

IMMORTALS AND APPLE BEARERS: TOWARDS A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF ACHAEMENID INFANTRY UNITS

There has been surprisingly little written about the standing army or *spāda* of Achaemenid Persia, even though its most well-recognized formation, the so-called Immortals, is a staple of modern accounts of the Persian Wars.¹ Indeed, it emerges that our understanding of the infantry units of this ostensibly familiar period of Persian history is surprisingly patchy. For the most part, it is derived from rather uncritical interpretations of Herodotus' account of Xerxes' attempted invasion of Greece in the early fifth century B.C., in addition to the historians of Alexander the Great, and Arrian in particular. This article seeks to shed further light on the body of Persian infantry commonly referred to as the Immortals (ἀθάνατοι), which unit, perhaps most famous for its involvement at Thermopylae (480 B.C.),² is normally presumed to have been 10,000 strong and seems to have disappeared in the aftermath of Xerxes' defeat (post 479 B.C.).³ It also looks at the elite unit

¹ Abbreviations: references to periodicals follow the 'Liste des périodiques' in *L'Année philologique*; other abbreviations are as in LSI, OLD or OCD³. All translations, unless noted otherwise, are from the relevant Loeb Classical Library edition, adapted where deemed necessary. I would like to thank Dr Philip Rance for commenting on an earlier version of this paper, and confess to being indebted to CQ's anonymous referee for guiding me towards some *loci* that would otherwise have been overlooked. On the term *spāda*, see A.S. Shabazi, 'Army I: Pre-Islamic Iran', in E. Yarshater (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Iranica* II (London and Boston, 1985), 489–99, at 491.

² See Hdt. 7.211.1, with Diod. Sic. 11.6.3–11.11.6.

³ J.E. Atkinson, *A Commentary on Q. Curtius Rufus' Historiae Alexandri Magni Books 3 and 4* (Amsterdam, 1980), 123, rightly notes that Herodotus held that the name ἀθάνατοι referred to the unit's constant numerical strength, as opposed to a near-mythical status; on this, see R.N. Frye, *Heritage of Persia* (New York, 1963), 268, n. 82; id., 'The institutions', in G. Walser (ed.), *Beiträge zur Achämenidengeschichte* (Wiesbaden, 1972), 83–93, at 87, following A. Pagliaro, 'Riflessi di etimologie iraniche nella tradizione storiografica greca', *RAL* ser. 8, vol. 9 (1954), 133–53, at 149, with strong reservations expressed by R. Schmitt, 'Immortals', in E. Yarshater (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Iranica* XIII (London and Boston, 2006), 2–3, at 2. Herodotus (7.83.1) himself states that the Immortals were called thus because, if any member died or fell sick, another was chosen to replace him, so that the unit was always 10,000 strong; on this meaning, see e.g. PSI 4.377.5 (250/249 B.C.), *P Strass.* 30.6 (A.D. 276). This usage is also found in later texts; e.g. Cassius Dio (52.27.1) uses στρατιώτας ἀθάνατους to describe Rome's standing army. Yet there is a school of thought that the Greek designation was originally an erroneous rendering of the Old Persian *anušiyā* or 'followers' and that the Greeks mistook *anušiyā*, the Immortals' real name (recorded in the Behistun inscription at 4 line 82 with reference to the named 'followers' of Darius I), for the hypothetical Old Persian **anaušā*, a cognate of the attested Avestan *anaoša* ('immortal'); see J. Wiesehöfer, *Ancient Persia from 550 BC to 650 AD*, tr. A. Azodi (London and New York, 1998), 92. The word *anušiyā* is also used to describe the followers of Darius' enemy in the Behistun inscription; see e.g. 1 line 58, 2 lines 77 and 95, 3 line 49. Cf. N. Tallis, 'Transport and warfare', in J. Curtis and N. Tallis (edd.), *Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia* (London, 2005), 210–35, at 215, who suggests that 'Immortals' was perhaps a 'Persian nickname' owing to 'the similarity of the words [*anušiyā* and *anaušā*] in Old Persian'. On the name and its meaning, see also G. Gnoli, 'Antico-persiano *anušiya* e gli Immortali di

known as the Apple Bearers (*μηλοφόροι*), a group of soldiers who appear in both Herodotus' narrative of Xerxes' invasion,⁴ as will be argued, and again in accounts relating to Alexander's conflict with Darius III at Gaugamela in 331 B.C. – all with a view to establishing the unit's relationship with the so-called Immortals. Of course, we are on very shaky ground when it comes to ascertaining the strength and composition of Achaemenid infantry units. Persian sources, apart from pictorial or sculptural representations, are negligible, which means that we must largely rely on interpreting sources that view our subject through foreign eyes. The purpose of this article is not necessarily to draw a series of watertight conclusions; rather, its aim is to assemble, for the first time, all the relevant available literary evidence pertaining to the *ἀθάνατοι* and *μηλοφόροι* so as to provide a measured analysis of the inconsistencies that mark the source traditions relating to Persian infantry units. This is especially necessary in view of the wildly divergent and sometimes even internally inconsistent opinions offered on elite Persian units in modern commentaries and editions of the ancient sources under investigation here. Furthermore, this study does not touch upon matters concerning the dress and equipment of standing Persian infantry formations, and certainly avoids questions pertaining to the overall size of Persian armies in the field.⁵ Instead, it will look primarily at Persian infantry unit sizes and seniority within the Achaemenid standing army, save for occasions where equipment allows a better understanding of the composition of the units themselves.⁶

I. HERODOTUS AND THE IMMORTALS

In the following section, we will be concerned primarily with establishing the exact relation between the 10,000 Immortals described by Herodotus in the context of Xerxes' invasion of Greece, and the other 1,000-strong elite units (often thought of as part of the same group) that he describes. Though opinions have been offered elsewhere on this theme, serious doubts should be placed on the veracity of these assertions, and especially the belief that the Apple Bearers were part of the Ten Thousand. Although we are primarily concerned with Xerxes' campaign, Sekunda thinks it possible that the valiant Persian soldiers (*Πέρσαι ... αὐτοί*) described by Herodotus (6.113.1) at Marathon (490 B.C.) during the reign of Darius I are 'likely to have been a *hazarbam* of spearbearers (*arstibara*)', the reason being that 'it was standard practice for senior commanders to be accompanied by a bodyguard of such

Erodoto', in J. Duchesne-Guillemin and P. Lecoq (edd.), *Monumentum Georg Morgenstierne I*, Acta Iranica 5 (Leiden, 1981), 266–80.

⁴ They are not specifically named as such in Herodotus' account, though we do read of troops (Hdt. 7.41.2) equipped with spears with golden apples on their butts.

⁵ The two-dimensional coloured brick representations of Persian soldiers from Susa arguably provide the best depiction of what members of the Ten Thousand looked like; see S. Bittner, *Tracht und Bewaffnung des persischen Heeres zur Zeit der Achaimeniden* (Munich, 1985), Taf. 2–3 and 5a; D. Head, *The Achaemenid Persian Army* (Stockport, 1992), 11; and N. Sekunda, *The Persian Army, 560–330 BC* (London, 1992), *passim*. Schmidt (n. 3), 2, however, is not convinced of this attribution.

⁶ We need not assign too much credence to Hesychius, s.v. *ἀθάνατοι*, who contends that the unit was comprised of cavalry, though, given that he was writing in the fifth century A.D., this could have implications for the problematic matter of the Sassanian 'Immortals'.

troops'.⁷ Herodotus, however, gives no real clue as to the identity of the Persian troops, who fought in the middle of the line.⁸ Whatever the case, it is Herodotus' description of the Immortals and other standing infantry units in Xerxes' reign that is of most importance.

At this point, it will be well to look closely at the pertinent passages of Herodotus' work dealing with Persian infantry. The first passage, worth quoting in full, describes the appearance of Xerxes' army almost immediately before it makes its way across the Hellespont on a pontoon bridge:

ποιήσαντων δὲ τούτων τοῦτο, μετὰ ταῦτα διεξήκει ὁ στρατός· ἡγέοντο δὲ πρῶτοι μὲν οἱ σκευοφόροι τε καὶ τὰ ὑποζύγια, μετὰ δὲ τούτους σύμμικτος στρατός παντοίων ἐθνῶν ἀναμίξ, οὐ διακεκριμένοι· τῇ δὲ ὑπερημίσεες ἦσαν, ἐνθαῦτα διελέλειπτο, καὶ οὐ συνέμισγον οὗτοι βασιλεῖ. προηγύντο μὲν δὴ ἱππῶται χίλιοι, ἐκ Περσέων πάντων ἀπολελεγμένοι· μετὰ δὲ αἰχμοφόροι χίλιοι καὶ οὗτοι ἐκ πάντων ἀπολελεγμένοι, τὰς λόγχας κάτω ἐς τὴν γῆν τρέψαντες· ... αὐτοῦ δὲ ὀπισθεν αἰχμοφόροι Περσέων οἱ ἀριστοὶ τε καὶ γενναϊότατοι χίλιοι, κατὰ νόμον τὰς λόγχας ἔχοντες, μετὰ δὲ ἵππος ἄλλη χιλίη ἐκ Περσέων ἀπολελεγμένη, μετὰ δὲ τὴν ἵππον ἐκ τῶν λοιπῶν Περσέων ἀπολελεγμένοι μύριοι. οὗτος πεζὸς ἦν· καὶ τούτων χίλιοι μὲν ἐπὶ τοῖσι δόρασι ἀντὶ τῶν σαυρωτήρων ροιὰς εἶχον χρυσέας καὶ πέριξ συνεκλήιον τοὺς ἄλλους, οἱ δὲ εἰνακισχίλιοι ἐντὸς τούτων ἑόντες ἀργυρέας ροιὰς εἶχον· εἶχον δὲ χρυσέας ροιὰς καὶ οἱ ἐς τὴν γῆν τράποντες τὰς λόγχας, καὶ μῆλα οἱ ἄγχιστα ἐπόμηναι Ἐρέξη. τοῖσι δὲ μυρίοις ἐπετέτακτο ἵππος Περσέων μυρίη. μετὰ δὲ τὴν ἵππον διέλειπε καὶ δύο σταδίου, καὶ ἔπειτα ὁ λοιπὸς ὄμιλος ἦε ἀναμίξ.

