

# **“Ce fameux bâton qu’on a dans sa giberne”: So you want to be an Assyrian Officer?**

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*Abstract:* “Ce fameux bâton qu’on a dans sa giberne”, *this famous staff we all have in our cartridge box*, is a reference to a French proverb employed in the armies of Napoléon I<sup>er</sup>. This quote meant that the most common private had virtually all the chances to receive the staff of field-marshal, the highest military dignity, in his cartridge box.

Several French officers and field-marshals, mostly from the lowest social origins, came to power only thanks to their prowess during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.

On a lot of aspects, the Revolutionary and Napoleonic armies can be compared with the Neo-Assyrian *kisir šarruti*, as long as polyvalence, meritocracy and organization are concerned.

In that respect, a first census of all the skills demonstrated by the archers in the Neo-Assyrian army, and their relation to power, can help to understand how long and hard was the way to a commanding position, moreover for those of the lowest social origins.<sup>2</sup>

*Keywords:* Assyrian, archer, training, officer, warfare, tactics, drill, chariotry, alphabetization, command class, hierarchy, specialty, siegecraft, hospital, armouries.

## **Introduction**

When the firearms started to widespread among the European armies during the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, the tendency to rely on armored pikemen to protect the shooters with their 6 m long shafts was still at its apogee. With time and practice, commanders understood how fast the training of a musketeer was, how

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<sup>1</sup> To my dearest father, who taught me the trade of warfare, and always had the time to answer my questions with accuracy.

<sup>2</sup> See also De Backer, forthcoming (d).

destructive a trained musketeer was, and how cheap a firearm was, compared to the costs of training and armour for the pikeman.

More than that, the volleys of muskets could stop a cavalry charge as well as a wall of pikes, without the cumbersome aspect of the shafts, as firearms were hardly longer than a mere 1,50 m, and with the supplementary advantages of longer range and faster mobility.

The pikemen were still considered the noble weapon, for their training was long and hard, something demonstrated by the books of Wallhausen and Van Breen, among others.<sup>3</sup> The noble pike had proved its devastating effects in the field, with peasants from Strasbourg taking over the Austrian cavalry of Duke Leopold, or the Swiss people slaughtering the French cavalry of King François I<sup>er</sup> during the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The never-ending conflicts democratized the firearms, and the revolutionary ideas of Mauritz of Nassau and Johannes Jacob von Wallhausen, the volley shooting and fast reloading system changed the game by making musketeers protecting pikemen. After the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the musketeers came to be the essential part of any contemporary and western army.

At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the invention of the bayonet, a knife that could be set into the mouth of the gun to use it as a shorter spear, and then of the ring bayonet, that could be set around it without impeding the gun to shoot, blew the death and the disappearance of pikemen from the modern battlefields.

When Henry IV<sup>th</sup> of France gave muskets to his horseguards at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and then changed the Carabins Company into the First Company of Musketeers, the élite soldiers would be horsemen able to fight and shoot on foot and on horseback.

From then on, new shooting methods and tactics were studied, experimented and enhanced, as it is still the way today, taking the best shots of each army into its élite and special forces. Now, this heritage still goes on, for example with the 13<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Dragoons - Paratroopers of the French army.

Such a change also happened at the end of the Early Bronze Age, when Chariot archers came to supersede the heavy Early Dynastic phalanx. Then, after more than seven hundred years of supremacy, the chariot archers started to faint against the horse-archers, and then the mounted archer-lancers of the Neo-Assyrian kingdom, at the beginning of the I<sup>st</sup> Millennium B.C.

In the Neo-Assyrian period and kingdom, the best soldiers of the army were the archers, if only because they could kill or harm more enemies from afar than a single shield-bearer could in close combat during the same time. Several types

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<sup>3</sup> Brnardic 2009: 11-12.

of shootings tactics could be employed, but these were already studied in details for the siege context in a recent book.<sup>4</sup>

The best soldiers of the Neo-Assyrian army had to be trained in shield fencing, spear combat, archery, swimming, horsemanship, chariot driving and, perhaps, also sapping and destruction for the siege operations.

As they would provide the reserve from which the King, the magnate or the army commander would take his body guards and Junior Officers, those warriors also needed to read and write.<sup>5</sup>

In this paper, a census of all the demonstrated skills of the basic Neo-Assyrian Junior Officer will be proposed to offer an insight of the requirements to gain promotion in this army between the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.

The historical context was also of primary importance, as comparative elements and people like the French army of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars showed it, but such a thorough research is not the goal of this study. To only mention a few of them, people like Jean Lannes and Pierre Augereau can be compared to Hector MacDonald during the wars of Empress Victoria of England.

## 1. Elementary Drill

For the sake of this paper, and according to the success the new recruits of Emperor Napoléon I<sup>er</sup>'s army demonstrated while learning the essential drills between two battles during the year 1814, the regulations on soldier drills compiled by the French Army will be employed as a comparison model.<sup>6</sup>

### A. *School of the Soldier*

The “School of the Soldier” taught the essential skills to the recruits, i.e. marching with the equipment in good array, identifying his commanders, walking pace, maintenance of equipment, parade movements, as well as spear and shield fencing.

### B. *School of the Platoon*

The “School of the Platoon” would include all tactics and maneuvers including the smallest Neo-Assyrian Combat groups: the one hundred company. With these skills, the warriors would also learn to cross a river with a shield on their back and swim on a goat skin, how to camp and build fortifications.

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<sup>4</sup> De Backer 2013.

<sup>5</sup> De Backer 2012a and 2012b.

<sup>6</sup> Règlement concernant l'Exercice et les Manoeuvres de l'Infanterie du Premier Aout 1791.

