not shared by the people of other regions. The Persians excelled in bravery, courage, and martial arts, which are fundamental pillars of virtue... The king distinguished the army and its men from others because their duty was warfare. Therefore, he favored and prioritized them over all other social classes, as their profession at all times was war. They and their possessions and followers are dedicated to the homeland, as they defend the interests of their country. Their profession is fighting the enemies of the homeland, while the practitioners of other professions live in comfort, at home, with their wives and children. Therefore, the practitioners of other professions should pay homage to the soldiers and bow down to them." Another principle emphasized by King Anushirvan, which relates to the status of the army in the Sassanian state, is his statement: "The state stands and relies on the army, which performs its duty in safeguarding the borders of the state..."

The Sassanian army enjoyed a prestigious status within the Sassanian state, and based on this, the state made great efforts to develop it. During the days of Khosrow Anushirwan I, discipline and organization in the army reached their highest levels[20]. The Sassanian army's weapons, equipment, and combat capabilities were updated and reached their peak and perfection during this era. Senior commanders and officers played an important role in educating and training the Persian soldiers in horsemanship, archery, and other martial arts. It was incumbent upon the warrior to wear armour, be strong, brave, prepared for battle, be obedient, and promptly execute their leaders' orders[21]. Sassanian soldiers were known for their proficiency in using various weapons, including the double-headed sword, which they adopted from the Turks due to the numerous wars they waged with them[22]. Additionally, they excelled in using bows and arrows due to their encounters with Turkish tribes. The Sassanians were also distinguished by their proficiency in various other martial arts, especially fencing and archery. The prominent reliefs and inscriptions in Firuzabad demonstrate the skill of Ardashir I and Shapur I in archery, as they are depicted holding bows. In the stone relief found in Hajjabad, Shapur himself is depicted boasting of his skill in keeping the bow and shooting arrows[23].

Several messages and biographies dating back to the Sassanian era contain valuable information on how to utilize various formations and tactics in wars, as well as information regarding horse care, city siege, archery, sword fighting, soldier nutrition methods, psychological warfare techniques, and how to deal with the enemy at the moment war breaks out, among other matters[24].

So, the young man intending to volunteer for military service in the Sassanian era would initially receive special instructions and training in camps from some officers before joining the army ranks. The significance of the army and military education in the Sassanian state is emphasized by the five inscriptions commemorating the victories of King Shapur I over the Roman armies. The first inscription of Shapur I commemorates his three victories over Roman emperors (Gordian III, Philip the Arab, and Valerian), depicting King Shapur amidst his enemies riding his horse, appearing larger in size than the other figures in the inscription. Additionally, it shows the Roman Emperor Philip kneeling and submissive before the feet of the Sassanian king, seeking mercy, safety, and forgiveness. In another inscription, Shapur is depicted as victorious,

holding Valerian by the hand, which is hidden within his sleeve, indicating respect and submission to the strength of the Sassanian state. Another inscription shows a group of Persian nobles and Roman captives arranged hierarchically before the king, illustrating how his enemies were defeated in battle[27]. Shapur I immortalized his victories in the inscription of the Ka'ba-ye Zartosht (Cube of Zoroaster), where it is stated: "When I ascended the throne, the Roman Emperor Gordian gathered an army and came to the land of Mesopotamia to fight us. A great battle took place on the borders of Babylon, and the Roman Emperor met his death. The Roman army was defeated, and the Romans chose Philip as their king. Philip came to us seeking intercession and mercy. He paid us a ransom of five hundred thousand dinars to save the lives of the prisoners and pledged to pay tribute to us.

Emperor Valerian advanced towards us in the third campaign when we marched to Carrhae and Edessa (Riha) and besieged them. We fought fiercely with him and captured the Emperor himself as a prisoner[28]."

