



**Muhammad A. Dandamayev** (Sankt-Petersburg, Russia)

## CENTRAL ASIAN SOLDIERS IN ACHAEMENID BABYLONIA

**Keywords:** Chorasmians, Sakai, Arumāya, Achaemenid Babylonia

The Persian state of the Achaemenid period was the first world empire. It was founded between 550 and 510 B.C., and its borders stretched from Egypt to Central Asia and north-western India. Intensive processes of syncretism of cultures and religious ideas of many various nations were characteristic for this period. The Persian state administration established in many countries military colonies which included representatives of various nations of the empire. In particular, we know about these processes from Babylonian administrative and economic documents where many individuals from various parts of the empire, including Central Asian immigrants, are referred to. The Persian administration not infrequently appointed to the administrative apparatus individuals who were not indigenous inhabitants of the country.

After the capture of Babylonia by the Persians, this fertile country became more accessible to immigrants and besides the state administration established there military colonies consisting of Persians, Medes, Lydians, Carians and other ethnic groups, including also inhabitants from Central Asia. It would be appropriate to begin this survey from Chorasmians.

A Chorasmian<sup>1</sup> Dadaparna' by name is referred to in a document drafted in the fifth regnal year of the Persian king Cyrus, i.e. 534 B.C. (UCP 9/II, 38:7). The same Chorasmian is mentioned also in UCP 9/II, 39. These texts have been studied by Zadok.<sup>2</sup> Both documents have been discovered at Uruk and probably belonged to the archives of the Eanna temple which was located there. As seen

---

<sup>1</sup> [Hur-zi]-ma-a-a (see UCP 9/II, 38:7). Cf. Old Persian Uvārazmī- and Humarizmu- ("Chorasmia") in the Babylonian version of the Behistun inscription.

<sup>2</sup> Zadok 1976, 214; 1981, 658.

from them, Dadaparna' was a messenger sent by the royal administration in order to take care of some property which belonged to the state.

According to another document from the Eanna archives, in 527 B.C. the administration of the same temple was ordered to send fifty temple slaves in order to serve as archers at the disposal of a Chorasmian<sup>3</sup> who was a superior of a fortified outpost located near Uruk and one more individual who was a Babylonian. The name of this Chorasmian is broken off. Another document from the reign of Cyrus or Cambyses (the date is destroyed) mentions a Chorasmian (Hur-zi-ma-a-a) Ukiriia by name who served as the manager of the palm grove belonging to the royal manor in Amanu, near Uruk.<sup>4</sup> Finally, a Chorasmian (Hur-zi-ma-a-a) by the name Ubaratta is referred to among several witnesses of a promissory note drafted in Babylon in 505 B.C.<sup>5</sup>

Babylonian documents of the Achaemenid period contain much more information about Sakai. As known, the Persians called all the Scythian tribes Sakai. They and Persians spoke closely related languages and could understand each other without translators. They, along with the Persians, Medes and Bactrians constituted the nuclear of the Achaemenid army. The Babylonian texts call the Sakai "Cimmerians" (Gimirrāja) using the name of the tribes that penetrated the Near East from the Black Sea region in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. In the Persian and Elamite versions of the Achaemenid inscriptions, the Scythian tribes are designated as Sakai, while in the Babylonian versions of the same inscriptions they are called Cimmerians using archaic ethnic nomenclature. The only Babylonian text which refers to Sakai is *CT* 55, No. 93 (line 9) written in Sippar during the reign of Darius I. In this text a certain Dēmishi bears the ethnic name Sakai. The Sakai tribes supplied the Achaemenid army with a substantial number of mounted bowmen who were accustomed to permanent military life and who served in the Persian garrisons in Babylonia, Egypt and other countries. The Persian administration created military colonies out of representatives of various peoples in Babylonia and other countries. The colonists were distributed among the military districts and received allotments of land. For instance, in 529 B.C. the Persian governor of Babylonia, Gubāru (Gobrias) ordered to transfer for use to the "Cimmerians" and "Subareans" a canal for the irrigation of their fields (*BE* 8, No. 80). According to another document which was drafted in Babylon in 505 B.C. a "Cimmerian" named Sakita together with a Chorasmian and some other individuals are mentioned as witnesses of a business transaction.<sup>6</sup> Also it can be mentioned

<sup>3</sup> *YOS* 7, No. 154:11: URU Hur-zi-ma-a-a

<sup>4</sup> Moore 1939, 89,51.