### C. *School of the Battalion*

The “School of the Battalion” was designed to train the recruits in special tactics, including a taller amount of warriors and combined types of troops, i.e. Infantry, Cavalry and Chariotry.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Classification

Certainly, one of the first categorization of the recruits newly drafted by the *pirru* system relied on their size and strength, as was also stated by Vegetius for the Roman army.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, people with a better grip on bow shooting, like hunters or stranger warriors, would rather be incorporated in the archer units, as was the case for the English Longbowmen during the Middle Ages.<sup>9</sup> Other, more robust, fellows from the peasantry layers of the Neo-Assyrian society, would rather be employed as shield-bearers, like mobile cover for archers, and trained with the spear to keep the threats at bay from them.<sup>10</sup>

In anyways, a particular series of training certainly took place to compensate the lacks and multiply the skills of deserving warriors. The depiction of a light spearman decorated with torcs and bracelets after a victory certainly sustains the idea that sometimes, they were perhaps given a choice: a decoration or a promotion. General Hector McDonald chose the latter, and then rose to the rank of General from the status of Private. Other warriors perhaps also refused such an honour, only to stay with their troopmates for sentimental reasons, like General Sourd.<sup>11</sup>

This permanent training to improve the skills of the soldiers followed three main stages: the basic footman class as a shield-bearer, the middle class of an archer and the upper class of an archer-lancer.<sup>12</sup>

### A. *Lancer*

The basic farmer that was sent for shield-bearer training for his strength and had showed some particular abilities in fighting and tactics would surely be kept in the core of the standing army.<sup>13</sup> From then, he would follow the basic archery class and learn the other part of his binom: the archer and shield-bearer team.

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<sup>7</sup> See De Backer 2009b.

<sup>8</sup> Vegetius, *Epistoma Rei Militaris*, chap. X.

<sup>9</sup> Bartlett 1995: 5.

<sup>10</sup> De Backer 2004 and 2012b.

<sup>11</sup> Boivin 1841: 263.

<sup>12</sup> See De Backer 2012b.

<sup>13</sup> De Backer 2012c.

After a while, he would be incorporated in a senior unit as an archer, like it appears on the reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II and bronze bands of Shalmaneser III, according to the particular type of *epistema* on the shield.<sup>14</sup>

### B. *Archer*

The basic hunter or young aristocrat that had served as an archer and distinguished himself would surely be taught the shield-bearer class, as a way to have a better grip on how to employ his troops.

A huge amount of Assyrian or Assyrianized units were incorporated and included in the protection of roads, armouries, cities, fortress and marching army lists, thus requiring a huge amount of Assyrian or Assyrianized officers to monitor them.

### C. *Archer-Lancer*

Once a warrior was trained as an archer and as a shield-bearer, seasoned with the practice of combat in both roles, he became an archer-lancer, although this particular term does not appear in the contemporary texts, one can assume this to be the status of the guards.<sup>15</sup>

## 3. Angle for shooting

The basic archery class would train the recruits in the choice of the angles of fire, according to the situations he would encounter and the desired effect. There are three essential angle for shooting the bow: vertical, horizontal and diagonal.

### A. *Vertical*

Archers were the basic components of any Neo-Assyrian army in campaign, as they could shoot on vertical angles, something a javelinman cannot achieve.<sup>16</sup> This skill was mostly required during the operations of conquest and defense of territories, mainly focused on the activities on fortifications.

#### 1) Upward

Archers protected the assault troops by shooting at the defenders located on the top of the ramparts they besieged, coming closer and closer as far as being at the foot of the walls for better accuracy.

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<sup>14</sup> See also De Backer, forthcoming (e).

<sup>15</sup> Malbran-Labat 1982: 141.

<sup>16</sup> De Backer 2008.

## 2) Downward

Archers were the essential part of a city's defenders, as could shoot from the top of the wall to prevent or delay any incoming assault and only cost their food and the materials to manufacture large quantities of arrows.

### B. *Horizontal*

The horizontal angle of fire enhanced the strength of impact and penetration on the target in close range, a skill that could surely save an archer from a charging enemy in battle. The ability to cover a wide area in front of him with multiple missiles in a short time also contributed to the archer's prominent status among the Neo-Assyrian army (Fig. 1).

### C. *Diagonal*

The diagonal angle of shooting allowed the archer to touch targets situated on an elevation, or at a longer distance, for an arrow only flies on a straight direction for a short time.

## 4. Rate of Shooting

Shooting well was of outmost importance but shooting well and fast surely would help the warrior to get a promotion.

The rate of shooting will be, for the sake of this paper, the amount of arrows an archer can shoot accurately to a target before the third one hits the objective (Fig. 2).

### A. *Slow*

"Slow is smooth and smooth is fast" is one of the sayings taught by some particular experts to their recruits for sniping. Although the strength required to keep the bow drawn could not last for a long time before tiring the arm of the archer, it surely help accuracy when newbies were provided with a bow for the first time (Fig. 3).

The citizens of England during the wars the One Hundred Years had to learn and practice bow shooting during a long part of their days, and the best shot were taken to France by the King and the Black Prince as light troops for skirmishing and raids.

### B. *Fast*

Once he knew how to achieve accuracy, the archer would certainly be trained in fast shooting, as a rain of arrows can better stop an enemy charge than a wall of pikes (Fig. 4).

More than that, fast shooting would be one of the outmost importance skills for the attack and defense of cities, and thus was certainly highly appreciated by the governors.

Such a skill must have been highly regarded by the Neo-Assyrians for its efficiency on the battlefields. The English longbowmen, sick, starving and outnumbered, achieved victory three times in the same way, shooting more than five arrows at a minute, on the heavy armoured French knights at Poitiers, Crécy and Azincourt.<sup>17</sup>

## 5. Stances

The close observation of the skeletons found under the remains of the Halzi gate at Nineveh demonstrated the particular strains of archery in two basic positions.<sup>18</sup>

### A. *Standing*

As the essential way to shoot the bow, recruits were certainly taught how to place their feet, basin and shoulders to draw the bow. This was required when fighting to protect a city wall from the top on the besieging enemy or in pitch battle, against enemy cavalry.

