

## ACHAEMENID ELITE CAVALRY: FROM XERXES TO DARIUS III

A proper understanding of any military establishment is predicated on a sound understanding of the distinctions of its various components, including the relationship of elite units to those of lesser standing. The infantry of Achaemenid Persia has been given increased attention in recent years, especially in my three recent articles on (a) the permanent Achaemenid infantry, these being the 10,000 so-called Immortals (ἀθάνατοι) and the 1,000 Apple Bearers (μηλοφόροι), (b) the κάρδακες, whom I identified as a kind of general-purpose infantry of indeterminate ethnicity, and (c) the defensive equipment of Achaemenid infantry.<sup>1</sup> In these articles, the Persian cavalry, or *asabāra* in Old Persian, was mentioned in passing, yet a thorough appraisal of elite Achaemenid cavalry is still required. For example, in his overview of Xerxes' army, Barkworth pays particular attention to the elite infantry, but the cavalry is mentioned only in passing, while Shabazi, in his entry on the Achaemenid army or *spāda*, does not mention elite cavalry at all.<sup>2</sup> In a recent important study, Tuplin looked carefully at the evidence for Achaemenid cavalry and the degree of importance attached to cavalry among the Persians, but only mentioned what might be termed elite cavalry twice – he did not offer any in-depth commentary on their relationship to other cavalry units.<sup>3</sup>

In the case of the Achaemenid army, there is a tendency to assimilate status with origin in the Persian heartland and/or with a close association with the Great King's person. There is a general acceptance, however debatable, that Herodotus' 10,000 Immortals comprised the Great King's 'guard', in the sense of an elite unit that accompanied the monarch in the field.<sup>4</sup> Yet the 10,000 cavalry mentioned at the same *locus*

<sup>1</sup> See M.B. Charles, 'Immortals and Apple Bearers: towards a better understanding of Achaemenid infantry units', *CQ* 61 (2011), 114–33; id., 'The Persian Κάρδακες', *JHS* 132 (2012), 7–22; id., 'Herodotus, body armour and Achaemenid infantry', *Historia* 61 (2012), 257–69. Abbreviations follow the 'Liste des périodiques' in *L'Année philologique*. Other abbreviations are as per LSJ and the *OLD*. All translations are my own. I would like to thank *CQ*'s anonymous referee as well as Dr Philip Rance for making insightful comments that have undoubtedly benefited this work.

<sup>2</sup> P. Barkworth, 'The organisation of Xerxes' army', *IA* 27 (1992), 149–67, especially 153–5, likewise E. Obst, *Der Feldzug des Xerxes* (Leipzig, 1914), 89–90; A.S. Shabazi, 'Army I. Pre-Islamic Iran', in E. Yarshater (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 2 (London and Boston, 2000), 489–99.

<sup>3</sup> C.J. Tuplin, 'All the king's horse: in search of Achaemenid Persian cavalry', in M. Trundle and G. Fagan (edd.), *New Perspectives on Ancient Warfare* (Leiden, 2010), 100–82, and especially 163 and 177. Tuplin's general conclusion is that cavalry were not quite as important among the Achaemenids as many scholars have led us to believe, a view which has important ramifications for a number of military issues, including the identification of the Chiliarch *par excellence* as an infantry or cavalry commander; on which, see Section 4 below.

<sup>4</sup> See, indicatively, P. Ducrey, *Guerre et guerriers dans la Grèce antique* (Paris, 1985), 100; P. Green, *The Greco-Persian Wars* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1996), 60; A. Keaveney, *The Life and Journey of Athenian Statesman Themistocles (524–460 B.C.?) as a Refugee in Persia* (Lewiston, NY, 2003), 46, 119; K. Farokh, *Shadows in the Desert: Ancient Persia at War* (Oxford and New York, 2007), 75; F. Maurice, 'The size of the army of Xerxes in the invasion of Greece 480 B.C.', *JHS* 50 (1930), 210–35, at 226; J.A.R. Munro, 'Some observations on the Persian wars (the campaign of Xerxes)', *JHS* 22 (1902), 294–332, at 296; Shabazi (n. 2), 492. N. Sekunda, 'The Persians', in J. Hackett (ed.), *Warfare in the Ancient World* (New York, 1989), 82–103, at 84, describes the ἀθάνατοι as 'the King's ... personal division'.

(7.40–1) have received little attention. Moreover, some studies have called into question the traditional way of ascertaining what constitutes ‘elite’ and ‘regular’ Persian units.<sup>5</sup> According to this emerging view, the standing royal or ‘palatine’ army, divorced from the various satrapal armies and ethnic levies called upon in times of war (including Persian and Median ones), should really be considered as something approximating ‘elite’ on account of its close association with the Great King.<sup>6</sup> Scrutinizing the proposition of proximity to the king being in some way equivalent to elite status therefore necessitates the examination of both putative elite infantry and cavalry in our ancient sources. To do this, it is necessary to examine in turn, and in chronological order, those pieces of evidence that allude, or have been alleged to allude, to what might appear to be elite cavalry.

Of course, determining the strength and composition of Achaemenid military units from textual evidence is fraught with difficulty.<sup>7</sup> A study of the putative elite cavalry cannot avoid these complications. One must rely, in the main, on those writing about Achaemenid cavalry from a Greek writer’s perspective, such as Herodotus, Arrian and Diodorus Siculus. This includes later Latin authors, such as Curtius Rufus, who largely based their work on earlier Greek material. This study does not aim to furnish any ironclad conclusions about such units. Rather, it seeks to assemble the corpus of available useful evidential material – an exercise which ultimately will touch on other cavalry units in Persian service, for determining exactly which units referred to in our sources are really elite constitutes a task of its own. Of course, there are various passages in our Greco-Roman sources pertaining to Achaemenid royal armies, rather than just satrapal troops.<sup>8</sup> But only those that have the potential to advance the present discussion relating to elite cavalry will be dealt with in any detail. By doing so, it is hoped that a measured analysis of the inconsistencies that characterize the source traditions will result. As with the elite infantry, such an undertaking aims to shed light where others, in their efforts to make sense of the sometimes internally inconsistent source material, have encountered confusion, and contributed not a little of their own. Furthermore, the study will not devote attention to the equipment of these cavalry units, nor analyse their performance in battle, except for where this is necessary to achieve a more complete understanding of unit type and composition.<sup>9</sup> It will also refrain from commenting

<sup>5</sup> See P. Briant, ‘The Achaemenid empire’, in K. Raaflaub and N. Rosenstein (edd.), *War and Society in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds* (Cambridge, MA, 1999), 105–28, at 121; Charles (n. 1 [2011]), 131–2; cf. T. Cuyler Young, ‘The consolidation of the empire and its limit of growth under Darius and Xerxes’, in J. Boardman, N.G.L. Hammond, D.M. Lewis and M. Ostwald (edd.), *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 4: *Persia, Greece and the Western Mediterranean, c. 525 to 479 B.C.* (Cambridge, 1988<sup>2</sup>), 53–111, at 91–2.