First went the baggage train and the beasts of burden, and after them a mixed host of all sorts of nations, not according to divisions but all mingled together; when more than half had passed there was a space left, and these latter came not near the king. After that, first came a thousand horsemen, chosen out of all the Persians; next, a thousand spearmen (*αἰχμοφόροι*), picked men like the others, carrying their spears reversed ... Behind him [*sc.* Xerxes, who was preceded by a chariot 'carrying' the chief Persian deity⁹] came a thousand spearmen (*αἰχμοφόροι*) of the best and noblest blood of Persia, carrying their spears in the customary manner; after them a thousand picked Persian horsemen, and after the horse the ten thousand who were infantry, chosen out of the rest of the Persians. One thousand of these latter bore golden pomegranates on their spear-shafts in place of the spike, and surrounded the rest; the nine thousand were enclosed within, and bore silver pomegranates; they who held their spears reversed carried golden pomegranates also, and they who were nearest to Xerxes, apples of gold. After the ten thousand came ten thousand Persian horsemen in array. After these there was a space of two furlongs, and next the rest of the multitude followed without order or division. (7.40.1–41.2)

That Herodotus interrupts his broader historical narrative to give such detail is significant. The juncture could suggest that he was, here, relying on eyewitness

⁷ N. Sekunda, *Marathon 490 BC* (Westport, CT and London, 2005), 25: 'a few *hazarabam* of élite infantry may have been present'. Head (n. 5), 10, notes that *arstibara* is only attested as an individual rank ('the king's own spear-bearer'), not as a unit title; see also N. Sekunda, 'The Persians', in J. Hackett (ed.), *Warfare in the Ancient World* (New York, Oxford and Sydney, 1983), 82–103, at 84, but no mention at id. (n. 5), 14. On the *locus*, see L. Scott, *Historical Commentary on Herodotus Book 6* (Leiden and Boston, 2005), 389–90, though no specific suggestions regarding the identity of the Persian troops in the centre are provided.

⁸ J.A.R. Munro, 'Some observations on the Persian wars (the campaign of Marathon)', *JHS* 22 (1899), 185–97, at 189, despairs of ascertaining the composition of the Persian force. N. Whatley, 'On the possibility of reconstructing Marathon and other ancient battles', *JHS* 84 (1964), 119–39, at 132–3, also says very little.

⁹ Herodotus calls the god 'Zeus' instead of a Greek variant of Ahuramazda.

testimony, or some kind of Persian order of battle; or else the recorded detail was intended to inspire such confidence, and simultaneously add colour to the account. It is clearly impossible to arrive at any definite conclusions.¹⁰

There is no mention yet of the so-called Immortals (*ἀθάνατοι*), a curious omission rightly described by Macan long ago as 'a mystery'.¹¹ The number 10,000, the generally agreed strength of the Immortals, is certainly present in the passage under discussion; yet, on this occasion, the number is associated with Persian infantry in general. We are not given any other details regarding the troops' provenance, though the context suggests that Herodotus is describing infantrymen of some importance – these are no mere foreign levies or satrapal units. Of these men, 1,000 are said to have carried spears with golden pomegranates and are described as encircling the remaining 9,000 enclosed within a square formation. That these 9,000 bore silver rather than golden pomegranates seems to indicate a somewhat lesser station. Although we are not given any further details, the prevalence of chiliads would suggest that the combined 10,000 infantrymen would have been divided up into ten units, each 1,000 strong.¹² Given that the number 10,000 is clearly invoked, it can be assumed that the 10,000 pomegranate-bearing Persian infantry were the famed *ἀθάνατοι*. We must not forget the 1,000 *αἰχμοφόροι* with their reversed golden-pomegranate-bearing spears marching directly before the king, in addition to another 1,000 *αἰχμοφόροι* with golden apples on their spear butts – supposedly of the noblest Persian blood – who immediately follow him. The proximity of the *αἰχμοφόροι* to Xerxes might be argued as indicative of a higher station. Despite

¹⁰ On Herodotus' use of eyewitness reports, see D.M. Lewis, 'Persians in Herodotus', in M. Jameson (ed.), *The Greek Historians: Literature and History. Papers Presented to A. E. Raubitschek* (Stanford, 1985), 101–17, at 117; at 103–4 he describes 'VII.61–98' as one of 'three passages where the chances of a documentary basis have always seemed fairly high'. He concludes (117) that the list of Xerxes' army was forged from 'first-hand information and the work of his predecessors'; cf. J.A.R. Munro, 'Some observations on the Persian wars (the campaign of Xerxes)', *JHS* 22 (1902), 294–332, at 295, where doubts are expressed, in addition to P. Barkworth, 'The organisation of Xerxes' army', *IA* 27 (1992), 149–67, at 156, where a 'fourteen-thousand-strong guards division' is accepted, but doubts are expressed about the rest of the army list. O.K. Armayor, 'Herodotus' catalogues of the Persian empire', *TAPhA* 108 (1978), 1–9, contends that Herodotus harnessed 'Greek traditions, Ionian geography, logography, and epic and lyric poetry' (8). On possible (documentary) Persian sources of Herodotus, viz. Demaratus or Megabyzus, see J. Wells, 'The Persian friends of Herodotus', *JHS* 27 (1907), 37–47, at 37 (adducing the *locus* in question as evidence), with M.A. Dandamaev, *A Political History of the Achaemenid Empire*, tr. W.J. Vogelsang (Leiden, 1989), 192; T. Harrison, 'The Persian invasions', in E.J. Bakker, I.J.F. de Jong and H. van Wees (edd.), *Brill's Companion to Herodotus* (Leiden, 2002), 551–78, at 576; O. Murray, 'Herodotus and oral history', in H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and A. Kuhrt (edd.), *Achaemenid History II* (Leiden, 1987), 93–115, at 109; W.W. Tarn, 'The fleet of Xerxes', *JHS* 28 (1908), 202–33, at 231.

¹¹ R.W. Macan, *Herodotus. The Seventh, Eighth & Ninth Books* I.1 (London, 1908), 61; see also A.F. Butler, *Herodotus VII* (London, 1926), 172; A.R. Burn, *Persia and the Greeks: The Defence of the West, c. 546–478 B.C.* (London, 1962), 326.

¹² On the use of the decimal system, see J.M. Cook, *The Persian Empire* (London, 1983), 101; Dandamaev (n. 10), 194; G. Widengren, 'Recherches sur la féodalisme iranien', *Orientalia Suecana* 5 (1956), 79–182, at 160–2; Wiesehöfer (n. 3), 91, with 67–70. Perhaps those of Herodotus' Ten Thousand with golden rather than silver pomegranates on their spears (7.41.2) were senior members of the *ἀθάνατοι*. Head (n. 5), 17, raises the possibility that they were 'the commanders of ten, or file-leaders'; on the *δεκάρχης*, see also E. Obst, *Der Feldzug des Xerxes* (Leipzig, 1914), 85, and Barkworth (n. 10), 154–5, with n. 28, who assumes that these would have carried wicker shields and constituted the 'front rank' on the battlefield, whereas the rest would have used a small 'figure-eight' shield as seen on the Persepolis reliefs; see R.W. Ferrier (ed.), *The Arts of Persia* (New Haven, CT and London, 1989), 47; see also n. 13 below.

their apples, the troops are not *specifically* described as *μηλοφόροι*, though this is surely the unit referred to as such by later writers.

The next time that we read of the Ten Thousand and other exalted infantry occurs in the context of Xerxes' army crossing the Hellespont:

ἤγγοντο δὲ πρῶτα μὲν οἱ μυρία Πέρσαι, ἐστεφανωμένοι πάντες, μετὰ δὲ τούτους ὁ σύμμικτος στρατὸς παντοίων ἐθνέων. ταύτην μὲν τὴν ἡμέρην οὗτοι, τῇ δὲ ὑστεραίῃ πρῶτοι μὲν οἱ τε ἵπποται καὶ οἱ τὰς λόγχας κάτω τράποντες· ἐστεφάνωντο δὲ καὶ οὗτοι. μετὰ δὲ οἱ τε ἵπποι οἱ ἱροὶ καὶ τὸ ἄρμα τὸ ἱρόν, ἐπὶ δὲ αὐτὸς τε Ξέρξης καὶ οἱ αἰχμοφόροι καὶ οἱ ἵπποται οἱ χίλιοι, ἐπὶ δὲ τούτοις ὁ ἄλλος στρατός.

In the van came the ten thousand Persians, all wearing garlands, and after them the host of diverse nations. All that day these crossed, and on the next, first the horsemen and they who bore their spears reversed [that is, one of the two groups of *αἰχμοφόροι*]; these also wore garlands. After them came the sacred horses and the sacred chariot, then Xerxes himself and the spearmen (*αἰχμοφόροι*) and the thousand horse, and after them the rest of the host.
(Hdt. 7.55.2-3)

The details provided here are remarkably consistent with what is found at Hdt. 7.40-1, the main difference being the position of the units in the marching column. The Ten Thousand lead the combined infantry of all the nations under Persian sway. Those who carried their spears reversed appear once again before the Great King and the sacred chariot. It might be presumed that those *αἰχμοφόροι* closely accompanying the king are again those whose spear butts were adorned with golden apples, that is, the *μηλοφόροι* of later authors.¹³ Thus we again find 12,000 Persian infantrymen *in toto*.

A passage appearing shortly thereafter adds further detail:

οὗτοι ἦσαν στρατηγοὶ τοῦ σύμπαντος πεζοῦ χωρὶς τῶν μυρίων· τῶν δὲ μυρίων τούτων Περσέων τῶν ἀπολελεγμένων ἐστρατήγεε μὲν Ὑδάρνης ὁ Ὑδάρνεος, ἐκαλέοντο δὲ ἀθάνατοι οἱ Πέρσαι οὗτοι ἐπὶ τοῦδε· εἴ τις αὐτῶν ἐξέλιπε τὸν ἀριθμὸν ἢ θανάτῳ βιηθεὶς ἢ νόσῳ, ἄλλος ἀνὴρ ἀραίρητο, καὶ ἐγίνοντο οὐδαμὰ οὔτε πλεῖνες μυρίων οὔτε ἐλάσσονες. κόσμον δὲ πλείστον παρείχοντο διὰ πάντων Πέρσαι, καὶ αὐτοὶ ἀριστοὶ ἦσαν· σκευὴν μὲν τοιαύτην εἶχον ἥ περ εἴρηται, χωρὶς δὲ χρυσόν τε πολλὸν καὶ ἄφθονον ἔχοντες ἐνέπρεπον, ἄρμαμάξας τε ἅμα ἤγοντο, ἐν δὲ παλλακὰς καὶ θεραπηγὴν πολλήν τε καὶ εὐ ἐσκευασμένην· σῖτα δὲ σφί, χωρὶς τῶν ἄλλων στρατιωτέων κάμηλοί τε καὶ ὑποζύγια ἦγον.