### B. *Kneeling*

The second position was surely reserved for seasoned archers, as to be able to shoot from the foot of the walls they besieged or during a pitch battle as the siege-redoubt tactics, in order to offer a smaller target at the aim of the enemy missiles.

### C. *From a Siege-Ladder*

Élite soldiers would certainly know how to shoot from particular positions, like on a siege-engine or on a siege-ladder, as the modern special forces learn to do as well.

Experience and strength would surely make it easier to the seasoned warrior than to the new recruits, and this could explain why archers with such a skill are sent forth to take an enemy rampart, at the top of a siege ladder.

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<sup>17</sup> Modern re-enactors reach the toll of ten arrows in a minute, for the best of them. See Knight 1998: 38.

<sup>18</sup> De Backer, forthcoming (b).

## 6. Mobility

Archers had to be fast in order to avoid some of the enemy troops and quickly deploy wherever they were required to, thus they surely would learn how to shoot while they were walking, or even running.

The common archers would run barely naked, to keep the ability to run away and skirmish from afar, while more and more armor was provided to the most efficient ones, following their promotion in senior troops. Anyways, it seems certain that those Heavy Archers had to keep fit enough to be able to run and climb a ladder and with the spare weight and cumbersome aspect of their heavy protection.

### A. *Motionless*

The most basic archery class starts with the correct position for a good draw, and has been dissected into several steps by particular, ancestral ways of the warriors, as the Japanese way of the archer: the Kyudô or the book of Ascham.<sup>19</sup>

### B. *Slow*

Once the archer was a good shot, he was possibly trained in the art of shooting while moving, as combat situations and wounded beasts during the hunts made such a skill necessary for the sake of the kingdom, or the King's own.

### C. *Fast*

As the very best soldiers of any Western army are trained to shoot in several conditions, like while they are running downward on the façade of a building,<sup>20</sup> the élite archers of the Assyrian army surely were able to shoot as they were running or as the horse they rode was charging.

## 7. Directions

Usually, the Neo-Assyrian warrior would learn how to move in two directions: the longitudinal and the lateral one.

### A. *Longitudinal*

A Neo-Assyrian conscript had to learn to follow his commander, and to protect the retreat of the commander, and not to flee, if manageable.

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<sup>19</sup> Ascham R., *Toxophilus*, 1545.

<sup>20</sup> The "Australian" Rappel.



1) To the Front

While moving forward, the archer had to compensate the longitudinal balance caused by the moves of his steps on his aim, and learn to control his breath to shoot properly.

So far, police forces and armies still train their operatives in shooting while moving as well.

2) To the Back

If things went wrong, or if a deceit was organized by the commander, the archer had to be able to correct his draw and aim while stepping backward, keeping his balance not to fall. Such occurrences would have happened during a lasting fight, or to delay enemies from V.I.P.'s, as it possibly happened after cities were taken.

*B. Lateral*

Having to fight with the assistance of a shield-bearer, the archer also had to know how to shoot when stepping aside, to follow his teammate or to avoid an enemy projectile (Fig. 5).<sup>21</sup>

1) To the Right

For a right-handed archer, it is easier to correct his draw when stepping aside to the right, for he only has to play with the balance of his weight on his knees.

2) To the Left

Correcting the draw to the left is harder, as it asks for the shoulders and basin to move, and these are the essential pillars of a good draw, making it harder to manage for archers.

## 8. Targets

The best shots in the Assyrian army could fire at a mobile or a standing target: two skills that would make them suitable companions to go hunting lions.

*A. Immobile*

Shooting at an immobile target is the third step in basic archery, right after the good positioning and the correct draw. Such a basic skill was the base to train the Infantry recruits into archers for combat, shooting in huge concentrations at huge enemy formations.

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<sup>21</sup> De Backer 2010a and 2011a.

### B. *Mobile*

One the warrior was seasoned in archery, he was certainly able to shoot at a moving target, or he was trained for that, as the élite Corps of the Neo-Assyrian army was firstly the Chariot Archer, and then the Cavalry Archers, both of them fast, furious and mobile on their targets.

## 9. **Laterality**

The laterality of archers on the Neo-Assyrian reliefs has already been the topic of another paper, but it takes even more sense in this one.<sup>22</sup>

### A. *Right-Handed*

The bones of the Neo-Assyrian warriors discovered under the remains of the Halzi gate of Nineveh demonstrate huge strains on the right limbs in efforts linked to the practice of archery.<sup>23</sup>

As one can understand, the most widespread laterality at the time was perhaps the right-handed one, thus most recruits would be trained as right-handed archers.

### B. *Left-Handed*

As it is the case in Western armies nowadays, the best soldiers are trained to fight and shoot with both hands, as a mean to compensate a possible wound during a mission and safeguard the warrior.

This can also be a point for particular depictions of the Neo-Assyrian archers, for not everybody is right-handed.

### C. *Ambidexterity*

The crest of the best was, and still is, to have ambidextrous soldiers, able to fight any weapon with any hands, and this surely came with practice and experience in the ranks of the army during campaigns or special missions.

After all, archery and fencing require only one arm at a time to provide most of the effort, and particular conditions like topography could require the soldier to change his stance in order to fight properly.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> De Backer 2012a.

<sup>23</sup> De Backer, forthcoming (a).

<sup>24</sup> De Backer 2009a.