<sup>6</sup> On this, see G. Cawkwell, *The Greek Wars: The Failure of Persia* (Oxford, 2006), 239: ‘The alleged Palatine army was no more than the Royal Guards’, largely supported by Charles (n. 1 [2011]), 132. Much earlier, R.N. Frye, ‘The institutions’, in G. Walsler (ed.), *Beiträge zur Achämenidengeschichte* (Wiesbaden, 1972), 83–93, at 91, was coming round to this way of thinking. Of course, these units could operate under the command of the king’s generals, as seemingly occurred when Xerxes quit Greece and left the most senior units in Mardonius’ hands (Hdt. 8.113.2).

<sup>7</sup> See Charles (n. 1 [2011]), 115. For a discussion of iconographic, numismatic and similar non-literary sources for Achaemenid cavalry, see Tuplin (n. 3), 104–20.

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, passages such as Hdt. 4.128.3 (cavalry mentioned, but no numbers provided), Plut. *Art.* 24.1 (10,000 cavalry) and Diod. Sic. 16.40.46 (30,000 cavalry), all of which deal with royal armies, offer us little with respect to identifying elite cavalry units. As Tuplin (n. 3), 143 identifies, cavalry units often ‘appear in military narrative without the remotest information about where they come from’.

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed treatment of this, see Tuplin (n. 3), 158–74. On the equipment of Achaemenid cavalry, see A.K. Nefedkin, ‘The tactical development of Achaemenid cavalry’, *Gladius* 26 (2006), 5–18

on iconographic sources pertaining to Achaemenid cavalry, with the implications of this study on this field of enquiry being left to others.

## 1. ELITE CAVALRY IN HERODOTUS

Any study of the elite Achaemenid cavalry must inevitably begin with Herodotus, who devotes considerable space to describing the forces of the Great King Xerxes. One might imagine that some useful information on the composition of elite Persian cavalry units before this time might emanate from Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. Yet it is generally understood that this work, in the main, constitutes a form of didactic historical romance.<sup>10</sup> As a result, it is of very limited utility for our purpose. It will be only be adduced where it has the potential to corroborate other snippets of evidential material, although considerable caution will nevertheless be warranted when using this text.

Persian cavalry are described at Marathon (490 B.C.) during the reign of Darius I, but there is little in Herodotus' description (6.112–13) that can be used to distinguish elite from regular cavalry. Furthermore, cavalry are not specifically mentioned in Herodotus' brief description of the battle, which seems to have been largely an infantry contest.<sup>11</sup> Now to Xerxes' reign. In the oft-cited passage (Hdt. 7.40.1–41.2) describing the appearance of Xerxes' army before it made its way across the Hellespont on a pontoon bridge, some relevant information is provided. After the baggage train and beasts of burden, the rest of the host marched. But when more than half of this rather motley assemblage had passed, the truly Persian troops started to appear. First came '1,000 horsemen, selected out of all the Persians' (ἵππῳται χίλιοι ἐκ Περσέων πάντων ἀπολελεγμένοι, 7.40.2), then 1,000 spearman (αἰχμοφόροι, 7.40.2) carrying their spears turned downwards, with golden pomegranates on the butts of their spears. Next came a chariot carrying the chief Persian deity, and then Xerxes himself, followed by another 1,000 spearmen (αἰχμοφόροι again, 7.41.1) with their spears, bearing golden apples, carried in the customary fashion. After these, '1,000 picked Persian horsemen' (ἵππος ἄλλη χίλιη ἐκ

and the comprehensive treatment of S. Bittner, *Tracht und Bewaffnung des persischen Heeres zur Zeit der Achaimeniden* (Munich, 1985), *passim*, and especially 180–225, with 274–88.

<sup>10</sup> See especially J. Tatum, *Xenophon's Imperial Fiction: On 'The Education of Cyrus'* (Princeton, NJ, 1989), chapters 1–2, supported by P. Christesen, 'Xenophon's "Cyropaedia" and military reform in Sparta', *JHS* 126 (2006), 47–65, at 47, with B. Due, *The Cyropaedia: Xenophon's Aims and Methods* (Aarhus, 1989), 26. But cf. S.W. Hirsch, *The Friendship of the Barbarians: Xenophon and the Persian Empire* (Hanover and London, 1985), chapter 4, and especially 62–3 and 87; and also C. Tuplin, 'Xenophon and the garrisons of the Achaemenid empire', *AMI* 20 (1987), 167–245, at 167; P. Stadter, 'Fictional narrative in the *Cyropaedia*', in V.J. Gray (ed.), *Xenophon* (Oxford, 2010), 367–400, at 368. On Xenophon's possible use of Iranian oral tradition, see H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 'The death of Cyrus: Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* as a source for Iranian history', in V.J. Gray (ed.), *Xenophon* (Oxford, 2010), 439–53, at 441–4.

<sup>11</sup> Marathon was chosen by the Persians as a suitable venue for a battle since the ground was suitable for deploying cavalry (Hdt. 6.102.1); cf. Nep. *Milt.* 4.1, 5.5 (10,000 horsemen supposedly mustered for the expedition, a figure which seems preposterous). J.A.R. Munro, 'Some observations on the Persian wars (the campaign of Marathon)', *JHS* 22 (1899), 185–97, at 189, thinks it impossible to ascertain the Persian force's composition, while N. Whatley, 'On the possibility of reconstructing Marathon and other ancient battles', *JHS* 84 (1964), 119–39, at 132–3, says little on the topic. J.A.S. Evans, 'Cavalry about the time of the Persian wars: a speculative essay', *CJ* 82 (1986/7), 97–106, at 106, concludes that the cavalry force must have been 'very small'. On the campaign, see N. Sekunda, *Marathon, 490 B.C.: The First Persian Invasion of Greece* (Westport, CT and London, 2002).