These were the generals of the whole land army, saving the Ten Thousand; Hydarnes son of Hydarnes was general of these picked ten thousand Persians, who were called Immortals for this reason, that when any one of them fell out of the number by force of death or

¹³ J.E. Powell, *A Lexicon to Herodotus*² (Hildesheim, 1977), s.v. *αἰχμοφόροι*, notes that the word is used to denote 'royal *bodyguard*' at 1.8.1 (bodyguard of the Lydian king) and 7.103.5 (troops of Xerxes), and non-Greek 'spearmen' elsewhere. Note that Bittner (n. 5), 160 and Taf. 5a describes elite Persian troops as 'Gerrophoren' on the basis of their large, rectangular wicker shields. In view of his contention that these soldiers contributed 'zum direkten Schutz des Großkönigs' (see also 310), it would appear that he is referring to the *μηλοφόροι*; yet his citation of Xen. *An.* 1.8.9 (*γεροφόροι*) in the context of Persian guard troops is problematic given that, at this *locus* (events of 401 B.C.), they were operating alongside cavalry under Artaxerxes II's satrap Tissaphernes on the left wing; but cf. Pl. *La.* 191b-c, where the Spartans, at Plataea, hesitated to attack those with wicker shields, which troops may well have been either Immortals or Apple Bearers. Herodotus (9.61.3) merely writes of a wall of wicker shields (*τὰ γέρρα*) rather than specific troops; see also Strab. 7.3.17.

sickness, another was chosen, and so they were never more or fewer than ten thousand. The Persians showed of all the richest adornment, and were themselves the best in the army.¹⁴ Their equipment was such as I have recorded; over and above this they made a brave show with the abundance of gold that they had; carriages withal they brought, bearing concubines and servants many and well equipped; and their food was brought to them on camels and beasts of burden, apart from the rest of the army. (7.83.1–2)

Herodotus clearly regards the 10,000 infantrymen under Hydarnes as a highly important force.¹⁵ Furthermore, he specifically calls Hydarnes' 10,000-strong unit the *ἀθάνατοι* – the first time that the Ten Thousand are so named – before proceeding to explain their name.¹⁶ He also calls them 'picked' (witness *ἀπολελεγμένων*), a word which seems to affirm their station, and that it was considered something of an honour to be part of this standing infantry force of constant numerical strength.

If one trawls through *all* the information recorded by Herodotus relating to the Persian (rather than foreign) infantry contingent, it becomes apparent that only 12,000 Persian infantrymen are specifically referred to as such in Xerxes' entire force, though this is obviously not to say that other truly Persian units, such as units from the satrapies, did not also take part.¹⁷ The breakdown of the named Persian infantry is thus:

- 1,000 with golden-pomegranate-bearing spears reversed who march before the Great King;
- 1,000 with golden apples on their spears stationed closest to (and behind) the Great King; and
- 10,000 composed of another 1,000 bearing spears with golden pomegranates, and 9,000 carrying spears with pomegranates of silver.

¹⁴ Whether this statement refers to the Immortals or Persian infantry in general is problematic; on the splendid appearance of the *μηλοφόροι*, see Ael. *VH* 9.3; cf. Curt. 3.3.13 (on the Immortals). Clearchus (49 Wehrli = *FHG* II 304), in a somewhat perplexing fragment preserved by Athenaeus (12.514d), claims that the opulence of the *μηλοφόροι* was deliberately meant to recall the softness (*τρυφή*) of the tyrannical Medes, whose royal guardsmen were similarly equipped. Indeed, Clearchus states that the institution of the Apple Bearers (*μηλοφορία*) was Median in origin. For commentary, see F. Wehrli, *Die Schule des Aristoteles: Texte und Kommentar. Heft 3: Klearchos*² (Basel, 1967), 62.

¹⁵ Cook (n. 12), 144, conjectures that Hydarnes, aside from being commander of the Immortals (481–480 B.C.), must also have been the chiliarch (*hazārapatiš*). He holds that Hydarnes took the *μηλοφόροι* back with him from Greece when Xerxes retired, thus leaving only 9,000 of the Immortals behind. Schmitt (n. 3), 2, even contends that 'it is quite probable' that the *ἀθάνατοι* returned to Asia with Hydarnes, and that Herodotus' information is 'simply wrong' – a rather pessimistic evaluation. Cf. A.W. Collins, 'The office of chiliarch under the Successors', *Phoenix* 55 (2001), 259–83, at 268, n. 47: '[not] ... a regular function of the chiliarch' (reiterated at 273); on the chiliarchy, see H. Berve, *Das Alexanderreich auf prosopographischer Grundlage* I (Munich, 1926), 112; P.J. Junge, 'Zur Stellung des Chiliarchen der kgl. Leibgarde im Achämenidenstaat', *Klio* 33 (1940), 13–38.

¹⁶ See n. 3 above.

¹⁷ See commentary by J.F. Lazenby, *The Defence of Greece 490–479 B.C.* (Warminster, 1993), 23: '12,000 infantry, including the so-called "Immortals", and 12,000 cavalry, who formed the royal guards'. It is true that, at 7.61.1–2, Herodotus describes the equipment of the Persians themselves and states that they (the Persian levies? combined infantry and cavalry?) were commanded, puzzlingly enough, by Otanes. Despite this, the description of the equipment presumably relates to both infantry and cavalry. Herodotus (7.84) himself says that they were accoutred in similar fashion.

The 10,000 men collectively are clearly identifiable as the ἀθάνατοι, despite their internal variation in equipment.¹⁸ This would mean that, at least in Herodotus' eyes, the μηλοφόροι, the elite Persian unit recorded by Arrian in his account of Gaugamela (3.11.5), were *not* part of the Immortals, but rather constituted an even more distinguished unit, that is, the immediate infantry bodyguard of the Great King (as indicated by their extreme proximity to his person).¹⁹ This view, as indicated previously, is not widely supported since it is generally assumed that the μηλοφόροι formed *part of* the Ten Thousand – which forces us to extrapolate that the 'regular' Immortals numbered only 9,000, or even 8,000 if the other 1,000-strong unit of αἰχμοφόροι is included in this figure.²⁰ Even Bowie, in a recent treatment of this problem, is unsure of what to make of these figures.²¹

According to Cawkwell, Herodotus (7.41.1) writes of 'the best and noblest of the Persians', whom he described as i) 'carrying spears with golden pomegranates [*sic*, not *apples*] on the butt', and ii) 'a separate body, [although] ... it is clear they were part of the ten thousand Immortals'.²² Cawkwell gives no explanation for this conclusion, nor explains the status and function of the other 1,000-strong infantry unit that Herodotus describes. The main problem lies in determining whether there really were *three* 1,000-strong groups carrying spears with golden fruit (be they apples *or* pomegranates).²³ Most recently, Flower and Marincola have strongly asserted the view that there were indeed 'two chiliads of select infantry' and contend that the two select infantry units (and cavalry) were divided between Mardonius and Xerxes when the king returned home.²⁴ Yet it could be that Herodotus' sources were in conflict over this point and, as a result, he muddled his information. However,

¹⁸ P. Green, *The Greco-Persian Wars* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1996), 63, claims that all Immortals had a 'silver pomegranate butt' on their spears – an inference drawn from the tile friezes of Susa rather than Herodotus.

¹⁹ Hesychius (s.v. μηλοφόροι), compiling his lexicon in the fifth century A.D., defines them as the 'attendants of the Persian king' (θεραπεία Περσικὴ τοῦ βασιλέως).

²⁰ On this approach, see Macan (n. 11), 61; see also Atkinson (n. 3), 123; A.B. Bosworth, *A Historical Commentary on Arrian's History of Alexander I* (Oxford, 1980), 299; P. Briant, *Histoire de l'Empire Perse. De Cyrus à Alexandre* (Paris, 1996), 273; T. Cuyler Young Jr, 'The consolidation of the empire and its limit of growth under Darius and Xerxes', in J. Boardman, N.G.L. Hammond, D.M. Lewis and M. Ostwald (edd.), *Cambridge Ancient History, vol. 4: Persia, Greece and the Western Mediterranean, c.525 to 479 B.C.* (Cambridge, 1988²), 53–111, at 91–2; Frye (n. 3 [1963]), 109; A.T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire* (Chicago and London, 1948), 239; Sekunda (n. 7), 34, although at id. (n. 5), 7 he states that the μηλοφόροι were a separate unit; cf. H.T. Wade-Gery, 'The Peace of Kallias', in A. Andrewes (ed.), *Essays in Greek History* (Oxford, 1958), 201–32, at 215.

²¹ A.M. Bowie, *Herodotus. Histories Book VIII* (Cambridge, 2007), 204: 'they may have incorporated ... the one thousand'.

²² G. Cawkwell, *The Greek Wars: The Failure of Persia* (Oxford, 2006), 238, adduces 'Heraclides (FGH 689 F1)', although he could be on shaky ground here. Following J. Marquart, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte von Eran I* (Göttingen, 1896), 57, and F. Schachermeyr, *Alexander in Babylon und die Reichsordnung nach seinem Tode* (Vienna, 1970), 32, he also holds that the Chiliarch 'commanded the Immortals'; see also R.N. Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran* (Munich, 1984), 107, but cf. Berve (n. 15), 112: '[der] Führer der Leibwache'. Pagliaro (n. 3), 135, oddly describes the χιλίαρχος as 'il comandante della guardia reale', which he seems to presume was the 'decimila immortali' (146).

²³ Lewis (n. 10), 117 notes *loci* where Herodotus' description of weaponry matches fragments of Hecataeus (FGrH 1 F 287 = Hdt. 7.72.1; FGrH 1 F 284 = Hdt. 7.62.2). It is therefore possible that Herodotus' description of the Immortals' spear butts was not his own invention; see also Armayor (n. 10), 8.