<sup>5</sup> Strassmeier 1897, 458, 14.

<sup>6</sup> Strassmeier 1897, 458.

here a document from the city of Dilbat drafted in 489 B.C. where a field belonging to a “Cimmerian” is referred to.<sup>7</sup>

Gimirrāja (i.e. Sakai) are also mentioned frequently in Babylonian administrative and business documents of the Achaemenid period as royal soldiers who were members of the military colonies established by the Persian administration. Documents from the archive of the Murashu business house contain many references to the “Cimmerians” (Gimirrāja), who judging by the parallel Old Persian and Elamite versions of the trilingual Achaemenid inscriptions, were the Sakai. For instance, as seen from the document *BE* 10, No. 97 drafted in Nippur in 420 B.C. Rimut-Ninurta who was a member of the business house of Murashu paid to the “foreman of the Cimmerians” Taddannu, son of Tīrijama, as royal taxes two minas of silver and some products (beer, flour, barley, etc.) as a one year rent from bow fiefs which were rented out to the Murashu firm. Taddannu is a Semitic name, but his father Tīrijama bore an Iranian name. As seen from another document the house of Murashu paid the royal tax for rented land to Tīribazu, son of Humata and brother of Tīriparna, the chief of “Cimmerians” (they both are Iranian names). They apparently were representatives of Central Asian Sakai of the Haumavarga or Tigrakhauda, from whom the Persian administration had established military colonies near Nippur. In 417 B.C. some “Cimmerians” paid two minas forty shekels of silver as royal tax on grain fields from seven bow fiefs located near Nippur.<sup>8</sup> Thus, military colonies of “Cimmerians” existed around Nippur in the second half of the fifth century B.C. Sometimes the “Cimmerians” rented out their fiefs to the Murashu business house, which paid rent to the holders of these fiefs and taxes in grain, beer, sheep, etc. as well as money destined for the king. By the fifth century B.C. these Sakai had adapted themselves to local customs and even often gave their children Babylonian names.

As known, Sakai served in the army mainly as equestrian archers. Besides, one document from Uruk dated to the sixth regnal year of Cambyses (524 B.C.) indicates that some Sakai also served in Babylonia as sailors (*VAS* 20, No. 49). As seen from this text, 60 liters of flour were issued to the “Cimmerians” Ushukaja and Tattakkaja who were in charge of ships. Their names are Iranian. Thus some of the Sakai soldiers in Babylonia took care of boats which carried loads at the order of the royal administration. This document was discovered in Uruk during archaeological excavations. In this connection can be mentioned Herodotus’ (7.96) statement that during the Persian invasion into Greece on their ships were, along with Persians and Medes, also Sakai.

In some Babylonian documents we also encounter the ethnic designation Arumāja (LÚ Ar-ú-ma-a-a) which designated soldiers from some part of Central

<sup>7</sup> See Roth 1989/1990:55 with reference to BM 92799:16.

<sup>8</sup> Krückmann 1933, No. 189.