Περσέων ἀπολελεγμένη: 7.41.1) followed, and then 10,000 Persian infantrymen, with 1,000 bearing spears with golden pomegranates on the butts, and the rest bearing ones of silver. After these troops came '10,000 Persian horsemen' (ἵππος Περσέων μυρία, 7.41.2) and, after a space, the rest of the army marched.

What to make of this is problematic, though one might as well start with the infantry, since they have already been discussed elsewhere.<sup>12</sup> In any case, identifying these units also has clear implications for the cavalry. Herodotus describes two units of 1,000 of spearmen or αἰχμοφόροι, and then 10,000 other infantry, which at least indicates that the Persian army was organized in decimal fashion.<sup>13</sup> These 10,000 seem to be the Immortals or ἄθάνατοι, described in more detail at Hdt. 7.83.1–2, with the different pomegranates (gold and silver) presumably denoting some sort of internal hierarchy. The Apple Bearers or μηλοφόροι described in later accounts are clearly indicated by their equipment (that is, golden apples), but we are left with a mystery 1,000-strong unit marching with spears turned downwards. Following the earlier speculation of Sir Frederick Maurice and Nick Sekunda, I recently tried to cut the Gordian knot, so to speak, by suggesting that the infantry units marching before and after the king's chariot are really both Apple Bearers, with Herodotus' accidentally doubling up the number (so 500 + 500, and not 1,000 + 1,000).<sup>14</sup> With no evidence to the contrary, it seems best to go along with my previous surmise. In sum, our interpretation of Herodotus presents us with a guard unit of 1,000 infantry (μηλοφόροι), plus a 'palatine' infantry grouping of 10,000 (ἄθάνατοι).

The Persian cavalry represent almost a mirror image of the infantry. Herodotus describes two lots of 1,000 picked horsemen, although the use of ἐκ Περσέων πάντων ἀπολελεγμένοι (7.40.2) and ἐκ Περσέων ἀπολελεγμένη (7.41.1) respectively does not allow us to determine which of these units is meant to be the senior.<sup>15</sup> There are also 10,000 other Persian cavalrymen, with nothing to suggest that they were particularly special, other than that they were ethnically Persian (or perhaps also Median).<sup>16</sup> These horsemen, as described here, could represent the cavalry equivalent of the Immortals, but that view is not entirely secure. Indeed, Ernst Obst has described them simply as cavalry 'der Linie'.<sup>17</sup> Now, the notion of Herodotus muddling, or rather doubling, the number of the μηλοφόροι suggests that he could have done likewise with the picked cavalry; that is, instead of two units of 1,000 picked cavalry, we really have a 1,000-strong unit divided into two 500-strong groups.<sup>18</sup> Hence, 500 of these picked cavalry form the vanguard of the royal party (and indeed the whole ethnically Persian or

<sup>12</sup> See Charles (n. 1 [2011]), 115–24.

<sup>13</sup> On the use of the decimal system, see M.A. Dandamaev, *A Political History of the Achaemenid Empire*, trans. W. J. Vogelsang (Leiden, 1989), 194; Frye (n. 6), 91; G. Widengren, 'Recherches sur la féodalisme iranien', *Orientalia Suecana* 5 (1956), 79–182, at 160–2.

<sup>14</sup> Maurice (n. 4), 230; N. Sekunda, *The Persian Army, 560–330 B.C.* (London, 1992), 6–7.

<sup>15</sup> Tuplin (n. 3), 177 n. 291 observes that 'some of the *aikhmophoroi* are described as "best and noblest"; no such qualification attaches to the cavalry'. But the phrases ἐκ Περσέων πάντων ἀπολελεγμένοι and ἐκ Περσέων ἀπολελεγμένη could be intended to carry similar weight.

<sup>16</sup> On the possibility of Medes being members of elite Persian units, see A.T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire* (Chicago and London, 1948), 238, but cf. Charles (n. 1 [2011]), 131 n. 82.

<sup>17</sup> Obst (n. 2), 89.

<sup>18</sup> This is suggested in passing by Sekunda (n. 14), 7, though with the caveat 'this is less certain' (i.e. compared to Herodotus having made the same mistake with the two groups of αἰχμοφόροι). Cawkwell (n. 6), 238 also thinks that Herodotus only meant one 'unit of 1,000 elite Persian cavalry', though he does not articulate his reasoning. Many scholars stick with two 1,000-strong elite cavalry units: see e.g. Obst (n. 2), 89; N.G.L. Hammond, 'The expedition of Xerxes', in J. Boardman, N.G.L. Hammond, D.M. Lewis and M. Ostwald (edd.), *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 4: *Persia, Greece and the Western Mediterranean, c. 525 to 479 B.C.* (Cambridge, 1988<sup>2</sup>), 518–91, at 534; D. Head,

Median contingent of Xerxes' army), while the other 500 form a rearguard. The 10,000 infantry and 10,000 cavalry are therefore not part of the group most intimately associated with the monarch; rather, they are meant to constitute the truly Persian army that travelled with the Great King when on campaign, or at least on this particular campaign. In short, we have a guard unit of 1,000 picked cavalry, together with a less-exalted cavalry force of 10,000.<sup>19</sup>

The next occasion on which truly Persian troops are mentioned occurs at Hdt. 7.55.2–3, where the Persian army cross the Hellespont. This time, we look at the passage verbatim, for it is much shorter:

First the 10,000 Persians (οἱ μύριοι Πέρσσαι) led the way, all wearing wreaths, and after them the intermingled host of manifold nations. All that day these crossed and, on the following day, first the horsemen (ἰππότες) and those bearing their spears turned downwards [that is, one of the two groups of αἰχμοφόροι described at Hdt. 7.40–1]. These also wore wreaths. Next after them came the sacred horses and the sacred chariot, then Xerxes himself and the spearmen (αἰχμοφόροι), and the 1,000 horsemen (οἱ ἰππότες οἱ χίλιοι), and after them the remainder of the army.

