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FIRST IRANIAN MILITARY UNITS IN THE ARMY OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT*

Discussions of Alexander's monarchy have accorded little room to the role played by Iranians in the great conqueror's army. While the issue appears in several studies and monographs on Alexander's policies in Asia,[1] there has never been a comprehensive study that seeks to analyze not only the numbers but also the place accorded to Iranian troops in Alexander's army as well as the influence that they exerted in both the military and the empire.[2] The ancient authors of Alexander paid little attention to these Oriental troops, providing only scant and fragmentary information on them, preferring instead to ignore them. This tendency in the sources was rightly pointed out by E. Badian: 'We know very little about Alexander's actual use of Iranians, except for a few eminent personages (such as satraps) and, in a very general sense, auxiliary units. Our sources were not interested, and even *their* sources had not been, except where serious trouble resulted.'[3] As a result, by failing to appreciate the Iranian presence in Alexander's army, scholars are hindered from

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[1] Various aspects of the Iranians' presence in Alexander's army have been analyzed in Berve 1926 I, 103–217; Brunt 1963, 27–46; Griffith 1963, 68–74; Badian 1965, 160–1; Bosworth 1980, 1–21; Hammond 1983; 1996; 1998; Olbrycht 2004; 77–204; 2010, 364–365.

[2] Bosworth 1980; 1–21; Hamilton 1987, Briant 1980, 37–83 (= *Rois, tributs et paysans,* Paris 1982, 357–403); Olbrycht 2004; 2010; Lane Fox 2007, 267–311; Müller 2011.

[3] Badian 1985, 482. Similarly Berve 1926, I, 152.

reaching a clear understanding about the nature of his power and hence his empire.[4]

The present study focuses on the circumstances that allowed for the integration of Iranians in Alexander's army in 330 BC. It will be seen that their presence came as the result of political innovations introduced by the king and military necessity. These conditions in turn drove Alexander to enact changes in his armed forces, especially with respect to the expanded role of his cavalry. To combat the resistance that he encountered in eastern Iran and Central Asia, Alexander urgently needed fresh troops, but the reinforcements he received from the Balkans and western Asia proved insufficient. He was, therefore, left with only one solution: the recruitment of Iranians.

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The death of Darius III in western Parthia (summer 330) concluded an important stage in Alexander's Asian expedition. For many Macedonians, this event meant the end of the war: the king of the Persian empire had been defeated and murdered by his own officials. Although the eastern part of that great empire remained unconquered, most Macedonians wished to return home. They had achieved more than they had dreamt before the war began in 334. For their part, many Iranian officials and commanders, who had remained loyal to Darius to the end, saw no point in offering further resistance and surrendered to Alexander. The commanders, who were still at the head of a powerful army, controlled the Achaemenid heartland and royal residences – Persepolis, Susa, Babylon, and Ekbatana. Yet when Alexander crossed the Caspian Gates in 330, he did so without any effective resistance against his army in western Iran.[5]

The Macedonian king thus decided to continue the war and press on into eastern Iran and Central Asia.[6] He found it difficult, however, to persuade his Macedonian soldiers to keep fighting. Nor was that the only serious challenge he faced. Of crucial importance was his need to maintain the army's combat readiness in tact. For that purpose, it was necessary to ensure appropriate logistical support and especially to reinforce the ranks with new soldiers.

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[4] Droysen 1885, 27 devotes no more than a few sentences to the Asian cavalry in his comprehensive study of Alexander's army. In his discussion of Alexander's army, English 2009 makes no mention of the Iranian element.

[5] On the subjugation of Babylonia and Western Iran, see Seibert 1985, 96–114 and Bosworth 1988, 85–97.

[6] Olbrycht 1996, 151–153.

During the war in Persia, Alexander's army was continually reinforced by recruits from the Balkans. In the spring of 333, Alexander received 300 cavalry and 3,000 infantry from Macedon as well as some troops from Thessaly and Elis (Arr. 1.29.4). Further reinforcements joined Alexander in the summer and autumn of 333.[7] In Sittakene (Diod. 17.65.1; Curt. 5.1.39–42; Arr. 3.16.10) in 331 Alexander was met with fresh recruits from officers whom he had sent to collect them in Macedon (Diod. 17.49.1; Curt. 4.6.30) the year before. After 331, the king's army received no further reinforcements from Macedon. Apparently, the country had been stripped of recruits. The effect of Alexander's expedition on Macedonian demographics is variously estimated,[8] but there is general agreement that it aggravated the country's male population. This is made clear especially by Diodoros (18.12.2) who writes about the shortage of men in Macedon at the outset of the Lamian War (322) as a result of so many recruits who had been sent to Alexander.[9] Alexander himself was well aware of the demographic difficulties in his homeland. In 334 he dispatched Macedonian newlyweds home from Anatolia to winter and return to service in the following spring. He also ordered officers 'to enlist as many cavalry and infantry from the land as possible' (Arr. 1.24.1). When he released a small group of Macedonians in Baktria in 329, Alexander demanded that they attend to begetting progeny (*ut liberos generarent* – Curt. 7.5.27).

That no further Macedonian reinforcements were sent was in part due to the less than stable situation in Hellas after 331. While Antipater could count on receiving a number of Macedonian recruits in Europe, he needed them urgently for action in Greece: Agis III of Sparta had initiated a war against Macedon (331).[10] Unrest kept breaking out in various regions throughout the Balkans. Zopyrion, Alexander's general in Thrace, was completely routed by the Scythians and perished with his army of 30,000 men (ca. 330 or 326).[11] Thus

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[7] Curt. 3.1.24, 3.7.8; Kallisthenes *FGrH* F 35 (= Polyb. 12.19.1–2). See Bosworth 2002, 69–70.

