

ARMIES AND NAVIES

Lecture 18: Cavalry

Prehistory of the Horse

- ▣ The horse was probably domesticated in south Russia in the neolithic period.
- ▣ Horses are known in the Greek world from the early Bronze Age onwards.
- ▣ From c1500 BCE horse-drawn chariots are known from Mycenaean Greece, following a custom known from the Near Eastern civilizations.

The Chariot

- ▣ Chariots are known from Mycenaean evidence and Homer.
- ▣ If Homer depicts reality, then chariots were used in war until the 8th century BCE.
- ▣ However, these were used as status symbols and their only purpose were to transport warriors to and from battle.

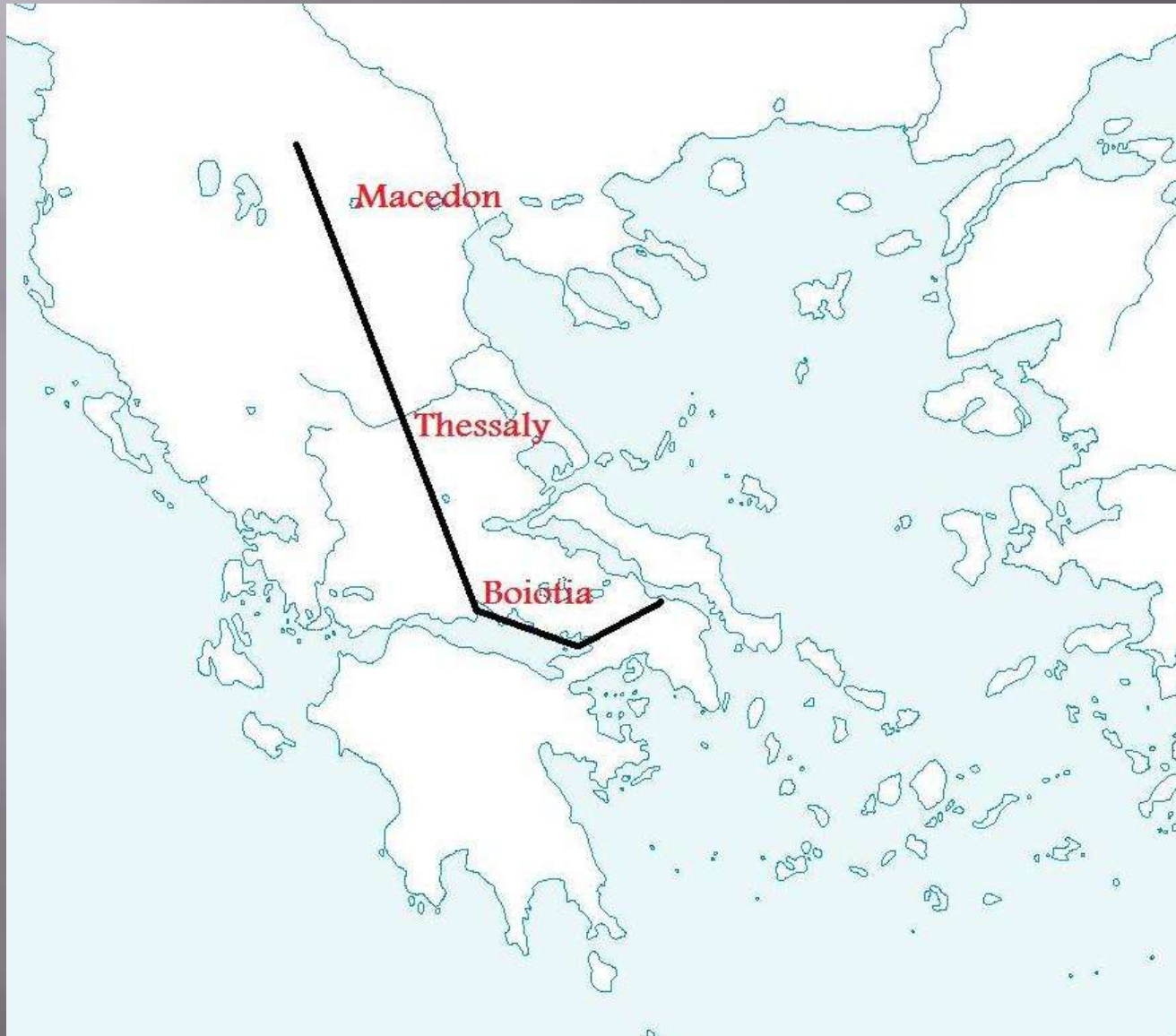
The Hippeis

- ▣ Horses and horsemanship in the majority of the Greek poleis meant wealth.
- ▣ We know of several poleis that had archaic aristocracies with the name of 'horsemen', such as Orchomenos in Boiotia and Chalkis and Eretria in Euboea.
- ▣ In the classical period, we know of poleis where the upper or part of the upper classes were named 'horsemen', such as the hippeis of Athens and the wealthier citizens of Sparta.