I have previously observed, with respect to the infantry, that '[t]he details provided here are remarkably consistent with what is found at Hdt. 7.40–1, the main difference being the position of the units in the marching column'.<sup>20</sup> The same observation could hold more or less true for the cavalry, but we clearly need to reconcile one lot of unnumbered ἰππότες and a group of a 1,000 horse (οἱ ἰππότες οἱ χίλιοι) with what Herodotus provides at 7.40–1. Let us see what can be done. Four distinct interpretations present themselves: (a) οἱ μύριοι Πέρσσαι is shorthand for both the 10,000 infantry and the 10,000 cavalry, which mean that the two groups of ἰππότες at 7.55.2–3 are both 1,000 strong; (b) the first group of ἰππότες includes the 10,000 cavalry and one of the two units of 1,000 cavalry; (c) the 10,000 horse are missing, and the two cavalry groups comprise 1,000 men each, with the first lot going unnumbered; and (d) the first group of unnumbered ἰππότες is indeed the 10,000 cavalry, which means that one of the 1,000-strong units of ἰππότες found at 7.40–1 is missing.

The first option, originally proposed by W.W. How and Joseph Wells, seems rather arbitrary, and is not altogether convincing as a result.<sup>21</sup> It might be best to hold that οἱ μύριοι Πέρσσαι refers only to the Immortals. The second solution is also difficult to defend. With regard to the third, suggested by De Sélincourt, one wonders why Herodotus would have omitted a whole myriad of cavalrymen.<sup>22</sup> The fourth option remains. Given that only one lot of 1,000 cavalry is clearly numbered as such, it is

*The Achaemenid Persian Army* (Stockport, 1992), 63; J.F. Lazenby, *The Defence of Greece 490–479 B.C.* (Warminster, 1993), 23; see also Olmstead (n. 16), 247.

<sup>19</sup> This, then, is part of the force that Isocrates (4.145) describes as 'the army that goes around with the king' (τὴν στρατιὴν τὴν μετὰ τοῦ βασιλέως περιπολοῦσαν), though he does not mention if this was infantry, cavalry, or both. Note, too, the words of Darius I in the Behistun Inscription: 'The Persian and Median army, which was under [the control of] me, that was a small thing' (col. 2 line 25); translation by R. Schmitt, *The Bisitun Inscriptions of Darius the Great: Old Persian Text* (London, 1991), 57.

<sup>20</sup> Charles (n. 1 [2011]), 113.

<sup>21</sup> W.W. How and J. Wells, *A Commentary on Herodotus*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1912), 148 hold that οἱ μύριοι refers to 'both the foot and the horse ... unless H. has altogether forgotten the myriad of horse'. But Herodotus' use of οἱ μύριοι Πέρσσαι seems, here, to indicate 'the 10,000 Persians', in much the same way that Xenophon (*Hell.* 7.1.38) uses οἱ μύριοι to refer to the 10,000-strong assembly of the Arcadians.

<sup>22</sup> A. De Sélincourt (trans.), *Herodotus: The Histories*, rev. A.R. Burn (repr. of the 1954 edn, London, 1972), 464.

possible that we could well have been correct in assuming that Herodotus had made a mistake at 7.40–1; that is, he had inaccurately described *two* 1,000-strong picked cavalry groups, instead of only *one* 1,000-strong picked unit, which had been divided into two 500-strong squadrons. Such an inference provides further support for the supposition that there was only one 1,000-strong unit of picked infantry, even though we still find two units of αἰχμοφόροι at Hdt. 7.55.2–3. Yet no numbers are given here, so perhaps the unit, once again, had been split into two. To conclude, we have 12,000 cavalry in the first Herodotean passage and (arguably) only 11,000 in the second. A further avenue to describe the discrepancies between the passages is presented by Hdt. 7.55.3, where we discover that Herodotus had consulted at least two accounts for his description of the crossing. It is therefore possible that he had also consulted multiple accounts when he wrote 7.40–1, and had accidentally doubled up the 1,000-strong cavalry and infantry units as a result of misunderstanding his sources.

The next occasion that Herodotus refers to elite Achaemenid cavalry is in the aftermath of the Persian failure at Salamis (480 B.C.). Xerxes, about to leave Greece, handed over command to Mardonius, who then selected a force from the remaining host. Again, we look at the passage (Hdt. 8.113.2) verbatim:

When they had arrived in Thessaly, Mardonius thereupon picked out first all the Persians called Immortals [witness τοὺς ἀθανάτους καλεομένους], except for Hydarnes their general, who declared that he would not abandon the king's person; and then, the Persian θωρηκοφόροι [deliberately left untranslated], and the 1,000 horse (τὴν ἕκτον τὴν χίλιην).<sup>23</sup>

The 10,000 Persian horse referred to in the first passage discussed above (Hdt. 7.40–1), and probably in the second (Hdt. 7.55.2–3), do not seem to have been required, while only one of the two 1,000-strong units of picked horse found at Hdt. 7.40.1–41.2 is mentioned explicitly.<sup>24</sup> The θωρηκοφόροι, literally those ‘bearing cuirasses’, has sometimes been thought of as cavalry, and so could possibly represent one of the two 1,000-strong units referred to at Hdt. 7.40.1–41.2 – or indeed the 10,000 cavalry with some stretch of the imagination. But I prefer to follow my previous, if tentative, suggestion that this is meant to be the type of soldier that Herodotus refers to elsewhere as αἰχμοφόροι; that is, these are possibly the Apple Bearers or μηλοφόροι.<sup>25</sup> With respect to the Persian units that Mardonius chooses, we find the Immortals, together with what might well be termed the infantry and cavalry guard units. If the θωρηκοφόροι were not guard infantry (and the term *is* used elsewhere to denote troops simply wearing cuirasses), we are left to ponder the status of those picked soldiers who fought so bravely with Mardonius at Plataea in 479 B.C. (Hdt. 9.63.1–2). Although some scholars have maintained a contrary view, these men were more likely to have been infantry (or at least dismounted cavalry) given the context of a hand-to-hand struggle with Lacedaemonian hoplites – even if Mardonius himself was mounted.<sup>26</sup> In short, it would seem odd that these 1,000 picked men, described as the flower of the Persian

<sup>23</sup> Head (n. 18), 65 incorrectly writes that Herodotus refers to ‘the Persian *doruphoroi*’ at this *locus*. Cf. Diod. Sic. 11.19.6.

<sup>24</sup> This is also observed by R.W. Macan, *Herodotus: The Seventh, Eighth & Ninth Books*, vol. 1.2 (London, 1908), 539 and J.E. Powell, *Herodotus: Book VIII* (Cambridge, 1939), 136, although they do not offer any explanation.