²⁴ M.A. Flower and J. Marincola, *Herodotus: Histories Book IX* (Cambridge, 2002), 218.

that one group marched with their spears reversed – a rather specific detail – is difficult to explain away. Indeed, other evidence, such as the mid-fifth century B.C. Tatarlı tomb paintings, corroborates the Herodotean notion of Persians sometimes carrying their spears reversed. In one scene originally on the east wall, the three soldiers following the first chariot in the procession carry reversed spears, albeit without pomegranate butts.²⁵ Diodorus Siculus, though he describes the so-called Immortals, fails to mention any other elite units, so he cannot help us here.²⁶ The simplest option would be to omit, as Maurice does, one of the two units of 1,000 *αἰχμοφόροι* described.²⁷ Despite this, scholars such as Barkworth and Briant are adamant that two picked units of 1,000 men existed *outside* the *ἀθάνατοι*.²⁸ A middle path is offered by Sekunda, who, in a work perhaps not meant to be of a highly scholarly nature, nevertheless provides the convenient explanation that the two groups described were merely halves of the 1,000-strong *μηλοφόροι*, and that Herodotus (or else his source) mistakenly doubled their number. This solution admirably deals with the detail of the spears being reversed, but ignores the pomegranate vs. apple detail recorded by Herodotus at 7.41.2.²⁹

The next occasion that Herodotus mentions picked Persian infantry is in the aftermath of Salamis (480 B.C.), where the Persian fleet was badly defeated. Xerxes, having determined to leave Greece, handed over command to Mardonius. This general then selected a force from the remaining host:

ὥς δὲ ἀπίκατο ἐς τὴν Θεσσαλίην, ἐνθαῦτα Μαρδόνιος ἐξελέγετο πρώτους μὲν τοὺς Πέρσας πάντας τοὺς ἀθανάτους καλεομένους, πλὴν Ὑδάρνεος τοῦ στρατηγοῦ (οὗτος

²⁵ On this, see L. Summerer, 'Imaging a tomb chamber: the iconographic program of the Tatarlı wall paintings', in S.M.R. Darbandi and A. Zournatzi (edd.), *Ancient Greece and Ancient Iran: Cross-Cultural Encounters* (Athens, 2008), 265–99, at 276–7, with fig. 6. For further information on these paintings, see ead., 'Picturing Persian victory: the painted battle scene on the Munich wood', *ACCS* 13 (2007), 1–30. This phenomenon is absent at Persepolis, but sometimes occurs on seal images, e.g. Susa 2208, in P. Amiet, *Glyptique susienne des origines à l'époque des Perses achéménides* II (Paris, 1972); and the Moscow Artaxerxes Cylinder Seal, where a king figure holding a reversed spear (with pomegranate butt held aloft) leads three prisoners of war; on which, see A.S. Strelkov, 'Moscow Artaxerxes Cylinder Seal', *American Institute for Iranian Art and Archaeology* 5 (1937), 17–21, fig. 2; W. Nagel, 'Datierte Glyptik aus Alt Vorderasien', *AfO* 20 (1963), 125–40, at 134, with 131, fig. 13; M. Dandamaev, *Persien unter den ersten Achämeniden*, tr. H.-D. Pohl (Wiesbaden, 1976), pls V, XIV.

²⁶ See Diod. Sic. 11.7.4, where the 'picked' *ἀθάνατοι* are described as the bravest of all the Persians. Diodorus' account (11.6.3–11.11.6) of Thermopylae is generally even more rhetorical and chauvinistic than that of Herodotus (cf. 7.211.1).

²⁷ F. Maurice, 'The size of the army of Xerxes in the invasion of Greece 480 B.C.', *JHS* 50 (1930), 210–35, at 230, allows for the Ten Thousand, in addition to '1000 picked infantry', as part of 'Xerxes' personal escort' – with no mention of those *αἰχμοφόροι* who marched with spears reversed.

²⁸ Barkworth (n. 10), 153–4; P. Briant, 'The Achaemenid empire', in K. Raaflaub and N. Rosenstein (edd.), *War and Society in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds* (Cambridge, MA, 1999), 105–28, at 116. Briant implies that Herodotus, with respect to the *αἰχμοφόροι*, distinguishes between the 'spearmen "selected among all Persians"' and those described as 'the best and most noble of the Persians', i.e. the *μηλοφόροι*. Perhaps this was the group with whom the future Darius I served during Cambyses' Egyptian campaign – he is described as a *δορυφόρος* at Hdt. 3.139.2. See also R.A. Gabriel, *The Great Armies of Antiquity* (Westport, CT and London, 2002), 160, who writes of 2,000 foot soldiers in 'the king's bodyguard'.

²⁹ Sekunda (n. 5), 6–7. Perhaps Herodotus was also mistaken on the matter of pomegranates and apples, or else he conflated accounts that either referred to pomegranates and apples, but not both.

γὰρ οὐκ ἔφη λείβεσθαι βασιλέος), μετὰ δὲ τῶν ἄλλων Περσέων τοὺς θωρηκοφόρους καὶ τὴν ἵππον τὴν χιλῆν.

When they were in Thessaly, Mardonius there chose out first all the Persians called Immortals, save only Hydarnes their general, who said that he would not quit the king's person; and next, the Persian θωρηκοφόροι [deliberately left untranslated], and the thousand horse.³⁰ (Hdt. 8.113.2)

Herodotus goes on to describe the other contingents of Mardonius' force, which allegedly numbered 300,000 men (Hdt. 8.113.3). The *locus* referred to above has occasioned some debate.³¹ Hignett finds fault with Herodotus' account and contends that the Immortals returned to Asia with Hydarnes, their commander.³² He also proposes that they 'would be the obvious escort for Xerxes on his return, and may have remained with him at Sardis as his bodyguard' (no mention of the *μηλοφόροι*). Yet Hignett contradicts himself by stating that 'Aeschylus in the *Persai* [at lines 803–4] represents Mardonius' army as a picked force so, on this basis, it is not altogether impossible that the Immortals remained in Europe'.

What is surprising, however, is that very little has been made of Herodotus' reference to θωρηκοφόροι – the only time that the word is used to describe Persian rather than subject troops – remaining with Mardonius.³³ Indeed, Bowie, in the most recent commentary of Book 8 of the *Histories*, passes over the matter in silence.³⁴ Yet Godley, Powell and Grene see these men as 'cuirassiers', a very literal translation, but a term normally implying a cavalry unit in English, while Briant and Masaracchia opt for 'troupes cuirassées' and 'quelli armati di corazza' respectively.³⁵ The θωρηκοφόροι could thus be one of the 1,000-strong units of αἰχμοφόροι mentioned by Herodotus at 7.40.2 and 7.41.1, as Powell and indeed

³⁰ Cf. Diod. Sic. 11.19.6.

³¹ J.A.R. Munro, 'Some observations on the Persian wars (the campaign of Plataea)', *JHS* 24 (1904), 144–65, at 144, in calculating the forces initially available to Mardonius, reckons on the 10,000 Immortals, but makes no mention of any other 'elite' Persian formations.

³² C. Hignett, *Xerxes' Invasion of Greece* (Oxford, 1963), 267; 'apocryphal' at 267 n. 2.

³³ Herodotus uses the Ionian version of θωρακοφόρος (also at 7.89.3 and 7.92) to describe cuirass-wearing Egyptian and Lycian troops respectively. The word is also used in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. At *Cyr.* 5.3.36–7, for example, θωρακοφόροι are described as slow-moving, presumably on account of their armour; see M. Bizes (ed. and tr.), *Xenophon. Cyropédie* II, Collection Budé (Paris, 1973), 106. The θωρακοφόροι are led by the noble Chrysantas, known only from the *Cyropaedia*. At *Cyr.* 4.1.4, Chrysantas was promoted to the rank of chiliarch (witness *χιλιάρχία*) while, at *Cyr.* 8.3.16, he commands 10,000 cavalymen. In the same work, θωρακοφόροι also appear at 5.3.52, 6.3.24, 7.1.10 and appear to be an important element of Cyrus' new-style army, though there is no real sense that they were an elite formation.

³⁴ Bowie (n. 21), 204 ff.

³⁵ A.D. Godley (tr.), *Herodotus* IV, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA and London, 1925), 117; Powell (n. 13), s.v. θωρηκοφόροι; D. Grene (tr.), *Herodotus: The History* (Chicago and London, 1987), 598; Briant (n. 20), 209, seemingly based on P.-E. Legrand (ed. and tr.), *Hérodote. Histoires Livre VIII Uranie*, Collection Budé (Paris, 1953), 112; A. Masaracchia (ed. and tr.), *Erodoto. La Battaglia di Salamina. Libro VIII delle Storie* (Milan, 1990), 115. Macan (n. 11), 539, struggles to offer an explanation aside from 'a special body of men'. J.E. Powell, *Herodotus. Book VI* (Cambridge, 1939), 137, merely writes that 'This corps has not been mentioned before', while W.W. How and J. Wells, *A Commentary on Herodotus* II (Oxford, 1912), 273, provide 'cf. vii. 61. 1n.' (a reference to Herodotus' statement that Persian troops wore scale corselets); likewise E.S. Shuckburgh, *Herodotus VIII Urania* (Cambridge, 1903), 169. G. Rawlinson (tr.), *Herodotus*, in F.R.B. Godolphin (ed.), *The Greek Historians* I (New York, 1942), 505, opts for 'the Persians who wore breastplates'.

Masaracchia would prefer – it should not be assumed that he is referring to a cavalry unit, as he clearly does with τὴν ἵππον τὴν χιλίην.³⁶ De Sélincourt refers to the θωρηκοφόροι as ‘the Persian spearmen’, seemingly not on the basis of the Greek, but rather on the basis that Herodotus is describing one group of elite infantry, and one of cavalry.³⁷ If this reasoning holds, the *locus* represents one of the most important pieces in the Immortals and Apple Bearers puzzle. If the θωρηκοφόροι are indeed those troops described elsewhere as μηλοφόροι (or indeed αἰχμοφόροι in the *Histories*), it adds further weight to the contention that, in Herodotus’ view at least, the μηλοφόροι were not part of the Ten Thousand, but comprised a separate unit.

The last that we hear of Persian elite infantry in the *Histories* seems to be at the battle of Plataea (479 B.C.). Herodotus (9.63.1) writes that Mardonius, astride a white horse immediately before his death, was accompanied by ‘a thousand picked men who were the flower of the Persian troops’ (περὶ ἑωυτὸν λογάδας Περσέων τοὺς ἀρίστους χιλίους). These thousand men could be any of the four chiliads of infantry and cavalry described at Hdt. 7.40–1, though they are usually assumed to be the cavalry unit described as τὴν ἵππον τὴν χιλίην at Hdt. 8.113.2.³⁸ Despite this, it does not follow that the troops in question were cavalry simply because Mardonius was mounted, as Flower and Marincola rightly point out.³⁹ If Herodotus is here referring to infantry, as the context suggests (cavalry would be poor protection for Mardonius in a static fight against Greek hoplites, and Lacedaemonians in particular), these elite soldiers could be the μηλοφόροι, and thus the θωρηκοφόροι described at Hdt. 8.113.2.⁴⁰ Without providing any rationale, Burn described these brave men as ‘The Thousand, the élite regiment of the Immortals’.⁴¹ Even if the notion of the μηλοφόροι being part of the Ten Thousand remains problematic, Burns’ surmise, supported by Shabazi, who specifically refers to the guard unit at Plataea as ‘the Apple-bearers’, is highly attractive.⁴² That the same men are described as the best of the Persian troops also appears to identify them with the king’s infantry guard, described as ‘the best and noblest blood of Persia’ (Περσέων οἱ ἀριστοὶ τε καὶ γενναυότατοι) at Hdt. 7.41.1, rather than

³⁶ J.E. Powell, *Herodotus. Book VIII* (Cambridge, 1939), 136; Masaracchia (n. 35), 215. It is impossible to ascertain which one of the two cavalry units introduced at Hdt. 7.40.2 and 7.41.1 is meant, though the unit is possibly equivalent to ἵππος ἄλλη χιλίη ἐκ Περσέων ἀπολελεγμένη (Hdt. 7.41.1).