## 10. Topography

New recruits training to be archers would learn how their surrounding influenced their targeting, use it as a land mark, draw on the bow and shooting: weather and landscape.

The training of Junior Officers in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras also took place as an attachment to a Senior Officer as a courier and surveyor.

### A. *Weather*

Weather was the first element to understand for a good archer, as several elements linked to the weather affect the shot.

#### 1) Sun

The position of the sun would impede the sight of the archer shooting in front of it, thus the warrior had to be trained to face this difficulty or find a way to turn around it.

#### 2) Wind

The wind influences the travel, speed and range of the arrows, thus the good archers had to be able to use it as an ally for their shot.

#### 3) Rain

Rain would damage the bow string and impede strength or precision during battles if the archer was not able to correct his shot according to these risks.

### B. *Landscape*

In combat, the archers had to face different landscapes than they had seen at home. Becoming accustomed to shooting from the deep valleys or the top of a mountain, they would be able to enhance their good shot ability.

#### 1) Elevation

Elevation influences the range of the arrows and the archer's mind must compute differently if he is shooting from the foot of a rampart or the top of a siege-engine.

#### 2) Cover

The use of cover would allow the archers to find hard protection against the enemy missiles and projectiles, like the siege-shields or the smaller buildings at the foot of fortress.

### 3) Conceal

Conceal would allow the archer to find some protection by hiding behind a soft element of the landscape, like the bushes of Babylonia or the trees of Lebanon.

## 11. Tactics

At each point of his promotion, the warrior would learn particular tactics linked to his new unit, certainly following the ascending level from the farmer to the magnate: Infantry, Cavalry and Chariotry.<sup>25</sup>

### A. Infantry

In his first combats, the recruit would learn how to be part and act in a particular unit of the basic infantry, storming the walls of the besieged cities, protecting the archers in pitch battles and protecting officials in patrol or the camp at night (Fig. 6).

Archers were supposed to be able to shoot from behind the shield-bearers, even in deep formations as it appears usually on the Neo-Assyrian depictions, a tactic called the “volley fire” and that was employed as late as the Napoleonic era.

As told by Private Jean-Roch Coignet, once a soldier mastered the maneuvers and duties of a senior level, he could become a Corporal, if he knew how to swim, read and write.<sup>26</sup>

### B. Cavalry

In the Neo-Assyrian period, the increasing employment of the horse imposed the knowledge of horsemanship to distinguished soldiers, for traveling, patrolling, recruiting, training and combat.

The same principle was employed in the Roman period of the Principate, when a Junior Officer of an Infantry *cohors* would be promoted in a Cavalry *ala* to be trained as a Junior Officer in that particular arm.<sup>27</sup>

### C. Chariotry

As the Neo-Assyrian warrior accomplished more and more prowess, he could be noticed by a Senior Officer and incorporated in his escort, to become a member of a chariot team, firstly as a *tašlišu*, or a shield-bearer, and then as a *mukil apatê*, chariot driver.

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<sup>25</sup> See also De Backer 2010b.

<sup>26</sup> Larchey 1883: 220.

<sup>27</sup> Fields 2006: 9, fig. 1 and 2009: 8-9.

As it was the system during the feudal times, it would give him the time and occasion to learn from the experience of the elder.

Such an experience happened to young Private Jean Baptiste Sourd when he saved the life of Général Masséna during a sally out of Gena, and was then promoted to Maréchal des Logis in the élite regiment of the Guides d'Italie.<sup>28</sup>

## 12. Vectors

As he was promoted to upper and upper levels, the warrior had also to learn how to use, maintain and, possibly, also manufacture pieces of his vectors: feet, horse and chariot.

### A. *Foot*

During his first tour of duty, the new recruit would learn how to walk at particular rhythm, obey the signals transmitted by the motions of standards or by the sound of the trumpets.

### B. *Horse*

One incorporated in a cavalry unit, the warrior would learn horsemanship and the manufacture of saddle, bridle and stable. Cavalry was one of the most important class of warriors in particular areas of the Assyrian empire, like the highlands of Iran or the seashore of the Levant. Cavalry was also employed by the Royal Courriers, the frontier patrols and the warriors of special troops.

### C. *Chariotry*

As he knew how to take care of horses, the warrior could learn how to fight, maintain and drive a chariot, before receiving a new appointment in the Chariotry.

## 13. Alphabetization

Young Maréchal des Logis Marbot was chosen as a commander by his light cavalry troopmates during a reckon mission because he was the only one that was able to read a map.<sup>29</sup>

Corporal Coignet was accommodated with young Velites of the Guard, so they could teach them to write and read, while he would improve their military skills.

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<sup>28</sup> Mullié 1851: 539.

<sup>29</sup> Marbot 1891: 74-81.

### A. *Factors*

The Royal Army of the Assyrian kings heavily relied on administration, and this strongly implies that a huge part of the managers had to be able to read and write in the same language.

With so many different people incorporated in the army between the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C., the choice for a particular, international and easy language was also an essential requirement, as it is also the case nowadays.

#### 1) Needs: Management of the Combat Groups

The very first need of the Neo-Assyrian army was the quick and efficient replacement of casualties in troop managers, and the ability to train and teach them what their new trade required as fast as possible.

The incorporation of many foreign privates, NCO's and Officers also made it necessary to design a particular, unique "training" for them all. This "class" surely allowed all these new staff members to fill the three essential needs for a combat group:

##### a) Count the Men and Equipment

The first task of a commander is to know how many people he brings in and out of the field.

##### b) Read the Orders

The second task of a commander relies on the need to read and understand orders from the top of his hierarchy.

##### c) Write the Reports

The third task of a commander was to send reports of activities to the hierarchy so that they know what happened in as many details as possible.