<sup>25</sup> Charles (n. 1 [2011]), 122–3, following A. Masaracchia (ed. and trans.), *Erodoto: La battaglia di Salamina. Libro VIII delle Storie* (Milan, 1990<sup>2</sup>), 215; cf. Briant (n. 5), 118: ‘the Persian spearmen’. For further references to the *locus*, see Charles (n. 1 [2011]), 122 n. 35.

<sup>26</sup> This was previously remarked upon by Tuplin (n. 3), 163, who also questioned whether 1,000

infantry (περὶ ἐωυτὸν λογάδας Περσέων τοὺς ἀρίστους χιλίους), were not meant to be referred to at Hdt. 8.113.2.<sup>27</sup> Thus we might infer from Hdt. 8.113.2, together with the context of the information presented to us about the later battle of Plataea, that there was indeed only one group of 1,000 elite horsemen present on the campaign. This means that the passage can effectively be reconciled with what we might well term the ‘corrected’ view of Hdt. 7.40–1 established previously.

To conclude our discussion of Herodotus, it seems most likely that the truly Persian cavalry elite of Xerxes’ day consisted of only *one* unit of 1,000-strong guard cavalry. If we follow Herodotus, there was also a 10,000-strong force of Persian cavalry. Yet the existence of these 10,000 cavalrymen, in the face of a lack of corroborating evidence from the period, aside from a possible aside in Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* (8.3.16), is not entirely secure. It is possible that the numbers presented for this group are part of a general exaggeration of Persian military forces on the part of Herodotus or his source/s, as is convincingly illustrated by the logistical analysis of Cuyler Young.<sup>28</sup> While the Immortals, which we presume to be infantry, are indeed referred to outside Herodotus, for example by Curtius Rufus (3.3.13), Heraclides of Cumae (*FGrHist*

horsemen could have been contained ‘in the rather confined space in which the crucial Spartan–Persian engagement was fought’. Evans (n. 11), 100 does observe that a Persian cavalryman was more or less ‘a dragoon’, and so could fight on foot if needed, but we cannot be certain if this was the case here. For θωρακοφόροι as cavalry, see A.D. Godley (trans.), *Herodotus*, vol. 4. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA and London, 1925), 117; J.E. Powell, *A Lexicon to Herodotus* (Hildesheim, 1977<sup>2</sup>), s.v. θωρακοφόροι; D. Grene (trans.), *Herodotus: The History* (Chicago and London, 1987), 598. But cf. P. Briant, *Histoire de l’Empire perse: de Cyrus à Alexandre* (Paris, 1996), 209 (‘troupes cuirassés’); P. Vannicelli, A. Corcella and A. Frascchetti, *Erodoto: Le Storie Libro VIII. La vittoria di Temistocle* (Milan, 2003), 141 (‘quelli armati di corazza’); Masaracchia (n. 25), 115 (‘quelli armati di corazza’). Powell (n. 24), 136 merely writes: ‘This corps has not been mentioned before.’ Macan (n. 24), 539 holds that they were infantry, but their ‘designation is not quite clear’. Lazenby (n. 18), 207 oddly describes them as ‘ordinary Persian troops’ wearing the sorts of cuirasses described at Hdt. 7.61.1, while Hammond (n. 18), 534 merely contends that ‘two of the Royal Guard regiments’ remained. Herodotus uses the Ionian version of θωρακοφόρος, a spelling which he employs again at 7.89.3 and 7.92 to describe armour-wearing Egyptian and Lycian troops respectively. At Xen. *Cyr.* 5.3.36–7, θωρακοφόροι are described as slow-moving, surely on account of the weight of their armour. Such troops also appear at Xen. *Cyr.* 5.3.52, 6.3.24, 7.1.10, but the context does not really suggest that they were meant to be elite formations. On θωρακοφόροι in Xenophon, see Tuplin (n. 10), 221, who sees such troops as infantry, with G. Widengren, ‘Über einige Probleme in der altpersischen Geschichte’, in J. Meixner and G. Kegel (edd.), *Festschrift für Leo Brandt zum 60. Geburtstag* (Cologne and Opladen, 1968), 517–33, at 528. On Mardonius’ guard at Plataea being cavalry, see How and Wells (n. 21), 314; E.S. Shuckburgh, *Herodotus VIII Urania* (Cambridge, 1903), 129; E. Ufer, ‘Platää’, in J. Kromayer and G. Veith (edd.), *Antike Schlachtfelder*, vol. 4 (Berlin, 1929), 107–65, at 160–1; on the group being infantry, see A.R. Bum, ‘Persia and the Greeks’, in I. Gershevitch (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 2: *The Median and Achaemenian Periods* (Cambridge, 1985), 292–391, at 330; Charles (n. 1 [2011]), 123–4 (though with some caveats); Shabazi (n. 2), 492. Cf. Barkworth (n. 2), 151, who agrees that at least one of the two 1,000-strong cavalry units was present at Plataea, yet the language used at Hdt. 8.113.2 is remarkably similar to that used to describe the σιχημοφόροι at Hdt. 7.41.1, witness σιχημοφόροι Περσέων οἱ ἀριστοὶ τε καὶ γενναϊότατοι χίλιοι (‘1,000 spearmen of the best and most noble blood of Persia’).

<sup>27</sup> M.A. Flower and J. Marincola, *Herodotus: Histories Book IX* (Cambridge, 2002), 218 opt for an infantry unit, but contend that there were indeed two 1,000-strong elite units of infantry and cavalry, a position followed by A.M. Bowie, *Herodotus: Histories Book VIII* (Cambridge, 2007), 205.

<sup>28</sup> T. Cuyler Young, ‘480/479 B.C.E.: a Persian perspective’, *IA* 15 (1980), 213–39, at 237 with n. 57. This is not the place to go into a detailed discussion about the size of Xerxes’ army. Suffice it to say that even Maurice’s conservative estimate ([n. 4], 224) of a limit of 210,000 men and 75,000 animals is probably too high; cf. the astronomical figures at Hdt. 7.185.3, where 2,641,610 fighting men (including ships’ crews) are recorded.

689 F 1 = Ath. 12.514b–c) and Pausanias (6.5.7),<sup>29</sup> the myriad of cavalry, as a special grouping with a royal or at least ‘palatine’ association, is not mentioned by anyone else, although Hesychius, writing in the fifth century A.D., does refer to ἄθάνατοι (= A 1531) as cavalry.<sup>30</sup> But this is presumably in error, unless he is referring, here, to the Sassanian cavalry called Immortals by late-antique writers such as Procopius (1.14.31, 1.14.44).<sup>31</sup> In light of these problems, Cawkwell contends that the 10,000 ‘may have been Persian cavalry assembled from the satrapies’, and it is just possible that he might be right.<sup>32</sup> If the 10,000 cavalymen were not, then, a special grouping, contrary to what Herodotus implies, one wonders whence its members might have come, and what their relationship to other cavalry units might have been. We will return to this vexing matter in Section 4 of this study.

