

# Iran-dokht – Daughters of Iran

## Aryan Women Warriors

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### 1. Women as Leader-Warriors in Tradition

The Iranian-Aryan professional group that included leaders and warriors were the khshathra/rathestaran – leaders who were warriors as well. Examining the annuals of history, it would seem that while Aryan women were not necessarily and consistently warriors in a standing army, they answered the call for warriors and leadership when most needed by the nation. A modern example helps us flush out the concept. Today, we notice that there are a large number of Kurdish women warriors battling the Islamic State – but these women were not necessarily warriors in a standing army prior to the attack on their lands and people. When faced with an existential threat, regardless of their occupation at the time, Kurdish women and men answered the call to take up arms in unison with both women and men rising through the ranks to become commanders and generals. Today, fighting together, Kurdish women and men have all but pushed the Islamic State out of all occupied lands and this is particularly significant in Syrian Kurdistan where they were initially overrun by the Islamic hordes. Such is the efficacy of gender equality.

While Persian-Aryan history does not provide us with many narratives about regular soldiers be they women or men, what we have are stories about royalty and nobility – shahnamehs if you will. The following are a few examples of royal or noble women leader-warriors, some of who are called Iran-dokht (Iran's daughter).

### 2. Queen Penthesileia – Answering the Call

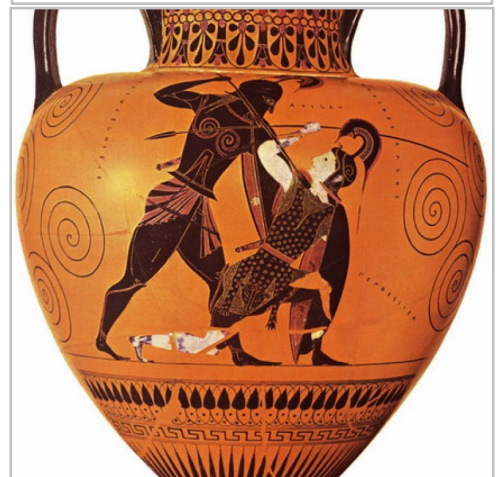
Our first example of the tradition we have outlined above is found in early history. Queen Penthesileia organized an army to come to the aid of the Trojans after Troy was attacked by the Greeks around 1,200 BCE. The Greeks called her an 'amazon' and in typical fashion developed a melodramatic myth around her. While the Greek warrior Achilles killed Penthesileia in single combat, he is tragically supposed to have fallen in love with her – after he had killed her.

### 3. Iran-Dokht Artemisia I

It the same Asia Minor region to which Penthesileia belonged, one of the early queens named by some as Iran-dokht is Artemisia I. She was queen or satrap (governor general) of



Syrian Kurdish son and mother. Credit: forum.stripovi.com.



Achilles killing Queen Penthesileia at the Battle of Troy (c. 1200 BCE). Penthesileia is wearing 'Persian' i.e. Aryan attire – an elaborately patterned tunic and trousers. The scene is painted by the artist Exekias on a c.540-530 BCE amphora (wine jug) found in S. Italy, then part of Magna Greece. Credit: showme.com.

Caria/Karka under Persian King Xerxes (486-466 BCE). As admiral of her navy, she undertook naval expeditions against the Greeks.

#### 4. Iran-Dokht Apranik

Apranik was the daughter of Piran, Yazdegird III's General. She was a military commander in her own right, fought against the Arab invaders and continued to lead a resistance after the Arab conquest of Iran - thereby becoming a symbol of Iranian resistance against Arab oppression and domination.<sup>1</sup>

#### 5. Ordinary Women of Courage

While our examples above are nobles (khshathra/rathestaran), the women of Kurdistan who have taken up arms are ordinary people.<sup>2</sup>



Likeness of Apranik by H. Shakiba. Credit: slideshare.net/michaelasanda.

#### 6. In Closing

In the process of building communities, human beings tend to assign roles to men and women. However, when it comes to roles that serve or work with the community, more often than not, these assignments are artificial social constructs and are not intrinsic to a gender. Culture and tradition play significant roles in how a community perceives the public role of men and women.

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#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The Nisibis War (337-363 CE) by J. S. Harrel (MA thesis) (Northridge, 2002) p. 76. The author acknowledges his source does not follow scholarly protocols.

<sup>2</sup> A more complete explanation is at <http://zoroastrianheritage.blogspot.ca/2015/06/amazons-kurdish-women-warriors.html>.