Asia (*BE* 9, No. 74:8; 10:111:7, etc.). All references to them are in the Murashu documents from Nippur of the second half of the fifth century B.C. They were military colonists, mainly holders of bow fiefs which were located in five settlements in the Nippur region. According to one document from 425 B.C. eight “Cimmerian” colonists received rent (two minas of silver, three sheep, etc.) for their bow fields, which had been let out to the house of Murashu (*BE* 9, No. 74). Almost all their names were Iranian (Baga, Ispataru, Tīridata, Patishtana, Bagadāta, etc.), as were as their patronymics (Aturamanu, Ahratush, Ushtabazanu, etc.). Among them Baga, Tīridata and Bagadāta again received a rental payment from the house of Murashu for their allotments after a period of seven years (*PBS* II/1, No. 122). One of the chiefs of this ethnic group was Bel-iddin (a Babylonian name), the son of Bagadāta (Iranian name). Often they rented out their allotments of land to the Murashu business house.

For many years scholars considered that this ethnic name denoted inhabitants of the country Aria, or Areia (the Old Persian Harāiva-, Avestan Harōiva, etc.). The Greek authors called them Areioi or Arioi. Harāiva lay to the east of Parthia, on the territory of Herat in modern Afghanistan. But now the opinion that Arumāja was the name of the inhabitants of Haraiva is considered to be insolvent or at least doubtful since in the Babylonian versions of the Achaemenid inscriptions the Old Persian Haraiva is transcribed as Ar-ri-e-mu and not Areia<sup>9</sup>. Therefore so far it is difficult to identify Arumāja with confidence with any ethnic group, but nevertheless it is apparent that they belonged to the group of the eastern Iranian tribes.

## Abbreviations

- AfO* *Archiv für Orientforschung*  
*BE* *The Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania, Series A: Cuneiform Texts* (Philadelphia).  
*BM* *Tablets in the collection of the British Museum*  
*CT* *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum*  
*PBS* *University of Pennsylvania. The Museum, Publications of the Babylonian Section.*  
*UCP* *University of California Publications in Semitic Philology* (Berkeley, California).  
*VAS* *Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler* (Berlin).  
*YOS* *Yale Oriental Series, Babylonian Texts.*

<sup>9</sup> See Stolper 1985, 72; Schmitt 1994, 98; Tavernier 2007, 287.

## Bibliography

- Krückmann, O. 1933: *Neubabylonische Rechts- und Verwaltungstexte* (Texte and Materialien der Frau Professor Hilprecht Collection of Babylonian Antiquities im Eigentum der Universität Jena 2/3), Leipzig.
- Moore, E.W. 1939: *Neo-Babylonian Documents in the University of Michigan Collection*, Ann Arbor.
- Roth, M.T. 1989/90: 'The Material Composition of the Neo-Babylonian Dowry' *AfO* 36/37, 1–55.
- Schmitt, R. 1994: Review of M. Dandamayev, *Iranians in Achaemenid Babylonia*, *Kratylos* 39, 82–89.
- Stolper, M.W. 1985: *Entrepreneurs and Empire. The Murašû Archive, the Murašû Firm, and Persian Rule in Babylonia*, Leiden.
- Strassmeier, J.N. 1897: *Inschriften von Darius, König of Babylon*, Leipzig.
- Tavernier, J. 2007: *Iranica in the Achaemenid Period (ca. 550–530 B.C.)* (*Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 158), Leuven.
- Zadok, R. 1976: Review of W. Hinz, *Altiranisches Sprachgut der Nebenüberlieferungen*, (Wiesbaden 1975), *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 33, 213–219.
- Zadok, R. 1977: 'Iranians and Individuals Bearing Iranian Names in Achaemenian Babylonia' *Israel Oriental Studies* 7, 89–138.
- Zadok, R. 1981: Review of E.N. Voigtlander, *The Bisitun Inscription of Darius the Great. Babylonian Version* (London 1978), *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 38, 657–665.

## Abstract

This paper contains information on the military service of Central Asian soldiers in Babylonia during 539–331 B.C., when this country was a satrapy of the Achaemenid Persian empire. Among these soldiers were Chorasmians, Sakai and warriors from Arumāja. These soldiers were settled mainly in the region of Nippur allotting for their service parcels of land which were called “fiefs of the bow” for which they had to perform military service.