## 2. BETWEEN XERXES’ REIGN AND ALEXANDER’S CONQUEST

Between Xerxes’ attempted invasion of Greece and the campaigns waged by Alexander the Great against Darius III, there is scant information available about the Persian military formations of the period. Internecine strife was wont to break out on occasion, with an array of rebellions, such as those led by Megabyzus, Artyphios (Megabyzus’ son) and Pissouthnes, taking place. The most significant battle involving Persian troops arguably took place at Cunaxa in 401 B.C., between the forces of the royal pretender Cyrus the Younger, satrap of Lydia and Great Phrygia with Cappadocia (Xen. *An.* 1.9.1), and those of the ultimately victorious Artaxerxes II, previously installed officially as the Great King. For this battle, we have the eyewitness account of the Athenian mercenary leader Xenophon, who documents the engagement in his *Anabasis*. This is

<sup>29</sup> It is uncertain whether Curtius’ knowledge of the Immortals derives from Herodotus, or came via a different means; on the *locus*, see J. Dillery, ‘Xenophon, the military review and Hellenistic *pompe*’, in C. Tuplin and V. Azoulay (edd.), *Xenophon and His World: Papers from a Conference Held in Liverpool in July 1999*. *Historia Einzelschriften* 172 (Stuttgart, 2004), 259–76, at 268, with Charles (n. 1 [2011]), 129–30. On the *locus* in Pausanias, see Charles (n. 1 [2011]), 125; on the so-called Sassanian Immortals, see id., ‘The Sassanian “Immortals”’, *IA* 46 (2011), 289–313, where I suggest that the use of ἄθάνατοι to describe elements of the Sassanian cavalry is likely to be an attempt by later Greek writers to assimilate the Achaemenid and Sassanian dynasties for rhetorical reasons. Xenophon (*Cyr.* 7.5.68) writes of 10,000 palace guards (δορυφόροι) being instituted by Cyrus the Great, but, as C. Tuplin, ‘Xenophon and Achaemenid courts: a survey of the evidence’, in B. Jacobs and R. Rollinger (edd.), *Der Achämenidenhof. The Achaemenid Court: Akten des 2. Internationalen Kolloquiums zum Thema ‘Vorderasien im Spannungsfeld klassischer und altorientalischer Überlieferungen’* (Wiesbaden, 2010), 189–230, at 209 points out, ‘He does not label them as “Immortals”.’ Cf. Keaveney (n. 4), 43–4, who does indeed identify Xenophon’s δορυφόροι as the Immortals.

<sup>30</sup> Hesychius is as per the edition of K. Latte, *Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen, 1953).

<sup>31</sup> See also the testimony of the not always reliable John Malalas at *Chron.* 14.23. Socrates (*HE* 7.20.5) even describes the ‘so-called Immortals’ (οἱ καλούμενοι ... ἄθάνατοι) as being 10,000 strong (witness ἀριθμὸς δὲ ἔστιν οὗτος μυρίων γενναίων ἀνδρῶν), as per Hdt. 7.83.1. The derivative Theophanes (A.M. 5918) provides similar information. These are the only later sources to describe the so-called Sassanian Immortals as being composed of 10,000, which seems highly unlikely in any case; see Charles (n. 29), 300–1.

<sup>32</sup> Cawkwell (n. 6), 239. Cuyler Young (n. 5), 92 holds that the existence of a standing force of 10,000 cavalry is ‘possible’, yet oddly refers to the 1,000 guard infantry as ‘the Kinsmen’. Although it does not demonstrate the existence of a standing force of 10,000 cavalry, Xenophon writes of ‘the first-formed 10,000 cavalry’ (ἡπείξ οἱ πρότοι γενόμενοι μύριοι) in the *Cyropaedia* (8.3.16), all in the context of a procession.



not to say, of course, that Xenophon, in his service with Cyrus, saw *everything* that he describes, but we can at least be sure of the general immediacy of his testimony. We can supplement Xenophon's account with fragments of Ctesias preserved by Plutarch in his *Artaxerxes*, though these provide little information directly of use.

Let us concentrate on the cavalry of Artaxerxes, for Cyrus' forces clearly do not represent the forces of a fully invested Great King. At *An.* 1.7.11, we read that there were 6,000 horsemen under the command of the noble Artagerses. These were stationed in front of the king, with this information coming from those who had deserted Artaxerxes.<sup>33</sup> No mention is made of the ethnicity of these troops. This force is mentioned again at *An.* 1.8.24, in the context of (somewhat implausibly) being put to flight by the rampaging Cyrus and his 600 picked cavalry – a detail which hardly suggests that these 6,000 under Artagerses were what one could really describe as elite. There is, of course, the possibility that these 6,000 represented a mobilized portion of the 10,000 cavalry of the Herodotean model, but supporting this view is a fraught exercise given the paucity of evidence for such a formation existing outside the pages of Herodotus, at least in the very specific sense of a recognized grouping of 10,000. So, one might simply prefer to view these 6,000 men as cavalry of indeterminate origin in the Great King's service. That said, they were likely to have come, in this instance, from the Persian heartland, especially given the hasty circumstances under which Artaxerxes' army was assembled. It follows that there might indeed be a connection of sorts to the Herodotean 10,000, if this ever existed – but only with respect to origin. Barkworth even suggests that they were the *only* cavalry available.<sup>34</sup> Whatever the case, brave and loyal they do not seem to have been, unlike just about any other description of elite Persian troops who, even if bested by their Greek or Macedonian counterparts, do not shirk from their duty in combat. The Great King was protected by what Xenophon describes at *An.* 1.8.26 as being a 'compact body' (witness *στῖφος*). But even these were penetrated, for Cyrus was able to strike Artaxerxes through his cuirass, as is corroborated by Plutarch (*Art.* 11.2), who followed or indeed paraphrased Ctesias' now lost account. Horsemen are mentioned elsewhere throughout the narrative (for example, at *An.* 1.8.9, 1.8.18, 1.10.6–7, 1.10.12–13),<sup>35</sup> but they do not seem to have been of elite status.<sup>36</sup> In the end, Xenophon provides us with very little of importance. It is fortunate that the battles of Alexander and Darius provide us with further information relating to elite Persian cavalry.