³⁷ A. De Sélincourt (tr.), *Herodotus: The Histories*, rev. A.R. Burn (repr. of 1954 edn., Harmondsworth, 1972), 562. This translation is retained, without explanation, at P. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*, tr. P.T. Daniels (Winona Lake, IN, 2002), 196, but cf. id. (n. 20), 209. N.G.L. Hammond, ‘The expedition of Xerxes’, in Boardman et al. (n. 20), 518–91, at 534, merely describes the two 1,000-strong units as ‘Royal Guard regiments’, without venturing to suggest whether the two units were both comprised of cavalry (or a mixture).

³⁸ J.P. Barron, ‘The liberation of Greece’, in Boardman et al. (n. 20), 592–622, at 608, merely writes of ‘his picked and personal battalion’.

³⁹ Flower and Marincola (n. 24), 218. Cf. How and Wells (n. 35), 314, with Whatley (n. 8), 135–6.

⁴⁰ Wiesehöfer (n. 3), 91: ‘all the members of the king’s bodyguard were killed [at] ... Plataea’. Diodorus (11.31.1–2) proves of little use, although he does describe the men closest to Mardonius as ‘the best’ (ἀριστοι) and ‘picked’ (ἐπιλεκτοι). Rawlinson (n. 35), 542, simply calls them ‘the 1,000 picked men’.

⁴¹ A.R. Burn, ‘Persia and the Greeks’, in I. Gershevitch (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 2: *The Median and Achaemenian Periods* (Cambridge, 1985), 292–391, at 330.

⁴² Shabazi (n. 1), 492. Flower and Marincola (n. 24), 218, are undecided.

the mysterious formation preceding the king at Hdt. 7.40.2 whose apparent disappearance from Herodotus' narrative, if we discount Sekunda's admittedly plausible solution, remains inexplicable.⁴³

That the picked Persian spearmen, be they called αἰχμοφόροι or μηλοφόροι (or indeed θωρηκοφόροι), were also more exalted in status than the ἀθάνατοι is perhaps confirmed by 7.103.5 of the *Histories*. Here, Xerxes boasts to Demaratus, the exiled king of Sparta and now an adviser on military matters, that some of his αἰχμοφόροι would each gladly fight three Greek soldiers. Although these are obviously the words of Herodotus, it is at least reasonably clear that the αἰχμοφόροι are imagined as members of the Persian infantry elite (which is consistent with earlier *loci* in the *Histories*), with the context suggesting that Xerxes is referring to members of his immediate infantry bodyguard. Though this *locus* does not necessarily prove that the αἰχμοφόροι were entirely separate from the ἀθάνατοι, it does add weight to the view that they constituted the royal bodyguard. Herodotus tells us no more of elite Persian infantry units.⁴⁴ A final point is put forward by Barkworth, who notes that the Ten Thousand are clearly labelled as 'footsoldiers' (πεζοί), i.e. at Hdt. 7.41.2 with οὗτος πεζὸς ἦν, while the 1,000-strong infantry units are referred to as 'spearbearers' (αἰχμοφόροι = δορυφόροι).⁴⁵ This semantic argument is clearly consistent with the view that the ἀθάνατοι and μηλοφόροι were regarded by Herodotus himself as wholly distinct.

In brief, a careful re-reading of Herodotus supports the view that the μηλοφόροι were *not* part of the larger group of soldiers known as the ἀθάνατοι, and that both groups, despite their ostensible relationship to the Great King, could campaign together in his absence.

II. MISSING IMMORTALS AND THE APPLE BEARERS OF DARIUS III

Now that we have done with Herodotus, let us turn to the close of the Achaemenid dynasty, and the contest against Alexander the Great in particular. Here, our primary aim is to identify which, if any, of the elite infantry units mentioned by Herodotus can be identified with the elite group in the army of Darius III described by Arrian as μηλοφόροι. It will also be necessary to ascertain their numerical strength.

So what happened to the ἀθάνατοι? After the conclusion of the war with Xerxes, not much more is heard of them, at least in a military context. For example, they fail to make an appearance in Xenophon's *Anabasis*, which largely eyewitness account describes the battle of Cunaxa (401 B.C.), where the royal pretender Cyrus the Younger was routed by the Great King Artaxerxes II.⁴⁶ In his discussion of the

⁴³ In his summary of the battle, Herodotus (9.71.1) writes that the Persian foot (πεζὸς ... ὁ Περσέων) outfought their comrades.

⁴⁴ There remains a puzzling Herodotean reference (7.31.1) to Xerxes possibly assigning one of his Immortals (witness ἀθανάτω) to guard a beautiful plane tree in Asia Minor; but, in light of the material described in n. 3, the *locus* could refer to a guardian with an appointed successor, rather than a member of the Ten Thousand, a view supported by Schmitt (n. 3), 3 ('immortal custodian').

⁴⁵ Barkworth (n. 10), 154.

⁴⁶ On Artaxerxes' forces, see Xen. *An.* 1.7.11–12 and 1.8.8–10; 6,000 horsemen under Artageres were stationed in front of the Great King (*An.* 1.7.11 and 1.8.24), though cf. 1.8.26–7.

military situation on the eve of Cunaxa, Rahe asserts that the Immortals remained available to Artaxerxes, but this position is based on an assumption of continuity, though he admits that the feudal system 'had deteriorated', with important implications for Persian military strength.⁴⁷ Furthermore, despite the highly problematic introduction of the Ten Thousand in Quintus Curtius' description of the build-up to Issus (3.3.13), which is dealt with in detail further below, the so-called Immortals are not referred to in the campaigns of Alexander. This is difficult to understand given their relatively prominent role in Herodotus' narrative.

There is, of course, Pausanias' story (6.5.7) about a mortal combat at Darius II's court at Susa between the pankratiast Polydamas and three of the 'so-called Immortals' (τῶν καλουμένων ἀθανάτων). Given that Darius II became king in 423 B.C., we are ostensibly presented with some kind of evidence that the ἀθάνατοι still existed after the reign of Xerxes. That said, Pausanias' vignette hardly represents authoritative proof, especially given that the author was writing long after the event, and at a time when the legendary status of the ἀθάνατοι had been firmly established. Given that the fight took place at court, and presumably in the company of the king, it is perhaps more likely, if one follows the Herodotean paradigm, that the pankratiast's challengers were the elite αἰχμοφόροι described by Herodotus as closely accompanying the king at 7.41.1 and 7.55.3 (though there remains the counter-argument that these were merely a senior group of ἀθάνατοι). Even if we do allow ἀθάνατοι in the last two decades of the fifth century, as in Pausanias, there remains the temptation to assume that the corps of ἀθάνατοι was disbanded well before the campaigns of Alexander. But one group of Persian infantry described by Herodotus *are* indeed mentioned again in a relatively authoritative context – something which suggests some degree of continuity, at least at face value. Some careful analysis is warranted.

Issus (333 B.C.) represents the first major infantry vs. infantry engagement of the war. Darius himself was present, unlike at the Granicus (334 B.C.), where the Persian forces were commanded by a group of high-ranking nobles (Arr. *An.* 1.12.8). Thus it would be reasonable to assume that Darius was accompanied by his elite guard infantry. Yet the descriptions provided by Alexander's historians, such as Arrian (*An.* 2.8.5–8), who presumably based his narrative largely on Ptolemy's eyewitness account, and that of Aristobulus, provide no useful details.⁴⁸ There is certainly no clear description of Darius' immediate infantry *garde du corps*, either before the battle, during it, or in its aftermath.⁴⁹ Aside from 30,000 Greek mercenaries, ubiquitous in Persian armies of the period, Arrian (*An.* 2.8.6) describes 'heavy

⁴⁷ P. Rahe, 'The military situation in Western Asia on the eve of Cunaxa', *AJPh* 101 (1980), 79–96, at 94; on the feudal situation, see 90–3. Rahe points out that the failure to acknowledge primogeniture meant that the allotment expected to support a single cavalryman and pay the fixed annual assessment (used to maintain the army) decreased with each generation.

⁴⁸ On Arrian's use of Ptolemy for Issus, see *An.* 2.11.8. Aristobulus is not attested in the context of Issus, though one need not doubt that his account was used in some way.

⁴⁹ Curtius (3.9.4) writes that Darius was followed by 3,000 elite horsemen, 'his usual bodyguard' (*assueta corporis custodia*), with 40,000 unspecified troops in the vicinity. J.R. Ashley, *The Macedonian Empire: The Era of Warfare under Philip II and Alexander the Great, 359–323 B.C.* (Jefferson, NC and London, 1998), 225, writes that 'The two units of Darius' Royal Bodyguards totalled 2,000', presumably an allusion to the *μηλοφόροι* and the kinsmen cavalry found at Gaugamela.

infantry' (ὀπλίται) on the Persian side to the tune of 60,000 κάρδακες.⁵⁰ So it is not *completely* impossible that the Ten Thousand were part of this grouping, as one author curiously suggests.⁵¹ This, however, is highly unlikely given that the κάρδακες flanked the Greek mercenaries, who held the centre of the line. But it is uncertain what the Greek authors mean when they describe 'Persian' troops. Are they ethnically Persian, foreign troops aside from Greek mercenaries under Persian command, as seems to be suggested at *An.* 2.8.8 in an apparent reference to the κάρδακες (witness τοῦ ἐπὶ φάλαγγος τεταγμένου βαρβαρικοῦ), or a mixture of both? If we follow Briant's reasoning, which he derives from Hesychius (s.v. κάρδακες), these troops, being composed of *both* Persians and subject peoples, formed 'an imperial infantry'.⁵² If this is so, it is possible that the ἀθάνατοι, by the time of Darius III, could have been replaced by an even larger infantry force more genuinely representative of the empire's ethnically diverse inhabitants, and, what is more, better suited to the military exigencies of the day – a contention, however controversial, which perhaps warrants further discussion elsewhere. The availability of Greek mercenaries, a type of soldier that had proved more than a match for Persian line-of-battle infantry in previous engagements, unlike the ἀθάνατοι at Thermopylae, may have also hastened the so-called Immortals' demise.