Historical evidence unequivocally indicates that around 531 CE, Iran had a specific department for managing the army, similar to what is now known as the Ministry of War or Defense. This department was overseen by Warzak Feramadzar, meaning that this person served as the Minister of War[29]. His responsibilities ranged from leading and overseeing the army to negotiating with enemies during times of peace[30]. The Minister of Defense (Vuzurg Framadār) played a significant role in organizing and arranging military affairs. At the same time, the king himself could directly intervene in the army, and the Ministry of War was considered an essential ministry in the Sassanian state[31]. Ancient Iranians were the first to establish such a ministry in their country[32]. Since the Ministry of War had several branches, each specialized in specific tasks, some branches recorded the names of officers, soldiers, and knights. In contrast, others specialized in documenting rations and salaries for soldiers and officers. Additionally, another branch specialized in managing the inventory of weapons and feeding the animals belonging to the army, including horses, elephants, and camels[33]. The Sassanian army comprised various types and formations, each specializing in specific combat during wartime, which we will discuss in detail below.

4. Formations and Types of the Sassanian Army

The Sassanian army comprised various types and formations, and we will delve into some of the most important ones:

1. Cavalry

The cavalry represented the elite of the Sassanian army and played a significant role in battles. Their weapons included spears, arrows, swords, shields, and helmets. The cavalry consisted of nobles and aristocrats who were carefully selected. They benefited from shields to protect themselves and their horses. The cavalry, in turn, was divided into several categories as follows:

A. The Heroic Cavalry

This unit consisted of ten thousand horsemen, with their leader known as "Warahnikan Khwaday." The commander responsible for every thousand soldiers was called "Hazārbidh." Within this category, there were special subcategories known as the elite (Pahlavānān Vēlān), and their leader was called the "Vēlān Badh," or the leader of the elite.

B. Volunteer Cavalry:

These were individuals prepared and equipped by landlords, nobles, and aristocrats to serve the king and the state. Among them were also members of races, peoples, and other ethnic groups not of Persian origin but under the Sassanian state.

C. The Martyr Cavalry

They were hired knights and mercenaries known for their bravery and willingness to face death. As for the elephants, they served as reserve and support forces for the cavalry. They were used in wars and battles. Due to Iran's proximity to India, they imported elephants for their army. Soldiers and archers rode them, and their appearance was terrifying in battles, instilling fear in enemies. The units and squads containing elephants marched behind the cavalry, and their sound, smell, and appearance intimidated the enemy.

2. Infantry

The infantry represents the second category of the Sassanian army's formations, and their leader is called "Baykân Sālār[47]." The infantrymen were gathered and recruited from villages[48]. They were ordinary villagers, and serving in the army was considered part of their duties and responsibilities[49]. They served in the military during wars and in times of necessity without pay[50]. Their main task was to maintain order during peacetime[51]. Their feudal lords made their participation in military service mandatory to serve the king and the state. They only received rewards if victory was achieved[52]. Infantrymen were armed with their personal weapons, such as spears, daggers[53], swords, shields, and helmets[54]. Their weapons were light, and some did not wear shields[55]. Sometimes, they provided support and assistance to the heavy-armed cavalry[56]. There were also supporting units for the infantry consisting of units and groups comprising subjects and followers of the Sassanian state from the peoples of the border regions[57]. They were characterized by their greater skill and mastery of martial arts because they served their local princes[58]. Their members were characterized by the spirit of warriors and heroes, and Armenian mercenaries (Christians) held a professional and important position in the Sassanian army[59]. They formed a troop of soldiers, and their service was in exchange for money[60]. It can be said that the defensive system in the Sassanian era consisted of two lines: the first line comprised irregular fighters from the subjects of the border regions, followed by the second line consisting of the organized Sassanian regular army[61].

3. The Navy

The maritime force of Iran regained its strength with the beginning of a Sassanian rule, and by the year 309 CE, it had become a decisive naval force on the international stage. The movement of Arabs and traders along the western shores of the Arabian Gulf and their settling in the region prompted Shapur II of the Sassanian Empire to turn his attention to the Arabian Gulf and the empire's southern borders. Following his victory over the Arabs, Shapur II ordered the construction of merchant and warships and provided knowledge and specialized training to enhance this endeavour further. Initially, Iranian merchant ships sailed the seas, successfully repelling Roman and Abyssinian naval forces from the eastern waters. Subsequently, more warships were built to protect the southern maritime borders of the Sassanian Empire, although they did not reach the level of the naval power of the Achaemenid Empire.