Games and Development of Horsemanship in the archaic period

- ▣ At the eighteenth Festival they remembered the pentathlon and wrestling. Lampis won the first and Eurybatus the second, these also being Lacedaemonians. At the twenty-third Festival they restored the prizes for boxing, and the victor was Onomastus of Smyrna, which already was a part of Ionia. At the twenty-fifth they recognized the race of full-grown horses, and Pagondas of Thebes was proclaimed “victor in the chariot-race.” [8] At the eighth Festival after this they admitted the pancratium for men and the horse-race. The horse-race was won by Crauxidas of Crannon, and Lygdamis of Syracuse overcame all who entered for the pancratium. Lygdamis has his tomb near the quarries at Syracuse, and according to the Syracusans he was as big as Heracles of Thebes, though I cannot vouch for the statement. Pausanias 5.8.7-8

A geographical division



Arms and Armour

- ▣ As soon as they have acquired a firm seat, your next task is to take steps that as many as possible shall be able **to throw the javelin** when mounted and shall become efficient in all the details of horsemanship. After that **both horses and men must be armed**, so that, while they are themselves thoroughly protected against wounds, they may have the means of inflicting the greatest loss on the enemy.
Xenophon On the Cavalry Commander 1.6

A different type of horsemanship

- ▣ We would persuade the young recruits to learn for themselves how to mount from the spring; but if you provide an instructor, you will receive well-merited praise. The way to help the older men is to accustom them to get a leg-up in the Persian fashion. Xenophon *On the Cavalry Commander* 1.17

A classical Development

- ▣ Although horses and horsemanship was known in the Greek world from the Bronze Age, the use of cavalry in war appears to have gained considerable momentum in the classical period.
- ▣ In the beginning of the classical period, Athens at least appears to have had no cavalry, as it is not mentioned at all in the Marathon campaign.

A Persian Influence?

- ▣ Having got Eretria into their power, they stayed a few days and then sailed for the land of Attica, pressing on hard and supposing that the Athenians would do the same as the Eretrians had done. And since **Marathon was the most convenient place in Attica for horsemen to act** and was also very near to Eretria, therefore Hippias the son of Peisistratos was guiding them thither.
Herodotos 6.102

Developing a Cavalry force

- ▣ Pericles also showed them that **they had twelve hundred horse including mounted archers**, with sixteen hundred archers unmounted, and three hundred galleys fit for service. Such were the resources of Athens in the different departments when the Peloponnesian invasion was impending and hostilities were being commenced. Pericles also urged his usual arguments for expecting a favourable issue to the war. Thucydides 2.13

Uses of the Cavalry

In Campaign

- ▣ Eight days had now passed while they had been sitting opposite to one another, when he gave this counsel to Mardonios; and Mardonios, perceiving that the advice was good, sent the cavalry when night came on to the pass of Kithairon leading towards Plataia, which the Boeotians call the "Three Heads" and the Athenians the "Oak Heads." Having been thus sent, the cavalry did not come without effect, for they caught five hundred baggage-animals coming out into the plain, which were bearing provisions from Peloponnesus to the army, and also the men who accompanied the carts: and having taken this prize the Persians proceeded to slaughter them without sparing either beast or man; and when they were satiated with killing they surrounded the rest and drove them into the camp to Mardonios. Herodotos 9.39

In Battle

- ▣ After this deed they spent two days more, neither side wishing to begin a battle; for the Barbarians advanced as far as the Asopos to make trial of the Hellenes, but neither side would cross the river. However the cavalry of Mardonios made attacks continually and did damage to the Hellenes; for **the Thebans, being very strong on the side of the Medes, carried on the war with vigour, and always directed them up to the moment of fighting;** and after this the Persians and Medes took up the work and were they who displayed valour in their turn. Herodotos 9.40

In battle: Creating Confusion

- ▣ In the second place, since the space between the armies was a plain, the Lacedaemonians posted their horsemen in front of their phalanx, and the Thebans in like manner posted theirs over against them. Now the cavalry of the Thebans was in good training as a result of the war with the Orchomenians and the war with the Thespians, while the cavalry of the Lacedaemonians was exceedingly poor at that time. ... Now when Cleombrotus began to lead his army against the enemy, in the first place, before the troops under him so much as perceived that he was advancing, the horsemen had already joined battle and those of the Lacedaemonians had speedily been worsted; then in their flight they had fallen foul of their own hoplites, and, besides, the companies of the Thebans were now charging upon them. Xenophon *Hellenika* 6.4.10-12

In defense

- ▣ But if the city falls back on her navy, and is content to keep her walls intact, as in the days when the Lacedaemonians invaded us with all the Greeks to help them, and if **she expects her cavalry to protect all that lies outside the walls, and to take its chance unaided against her foes,** — why then, I suppose, we need first the strong arm of the gods to aid us, and in the second place it is essential that our cavalry commander should be masterly. For much sagacity is called for in coping with a greatly superior force, and abundance of courage when the call comes. Xenophon *On the Cavalry Commander* 7.4

Problems of Cavalry

- ▣ For the richest men kept the horses, and it was only when the ban was called out that the appointed trooper presented himself; then he would get his horse and such arms as were given him, and take the field on the moment's notice. As for the men, on the other hand, it was those who were least strong of body and least ambitious who were mounted on the horses. Xenophon *Hellenika* 6.4.11

Cavalry as Status Symbol



Questions?

Follow-Up Reading

- ▣ Xenophon *On the Cavalry Commander*(available from the Perseus Digital Library)
- ▣ Glenn R. Bugh 'Cavalry Inscriptions from the Athenian Agora' *Hesperia*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (Jan. - Mar., 1998), pp. 81-90 Stable URL:
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/148421>