Happily, more detail is available in the context of Gaugamela (331 B.C.), the pivotal battle in Alexander's Persian enterprise. Darius' infantry guard are specifically described as μηλοφόροι, presumably on account of the fruit (be they apples or pomegranates) adorning their spear butts.⁵³ Arrian (*An.* 3.11.5), our best source for the Persian forces used at Gaugamela since he followed the order of battle provided by Aristobulus,⁵⁴ writes that the μηλοφόροι were posted together with 'the

⁵⁰ Ashley (n. 49), 225, can only credit 'about 10,000'. In addition, another 20,000-strong division of uncertain ethnic origin and type faced Alexander's right, while other heavy and light infantry groups were stationed behind the aforementioned units; on the κάρδακες, see Strab. 15.3.18 and Nep. *Dat.* 8.2, with Polyb. 5.79.11 and 5.82.11. Xenophon (*An.* 1.8.22) describes the traditional Persian order of battle, with the king taking the centre; see also Arr. *An.* 2.8.11.

⁵¹ W.L. Adams, *Alexander the Great: Legacy of a Conqueror* (New York, 2006), 145. C.L. Murison, 'Darius III and the battle of Issus', *Historia* 21 (1972), 399–423, at 409 n. 32, writes of 'crack infantry regiments' at Issus, but fails to provide an evidential basis; see also W. Heckel, *The Conflicts of Alexander the Great* (Cambridge, 2008), 159.

⁵² Briant (n. 20), 121 (he does not mention the Immortals in this context). Cf. Bosworth (n. 20), 208, who contends that the κάρδακες were either 'the native Persian levy or an elite group of barbarian mercenaries'; see also W.W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great II* (Cambridge, 1948), 180–1 (but use with caution) and Sekunda (n. 5), 27, who sees them as Asiatic mercenaries. W. Dittberner, *Issos. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte Alexanders des Großen (Kapitel IV: Das Schlachtfeld und die Schlacht am Pinaros)* (Berlin, 1907), 34, describes them as 'die barbarischen Hopliten', while Ashley (n. 49), 225 (see also 61–2), dismisses the notion of κάρδακες as heavy infantry and contends that they were 'young Persians who had just completed their training', as per Strab. 15.3.18.

⁵³ E. Badian, 'Alexander in Iran', in Gershevitch (n. 42), 420–501, at 435, calls them 'pomegranate-bearers'.

⁵⁴ Aristobulus recorded a Persian order of battle that later fell into Greek hands (Arr. *An.* 3.11.3–7 = *FGrH* 139 F 17), though Badian (n. 53), 435 n. 1, doubts whether it ever existed. On Arrian's reliability regarding Gaugamela, see M.B. Charles, 'Alexander, elephants and Gaugamela', *Museion* 8 (2008), 9–23; on the Persian infantry, see E.W. Marsden, *The Campaign of Gaugamela* (Liverpool, 1964), 33. E. Badian, 'Orientals in Alexander's army', *JHS* 85 (1965), 161–2, at 161, pithily notes that 'accurate reporting of military matters is not one of Arrian's virtues'.

king's kinsmen' (οἱ ... συγγενεῖς οἱ βασιλέως), a cavalry unit, in the centre.⁵⁵ We are not told their strength. Likewise, no numbers are given at *An.* 3.13.1 or 3.16.1, where we read that the fleeing Darius was accompanied by a few of the *μηλοφόροι* – again, affirmation of their status as the immediate royal guard.⁵⁶

Despite Arrian's lack of numerical exactitude, the *μηλοφόροι* of Darius III are generally described in modern commentaries as 1,000 strong.⁵⁷ For example, Brunt, in describing the unit ('the royal bodyguard') as '1,000 strong' refers his readers to 'Herodotus vii 40 f'.⁵⁸ That said, the danger of using Herodotus, writing about military units operating some 150 years earlier, should be immediately obvious. Tarn writes that, 'on the analogy of the [1,000-strong] cavalry Guard [recorded at Diod. Sic. 17.59.2], one would naturally think of 1,000'.⁵⁹ The ancient sources are scarcely more helpful. Diodorus (17.59.3), though failing to state their number, contends that they were 'brave and numerous' (<διάφοροι> ταῖς ἀνδραγαθίαις καὶ πολλοὶ κατὰ τὸ πλῆθος), a description which does not particularly sit well with a unit size of 1,000.⁶⁰ Diodorus' source was most likely Clitarchus, himself not an eyewitness, but who may have used the first-hand information of Callisthenes, albeit with some literary embellishment. The equally derivative Curtius Rufus does not provide an equivalent term, and he fails to describe *any* elite Persian infantry unit immediately before or during the battle,⁶¹ while Justin's epitome of Pompeius Trogus (11.13–14) also omits their presence. To return to the matter of numerical strength, Athenaeus (12.514b–c), following Heraclides of Cumae (*FGrH* 689 F 1), describes 1,000 *μηλοφόροι* drawn from the 10,000 *ἀθάνατοι*. But it is uncertain whether this is not merely a misguided paraphrasing of Herodotus.⁶² The context, moreover, does not allow us to pinpoint an era with confidence. Since Heraclides wrote his *Persica* c. 350 B.C., the information clearly antedates Alexander's campaign.

⁵⁵ Marsden (n. 54), 58, describes the *συγγενεῖς* as 'royal horseguards'; see also Diod. Sic. 17.59.2, and cf. Hdt. 8.113.2: τὴν ἵππον τὴν χιλίην.

⁵⁶ Adams's rather naïve contention (n. 51), 169, that 'We can presume that the 10,000 Immortals were there' has no evidential basis.

⁵⁷ Scholars ascribing a unit strength of 1,000 to the *μηλοφόροι* at Gaugamela include Ashley (n. 49), 59, 459 n. 213; Bosworth (n. 20), 299; N.G.L. Hammond, *Alexander the Great: King, Commander and Statesman* (Bristol, 1989³), 141; Marsden (n. 54), 33, 34 ['royal infantry bodyguard'], with 43 n. 1; cf. 58. I. Worthington, *Alexander the Great: Man and God* (Harlow, 2004), 97, merely describes, puzzlingly enough, a '3,000-strong Royal Bodyguard of infantry and cavalry'. R.D. Milns, *Alexander the Great* (London, 1968), 118–19, places 'A thousand Royal Bodyguards' on either side of Darius, a reflection, it seems, of his (unexplained) view in the same work (52) that the 'Royal Bodyguard ... of Melophori' was composed of 2,000 men, a supposition also supported by P. Green, *Alexander of Macedon, 356–323 B.C.: A Historical Biography* (Harmondsworth, 1974), 228. Hammond (n. 37), 533, seems to follow Herodotus by naming two 1,000-strong 'Royal Guard' infantry units, in addition to the 10,000 Immortals, at Gaugamela. Whatever the case, the Persian heavy infantry (including 2,000 Greek mercenaries) were clearly acting in a minor support role to the cavalry and chariot arm.

⁵⁸ P.A. Brunt (tr.), *Arrian I*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA and London, 1976), 257 n. 5.

⁵⁹ Tarn (n. 52), 183 n. 6; he also holds (183) that, 'except [for] the archers', it is possible that the *μηλοφόροι* ('his bodyguard of spearmen') were the only truly Persian infantry available.

⁶⁰ Diodorus (17.59.4) also writes of 'all the household troops belonging to the palace' (συνηγωνίζοντο δὲ τούτοις οἱ τε περὶ τὰ βασιλεία διατρίβοντες), though it is uncertain what this means.

⁶¹ Rightly noted by Atkinson (n. 3), 404.

⁶² On this *locus*, see also Collins (n. 15), 268–9 n. 49.

Perhaps the best evidence that the *μηλοφόροι* of Darius III were indeed 1,000 strong comes from descriptions of Alexander's newly won empire. As Bosworth points out, Alexander adopted many Achaemenid institutions, especially in matters pertaining to the exaltation of his majesty.⁶³ A 1,000-strong unit of elite troops command by the chiliarch (*χιλίαρχος*), generally regarded as second only to the king in the court hierarchy, seems to have been one of them.⁶⁴ Here, one needs to note Diodorus' description (11.69.1) of Artabanus, chiliarch during Xerxes' reign, as enjoying 'the greatest influence at the court of King Xerxes and was captain of the royal body-guard' (*δυνάμενος ... πλείστον παρὰ τῷ βασιλεῖ Ξέρξῃ καὶ τῶν δορυφόρων ἀφηγούμενος*), with *δορυφόροι* here obviously referring to the spear-carrying *μηλοφόροι*.⁶⁵ The Alexandrian guard, according to a fragment of Phylarchus (*FGrH* 81 F 41 = *Ath.* 12.539e), was presumably constituted of 500 Persian *μηλοφόροι* and 500 Macedonian *ἀργυράσπιδες*.⁶⁶ This *locus* surely refers to a time after Alexander's return from India since an 'elephant-division' (*τὸ τῶν ἐλεφάντων ἄγγημα*) was posted nearby (= *Ath.* 12.539e–f). Less precise is Arrian's claim (*An.* 7.29.4) that Alexander introduced the 'the Persian Apple Bearers into the Macedonian battalions' (*δοκεῖ ταῖς τάξεσιν αὐτῶν τοὺς Πέρσας τοὺς μηλοφόρους*).⁶⁷ At the very least, this must surely refer to what Phylarchus, through Athenaeus, describes – that is, the institution of a mixed Persian and Macedonian guard, which is also possibly alluded to by Aelian at *VH* 9.3.⁶⁸ As Collins points out, it is possible that this is related i) to Diodorus' claim (17.110.1) that, after Alexander's discharge of Macedonian veterans in 324 B.C., 'one thousand Persians

⁶³ A.B. Bosworth, 'The death of Alexander the Great: rumour and propaganda', *CQ* 21 (1971), 112–36, at 132; see also Badian (n. 54), 161–2; Collins (n. 15), 260–1.

⁶⁴ Bosworth (n. 20), 229; cf. Schachermeyr (n. 22), 32: 'der Kommandant der tausend Männer, welche die Palastgarde darstellen'.

⁶⁵ See Collins (n. 15), 268, with *Plut. Them.* 27.2. Cf. Bosworth (n. 63), 131–2, who writes that 'the commander of the élite battalion of the Persian army, the 10,000 Immortals, was known as the chiliarch'; he oddly adduces *Diod. Sic.* 11.69.1 to demonstrate his conviction (132 n. 1). A group of 2,000 and 4,000 *δορυφόροι* are also mentioned in a royal procession at *Xen. Cyr.* 8.3.9, 15–16 (the details of which were presumably invented), but there seems to be little connection to other accounts; for example, while the group of 2,000 *δορυφόροι* is reminiscent of the 2,000 *αἰχμοφόροι* in Herodotus, they march well behind the king's chariot (the group of 4,000 appears directly behind Cyrus).

⁶⁶ On this, see Berve (n. 15), 125, where some reservations are expressed. Sekunda (n. 5), 31, uses this *locus* to support his contention that 'The Immortals were re-established by Alexander', but this seems to be pushing the evidence too far. Sekunda's surmise is odd given that he (quite correctly) does not admit to the Immortals being active under Darius III.