#### 2) Equipment

The equipment required to manage the combat groups of the Neo-Assyrian army was also, and essentially, administrative paper works, surely chosen for their low cost, long duration of employment and resiliency.

Most of them are depicted in the contemporary reliefs, as the papyrus writer, and clay ball printer, associated by Professor Fales to *ummānu Aramāyu*, the scribe for the Aramean Language and *ummānu Aššyrāu*, the scribe for the Assyrian Language.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> De Backer 2013: 118.

a) Papyrus

The papyrus certainly was employed in rolls, as it appears on the Neo-Assyrian reliefs and bronze bands, but this also means that this support was appropriated to the language it supported.

That language, surely written in a cursive shape on the field, would have been the Aramean.

Keeping papyrus properly rolled with an ink brick and a calamus required a special box in the bag of troop managers, with the time to find water to moisten the ink.

b) Clay Ball

Clay balls appear in the hands of other scribes, surely written with a cuneiform printing as the clay balls can also be associated with tablets.

Then, the language they supported would have been Assyrian.

Keeping clay balls wet in the bag of an NCO or of an Officer in campaign surely was a hard task, and hardened the job of the writer.

c) Wood and Wax Tablet

Papyrus and clay balls appear on the visual evidence of the Neo-Assyrian period booty and prisoners accountancy, although these two supports can hardly cope with the wear and tear in the bag of a Junior NCO or Officer, thus they surely chose another type of support.

Wood and wax tablets could be re-used, easily folded, resilient to the wear and tear of everyday paper works and could be written with the point of a dagger. At the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C., the Hittites already had a writer specialized in wooden tables for their armies: the <sup>10</sup>DUB.SAR.GIŠ.KARASĪ, “scribe of the army: on wood”.<sup>31</sup>

Such kinds of tablets were recovered in the palace of Nimrud, although their components display the rather elevated social status of their owner.<sup>32</sup>

3) Transmitter

The choice for a good transmitter between the different layers of the Neo-Assyrian army was essential to manage privates and commanders from different countries and speaking different languages.

Thus, the Assyrian Head-Quarters surely chose a language widely spread, easy to learn, and quick to write.

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<sup>31</sup> Lebrun 2005: 209-210.

<sup>32</sup> Wiseman 1955: 3-13; Howard 1955: 14-20.

a) Assyrian

It still takes a lot of time nowadays to learn how to read and write Akkadian, Assyrian and even Hieroglyphic Egyptian. Because of their linguistic complexity, but also because of the difficulty to cope with the huge amount of signs required for syllabs and determinatives, these cuneiform and illustrated writings took a long time for student to master.

Thus, apart from those foreigners of high status sent to the Assyrian Royal Court, very few people from the common layers of the I<sup>st</sup> Millennium B.C. ancient Near Eastern societies had the time to learn these writings.

b) Aramean

While more and more people from Aramean descent spoke that language in the Near East during the I<sup>st</sup> Millennium B.C., more and more of them felt in the Neo-Assyrian troops as their kingdoms were submitted by the kings of Niniveh.

This alphabetic scripture is quick to learn, while the language is not that difficult to learn and remember for many people allowed the foreigner to practice his skills with fellows in the military or in the society.

Training in writing Aramean was surely well supported by the administrative paper works of the army, as most European armies nowadays also use the international English for communications.

*B. Method*

During his first class as a private, the warrior would be taught the hierarchic signs and ranks, along with the particular titles and respect marks he has to employ according to the people concerned.

As he was getting higher and higher in the military establishment, he would need to improve his knowledge of protocol and paraphernalia.

1) Basic Command Class

In what will be called the “Basic Command Class” in this paper and only for the sake of this paper, the young NCO would enter a period of particular training. By being accommodated with seasoned NCO’s of his unit, he would be trained in his new trade by a kind of “do as I do” or “look and repeat” system on the field.

2) Upper Command Class

After a while, if he made it to enter the category of officers, the warrior would surely enter an intensive period of training in alphabetization if he was not yet able to read and write.



While nothing is known so far on the Neo-Assyrian Military “academies”, this does not prevent them from having a kind of class for their officers, as not everybody was born a combat genius.

This could be prepared in particular areas of the kingdom where several scholars were ready to teach adults, probably at the costs of the king.

The need for well-trained officers in the royal standing army strongly supports this assertion, as Officers needed to read and write messages, reports, accountancy, maps and many other administrative things.

### 3) Advanced Command Class

The last part of the Officer training would surely be started after some campaigns, as the warrior would learn how to manage posts, garrisons, fortress and even provinces, but surely this came with the help of personal experience, seasoned veterans met during the operations and advisers.

### C. *Locations*

The best locations to train N.C.O.’s and Junior Officers in reading and writing would have been the capitals, fortress or garrisons of particular units when they were not required to go in campaign.

### D. *“Examination”*

The “examination” or probation period of the newly alphabetized Junior officer would have been a command in a frontier area or in minor operations with seasoned veterans as advisers.

During this period, new officers might well have commanded huge groups but still kept their low rank while awaiting some room was open for them to take a new incorporation, as for the Roman system of the *Optio ad spem ordines*, the “NCO hoping for a superior command”.<sup>33</sup>

As was already the case during the Late Bronze Age, some theoretical manuals for particular types of commissions might have existed, as for the Captain of the Royal Guard or the Chief of a Frontier Post, but nothing has been discovered so far in the Neo-Assyrian sources concerning that particular topic.<sup>34</sup>

## 14. Hierarchy

Particular ranks and distinctive signs were employed in the Neo-Assyrian army to distinguish officers from privates.

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<sup>33</sup> Le Bohec 2000: 30.

<sup>34</sup> Goetze 1960; Guterbock 1991.