[8] The negative impact of Alexander's expedition on Macedonian demographics is most convincingly demonstrated by Seibert 1986, 835–851. For other assessments, see Adams 1984; Bosworth 1986; 2002, 64–97; Badian 1994.

[9] Badian 1994, 267 rejects Diodoros' statement with a dubious argument: 'This passage is indeed interesting, for it suggests that the theory held by Seibert and adopted by Bosworth, that Alexander exhausted Macedonian manpower, may even be ancient, and in fact date back to the Hellenistic age.' There is no need to consider Diodoros' sober remark as some false theory. Badian is ignoring the fact that out of Alexander's army in Asia only a few returned home before 323 and that the soldiers, the flower of the male population, were in a prolonged separation from their lawful wives, who remained in Macedon.

[10] Badian 1994; Blackwell 1999, 53–79.

[11] Iust. 2.3.4, 12.1.4, 12.2.16–17; Curt. 10.1.44–45. Cf. Bosworth 1988, 166; Seibert 1985, 184; Dempsie 1991, 78. Zopyrion's troops must have consisted chiefly of allied Thracians. The number of soldiers in his army given by the sources may be inflated.

Alexander was compelled to seek elsewhere for reinforcements. Thus he hired mercenaries, mainly Greek, but also Balkan (especially Thracian). Additionally, men were called up from various western Asian satrapies, such as Syria, Karia and Lydia.[12] Yet such measures fell short of solving the central problem of maintaining the royal army's numerical force and combat strength. Greek mercenaries (with few exceptions) did not constitute its key formations; they were mostly used as garrison personnel in the satrapies and as settlers in colonies. The same was generally true of Anatolians and Thracians. As a result, Alexander was compelled to tap into local populations where he concentrated his military and political activity from 330 onward – on the Iranian Plateau and in Central Asia.

There was one more important reason for Alexander to recruit Iranians: they were a major military potential in lands east of the Tigris and could pose a threat to Alexander, as was forcefully demonstrated in Areia, Sogdiana, and Baktria. To forestall any potential revolt, Alexander drew upon the lessons learned from his Thracian campaign.[13] In view of the approaching war with Persia, the king had made certain that he first pacify the Thracian tribes. He obliged Thracian war leaders and officials to accompany him on that expedition, a coercion he presented as an honor. In this way, Alexander achieved *uti principes beneficiis eius obstricti nihil novare vellent, plebs vero ne posset quidem spoliata principibus* (Front. *Strateg.* 2.11.3). In the Iranian satrapies, Alexander repeatedly insisted that hostages be given him. From Oxyartes, Rhoxana's father, he demanded two of his sons for military service, but the noble gave up all three (Curt. 8.4.21). Among the reasons why the Iranian phalanx troops called the Successors (*epigonoi)* were activated in 327 was the need to enlist fresh recruits and the growing fear of unrest in the Iranian hinterland as the Indian campaign progressed (Curt. 8.5.4). In India and on other occasions Alexander took hostages.[14] Typically, they were young men who were conscripted. For Alexander, this arrangement had multiple advantages. No only did he obtain new soldiers, but he secured the loyalty of their fathers and relatives, while simultaneously despoiling the satrapies of men fit to bear arms.

The role of Iranians in Alexander's army during his campaign against Darius III (334–330) was altogether marginal. Arrian attributes to Alexander a letter that he wrote to Darius while in Phoenician Marathos (332) in which he makes the outlandish statement: 'I hold myself responsible for all of your troops who did not die in the field but took refuge with me. They are serving now in my army of

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[12] From 330, details in Hammond 1996, 99–109.

[13] Bosworth 1988, 28–30.

[14] Hostages in India: Arr. 6.14.3. Polydamas, sent to Ekbatana to secure Parmenion's execution, was given two Arabs as companions, their wives and children remaining with Alexander as hostages to guarantee their loyalty (Curt. 7.2.18).

their own free will.'[15] Thus Alexander, claiming the kingdom of Asia, presented himself to the Orientals as their rightful king and tried to win them over for military service. The authenticity of this letter has been questioned, but there is no reason to reject its substance; i.e., the intentions of Alexander's policies.[16] The Macedonian was only too happy to recruit Iranians and other subjects of Darius III. Yet at that stage in the war we know of few instances of Achaemenid officials and Iranian soldiers deserting Darius to join Alexander. The only senior Achaemenid officer then in Alexander's immediate circle was Mithrines, who had surrendered the Sardes citadel in 333 (Arr. 1.17.3f.; Curt. 3.12.6). It seems that the claim of numerous Persian deserters was inserted in the letter by an author drawing from the accounts concerning the events after the battle of Gaugamela (331) when numerous Iranians arrived in Alexander's camp in the summer of 330 when he rested in Parthia and Hyrkania.

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The first Iranian units of significant size in Alexander's army, including Baktrians and Sogdians, are explicitly reported in Central Asia in 328 (Arr. 4.17.3). This raises the question of whether Alexander had not previously made use of the highly skillful Median or Parthian horsemen. Most scholars reject the possibility. But G.T. Griffith (1963, 69) posed just such a scenario: 'If Bactrians and Sogdians could be enlisted by 328, when those two satrapies were still very far from 'pacified', it is hard indeed to believe that the satrapies by now long securely held, such as Persis, Media and the rest, had not been called on for levies before this.' G.T. Griffith posited the notion as the natural result of 'general probability.' He rightly remarked that 'with much of the fine cavalry of the former Persian armies available now, it would seem surprising indeed if Alexander did not make use of it, always supposing that it was politically sound to do so.'