⁶⁷ M. Brosius, 'Alexander and the Persians', in J. Roisman (ed.), *Brill's Companion to Alexander the Great* (Leiden and Boston, 2003), 169–93, at 174, seems to interpret *Arr. An.* 7.29.4 as Alexander introducing the *μηλοφόροι* *holus-bolus* into the Macedonian army; see also Berve (n. 15), 125.

⁶⁸ Aelian writes of 500 *μηλοφόροι*, 500 *ἀργυράσπιδες* of Macedonian origin and 1,000 archers stationed inside Alexander's tent. Further protection was provided by 'high-born boys' (*nobiles pueri*), as Curtius notes at 10.5.8; see also 10.6.1 (*corporis eius custodes*), and cf. 5.1.42. For commentary, see Collins (n. 15), 264–5. It is possible that Chares of Mytilene, who wrote about life at court, was Phylarchus' source; see Jacoby's commentary to *FGrH* 125 F 4; on Chares, see O. Lendle, *Einführung in die griechische Geschichtsschreibung: von Hekataios bis Zosimos* (Darmstadt, 1992), 160–2; K. Meister, *Die griechische Geschichtsschreibung. Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende des Hellenismus* (Stuttgart, Berlin and Cologne, 1990), 107–8.

were admitted into the hypaspists attached to the court', and ii) to Justin's broadly similar testimony at 12.12.4.⁶⁹

Despite Curtius' silence regarding Issus and Gaugamela (perhaps indicative of his sources' lack of quality),⁷⁰ he was aware of the Immortals, if not the *μηλοφόροι* *per se*. This is demonstrated by his description (3.3.13) of Darius' marching column before Issus, where the Ten Thousand Immortals are mentioned. The problem, here, is that we cannot be sure whence Curtius derives his information. At first glance the vignette seems to be based to some degree on Herodotus, or else sources themselves based on Herodotus,⁷¹ but the description of the king's appearance at 3.3.17–19 is clearly not from Herodotus 7.40–1. Together with the comparable parade in the *Cyropaedia* (8.3.1–34, and especially 8.3.9–18), it is perhaps advisable to view all three instances as essentially independent pieces of evidence to demonstrate that military processions were an important feature of Achaemenid behaviour.⁷² After the Immortals came the 'the king's kindred' (*cognatos regis*), to the tune of 15,000 men (3.3.14); and, afterwards, a troop supposedly entrusted with caring for the 'royal robes' (*uestem ... regalem*).⁷³ According to Curtius (3.3.15), these were the *doryphoroe*, a word arguably equivalent to *μηλοφόροι*, as discussed above,⁷⁴ but which may derive from Xenophon rather than Herodotus, at least in

⁶⁹ Collins (n. 15), 264–5, with C. Tuplin, 'Persian decor in *Cyropaedia*: some observations', in H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and J.W. Drijvers (edd.), *Achaemenid History V* (Leiden, 1990), 17–29, at 22.

⁷⁰ Cf. A.R. Burn, 'Notes on Alexander's campaigns, 332–330', *JHS* 72 (1952), 81–91, at 82, who credits Curtius with using the good 'Mercenaries' Source', seemingly ignored by Arrian, for aspects of the campaigns – though apparently not Gaugamela.

⁷¹ Atkinson (n. 3), 12. Curtius' Immortals, who marched after the chariot consecrated to Jupiter (presumably equivalent to Herodotus' chariot bearing an image of 'Zeus' at 7.40.4), were more bedecked in gold ornamentation than any other Persian unit, again recalling Herodotus, this time at 7.83.2. H. Bardon, 'Quinte Curce historien', *LEC* 15 (1947), 193–220, at 130, criticizes Curtius – without explanation – for imprecise phraseology and cites *ad decem milia*, found at 3.3.13.

⁷² I thank *CQ*'s anonymous referee for this observation. J. Dillery, 'Xenophon, the military review and Hellenistic *pompai*', in C. Tuplin and V. Azoulay (edd.), *Xenophon and his World. Papers from a Conference Held in Liverpool in July 1999*, *Historia Einzelschriften* 172 (Stuttgart, 2004), 259–76, at 268, stresses the point that Xenophon's parade, though invented, is 'unique' because it is a solely a procession, and not an example of troops in readiness for war being reviewed.

⁷³ P. Goukowsky, 'Le cortège des «rois de Babylone», *BAI* 12 (1998), 69–77, at 71–3, argues that the text should read '*doryphorae vocabantur proximum his agmen, <deinde diphrophorae> soliti vestem excipere regalem; hi currum regis anteibant* etc.', and that *vestis* refers to the carpet on which the king walked. Indeed, Heraclides (*FGH* 689 F 1 = *Ath.* 12.514c) refers to very fine Sardian carpets used exclusively by the king; see also images from Persepolis at W. Hinz, *Altiranische Funde und Forschungen* (Berlin, 1969), p. 71, pl. 22 and p. 73, pl. 23, where figures carry rolled-up carpets.

⁷⁴ See Atkinson (n. 3), 123, though Marquart (n. 22), 57 is adamant that they are '*μηλοφόροι* oder *δορυφόροι*'. J.C. Rolfe (tr.), *Quintus Curtius I*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA and London, 1946), 83 n. h, obviously reflecting the notion that the *μηλοφόροι* were part of the Ten Thousand, states that 'The *Doryphoroe* were chosen as the king's body-guard from among the "Immortals"'; he also notes the discrepancy between the men's name and their function; cf. Atkinson (n. 3), 126, with Xen. *Cyr.* 8.3.15–16. Curtius (3.3.20) records the presence, immediately after the king's chariot, of 10,000 spearmen (*hastati*) carrying spears decorated with silver and a point of gold. Atkinson (n. 3), 130, claims that 'This group could be the Immortals ..., but only a thousand of them had spears adorned with gold' (a reflection of *Hdt.* 7.41.2). It is possible that Curtius is describing *two* lots of 10,000 infantry – if the *hastati* are indeed foot soldiers.

the context of the Persian infantry guard.⁷⁵ Still, Collins argues, not without reason, that *doryphoroe* was ‘probably a later scribal miscorrection of *dorophorae* ... [a transcription of *δωροφόροι*] that referred to the Persian “gift bearers” ... rather than to the Royal bodyguards’.⁷⁶ This would render the passage even more useless for our purposes. The king himself followed in his chariot, flanked on either side by two hundred of Darius’ noblest relatives (Curt. 3.3.15–21). Atkinson comments that there were two ‘distinct groups’ described as ‘the Bodyguards’, that is, ‘a corps of professional soldiers attached to the court, and an élite unit made up of 1000 of the Immortals’ (as is perhaps described at Hdt. 7.40–1).⁷⁷ He does not state which troops are the *μηλοφόροι*. Whatever the case, Curtius’ ‘testimony’ is hopelessly confusing.

So, *argumenta ex silentio* aside, there is insufficient cause to believe that the Ten Thousand were present at Gaugamela (or indeed Issus). Aristobulus’ order of battle is quite clear on this point, even if we cannot be sure that the units listed were actually deployed as such.⁷⁸ On the one hand, it could be supposed – presuming that the *ἀθάνατοι* still existed – that the Ten Thousand, together with other heavy infantry units, had been annihilated at Issus, and that only the *μηλοφόροι* could be assembled for Gaugamela; on the other, Darius clearly intended Gaugamela to be a cavalry battle, more so given the revivification of the Persian chariot corps (200 strong).⁷⁹ The two concepts may even be interconnected, with the recourse to cavalry and chariots being necessitated by the loss of the best Persian infantry, that is, the *κάρδακες* and the Greek mercenaries, at Issus.⁸⁰ Where all this comes unstuck is with the failure of any source to mention the Ten Thousand, or indeed the *μηλοφόροι* in this battle. True, there is nothing to say that they were *not* part of the 60,000 *κάρδακες* supposedly present (if it is presumed that these soldiers were indeed line-of-battle infantry), but strong doubts persist. Curtius (3.3.13) alludes to the *ἀθάνατοι* in the build-up to Issus, but the passage in question seems to be a mishmash of various source traditions. The verdict as to the Ten Thousand’s continued existence in the reign of Darius III must therefore remain ‘*non liquet*’, though a specialist royal guard, seemingly one of the groups of 1,000 *αἰχμοφόροι* mentioned by Herodotus, evidently continued.

III. BUILDING A MORE COHESIVE PICTURE

Although the material provided by the ancient sources is not wholly reconcilable, it is at least possible to establish a clearer picture of the infantry components of the

⁷⁵ At *Cyr.* 7.5.68, Xenophon writes that 10,000 Persian *δορυφόροι* kept guard at the Great King’s palace, always travelled with him, and still existed (accompanying either the king or stationed at Babylon) at the time of writing; but cf. *Cyr.* 8.3.9, 15–16. Briant (n. 20), 273, also identifies Curtius’ *Doryphoroe* as the *μηλοφόροι*; more tentatively, Collins (n. 15), 263–4. Note Diod. Sic. 17.77.4, where Alexander appoints Oxyathres, Darius III’s brother, as one of the *δορυφόροι*; but cf. Curt. 6.2.11 (*in cohortem amicorum*) and 7.5.40 (*inter corporis custodes*).

⁷⁶ Collins (n. 15), 268, n. 47, following the reasoning of W. Heckel, ‘*Doryphoroe* in Curtius 3.1.15 again’, *RhM* 135 (1992), 191–2.

⁷⁷ Atkinson (n. 3), 126: ‘cf. the term “somatophylakes” in Arrian’; see Badian (n. 54), 161.

⁷⁸ On this, see Charles (n. 54), 9–23.

⁷⁹ See Arr. *An.* 3.8.6; Curt. 4.9.4; Diod. Sic. 17.53.1.

⁸⁰ See Marsden (n. 54), 5. Briant (n. 20), 121 notes the absence of *κάρδακες* in Arrian’s description of Persian infantry at Gaugamela.

Persian standing army. This is particularly the case if the more derivative accounts, which sometimes smack of historical fantasy, are not accorded a high degree of authority. Indeed, when all the available written evidence for the Immortals and Apple Bearers is considered, only two significant accounts of genuinely independent evidential value remain (allowing for the fact that we do not have access to their own sources), viz. Herodotus' *Histories* and Arrian's *Anabasis*. The other sources add little else to these two accounts and, in some cases, further problematize what sense we *can* make of Herodotus and Arrian, especially with respect to unit deployment and numbers.⁸¹ Despite these problems, some inferences can be drawn.