Although the texts provide the names and characteristics of each, the visual data still needs a deeper study to fit with the hierarchy tree demonstrated in them.<sup>35</sup>

### A. *Infantry*

During his first tour of duty, the recruit learned how to recognize his superior officers in the Infantry, as this would be the most likely corps in which to train basic soldier for a start.

After his first bloods as a shield-bearer, he could learn to shoot the bow, practice it for one campaign or two, and then be incorporated in Cavalry.

Several French officers, as field-marshalls Jean Lannes and Charles Augereau, were elected as officers by their fellow troopmates for their distinguished prowess and acknowledged skills in combat. Certainly this was the best suited way to replace dead officers or strengthen the team spirit, as one would rather go to war with somebody of which he acknowledges the skills he has seen in action during similar situations.<sup>36</sup>

### B. *Cavalry*

Once trained to be an archer, the warrior would most likely work with shield-bearers and riders, as it appears on the visual materials from Ashurnasirpal II to Ashurbanipal. Cavalry patrols would certainly need the covering fire of archers when coming back to camp from a survey of the enemy troops in campaign, thus warriors had to know who they had to primarily protect among other corps.<sup>37</sup>

Maréchal des Logis Jean-Baptiste Guindey identified a Senior Officer during the battle of Saalfeld, tried to capture him but was so wounded in the combat he had to kill the man. Bringing back the decorations and sword of the soldier to the field hospital, he was told he would have been made an officer had he kept the man alive.<sup>38</sup>

### C. *Chariotry*

Having been promoted in Cavalry, the horse-archer would escort the chariots of Senior Officers or work as an attendant with the Chariotry, and thus learn to identify ranks in the Chariotry as well.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> De Backer, forthcoming (f).

<sup>36</sup> Blaufard 1997: 607-609.

<sup>37</sup> See also De Backer 2013: 261-263.

<sup>38</sup> Marbot 1891: 291.

<sup>39</sup> See also De Backer 2009-2011c.

## 15. Specialty

Particular specialties were required by the Neo-Assyrian spectrum of operations, four of the most important ones being essential to the expansion of the kingdom.

So far, few data have been recovered on these aspects of Assyrian warfare and military training, but it does not mean that no structure existed to improve the skills of warriors involved in such activities, as it also happened to Prince Senacherib working in the Intelligence Service of his father.<sup>40</sup>

Particular warriors would surely be sent to certain areas where they could learn with specialized people how to design a siege-engine, manage a hospital, maintain arsenals or seafaring. All these skills would come in handy if they made it to the rank of *rab kisir*, governor of a province, or even field-marshal.<sup>41</sup>

### A. *Siegecraft*

Siegecraft was essential to the conquest, keeping and protection of territories. Even though the tablets with mathematical exercises concerning a siege-ramp need to be further researched, one cannot dismiss the hypothesis that these would have been study tools.<sup>42</sup> The midshipmen of the Royal Navy two hundred years ago learnt to sail a ship from their captain in quite the same way, with blackboards.

This type of class surely took place where the best military scholars of the kingdom could be found: at the Court of the King or of the magnates, in the capitals.

### B. *Hospitals*

As Professor Fales said it, a lot of Neo-Assyrian archives are missing for the reasons that they might have not been considered essential to the idea this people wanted to leave of himself. Then, it seems appropriate to believe a particular training allowed certain warriors with lesser physical abilities, but seasoned and able, to know how to manage the hospitals in campaigns.

Anyways, some kind of structure must have been existed to keep the maximum amount of trained warriors alive.

### C. *Armouries*

Particular troops must have been devoted to the maintenance and to the study of military projects, according to the several new models of armours and tactics that appeared between Ashurnasirpal II and Ashurbanipal.

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<sup>40</sup> Dubovsky 2006: 266.

<sup>41</sup> Like Shamshi-Ilu at Til Barsip.

<sup>42</sup> Thureau-Dangin 1935.

As it still is the use now, such research took place in particular, isolated locations, with the maximum room for experimentations and good, seasoned and trustworthy soldiers to share experience and practice.<sup>43</sup> Such activities surely happened in particular areas, like the gathering centers of the Neo-Assyrian army before a campaign, like Til Barsip, or in the arsenals, like Fort Shalmaneser.

Fl. Malbran-Labat did mention such a kind of soldiers, from a far fortress in Syria, that were specialized in weaponry: the *kitkittû*.<sup>44</sup>

#### D. Amphibious Warfare

Although it hardly appears as such in the textual data, amphibious warfare was of outmost concern to particular kings, like Senacherib and Ashurbanipal to invade Elam and fight in the marshes of Babylonia.

Certainly, the warriors having distinguished themselves in river-crossing, landings or amphibious operations were sent to areas where these skills would be best suited, or trained.

### Conclusion

As one can see, it took a long time, a strong will, an appropriate historical context and lots of luck to become an officer from the ranks of the Neo-Assyrian army.

As it appears, jewels and weapons also helped to distinguish the position of a warrior in the hierarchy of the Neo-Assyrian army. Many decorations like bracelets and torcs have been observed on the depictions of high-ranking Neo-Assyrian officials, and particular warriors, on the reliefs from Ashurnasirpal II to Ashurbanipal.

The archer was the very symbol of higher status and authority in the Ancient Near East, at least from the Middle Bronze Age, thus one can understand this class of warrior also was a mean to an end: training and promoting warriors to create a reserve of Non-Commissioned Officers. These men were surely very helpful to manage the territories and people conquered during the expansion of the Neo-Assyrian empire, from the revival of Ashurnasirpal II to the dawn of Nineveh.

The evolution of Neo-Assyrian Archery warfare shows it, as the Cavalry archers of Ashurnasirpal II and Shalmaneser III needed a mounted shield-bearer to, protect them and hold the bridle of their horses. The guards of Ashurnasirpal II already had a spear, a shield, a bow, a sword and a mace, which made them

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<sup>43</sup> See also De Backer 2010c, 2012c and forthcoming (c).