Griffith's intuition was correct, but he failed to follow up on its implications, because he did not take note of the change in Alexander's policy in 330. From that year onward, the steady increase of Iranians in Alexander's army was the direct consequence of his new pro-Iranian policy which he had begun in the satrapy of Parthia-Hyrkania in eastern Iran.[17] While in Persis Alexander made no conciliatory gesture toward the Iranians, in Central Asia, however, such gestures

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[15] Arr. 2.14.7. On Darius III's letter and Alexander's reply, see Bosworth 1980a, 227–233; Bernhardt 1988; Bloedow 1995.

[16] On the authenticity of the letter and its substance, see Griffith 1963, 69, n. 4; 1968, 33–48; Pearson 1954–55, 447–450.

[17] Olbrycht 2010.

are visible, as in his agreement with Oxyartes to marry Rhoxana. Therefore, despite some initial setbacks in Central Asia, Alexander could count on the broad support of a great number of Iranians. In Persis and Media, the situation was more complicated as that was the heartland of the Achaemenids. Thus large-scale recruitment in Persis (330) was probably out of the question, what with popular opposition against Alexander and his own resentment toward its inhabitants at the time. In Media, Alexander met with little opposition in 330, even though what was left of Darius III's army must have been stationed there. Media held great military potential, as its cavalry and Nisaian horses were renown throughout Asia. Issos (333) saw a force of 10,000 Median cavalry next to 50,000 infantry troops (Curt. 3.2.4, 3.9.5). The Medes furnished essential forces for Darius' army at Gaugamela, but the size of their contingent is not known (Arr. 3.8.4; Curt. 4.12.12). The Parthians and Hyrkanians likewise fielded large contingents of their own. Did Alexander decide to deploy this potential in his vanguard?

It seems that the sources contain hints of Iranian cavalry in Alexander's army as early as 330 that have so far gone unnoticed. Curtius Rufus (7.3.4) provides a curious statement that during Alexander's stay in Arachosia, the royal army was joined by a cavalry detachment of 200 *nobiles* from Media. Curtius says:

Ibi exercitus, qui sub Parmenione fuerat, occurit: sex milia Macedonum erant et CC nobiles et V milia Graecorum cum equitibus DC, haud dubie robur omnium virium regis.

Curtius must be referring to the corps who were originally left in Ekbatana to guard the royal treasury and later under Kleitos joined up with Alexander in Parthia. Arrian informs us that Alexander left Harpalos with 6,000 Macedonians, a contingent of cavalry, and a few light troops to protect the royal treasury when it was moved from Persia to Ekbatana. Parmenion was instructed to take mercenaries, Thracians, and 'any cavalry other than the Companions past the country of the Kadusians and march into Hyrkania.' Finally Kleitos was ordered, on reaching Ekbatana from Susa, to take the Macedonians left in Media to protect the treasury and march on to Parthia (Arr. 3.19.7–8). In actuality, Parmenion remained in Media.[18]

Curtius Rufus and Arrian are in partial agreement over the composition of the troops in Media. But for one of the formations Curtius uses the curious term *nobiles*.[19] Usually, this is taken to mean Macedonian Companions (*hetairoi*), but in the text the Macedonians and the *nobiles* are mentioned separately. Moreover, the numbers of Macedonians in both sources are identical: 6,000 men. Thus, the 200 *nobiles* must be a reference to some non-Macedonian unit. Generally, the

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[18] Seibert 1985, 110.

[19] Brunt 1976, 529: 'Companion cavalry left behind.' Similarly Bosworth 1980a, 338.

term *nobiles* as a designation of Macedonian *hetairoi* does not occur in Curtius Rufus because he employs the terms *amici* or *cohors amicorum*.[20] Crucial to this issue is a description by Curtius Rufus of a feast Alexander gave in the capital of Sogdiana, Marakanda (8.5.9, ed. Müller):

> *Igitur festo die omni opulentia convivium exornari iubet, cui non Macedones modo et Graeci, principes amicorum, sed etiam barbari nobiles adhiberentur.*

Here the *nobiles* reappear and are easy to identify. While the term appears in the original text without an appositive, many editions of Curtius Rufus contain amendments such as *barbari*, *hostium*, etc.[21] Yet such additions only distort the original sense. The term *nobiles* clearly refers to Iranian aristocrats, chiefly those from Baktria and Sogdiana, who were present at the feast.[22] Strikingly, Iranian *nobiles* appear mentioned side by side with Macedonian (and the few Greek) Companions (*hetairoi*) described as *principes amicorum*. All this speaks against identifying the *nobiles* in Curt. 7.3.4, who are – mentioned separately from Macedonians and Hellenes – with the Macedonian *hetairoi*. In other words, in both passages in Curtius Rufus (7.3.4 and 8.5.9), the term *nobiles* applies to aristocratic Iranians.[23] On the whole, Curtius Rufus was only too eager to call Iranians *nobiles*.[24] It is plausible to generalize that the term and its derivatives generally refer to Iranians, very rarely to the Macedonian royal pages,[25] and altogether sporadically to Hellenes.[26]

In this way, Curtius 7.3.4 is proof that a detachment of 200 Iranian horsemen were present in Alexander's army, perhaps among the Companions, already in 330. If they had been dispatched from Media, they were probably in a unit composed of young Median aristocrats serving the twin roles of honorary hostages and the king's soldiers.

One more circumstance suggests that Iranian cavalry appeared in Alexander's by 330. In western Parthia, Alexander made a number of important deci-

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[20] Curt. 6.2.11, 6.7.17; 10.1.6. Cf. Eichert 1893, 47 and 172.