Together with corroborating details provided by Arrian about the army of Darius III, and the accounts of Diodorus Siculus and Curtius Rufus to a lesser extent, Herodotus' information confirms that those whom he refers to as the most highly-ranked Persian infantry comprised a unit of 1,000 rather than 10,000. This was the case in both Xerxes' reign and that of Darius III. The *μηλοφόροι*, if we identify the unit thus, therefore constituted the true royal guard of the Persian infantry and, what is more, seem to have existed throughout the period concerning us here. But even more substantial outcomes are possible. Despite the testimony of our sources referring to enormous Persian hosts, the evidence assembled indicates that the number of truly Persian infantry, and perhaps Median (and Elamite?) by extension, serving under the Great King, was relatively small – especially during times of peace. There is some conjecture about the ethnic composition of the so-called Immortals. The *μηλοφόροι* were almost certainly ethnic Persians, yet it has been supposed that the *ἀθάνατοι* may have included other peoples, mainly on the basis of the sculptures of Persepolis and the coloured bricks of Susa ('Medes' with tunic and trousers, 'Persians' wearing robes), though the modern interpretations of this evidentiary material are far from certain.⁸²

In short, the Ten Thousand, despite what is generally contended, was also not an elite force in the modern sense. This has been touched on by other authors, but the material presented herein suggests that even stronger conclusions can be drawn. The *ἀθάνατοι*, so long as they existed, constituted a kind of palatine army that formed, together with the 10,000 cavalry, the rump of the overall Persian military capacity, with other infantry being raised from the satrapies as needed – at least until shortly after Xerxes' death.⁸³ While many authors call the Immortals 'superb', 'elite', 'crack' or similar epithets,⁸⁴ it is likely that they were merely better trained and organized than the provincial forces. They were superior in that

⁸¹ Arrian is perhaps guilty of presenting a somewhat lacunose account of the battles described herein; on this, see Charles (n. 54), 20.

⁸² On this, see Bowie (n. 21), 204; Cawkwell (n. 22), 238; Cuyler Young (n. 20), 91; Gabriel (n. 28), 159. Olmstead (n. 20), 238, contends that Medes and Elamites as well as Persians constituted the *ἀθάνατοι*. These assertions are based on the sculptures of Persepolis and the coloured bricks of Susa ('Medes' with tunic and trousers, 'Persians' wearing robes); see also Hdt. 7.62.1, with Bittner (n. 5), 254–60. Head (n. 5), 10, however, sensibly contends that 'Median dress might not always imply Medes'; but cf. 12 and 20–2.

⁸³ E. Meyer, *Geschichte des Alterthums* III (Stuttgart, 1901), 70. Frye (n. 3 [1972]), 91, points out the existence of 'city garrisons', but notes that the 'central army' was 'probably mainly the royal guard'; see also G.B. Grundy, *The Great Persian War and its Preliminaries: A Study of the Evidence, Literary and Topographical* (London, 1901), 44; Wade-Gery (n. 20), 215–18.

⁸⁴ See Bowie (n. 21), 204; Burn (n. 41), 320; Cawkwell (n. 22), 214, n. 3; K. Farrokh, *Shadows in the Desert: Ancient Persia at War* (Botley, Oxford and New York, 2007), 75 (though no mention of the *μηλοφόροι*); Green (n. 18), 60; Head (n. 5), 12; Hignett (n. 32), 41; Marquart (n. 22), 24; Maurice (n. 27), 228; Obst (n. 12), 87; Pagliaro (n. 3), 149; Rahe (n. 47), 79; Schmitt (n. 3), 2; Shabazi (n. 1), 492; Tallis (n. 3), 214; Wiesehöfer (n. 3), 91.

sense, but not elite *per se*. Furthermore, the Ten Thousand were surely part of the force described by Isocrates (4.145) as ‘the army which wanders about with the king’ (τὴν στρατιὰν τὴν μετὰ τοῦ βασιλέως περιπολοῦσαν).⁸⁵ This reflects the words of Darius I in the famous Behistun Inscription (‘The Persian and Median army, which was under [the control of] me, that was a small thing’, 2 line 18).⁸⁶ Cawkwell is not far off the mark with his view that ‘The alleged Palatine army was no more than the Royal Guards’.⁸⁷ But, as suggested previously, the Immortals were not really a guard unit in a modern sense – that honour, at least among the infantry, fell to the *μηλοφόροι*, and possibly (to some extent) to the mysterious unit of *αἰχμοφόροι* described by Herodotus at 7.40.2 – at least if Sekunda’s surmise is dismissed.

One final question remains: were the *μηλοφόροι*, the elite of the Persian standing army, part of the Ten Thousand, as the majority of commentators suggest, or a separate unit? The evidence is not entirely consistent. Athenaeus (12.514c), borrowing from Heraclides of Cumae, clearly holds that they were drawn (*ἐκλεγόμενοι*) from the Ten Thousand, while Herodotus suggests that the Apple Bearers were a separate unit *outside* the Ten Thousand. What follows is conjecture, but it is possible that the *μηλοφόροι* were selected from the Ten Thousand on account of their ethnicity, experience or fighting prowess, just as Napoleon, by way of example, sought Old Guard replacements from the more senior and distinguished ranks of his Middle and Young Guard (both of which formed part of the combined *Garde Impériale*, which was, in reality, a small army). The Immortals, in order to maintain their constant numerical strength, must then have recruited new members, some of whom might eventually become *μηλοφόροι*, if they were of the appropriate ethnicity. The only alternative is to hold that Herodotus was entirely mistaken at 7.40–1 when he described more than 10,000 Persian infantry.⁸⁸

There is potentially further evidence to support the entirely separate nature of the *μηλοφόροι*. When Xerxes retired from Greece after the debacle at Salamis, it would be expected that any personal guard unit would have accompanied the

⁸⁵ Isocrates does not mention whether this force was comprised of infantry or cavalry, but one might well presume both; see Wade-Gery (n. 20), 215; with Xen. *Oec.* 4.6, on the Great King’s annual review of his military forces (including ‘mercenaries’ or *μισθοφόροι*). Cawkwell (n. 22), 238, adduces Xenophon’s account in the *Cyropaedia* (7.5.66–70), where we are told that all the best men were kept together; see Briant (n. 20), 272, with 197. E. Delebecque (ed. and tr.), *Xenophon. Cyropédie* III, Collection Budé (Paris, 1978), 112, fails to provide any useful insights.

⁸⁶ Translation of R. Schmitt, *The Bisitun Inscriptions of Darius the Great: Old Persian Text* (London, 1991), 57; cf. that of R.G. Kent, *Old Persian*² (New Haven, 1953), 123: ‘The Persian and Median army which was with me, this was a small (force)’; and P. Lecoq, *Les inscriptions de la Perse achéménide* (Paris, 1997), 196: ‘L’armée perse et mède qui était avec moi était peu nombreuse’; see also A. Andrewes, ‘Thucydides and the Persians’, *Historia* 10 (1961), 1–18, at 17. Note that, at the same *locus*, a certain Hydarnes was made their leader; cf. Hdt. 7.83.1, where the Immortals are commanded by ‘Hydarnes son of Hydarnes’. The *locus* also corroborates, to some degree, the view that the name *ἀθάνατοι* was a mistranslation of the Persian *amūšiyā* or ‘followers [of the Great King]’; on this, see n. 3. This also perhaps affirms the suggestion (discussed at n. 82) that the Immortals were composed of Persian *and* Median troops.

⁸⁷ Cawkwell (n. 22), 238. Cook (n. 12), 53, holds that Cyrus instituted the practice of a standing army of 10,000 Persian infantrymen loyal to him alone, who were later called ‘Immortals’, in addition to 10,000 cavalry (‘and perhaps similar forces of Medes’).

⁸⁸ *CQ*’s anonymous referee, by way of a further analogy, made the pertinent observation that the men picked from the *ἀθάνατοι* to join the *μηλοφόροι* no more have to remain members of their previous unit than ‘the best oarsmen’ (τοὺς ἀρίστους ἐρέτας) taken by Conon from ships at Mytilene in 406 B.C. to equip an escape ship remain crew members of their former ships (Xen. *Hell.* 1.6.19).

king – especially since Hydarnes, the chiliarch and thus normal commander of the *μηλοφόροι*, decided to return with his sovereign. But Herodotus' possible reference to *μηλοφόροι* as Mardonius' guard at 9.63.1 suggests otherwise. That Mardonius selected the Immortals *and*, as is argued above, this unit at 8.113.2 adds weight to the view that the *μηλοφόροι* were not part of the Ten Thousand, but could still campaign together. This was the case even if the king had retired from the field, though Briant does put forward the view that 'Les mélophores étaient attachés en permanence à la personne du roi'.⁸⁹ From what has been argued here, this does not seem to have been the case.

IV. CONCLUSION

A much better understanding of the Persian standing infantry of the Achaemenid era is possible, although the Ten Thousand and the Persian royal guard must remain enigmatic. This investigation, however, makes it clear that the royal guard, known to the Greeks as the *μηλοφόροι*, was the true elite regiment of Persian infantry throughout the Achaemenid period, while the so-called Immortals, by way of contrast, comprised the permanent Persian infantry in the Great King's service – at least while this collective entity lasted. It is not possible, however, to offer any clarity regarding the other 1,000-strong unit of *αἰχμοφόροι* described by Herodotus, although the suggestion that the two groups are halves of the same 1,000-strong unit of *μηλοφόροι* could well be meritorious.⁹⁰ The fame of the Immortals among the Greeks was not because they possessed any extraordinary military prowess but because they constituted a standing army of 10,000.⁹¹ They were thus superior (excepting the *αἰχμοφόροι*) to other Persian infantry units on account of their constant state of readiness and royal rather than satrapal association. While this is not remarkable from a modern perspective, it must have been a source of wonder to the Greeks, whose standing armies, if such they could be called, were very small indeed, or in some cases practically non-existent. Furthermore, this analysis refutes the widely accepted notion that the *μηλοφόροι* were part of the *ἀθάνατοι*, rather than a wholly separate unit. To suggest otherwise calls into question several passages of Herodotus, yet nobody has yet mounted a compelling case as to why his material relating to the Ten Thousand and the Apple Bearers should be discounted. Herodotus, though his initial account of the Persian infantry remains rather muddled, suggests elsewhere that the royal guard operated independently of the *ἀθάνατοι*. Likewise, Arrian's reference to the *μηλοφόροι* at Gaugamela without any hint of the Immortals – a formation surely known to the author and which seemingly did not exist by the time of Darius III – is highly suggestive of the independent nature of the royal guard. What became of the so-called Immortals, however, remains a mystery.

Southern Cross University, Australia

MICHAEL B. CHARLES

michael.charles@scu.edu.au

⁸⁹ Briant (n. 20), 273.

⁹⁰ Sekunda (n. 5), 7.

⁹¹ Cuyler Young (n. 20), 90.