Anushirawan, the sole Sassanian king after Shapur II who, contemplated expanding the Sassanian naval power and pushing the Romans away from the maritime trade routes of the Sassanian Empire. The circumstances of those days helped in achieving that idea[63], as he

occupied Lazica (present-day Georgia) on the coast of the Black Sea, thereby linking the Sassanian naval power to the states bordering the Black Sea[64]. After focusing on and strengthening the Sassanian naval power in the Arabian Gulf, Anushirawan established a new naval force in the Black Sea. This marked the first time in the history of the Iranian naval forces. For the training and education of the naval forces of the Sassanian Empire in the Arabian Gulf and the Black Sea, two separate institutions were established for knowledge and teaching of the arts of naval battles. During major naval battles, these institutions were under the supervision of the king and the Minister of War (Wuzurg Framadār). Sometimes, the naval force supported and assisted the other branches in land battles[65].

As for the types of ships, there were both small and large ones. Regarding historical evidence, there are rarely any records of the Iranian naval forces participating in land battles. However, examples and evidence of Sassanian military and commercial maritime activity indicate its breadth. Many battles in which the Sassanian naval force participated are documented. The greatest naval battle in that era occurred, proving the bravery of Iranian sailors. They altered the course of the Arabian Peninsula and the Arabian Gulf history. With eight ships, the Sassanian army set out via the Obolla port towards Yemen. Along the way, they encountered a storm, causing two ships to sink, while the remaining ships managed to withstand the difficulties. They anchored near Aden at a port called Muthawwib, where the Sassanian sailors disembarked onto Yemeni soil[66]. Such campaigns, involving a portion of the Sassanian naval force, serve as evidence of the extensive formations and divisions of the Sassanian naval force in that era, indicating the advancement of knowledge, sciences, and maritime arts among the peoples of coastal regions[67].

5. Leadership of the Sassanian Army

The leadership of the Sassanian army during the first three centuries of the Sassanian era was in the hands of the overall commander of the armed forces, known as the "Sepahbod" (سپاه‌بد). This was an inherited position held by a member of the royal family. Under his command were two significant leaders: one responsible for organizing the army's affairs and the other for leading the cavalry[68]. However, when Khosrow Anushirvan assumed power, he changed the organizational structure of the Sassanian army. Anushirvan redistributed the duties of the overall commander of the Sassanian army among four regional commanders (Sepahbod): one for the northern region, another for the eastern region, a third for the southern region, and the last for the western region. This change aimed to prevent the concentration of military power in the hands of a single person, which posed a threat to the state[69]. Anushirvan abolished the position of the overall commander of the armed forces, which one person had held for three centuries, and delegated its responsibilities to four commanders[70]. The aim of abolishing the position was to prevent power from being concentrated in the hands of one person, who might aspire to the throne and exert pressure on the king, especially during times of significant victories when they could garner the support of the army. This posed a significant threat to the king, as evidenced by the conflicts between Khosrow IV and Bahram Chobin, which persisted during his reign and that of his son, Khosrow II, resulting in considerable problems and chaos that were difficult to avoid[71]. In those days, the highest positions in the Sassanian army were typically given to royal family members[72]. The largest divisions of the army were called "Gund" (گند)[73], and their commanders were known as "Gund Salar" (گند سالار)[74]. The word "Gund" is equivalent to the Arabic word "Jund"[75]. The smaller units were called "Drafsh" (درفش)[76], which means "squad." Each squad consisted of several battalions ("Wush") (وشت)[77], and each battalion distinguished itself from the others[78].

The Sassanian king was the one who directed major battles, as he carried his throne amid the army, surrounded by his servants and attendants, in addition to a contingent of soldiers to defend him known as the Royal Guard. They had a distinct emblem, wearing long helmets as depicted in stone sculptures, as they encircled the king. The chief of this unit of the Royal Guard was called the "Bashitekban Salar," meaning the commander of the Royal Guard[79]. Flags and banners were raised at the corners of the throne, with guards standing behind them, comprising archers and infantry. In the king's absence, the army commander assumed control of the battle. The king did not engage in battle without the presence of religious figures and mobile fire temples, which were placed in a special tent near the king's tent[80].