[21] The term *barbari* was added by Freinsheim and accepted in the editions of Vogel and Müller (see Müller, Schönfeld 1954), whereas Hedicke, Rolfe, Bardon, and Atkinson prefer *hostium* (cf. Atkinson 2000). Lucarini 2009, 258 gives the phrase: *<Persarum> nobiles*.

[22] Curt. 8.19.21–22 identifies the participants as *barbari* and *Persae*, both terms principally referring to Iranians from Central Asia and the Iranian Plateau.

[23] It was Vogel 1880, 65, who first identified *nobiles* in Curt. 7.3.4 as Persians, but this observation has remained unnoticed.

[24] Curt. 3.13.6, 6.2.11, 8.4.21, 8.4.23, 9.10.19, 10.1.5.

[25] 8.2.35 (*nobiles iuvenes* in Sogdiana); 8.6.7 (*Hermolaus, puer nobilis ex regia cohorte*); 8.13.13 (*nobiles iuvenes* fighting against the Indian king Poros); 10.5.8 (*nobiles pueri custodiae corporis* after Alexander's death).

[26] 3.6.1 (for Greek physicians); 3.13.15 (for envoys from Sparta and Athens captured at Damascus).

sions that year. He dismissed his Thessalian horsemen and contingents of Greek allies (i.e., the contingents of the League of Corinth). For their return journey, the men were given the cover of a mounted detachment under Epokillos.

Arrian (3.19.5–6) places the dismissal of Thessalians at Ekbatana, the main operating base of Alexander's army in Iran.[27] According to the Vulgate tradition, the Thessalians and other Hellenes were dismissed after Darius III's death (Curt. 6.2.17; Diod. 17.74.3; Iust. 12.1.1). One does not exclude the other: Alexander released Greeks in an edict issued in Parthia, which was applicable to units stationed at Ekbatana. Alexander appears not to have set foot in that city in 330. The escort was doubtless necessary as the situation in newly conquered territories was still unstable, as dangers lurked from local tribes and former soldiers of Darius III. Some Greeks chose to enroll as mercenaries with Alexander's army. Thus, a group of Thessalians remained in Alexander's service until 329 (Curt. 6.6.35). The escort cavalry under Epokillos was probably made up of mercenaries.[28]

The departure of the Thessalians left Alexander without a major corps of choice cavalry. His other mounted units were concentrated in Media and Parthia. Vast amounts of gold and silver were stored in Ekbatana at the time, guarded by Harpalos, who was given for this purpose 6,000 Macedonians, additional cavalry, and light infantry (*psiloi*). The 6,000 Macedonians were only to remain at Ekbatana temporarily for Kleitos, who was then at Susa due to illness, was supposed to take over the force and bring it to Alexander. At that point, Alexander was pursuing Darius III with units of *prodromoi,* Companions (*hetairoi*), mounted mercenaries under Erigyios,[29] a part of the Macedonian phalanx, archers and Agrianes (Arr. 3.20.1). At the same time, a garrison under Parmenion, consisting of mercenaries, Thracians, and 'all the other cavalry (ὅσοι ἄλλοι ἱππεῖς) who were outside the Companion cavalry' (Arr. 3.19.7), was in Media. Who composed that cavalry?[30] Since Greek mercenaries and Thracians are mentioned separately, and neither *hetairoi* nor Balkan cavalry come into play (the Thracians most likely made up the infantry in Media), they could not have been Europeans.[31] In all likelihood, they were Iranians. Altogether Arrian lists all possible horse units of Alexander in

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[27] Bosworth 1980a, 335–336.; Seibert 1985, 109.

[28] Heckel 1992, 364.

[29] Milns 1978, 376; Seibert 1985, 111–113.

[30] Griffith (1963, 70) has noted that this is 'the only possible allusion that I have found to Oriental cavalry' in Alexander's army before 328, but he tends to diminish the strength of his argument, by ultimately identifying 'a third unit of mercenary horse.'

[31] Milns 1978, 375–376, argues that Parmenion received Greek mercenary infantry and cavalry, Thracian infantry and cavalry, the *prodromoi-sarissophoroi* and the Paionian cavalry. But the Greek and Thracian units are named separately from those 'remaining cavalry', and the *prodromoi* took part in Alexander's pursuit of Darius. Generally, Milns' modifications of Arrian's account clearly distort the evidence.

Media and Parthia in 330 as belonging to four corps, respectively commanded by Harpalos, Parmenion, Epokillos, and the king himself. This hypothetical Iranian cavalry unit would have presumably been assigned to Parmenion at Ekbatana. The Median satrap Oxydates, appointed by Alexander,[32] had apparently created mounted units of his own either to support Parmenion's military operations or to be sent to Alexander's field army (as is implied by Curt. 7.3.4).

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One of the most disputed contingents in Alexander's army is the mounted javelin throwers (ἱππακοντισταί). For the first time, the *hippakontistai* appear in Hyrkania in 330. Alexander used them to attack the Mardians alongside Hypaspists, archers, Agrianes, infantry batallions (*taxeis*) of Koinos and Amyntas, and a half of the *hetairoi* (Arr. 3.24.1). Arrian notes that the *hippakontistai* formed one *taxis*. From the Mardian campaign in Hyrkania the mounted javelin-men appear as an elite cavalry formation used in particularly difficult and dangerous military actions. A few weeks previously, Alexander had no *hippakontistai* under his command. While he was pursuing Darius III in eastern Media and western Parthia, Alexander had selected the best and fastest units, including the cavalry of *prodromoi* (Front-runners or Scouts) (Arr. 3.20.1). Toward the end of the chase, the king took Companions (*hetairoi*), *prodromoi*, as well as 'the strongest and lightest of the infantry' (Arr. 3.21.2).[33] A comparison of Alexander's forces in pursuit of Darius III and those involved in the attack on the Mardians in Hyrkania suggests that the *hippakontistai* operated tactically in place of the *prodromoi* cavalry. But this is just one aspect of the origin of the cavalry consisting of javelin throwers.