<sup>44</sup> Malbran-Labat 1982: 84.

the best shock and missile troops, from which the successors will draw their bodyguards companies.

The best warriors would also be partly helped by their officers, being the first in the list of candidates those proposed to the King for promotion, thus creating a network of interests and relationships that certainly went from the complicated to the more complicated. Such a process would help to explain how Shalmaneser III went to fight against his own nobility for the control of his kingdom, as most of Napoleon's high dignitaries failed.

If such a panel of skills, help and the luck to survive was necessary for the common warrior to become an officer, the historical context also helped particular people to rise to power, as the Emperor Napoléon I<sup>er</sup> or the *turtanu* Shamshi-Ilu demonstrated it.

Albeit these Napoleonic parallels surely will displease some people, nothing prevents the possible existence of such destinies in the armies of the Neo-Assyrian period, the only problem being that, so far, few research have been prepared to correlate depictions and quotes from the texts in this respect.

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## Figures

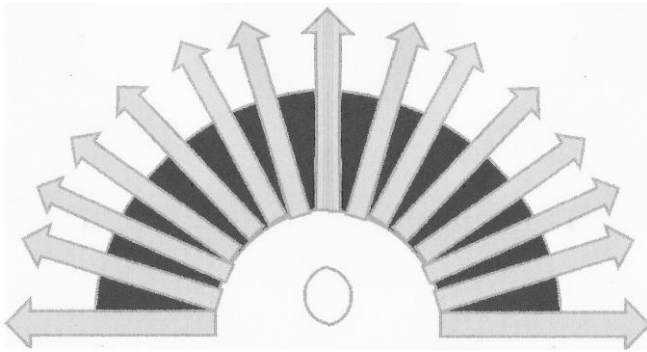


Fig. 1: Schematic displaying the different horizontal angles for shooting with the bow.  
Drawing by the author.

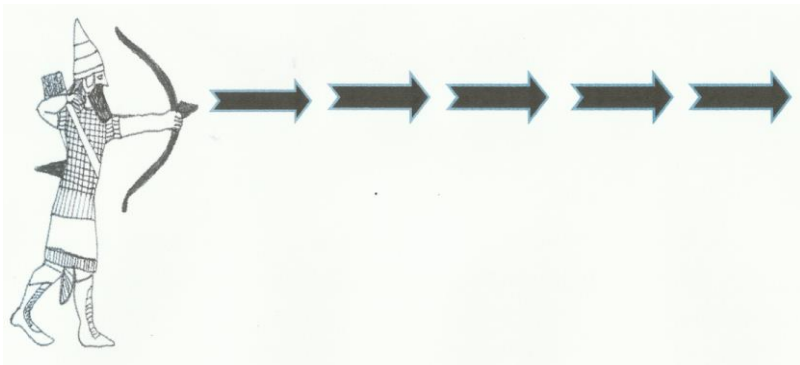


Fig. 2: Schematic displaying the principle of the high rate of shooting with the bow.  
Drawing by the author.



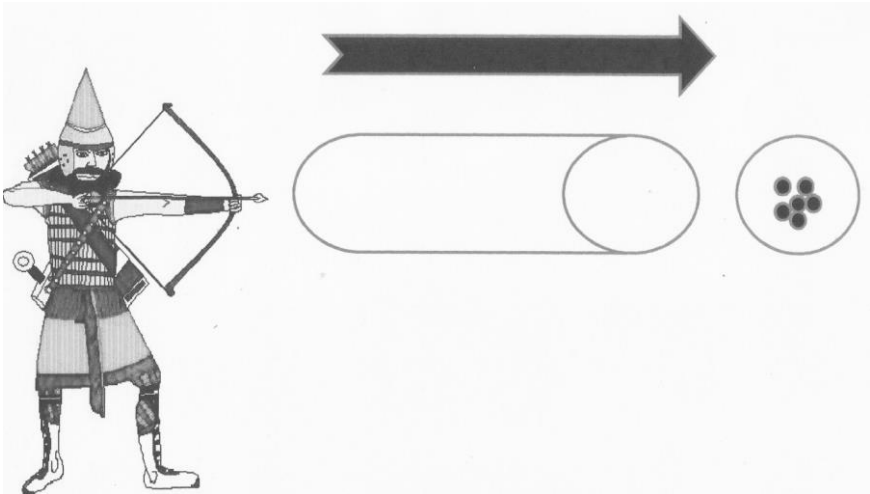


Fig. 3: Schematic displaying the cylinder of precision when targeting in slow rate of shooting with the bow. Drawing by the author.

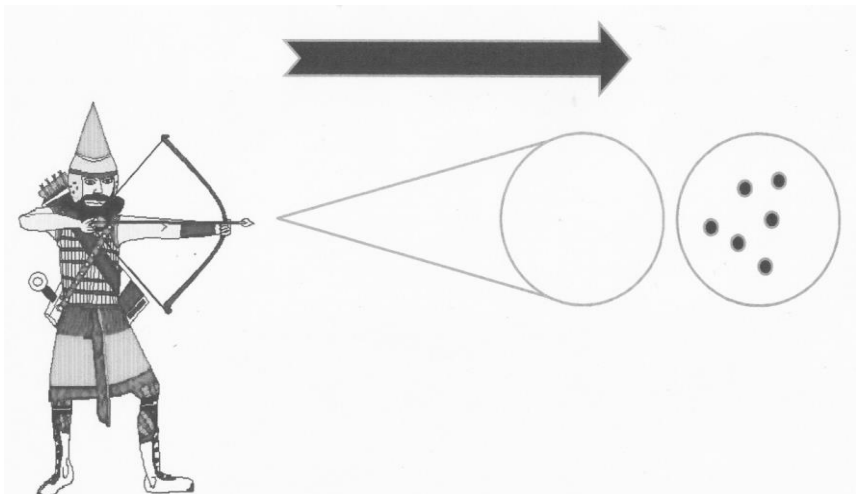


Fig. 4: Schematic displaying the cone of dispersion when targeting at a high rate of shooting with the bow. Drawing by the author.