### 3. THE ELITE CAVALRY OF DARIUS III

Persian cavalry fought in three engagements against Alexander the Great. Our sources, in the main, are (a) Arrian, who based his account on Ptolemy and Aristobulus, who were both present on the expedition and therefore saw many of the events described,

<sup>33</sup> Plutarch (*Art.* 9.1–4) does not describe the composition of Artagerses' force.

<sup>34</sup> Barkworth (n. 2), 165. Tuplin (n. 3), 176 does not identify the cavalry in any specific sense, though rightfully expresses doubt about 600 cavalry targeting a force of 6,000.

<sup>35</sup> It is possible that the horsemen mentioned here were elite cavalry, for they were accompanied by the royal standard (witness *τὸ βασιλείον σημεῖον*); see *Xen. An.* 1.10.12.

<sup>36</sup> Persian horsemen of Artaxerxes are also possibly described at *Xen. An.* 2.5.35, with the context suggesting, but not guaranteeing, that these men were cavalry (an escort of 300 men, described as *τεθωρακισμένοι*, accompanied three Persian members of the nobility who parlayed with the Greeks, including Xenophon himself).

and (b) Diodorus Siculus and Quintus Curtius, who, for the most part, followed the sometimes unreliable Cleitarchus, who seems to have been somewhat biased against Alexander. This Cleitarchean tradition underpins what has been commonly referred to, albeit somewhat too simplistically, as the Alexander ‘Vulgate’.<sup>37</sup> In general, the Ptolemy/Aristobulus tradition presented by Arrian has been regarded as preferable where there are discrepancies between these two broad traditions – as often there are. Yet the Cleitarchean tradition cannot be ignored, for it records incidents not mentioned by Arrian, and describes actions not witnessed directly by his sources, as will be seen below in the case of the Granicus.<sup>38</sup>

At the Granicus (334 B.C.), where the Persian forces operating in north-west Anatolia were commanded by a group of nobles (Arr. *An.* 1.12.8), with Darius being absent, more than 10,000 cavalry were supposedly present (Diod. Sic. 17.19.4). It is necessary to determine which of these might be regarded as in some way elite, for it is surely too facile to assert that these are the special grouping of 10,000 Persian cavalry referred to by Herodotus, the more so when Arrian (*An.* 1.14.4) more or less doubles their number. Despite our general misgivings about the Cleitarchean source tradition that he follows, Diodorus presents more detail of interest to us than does either Arrian or Curtius, even if his account of the battle tends to dwell on the heroic and the downright sensational. At 17.20.2, he records that the satrap of Ionia, one Spithrobatēs, a son-in-law of the Great King, hurled himself towards the Macedonian lines ‘with a large force of cavalry’ (μετὰ μεγάλης δυνάμεως ἵππέων), and had with him forty fellow combatants described as ‘royal relatives’ (συγγενεῖς).<sup>39</sup> When Spithrobatēs and his brother Rhosaces fell, these men, again referred to as συγγενεῖς, surrounded the stricken nobles and flung their javelins at Alexander (Diod. Sic. 17.21.1).<sup>40</sup> These συγγενεῖς were eventually either killed, or put to flight (Diod. Sic. 17.21.4).

Some reflection on Diodorus’ use of συγγενεῖς is warranted here. We are left with two options: (a) that συγγενεῖς is being used to describe members of an elite cavalry unit, as is suggested by Diodorus’ later use of the word at 17.59.2: συγγενεῖς ἵππεῖς; or (b) that the word is being used to describe members of a particular class within Persian society. The latter could mean that the 40 men described as συγγενεῖς were not necessarily a detachment of what one might suppose was a larger elite unit, perhaps 1,000-strong, as per the Herodotean model. Yet the way in which Diodorus describes

<sup>37</sup> On the respective utility of these sources with regard to military matters of the Alexandrian era, see M.B. Charles, ‘Elephants, Alexander and the Indian campaign’, *Mouseion* 10 (series 3) (2010), 327–53, at 329–32.

<sup>38</sup> For another possible example, see n. 62 below.

<sup>39</sup> But N.G.L. Hammond, ‘The battle of the Granicus River’, *JHS* 100 (1980) 73–88, at 87, has dismissed Diodorus’ account as ‘worthless’. He seems to have changed his tune, for, at id., *Alexander the Great: King, Statesman and Commander* (London, 1989<sup>3</sup>), 73, he asserts that the account is ‘drawn, it seems, from an original account by Cleitarchus’. But W. Heckel, *The Conquests of Alexander the Great* (Cambridge, 2008), 48 nevertheless urges caution when using Diodorus’ account. P. Green, *Alexander of Macedon, 356–323 B.C.: A Historical Biography* (Harmondsworth, 1974), 178 even sees an *Iliad*-like heroic overtone to the description. Hammond (above [1980]), 80 n. 21 holds that the presence of Darius’ ‘“Kindred”, trained at his court as élite cavalrymen’, demonstrates that Alexander’s plans were ‘well known at the Persian court’, while Briant (n. 26), 800 states that ‘ils représentent uniquement la noblesse perse d’Asie Mineure’. Note that, in Arrian (*An.* 1.15.7), Mithridates is identified as Darius’ son-in-law. No matter, for the point is the same.

<sup>40</sup> For further details of this, see Plut. *Alex.* 16.4–5, with id. *Mor.* 327a, 341b. For commentary, see A.B. Bosworth, *A Historical Commentary on Arrian’s History of Alexander*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1980), 123, who infers a Cleitarchean source tradition.

their involvement suggests that they acted as a kind of ‘guard’ to the noble Persian commanders. What their parent unit might have been, and how it relates to the Herodotean accounts of Persian elite cavalry, will become clearer when we tackle the later battle of Gaugamela. In essence, Diodorus seems to be telling us that elements of an elite grouping operated at the Granicus, even though the Great King was not present. That one of the nobles commanding the Persian forces was a relative of the king by marriage adds to the picture of these cavalrymen acting as a kind of ‘royal guard’, regardless of the Great King’s presence or absence. These men seem to have come from the Persian heartland, at least if the royal association holds, instead of being satrapal troops. It is therefore possible that other elements of the large cavalry contingent at the Granicus might also have been of Iranian origin and had accompanied the *συγγενεῖς* in their march to Anatolia. Of this, however, we cannot be certain.