A detachment of 40 *hippakontistai* was assigned by Alexander to Anaxippos, the Macedonian commander paired with the satrap of Areia, Satibarzanes, in 330 (Arr. 3.25.2). Arrian relates that they were to occupy key positions to prevent any escape as the Macedonians marched through Areia. Yet Anaxippos and his men were killed by Satibarzanes, who unexpectedly launched an attack against Alexander, who fought against the insurrectionists with his select units: the *hetairoi*, *hippakontistai*, archers, and two infantry brigades (*taxeis*) under Koinos and Amyntas (Arr. 3.25.6).

The *hippakontistai* subsequently participated in the pursuit of Artaxerxes Bessos in Central Asia (329). When Alexander learned that Spitamenes and Datapher-

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[32] Curt. 6.2.11; Arr. 3.20.3. Cf. Berve 1926 II, no. 588; Heckel 2005, 188.

[33] These infantry units were Hypaspists under Nikanor and Agrianes under Attalos, see Arr. 3.21.8 with Milns 1978, 377.

nes intended to hand over Artaxerxes Bessos, he dispatched Ptolemaios with three hipparchies of the *hetairoi*, all the *hippakontistai*, an infantry *taxis* under Philotas, a Hypaspist chiliarchy, Agrianes, and a half of his archers (Arr. 3.29.7). Mounted javelin-men fought in the battle against the Sacae on the Iaxartes river in 329 (Arr. 4.4.7). After crossing the river, Alexander sent a hipparchy of the mercenaries and four squadrons (*ilai*) of the *sarissophoroi* after the Sacae. Then he ordered three Companion hipparchies and 'all the mounted javelin-men' (*hippakontistai*) to charge at the nomads. He himself led the rest of the cavalry mingled with archers, Agrianes and ψιλοί under Balakros (Arr. 4.4.4–9).

Mounted javelin-men fought later in India (327–325). They are named among Alexander's troops next to the Hypaspists, Companions, *asthetairoi*, archers and Agrianes who assaulted the Aspasians, Guraians and Assakenians (327/326) (Arr. 4.23.1). During the heavy fighting against the Assakenians, Alexander formed a special corps, comprised of Companions, *hippakontistai*, *taxeis* of Koinos and Polyperchon, 1,000 Agrianes and archers (Arr. 4.25.6). In the battle of Masaga, *hippakontistai*, Agrianes and archers attacked the enemy as vanguard troops (Arr. 4.26.4). In the campaign in the lower Indus valley, the *hippakontistai* fought next to the Agrianes in Peithon's corps (Arr. 6.17.4).

Overall, the mounted javelin throwers (*hippakontistai*) appear in 330–325 as one of the most mobile and best units that Alexander commanded.[34] In a tactical sense, they filled the gap left by the *prodromoi*, but once the Iranian horse archers (*hippotoxotai*) entered service in 327, they took the place of the *hippakontistai* in the army's hierarchy. This is confirmed by the absence of the *hippakontistai* cavalry in the pitched battle on the Hydaspes (326) and instead by the presence in a key tactical role – of horse archers (*hippotoxotai*).[35]

The Thessalian cavalry was one of the best contingents in Alexander's army.[36] In the Iranian theatre, however, the utility of the Thessalians was limited. The terrain was mountains, partly steppe and desert; the tactics that were required were extremely rapid which only a sprit de corps could muster. The Thessalians were not suited for such an environment.[37] In Iran and Central Asia, Alexander needed a new type of cavalry, one that was lighter than the Thessalians and better adapted to the adverse conditions of Asia. It was the *hippakontistai* that filled that need. It was by no means a coincidence that the *hippakon-*

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[34] Gaebel 2002, 176–177.

[35] Olbrycht 2004, 151–170.

[36] Cf. Berve 1926 I, 140–141; Hammond 1981, 31–32.

[37] This is indicated by the fact that the Thessalian horsemen who stayed with Alexander in 330 as mercenaries (130 men in Curt. 6.6.35, cf. Arr. 3.25.4) apparently did not display any battle spirit and on reaching the Oxos in Baktria were sent back home (329) – Arr. 3.29.5; 5.27.5. Cf. Curt. 7.5.27.

tistai first appeared in Hyrkania, just after the Thessalians were dismissed. Their purpose was to fill the gap left by the withdrawn contingent.

Opinions of the origin and ethnic composition of the *hippakontistai* are highly divided: they are variously identified as former soldiers of Darius III,[38] newly recruited Iranians,[39] Balkan Paionians,[40] possibly even Macedonians.[41] Sources provide no clear indication on the ethnic makeup of the *hippakontistai*. The reason for this was largely the reform of the cavalry introduced by Alexander in Sittakene (winter 331/330). Until then, the king's mounted units were divided by nationality. Alexander abolished that distinction and named officers according to merit rather than birthplace (Curt. 5.2.6. Cf. Diod. 17.64.2–4). Thus some cavalry units had ceased to be recruited purely on an ethnic basis. Unfortunately, Curtius does not specify which units were affected. In reality, the ethnic principle in recruiting soldiers still played an essential role for we hear, e.g., of Baktrians and Sogdians fighting in Koinos' corps in Sogdiana next to the Companions, *hippakonstistai* and 'the other troops' in 328 (Arr. 4.17.3).