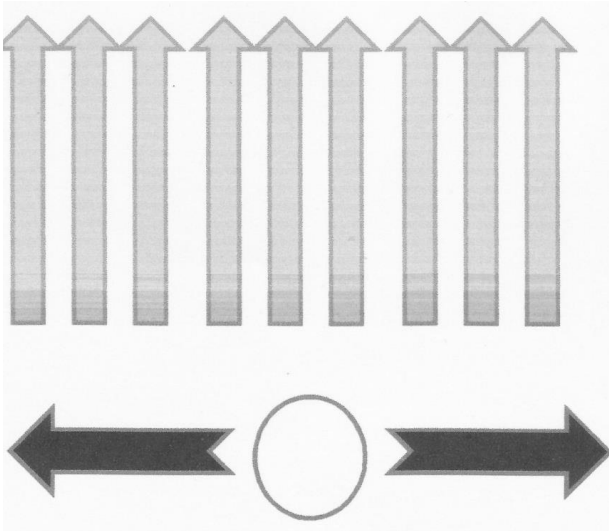


Fig. 5: Schematic displaying the different directions of the lateral shot with a bow. Drawing by the author.

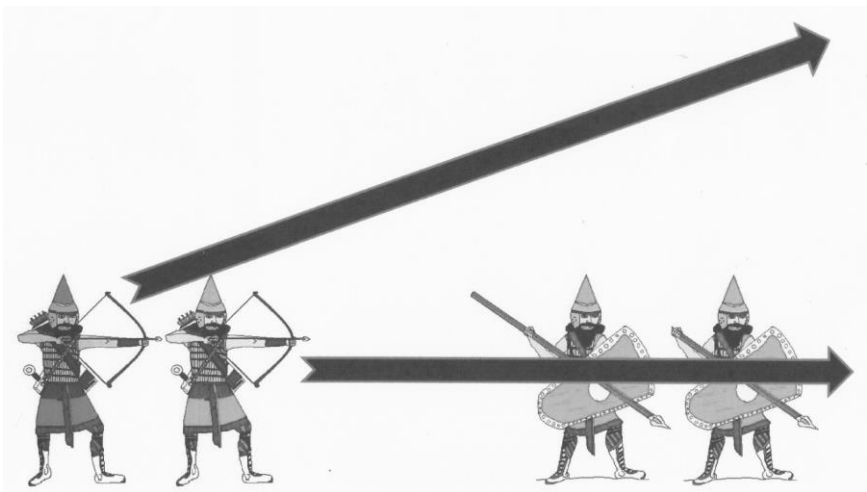


Fig. 6: Schematic displaying the different tactics employing diagonal and horizontal draw of the bow. Drawing by the author.

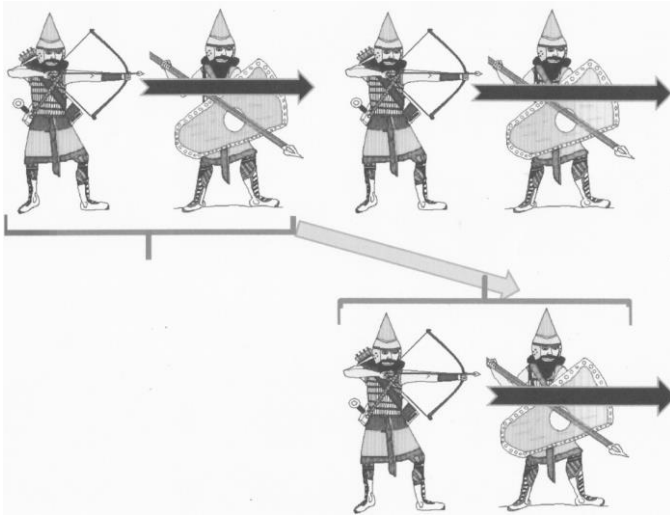


Fig. 7: Schematic displaying the different tactics relying on the width between the files of soldiers when they work in binoms of complementary functions. Drawing by the author.

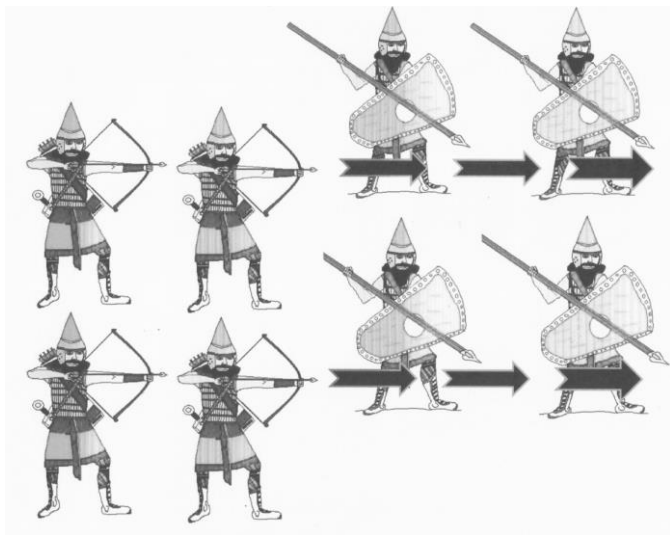


Fig. 8: Schematic displaying the tactics relying on the different composition of the binoms. Drawing by the author.