During the Sassanian era, there was a significant development in the art of besieging cities, as skill and tactics used in this context increased. The Sassanians learned the techniques of seizing fortresses from the Byzantines, employing siege engines, catapults, movable towers, and various ancient siege machines. They also learned how to break sieges and damage enemy mechanisms by pouring molten lead and inflammable materials onto them. If enemies penetrated their territories, they resorted to burning fields to deprive the enemy of financing their army. They also opened dam gates to hinder enemy advances. The Sassanians would take prisoners of war, who were either sold as enslaved people or deported to deserted areas within the state. The Sassanians employed a clever method to tally the casualties in battle. During a military parade before the king, soldiers would march past one by one, and each would throw an arrow into large containers specifically designated for this purpose. These containers were sealed with the royal seal. At the war's end, these containers would be brought and opened, and each soldier would retrieve an arrow. The remaining arrows in the containers indicated the number of casualties and prisoners, thus informing the king of the casualties suffered by his army in the battle[81].

6. Military Plans of the Sasanian Army

The plan of the Sasanians in battle was based on placing the cavalry at the forefront, considering those who were left-handed among the soldiers[82], as they would take their place on the left to avoid disrupting the rest of the troops. Alongside the cavalry were the responsible ones for surprise plans and ambushes, chosen from among the soldiers for their courage, vigilance, and seriousness, without coughing to avoid spoiling the plan. As for the horses, they were chosen from those that were not skittish or obstinate, and most often, their camp was located near water sources, as their stay there might be prolonged. Abu Qutaybah al-Dinawari mentions the tricks used when besieging fortresses and how to frighten the inhabitants and alarm them. The Sasanians had several methods to instil fear in the heart of the enemy during attacks and sieges, such as noise and clamour, with variations in their methods. They would infiltrate among them those who whispered to them, belittling their importance or those who dashed their hopes of rescue and relief. They also sent writings and publications to discourage their morale, or they would circle around the walls and signal with their hands as if pointing out strengths and weaknesses[83]. Places where ladders would be placed were identified, and perhaps this method was followed in that era, as there was a convergence between the military arts of the Sasanians and the Byzantines[84]. The Sasanians organized siege engines borrowed from the Romans and became more efficient, using machines for destruction, siege, catapults, and mobile towers in their battles[85]."

King Ardashir of the Sasanian Empire desired to increase the size of his army[86]. Every father needed to educate his son about horsemanship and combat. He ordered the teaching of war

principles and horsemanship to children and the proper use of various combat tools. When war was declared, there was no leniency in this matter. Once, a man with three sons requested exemption for one of his sons from military service. The king ordered the execution of all three sons and commanded the soldiers to march to the battlefields amid the sound of military music and the cheers of crowds exceeding the recruitment age[87]. King Ardashir of the Sasanian Empire did not suffice with the preparation and direction of the army during combat. Each group of one thousand fighters had an overseer (*mobdez*) assigned to them who was experienced and proven. The overseer would report to the king on the bravery and skill of his soldiers in combat to receive recognition in the army registry and double his reward. The weak were removed from the ranks of the army[88]. The Sasanian state also attached great importance to the soldiers' training, such as organizing their marching steps in parallel rows and maintaining uniformity during movement to preserve order[89].

The book "Tansar on Matters of Warfare" states: "Anyone who disobeys the kings or flees from battle will never be safe. The king has enacted a new law to kill those who flee from battle to serve as a lesson for others. Some of them are left alive to hope for pardon, living between despair and hope[90]."

The organization and discipline of the army in the Sassanian era illustrate to what extent there were specialized teachers and instructors carrying out their tasks in training, knowledge, and military education in various departments and branches. They were called military instructors (*راهنדרز بداسپور* أو *اندرز بندگان*). Their job was to go to cities and villages and select men capable of understanding the customs and principles of war, teach them the arts of battle, martial arts, and how to use weapons[91]. In ancient Iran, the means and equipment of battles were limited to certain types of weapons that were used in all battles. Some of these weapons, such as bows, spears, and swords, were used in all battles. However, over time, there was a change in some of them, and this change in the manufacture of weapons and the preference of one weapon over another in battles was related to the conditions and circumstances at that time, which is something acknowledged. It openly demonstrates the necessity of introducing new military knowledge into the ranks of the armed forces at any time and place. There are many types of weapons, including bows, arrows, spears, javelins, swords, daggers, catapults, and others, that the Sasanians used in their battles. It seems that the art of making catapults was borrowed from the Greeks. The javelin was used since the time of the Achaemenids until the fall of the Sasanian dynasty, as it had great importance in battles[92]. Iron bars were also utilized in battles, known for their heavy weight and mentioned in Iranian mythology. They were a common weapon in battles, requiring great strength, which is why they were rarely used by cavalry and mostly by infantry. This weapon was among the weapons used in the era of the Sasanians, who also used the bow and arrow, which was considered the simplest weapon and was used in various battles in ancient Iran[93].