A point to consider is whether the *hippakontistai* were, as some have proposed, of Thracian or Paionian background. No mention is made of Paionians after Gaugamela. Perhaps it is due to the inaccuracy of the accounts (after Alexander's reforms in Sittakene they were less specific on ethnic matters). Most probably, however, the Paionians, like other allied troops, were sent home by Alexander in 330.[42] The Thracians – whether foot or horse – were as a rule enlisted in occupying garrisons.[43] This contradicts claims that they made up a mounted javelin thrower squad as part of an elite cavalry in the king's field army.

In Alexander's army at the Hellespont, Diodoros (17.17.4) names a division of 900 horsemen under Kassandros. The whole unit consisted of Thracians, *prodromoi,* and Paionians. Probably a proportional division of the corps into three units of 300 men each should be assumed.[44] Sometimes, the designation *prodromoi* was used for the whole formation; e.g., Arrian 3.8.1 calls Paionian horsemen *prodromoi*.[45] In most cases, however, they are distinguished from the Paionians

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[38] Berve 1926, I, 151.

[39] Griffith 1963, 69–70; Hamilton 1987, 476–478; Brunt 1976, LXXIV-V; Wirth, Hinüber 1985, 881.

[40] Bosworth 1988, 271, remarks that the Paionians forming the πρόδρομοι 'are not mentioned after Gaugamela, and as light cavalry they could well have formed the nucleus of the specialized unit of javelin-men.' Similarly Bosworth 1980, 14–15.

[41] Bosworth 1980a, 352.

[42] Milns 1978, 376, maintains they were left with Parmenion at Ekbatana.

[43] Arr. 6.15.2; Curt. 10.1.1. Cf. Berve 1926 I, 134; Heckel 1992, 361.

[44] Milns 1966, 167–168; Hammond 1998, 408.

[45] On the *prodromoi*: Arr. 1.12.7; 1.14.6; 2.9.2; 3.7.7; 3.12.3; 3.18.2; 3.20.1; 3.21.2; Diod. 17.17.4. Cf. Heckel 1992, 351–355.

(Arr. 1.14.1, 1.14.6, 2.9.2, 3.12.3). The sources can be understood as implying that the *prodromoi* were sometimes also called *sarissophoroi*, i.e. Lancers.[46] However, the Paionian horsemen are never describes as *sarissophoroi*. Generally, the term *prodromoi* designatesd the whole elite unit of light cavalry led initially by Kassandros, in other cases it is used for the Macedonian units called *sarissophoroi*. The core of the *prodromoi* must have been recruited in Macedon, since Diodoros (17.17.4) makes no indication of their ethnic origin as is the case with foreign troops.[47] Also their commanders were Macedonian. In particular, the unit of Thracians, recorded together with *prodromoi* and Paionians, must have been recruited within Macedon for it was separate from the Thracian allied contingents. The term *sarissophoroi* last appears in Alexander's battle with the Sacae on the Iaxartes in 329 (Arr. 4.4.6). In this battle, the *hippakontistai* were already active. This rules out the *sarissophoroi* as a force from which the *hippakontistai* were recruited. In all likelihood, the *sarissophoroi* or *prodromoi* proper were incorporated into the Companion cavalry during the Baktrian campaign of 329–327.[48]

One more possibility remains to explain the origin and ethnic composition of the javelin-men cavalry units (*hippakontistai*): they could have been recruited from the excellent Iranian cavalry. While struggling to find reinforcements after 330, Alexander can hardly be thought to have ignored a chance to obtain cavalry in northern Iran. The *hippakontistai* unit appears soon after the tour of duty ended for a contingent of choice Thessalian cavalry numbering 1,800 at the start of the expedition. In the face of further fighting in Iran, in regions which excelled with cavlary, Alexander urgently needed considerable reinforcements to replenish his horse. Given the circumstances, this could only have been done by recruiting Medes, Parthians, Hyrkanians, and other Iranians.

While in pursuit of Darius III in eastern Media and western Parthia, Alexander took with him a large number of horse. Curtius Rufus (5.13.8) speaks of a select force of 6,000 horsemen and 300 *dimachae*, i.e., heavily armed infantry traveling on horseback. The figure of 6,000 cavalry, confirmed by Justin (11.15.4), seems extremely high. Apparently, it does not include the phalanx mentioned by Curtius (5.13.10) which followed the king. In the last stage of the

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[46] *Sarissophoroi*: Arr. 1.14.1; Curt. 4.15.13 (*sarissophoroi* under Aretes); Arr. 3.12.3 (Aretes as commander of the *prodromoi*). In the battle on the Granikos, Amyntas son of Arrhabaios led *sarissophoroi* next to the Paionians (Arr. 1.14.1); the designation *prodromoi* does not occure. The same Amyntas, attested in Arr. 1.12.6–7, commanded 4 *ilai* of the *prodromoi*, which – together with one Companion squadron – are called Scouts (σκοποί). That *sarissophoroi* was an alternative term for *prodromoi* is showed by Hammond 1998, 408–409.

[47] Rightly so Hammond 1998, 411.

