

# The Armies of Ancient Persia: The Sassanians

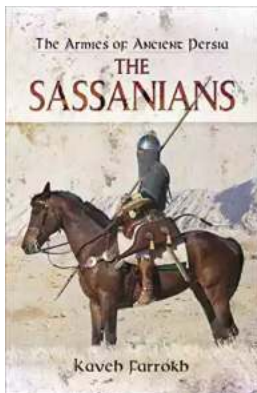


Ancient Persia has a rich and glorious history that stretches back thousands of years. Among the many great empires that ruled Persia, the Sassanians, also known as the Sassanian Empire or the Neo-Persian Empire, stood out as one of the most formidable powers in the ancient world. The Sassanian armies,

renowned for their military prowess and organizational skills, played a crucial role in shaping the empire's success and dominance.

## Rise of the Sassanian Empire

The Sassanian Empire emerged in the early 3rd century CE, following the fall of the Parthian Empire. Led by Ardashir I, the Sassanians aimed to restore Persian greatness and assert their authority over the region. Under the Sassanian rule, Persia experienced a cultural and military renaissance, and their armies were at the core of this revival.



### The Armies of Ancient Persia: The Sassanians

by Bernard Lewis (Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.6 out of 5

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## Composition and Structure

The Sassanian armies consisted of various units, each with its own specialized role on the battlefield. The backbone of their forces was the heavily armored cavalry known as the "Cataphracts." These elite horsemen formed the cavalry's frontline and were feared for their charging charges and impenetrable armor. Behind the Cataphracts, the regular cavalry and infantry stood ready to support and reinforce their comrades when needed.

The Sassanians heavily relied on archery, and their skilled horse archers played a vital role in their military strategy. These mounted archers were known for their exceptional accuracy and agility, capable of firing arrows with deadly precision while quickly maneuvering across the battlefield. Their ranged attacks inflicted significant damage and disrupted enemy formations, making them a force to be reckoned with.

## **Warfare Tactics**

Unlike their predecessors, the Sassanian armies adopted a more aggressive and offensive approach to warfare. They preferred open-field battles, where their cavalry superiority and archery skills could be effectively utilized. The Sassanians often deployed their troops in a crescent formation, known as the "horns of the bull." This formation allowed for coordinated attacks from both flanks while protecting their center, offering them a tactical advantage over their opponents.

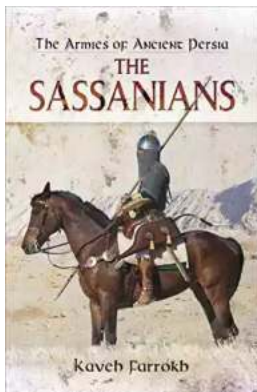
Their military commanders were also adept at psychological warfare. They would often use various strategies to intimidate and demoralize their enemies. Examples include deploying war elephants, unleashing arrows during ceasefires, or launching surprise night attacks. These tactics aimed to break the enemy's morale and disrupt their formations, ultimately leading to their defeat.

## **Legacy and Decline**

The Sassanians enjoyed several victories and expanded their empire significantly. However, like all great empires, internal conflicts and external pressures eventually led to their decline. The Arab conquests of the 7th century dealt a severe blow to the Sassanian Empire, leading to its eventual downfall. Nevertheless, their military legacy and influence endured, and numerous medieval dynasties drew inspiration from their tactics and organization.

Today, the remnants of the Sassanian Empire can still be seen in the archaeological sites scattered across modern-day Iran and Iraq. These include grand palaces, fortresses, and even rock reliefs depicting scenes of battles and military formations. The Sassanian armies may have faded into history, but the memory of their military might and strategic brilliance lives on.

The ancient Persians, particularly the Sassanians, were renowned for their military prowess and tactical innovations. Their armies, consisting of fearsome cavalry, skilled archers, and brilliant commanders, helped establish the Sassanian Empire as a dominant force in the ancient world. Their legacy continues to inspire military strategists and historians alike, reminding us of the importance of effective organization, disciplined training, and innovative tactics on the battlefield.



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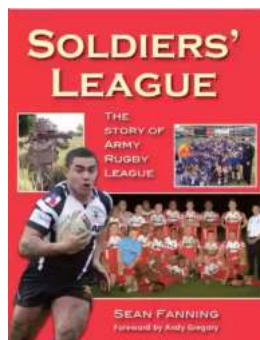
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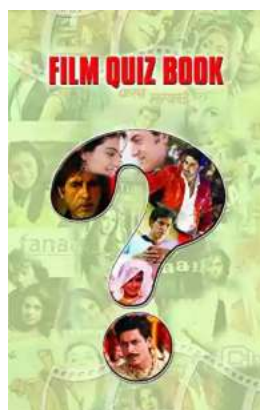
Throughout most of the classical period, Persia was one of the great superpowers, placing a limit on the expansion of Western powers. It was the most formidable rival to the Roman empire for centuries, until Persia, by then under the Sassanians, was overwhelmed by the Islamic conquests in the seventh century

AD. Yet, the armies of ancient Persia have received relatively little detailed attention, certainly in comparison to those of Rome. This work is the first of three volumes that will form the most comprehensive study of ancient Persian armies available. The Sassanians, the native Iranian dynasty that ousted their Parthian overlords in AD 226, developed a highly sophisticated army that was able for centuries to hold off all comers. They continued the Parthians famous winning combination of swift horse archers with heavily-armored cataphract cavalry, also making much use of war elephants, but Kaveh Farrokh interestingly demonstrates that their oft-maligned infantry has been much underestimated. The author, born in Athens, Greece, and expert in ancient Persian languages and military history, has been researching the military history and technology of Persia for a quarter of a century. He draws on the latest research and new archaeological evidence, focusing on the organization, equipment and tactics of the armies that dominated the ancient Middle East for so long.



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