Many books and letters were written about military formations during the Sasanian era, both in times of peace and in times of war. They contained instructions and military knowledge on how to utilize cavalry in the battlefield, as well as how to care for and manage horses. Additionally, they provided guidance on archery techniques, information on soldier nutrition and food, and chapters dedicated to the art of warfare, enemy engagement, and selecting battle locations. However, it can be said that Iranian military sciences and knowledge during the Sasanian era were not superior to those of the Romans[94]. In ancient Iran, particularly during the Sasanian era, there were skilled masters working in the field of weapon manufacturing, and the best war equipment was crafted through the efforts of those masters[95]. In a simple

reading of the Pahlavi message (Khosrow and Redak), all details regarding the issue of education and upbringing in the Sasanian era, especially towards the end, can be understood, particularly concerning the sons of nobility and aristocratic families in Sasanian society. This message represents a conversation between King Anushirawan and a young man whose father passed away when he was young. Anushirawan undertook the responsibility of caring for him and his family[96]. Similarly, Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* and Tabari in his history mentioned King Anushirawan's interest in the upbringing and education of orphans from the families of deceased high-ranking individuals. Anushirawan conducted a test for one of the orphaned students after completing his educational course, shedding light on the process of upbringing and education. This message emphasized the importance of martial affairs and physical education, in addition to highlighting the educational processes in the Sasanian era. It underscored the significance of religious education as the cornerstone of upbringing and education in the Sasanian era, starting from literacy and calligraphy skills, including fast and precise writing, rhetorical skills, playing musical instruments, knowledge of singing and dancing, understanding astronomy, playing chess, and recognizing fine cuisine and beverages. In Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, there is a reference to the importance of sports, physical education, and learning combat skills[97].

With the invention and innovation of new types of military equipment, there arose the need for how to better utilize such equipment. This involved the art, knowledge, and skill of weapon usage and a complete understanding of its application. In ancient times, when weapons were limited, anyone could, through simple exercises and practices, use all the available weapons and military equipment of their time. However, with the emergence of new weapons and military equipment, it became necessary to train and educate soldiers on how to use them. Among the military knowledge and arts are leadership operations, preparing the army for attacks, proposing and preparing military plans to ensure victory in battles, defensive matters, and caring for the soldier and his morale during times of peace and war, as well as the capabilities of rapid movement for armed forces, known today as tactical or strategic operations and maneuvers (war games), among others[98]. The young man was initially honored with the belt of manhood, and thereafter, he swore to follow the teachings of Zoroaster and to be loyal to his state. Following this, he was trained in swordsmanship, combat techniques, and the use of weapons and martial arts[99]. One of the most important military training practices that existed in the Sasanian era was the training of young people in equestrianism, riding wild horses, and horse racing competitions. The Sasanians considered horses to be among the best animals, especially white horses with wide eyes and shiny hair, as these breeds were preferred for their speed and strength[100]. Elite fighters in the late 3rd century AD were trained in a closed hall built in the Sasanian architectural style. The chief instructor (Arzbad) was a member of the elite and a seasoned warrior who had participated in previous wars. Essentially, the elite relied on great strength and cavalry tactics to break the enemy's ranks, as they were known for their skill in combat with spears[101].