[48] Berve 1926 I, 129; Hammond 1998, 418.

pursuit, when some units (cf. Curt. 5.13.8 and Arr. 3.20.1) must have remained behind due to fatigue, Alexander divided his troops and sent Nikanor on to check Darius' flight (Curt. 5.13.19). Nikanor's tactical aim required a considerable force, for the Persian corps showed a high level of combat readiness; Curtius mentions (5.13.19) a detachment of 3,000 Persian horsemen who offered resistance in one such engagements. At the same time, barely 3,000 of the cavalry kept up with Alexander himself (Curt. 5.13.21). Even if Curtius' and Justin's data are not altogether accurate – both authors do not mention the strength of the infantry units – the number of mounted soldiers is still unusual.

While describing the beginning of the pursuit of Darius in eastern Media, Arrian (3.20.1) speaks of Companions, *prodromoi,* the mercenary horse under Erigyios, the Macedonian phalanx, archers and Agrianes. But by reason of the speed of the march, many of Alexander's units 'were left behind worn out.' After crossing Rhagai, Alexander had with him – according to Arrian (3.21.2) – *prodromoi*, Companions and 'the strongest and lightest of the infantry,', i.e. the Hypaspists and Agrianes (cf. Arr. 3.21.8: on paper both infantry divisions had up to 4,000 men). Arrian (3.21.7) adds that five hundred of Alexander's horsemen were made to dismount so that a select number of infantrymen would be able to continue to march on horse.

The *hetairoi* (on paper they numbered some 2,000 men)[49] and *prodromoi* (the whole unit amounted to 900 in 334) added up to almost 3,000 men. Curtius' figure of 6,000 horsemen seems also to refer to other units, including 600 mercenaries under Erigiyos. Generally, the figure 3,500–4,000 would be probably the absolute maximum for the royal European cavalry forces operating against Darius in western Parthia in summer 330.[50] It seems possible that Alexander was already leading a sizable number of Iranian cavalry which, several weeks later, after Darius' death, were recorded in Hyrkania as the *hippakontistai* consisting then of about 2,000 men. Some of them probably served already as scouts, others were kept at the rear to be employed after the pursuit of Darius had ended. In the available evidence, however, the presence of Iranian horsemen is directly not attested; moreover, nothing is explicitly said about the origins of *hippakonstistai*. All we know is that the unit suddenly appeared in Hyrkania as one of Alexander's elite cavalry forces just after Darius' death. Generally, the available sources were not interested in the Iranian forces that were included in Alexander's army

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[49] The *hetairoi* cavalry numbered 1,800 soldiers in 334, see Diod. 17.17.4. In reckoning the attested reinforcements of 800 horsemen in 333 and 331, Alexander could have made up for losses and transfers, or perhaps could have slightly increased the strength of the Companion cavalry in Sittakene in 331 of up to about 2,000 men. For sources, see Berve 1926 I, 104–112.

[50] Erigyios' mounted mercenaries mentioned in Arr. 3.20.1 (about 600, see Diod. 17.17.4) must have stayed at the rear. They are not mentioned during the final stages of the pursuit.

unless they were engaged in major battles like the one at the Hydaspes. To sum up, there was about 2,000 Companions, 900 *prodromoi*, 600 mercenaries under Erigyios, and up to 2,000 Iranians – altogether 5,500 men, a figure remarkably near the total of 6,000, that is reported in Curtius and Justin.

Who served in the *hippakontistai* unit? It seems that Alexander decided to make use of Iranians in the summer of 330. Already after Darius III's defeat at Gaugamela (331), when Alexander stood at the gates of Babylonia, Susiana, and Persis, the hostile attitudes of Persians and other Iranians began to change. At that point, many Iranians concluded that Darius was bound to lose and that continued resistance was pointless. The Persian Mazaios, who had not long before valiantly fought against Alexander at Gaugamela, was appointed satrap of Babylon. He was the first notable Iranian to go over to Alexander's side, in return for a high office (another example is that of Mithrines of Sardes). From Babylonia to Paropamisos (Hindukush region), Alexander appointed more than a dozen satraps in the years 330–329, of whom only one (in Arachosia) was Macedonian, the rest were Iranian.[51] We can be sure that after destroying Persepolis, more and more Iranians were ready to support Alexander who appeared in Persia as the unquestionable victor.

Having subjugated Media, one of the largest satrapies in the Achaemenid empire, Alexander tried to win some of the local potentates. The conqueror first gave the satrapy to Oxydates. Curtius (6.2.11) reports that Oxydates had been arrested by Darius III and was under the sentence of death. Arrian (3.20.3) adds that Oxydates' experience under Darius recommended him to Alexander. Alexander's appointment in Media implies that he intended to replace satraps once loyal to Darius with those loyal to himself; a similar situation is to be understood for Amminapes, Alexander's newly appointed satrap in Parthia-Hyrkania.[52] Oxydates, like other Iranian potentates, must have had at his disposal a sizable number of troops from his clan ready to support Alexander's operations. In naming Amminapes as satrap of Parthia-Hyrkania, Alexander was apparently counting on their good acquaintance and on Amminapes' long involvement with Macedon as well as his family's connections in the satrapy. Significantly Alexander did not leave behind any Macedonian with an army in Parthia-Hyrkania. All he did was to attach to Amminapes a royal overseer (ἐπίσκοπος), Tlepolemos.[53] Conceivably, Amminapes must have had a sizable Iranian corps able to seize and hold his new satrapy safely. Surely, as an important member in the Parthian nobility, he could count on his own clan's support.

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[51] Olbrycht 2010, 353.

[52] Bosworth 1980a, 339.

[53] Arr. 3.22.1 uses thr verb ἐπισκοπέω 'to oversee', cf. Olbrycht 2004, 268–271.

Apparently, Iranian detachments recruited from among families and clans disloyal to Darius III gave birth to the *hippakontistai*. Iranian aristocratic houses, some of them openly supporting Alexander, especially after 331, had a large clientele which obeyed their order.[54] Possibly the *hippakontistai* partially consisted of survivors from Darius III's army stationed in Media itself or accompanying the Achaemenid king in his disastrous march eastward. The use of Iranian forces by Alexander during the pursuit of Darius in western Parthia may also be explained by the necessity of employing native soldiers well acquainted with the difficult conditions presented by the Alborz mountains, the adjoining deserts to the south and the forests of Hyrkania to the north between Rhagai and Hekatompylos. Surely Alexander was perfectly well aware of the danger presented by the harsh conditions and the possibility of unexpected Persian attacks. Moreover, he was keen to capture Darius before the Achaemenid king would be able to find shelter in the remote areas of eastern Iran or in Central Asia.

The use of the name *hippakontistai*, was probably initiated by Alexander because it does not appear before him and disappears after his death, replaced from the period of the Diadochoi on by the term 'Tarentines' ($\tau\alpha\rho\epsilon\nu\tau\hat{\imath}\nu\text{o}\iota$).[55]

The recruitment of the *hippakontistai* from among the Medes, Parthians, Hyrkanians, and other northern Iranians in 330 is very likely, since they were quite capable of fielding an excellent light cavalry, especially of mounted javelineers. In the Diadochoi period, Media is often referred to as a land of exquisite cavalry, especially horse javelineers.[56] All that changed was a terminology of armament. Among the thousands of corps of Median cavalry led by Peithon against Eumenes in Paraitakene and Gabiene (316) were $\lambda\text{o}\gamma\gamma\text{o}\phi\acute{\text{o}}\rho\text{o}\iota$, fighting alongside Parthian horse archers (Diod. 19.29.2). Their name was derived from $\lambda\acute{\text{o}}\gamma\chi\eta$ or 'javelin.' Tactically, the *lonchophoroi* did not differ from the *hippakontistai* of Alexander's time. Also the inhabitants of Parthia and Hyrkania were superb horsemen. Parthians and Hyrkanians fought valiantly at Gaugamela (Arr. 3.8.4; Curt. 4.12.11). The Hyrkanian cavalry appeared on the Graneikos (Diod. 17.19.4) and at Issos (total 6,000: Curt. 3.2.6, 9.5). At Ipsos (301) Seleukos had about 12,000 horse, almost entirely Iranian (Diod. 20.113.4). A decisive role in the battle was played by horse javelin-men using weapons of the same type as employed by Alexander's *hippakontistai*.[57]

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[54] It was a kind of *clientela* with connotations similar to what was recognized in the Roman world. Iranian aristocratic houses were organized in a way similar to the structure of the ruling Achaemenid clan, see Briant 2002, 334–338. Such houses had also armed forces of their own.

[55] According to Aelian (*Takt.* 2.11; 2.13 ed. Köchly), mounted javelin-men 'are properly called Tarentines.' Cf. Asklepiodotos, *Takt.* 7.11. On the Tarentines, see Launey 1949–1950, 601–604.

[56] Launey 1949–1950, 563–565.

[57] Olbrycht 2005, 231–234. Seleukos' horse archers and javelineers inflicted heavy losses on Antigonos' phalanx and surrounded it as light cavalry typically would. Antigonos himself was

Source accounts do not supply explicit figures on the strength of the *hippakontistai* under Alexander, but an estimate can be inferred. According to Arrian 3.24.1, it was organized initially as a single *taxis*. In the armies of the first half of the 4th century, *taxis* could refer to any large unit but was usually reserved for a single rank for either the cavalry or the infantry (cf. Xen. *Hell.* 4.1.26; 5.2.13). In Alexander's infantry, a *taxis* numbered initially 1,500 men, but after the Sittakene reforms, when the infantry and cavalry had been largely unified, it referred to 2,000 men.[58] It seems that the cavalry was also organized according to chiliarchiai, units numbering 1,000 men, and *taxeis*, encompassing two chiliarchiai. Thus, if the *hippakontistai* were organized along the lines preferred by Alexander after 331 as *chiliarchiai,* then they could well have numbered about 2,000 men, or two *chiliarchiai,* as subunits of one *taxis* in 330. It is highly likely that the *hippakontistai* grew in numbers during Alexander's campaign in eastern Iran and Central Asia, where there was no shortage of skilled cavalrymen: it could then easily exceed 2,000 men.

In sum the first Iranian units enlisted in Alexander's army were the cavalry detachments formed in Media; one of them, consisting of Iranian aristocrats, was sent to Arachosia in the autumn of 330. Another cavalry unit, supporting Alexander's generals in Media, was probably established by the satrap of the country Oxydates. Recruitment of Iranians for Alexander's army reached large proportions when the king established the *hippakontistai* division in 330. Three years later, during the war in India,[59] Iranians made up the most sizable ethnic component of Alexander's invasion force.

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killed in a hail of javelins (*akontismata* – Plut. *Demetr.* 29.3–5). Incidentally, Plutarch uses the term *akontisma* – a variant of *akontion* – also in his account of the killing of Darius III by his satraps (*Alex.* 43.1).

[58] For infantry, see Atkinson 1987; 1994, 58–59.

[59] Olbrycht 2004, 153–157.

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Abstract

The first Iranian units enlisted in Alexander's army were the cavalry detachments formed in Media; one of them, consisting of Iranian aristocrats, was sent to Arachosia in the autumn of 330. Another cavalry unit, supporting Alexander's generals in Media, was probably established by the satrap of the country Oxydates. Recruitment of Iranians for Alexander's army reached large proportions when the king established the *hippakontistai* division in 330.