The Sasanian king Ardashir established several schools and training camps dedicated to the training and education of military knowledge and martial arts on sound scientific principles. Subsequently, martial arts and military sciences continued to advance, with progress and development in the field of education, training, and military composition in the Sasanian state as well. Books were compiled on military knowledge, training, and martial arts, covering various aspects such as individual military training, acquiring necessary skills for the use of diverse war equipment, and all matters related to facing enemy armies. Additionally, there were discussions on leadership, offensive and defensive strategies, along with theoretical lessons alongside practical ones. These books contained

explanations of tricks that could surprise adversaries, with examples and illustrations of such tricks that could be planned by some senior commanders, such as setting up ambushes and launching surprise night attacks. This ensured that the trainees among the soldiers were knowledgeable about these tactics and could benefit from them in the future if they assumed high leadership positions in the army[102]. In texts and books specific to military knowledge and education in the Sasanian era, the book "Āryēn Nāmāk" contains all the information related to archery and other martial arts and combat. It is stated in this book: "It is difficult to carry the bow and arrow on the left shoulder and with the left hand. It is preferable to draw the bow with the right hand because the grip of the right hand will be in front of the chest, and the enemy can be easily seen. The fighter holds the end of the arrow with three fingers and grips the bow handle with his entire left hand ..." [103]. Similarly, it is stated in the same book: "The requirements of leadership and the army dictate that the weaker divisions and branches of the army be placed on the left side to protect them from enemy attacks from the side. The battle should begin with the cavalry, and the heart of the army should be kept in a high place to avoid attacks from the sides. The heart of the army should be overseeing and controlling the enemies, so that if the right and left sides of the army are defeated, the heart and the cavalry will remain in their positions[104]." Alireza Hekmat also quotes from the same source: "It is always necessary to keep the enemies away from the battlefield and from places where there are trees and rivers, and it is preferable to confine them to an open desert area[105]." From the book "Aryan Namek" also came the following: "The commander should never be negligent, and he must keep his army visible during the daytime. He should not engage in combat with any army unless there is an exit or passage for his army to escape in case of defeat, to facilitate the task of withdrawal from the battle." Additionally, it was stated in the same book: "If the majority of soldiers in the army are well-trained and ready to work and cooperate with their leaders and commanders, then an attack on them by the enemy is in favor of such an army. However, if the majority of soldiers are untrained and uneducated, then an attack on them would be in favor of the enemy[106]." Another piece of advice related to combat and the art of war is: "Whenever the army camps near a water source and the enemy intends to take some of that water, preventing them from accessing the water is unwise. This action will only make the enemies exert more pressure to obtain the water. If the enemy camps at a water source and controls it, they should not be driven away unless your army is thirsty and in need of water. Because anyone who does not need something does not care about it, but when someone needs something, they will do everything in their power to obtain it[107]."

Based on the aforementioned, it can be said that the Sasanians were keen on adopting everything new in the field of armament and training from other countries. Regarding this matter, Alireza Hekmat narrates in his work on behalf of the Sasanian king Shapur I: "A request was made to the Roman government to send three specialized professors in the manufacturing of Roman catapults to Iran to teach Iranian craftsmen the method of making large catapults and how they can be disassembled into separate pieces and then carried to another location. Indeed, the Roman government agreed to this request..." Indeed, the Roman government sent a number of professors and catapult makers to Iran, and they taught the Iranians the method of making large catapults. Shapur I benefited from these catapults in his army[108].

The great importance placed by the Sassanian kings on the army, military education, and training was a key factor in preserving the Sassanian state's borders and its prestige against attacks from other countries. Every physically fit Iranian was required to study military arts and sciences, learn them, and then teach them to others. Based on this foundation, it can be said that the army contributed to some extent to preserving Iranian civilization in the Sassanian era."

7. Conclusions

- 1- The study reveals that the Sassanian army, in its various formations and types, witnessed significant development during the Sassanian era. It appears that the constant threats faced by the Sassanian state from its neighbors on its eastern, northeastern, western, and southern borders prompted the Sassanian kings to prioritize the army's maintenance and modernization.
- 2- The establishment of the Diwan al-Jund (Army Bureau) during the Sassanian era aimed to attend to the army's needs and requirements, making it one of the most important bureaus in the Sassanian state.
- 3- Regarding the formations and types of the Sassanian army, they diversified to include cavalry, infantry, and supporting forces, as well as the navy, which also experienced tangible development during this era, although not reaching the level seen in the Achaemenid era.
- 4- The leadership of the Sassanian army also underwent changes, with it being divided and assigned to four commands and four fronts, unlike previous eras.
- 5- Concerning weapons, military equipment, and military plans, significant changes were observed, with the Sassanian state adopting some martial arts and weapon-making techniques from other countries to modernize its army. This modernization enabled the Sassanian army to safeguard the Sassanian state's borders from external attacks for over four centuries.

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