For Issus (333 B.C.), we unfortunately have only very rough accounts of the Persian forces. Since Darius, on this occasion, was present, one might presume that elements – if not all – of the elite cavalry were available. Yet the descriptions provided by the historians of Alexander’s campaign, such as Arrian (*An.* 2.8.5–8) and Diodorus (17.31.2), generally fail to elucidate which units were ranged against the Macedonians and their allies. Only Curtius provides details of the guard cavalry, for he writes, at 3.9.4, that Darius was followed by 3,000 elite horsemen (*tria milia delectorum equitum*), described as ‘his customary body-guard’ (*assueta corporis custodia*).<sup>41</sup> A strength of 3,000, though problematic, has been accepted by a number of scholars.<sup>42</sup> Note, too, that Diodorus (17.31.1) tells us that Darius, immediately before the battle, summoned his ‘friends’ (*φίλοι*) and ‘relatives’ (*συγγενεῖς*), with some of these being given commands, and others being ordered to fight by his side.<sup>43</sup> This could provide a neat tie-in to the material that he presents on the Granicus, but it is not certain that Diodorus, here, is using the word *συγγενεῖς* in the same way as he does at 17.20.2 – that is, to refer to some kind of ‘guard’ cavalry.<sup>44</sup>

Curtius’ relatively lengthy description of Darius’ army in the build-up to Issus, which borders on the fanciful given the continued appearance of the Immortals, needs to be adduced at this point, for it has a bearing on his claim that there were 3,000 cavalry guardsmen at Issus.<sup>45</sup> As I have argued elsewhere, the descriptions appear to be based ‘to some

<sup>41</sup> J.R. Ashley, *The Macedonian Empire: The Era of Warfare under Philip II and Alexander the Great, 359–323 B.C.* (Jefferson, NC and London, 1998), 225 writes that ‘[t]he two units of Darius’ Royal Bodyguards totalled 2,000’ (and see also pp. 259–60), which, as I have suggested at Charles (n. 1 [2011]), 125 n. 49, is ‘presumably an allusion to the *μηλοφόροι* and the kinsmen cavalry found at Gaugamela’. J.E. Atkinson, *A Commentary on Q. Curtius Rufus’ Historiae Alexandri Magni Books 3 and 4* (Amsterdam, 1980), 207 merely refers to the ‘two élite guard units’ at Gaugamela, each ‘some 1000 strong’.

<sup>42</sup> A.M. Devine, ‘Grand tactics at the battle of Issus campaign’, *AncW* 12 (1985), 39–59, at 48; Hammond (n. 39), 103. For support, see also Head (n. 18), 67; W. Judeich, ‘Issos 333 v. Chr.’, in Kromayer and Veith (edd.) (n. 26), 372–84, at 356; Sekunda (n. 14), 57. A.W. Collins, ‘Alexander and the Persian court chiliarhy’, *Historia* 61 (2012), 159–67, at 162, initially seems to accept Curtius’ notice, but later supports the view that the *συγγενεῖς* were ‘a 1,000-man unit’.

<sup>43</sup> The *συγγενεῖς* are also mentioned at Diod. Sic. 17.35.2–3, with their women and wealth described as having accompanied them into the field – now a prize of Alexander and his men; cf. Curt. 4.14.11, where the presence of wives and children at Gaugamela acts as an incentive for the Persians to fight with bravery. The word *συγγενεῖς*, in the sense of men who were ‘relatives’ of the king, is possibly suggested by *propinqui* at Curt. 4.13.12, since *propinquus* can certainly take on the sense of ‘kinsman’ or ‘relative’; for examples, see *OLD* s.v. *propinquus*, 4.

<sup>44</sup> E.W. Marsden, *The Campaign of Gaugamela* (Liverpool, 1964), 58 refers to the *συγγενεῖς* as ‘royal horseguards’.

<sup>45</sup> For an extended treatment of this puzzling passage, see Atkinson (n. 41), 123–35, with a discussion on sources at 133–5. On the Immortals having disappeared, see e.g. J.F.C. Fuller, *The*

degree on Herodotus, or else sources themselves based on Herodotus, but the description of the king's appearance at 3.3.17–19 is clearly not from Hdt. 7.40–1'.<sup>46</sup> I added that, 'together with the comparable parade in the *Cyropaedia* (8.3.1–34, and especially 8.3.9–18), it is perhaps advisable to view all three instances as essentially independent pieces of evidence to demonstrate that military processions were an important feature of Achaemenid behaviour'.<sup>47</sup> As for material relevant to us, one looks in vain to find anything of real worth, for no troops in the whole procession (3.3.9–25) are specifically described as horsemen, much less a royal cavalry bodyguard, aside from 'the horsemen of twelve nations with varying arms and customs' (*equitatus duodecim gentium variis armis et moribus*, 3.3.13) – surely not a reference to elite cavalry. 15,000 *cognati regis* ('kinsmen of the king') are found at 3.3.14, but we get no inkling that there were cavalry in a strictly military sense.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, there were 10,000 *hastati* following the king's chariot (3.3.20), but the reference to *hastae* implies infantry.<sup>49</sup> The only other notable information is that 200 of the king's *propinqui* or relatives were present (3.3.21), but it is uncertain whether these men can be equated with the *συγγενεῖς*, or whether they were meant to be drawn from the aforementioned *cognati regis*.<sup>50</sup> It might not be too pessimistic to dismiss the entire passage as evidence.

So, whence did Curtius (3.9.4) get the idea that the guard cavalry constituted 3,000 horsemen, at least for Issus? It is impossible to draw any definite conclusions, but it is *prima facie*

*Generalship of Alexander the Great* (repr. of the 1960 edn, New Brunswick, NJ, 1960), 164 n. 2; Charles (n. 1 [2011]), 114, 130, 133. Phylarchus (*FGrHist* 81 F 41 = Ath. 12.539f) describes 10,000 Persians being stationed outside Alexander's tent, but this cannot really be construed as Alexander having reintroduced the *ἀθάνατοι*. Some scholars do, however, support the notion of the Immortals under Darius III; see Atkinson (n. 41), 102, 123–4, 208; A.M. Devine, 'The strategies of Alexander the Great and Darius III in the Issus campaign (333 B.C.)', *AncW* 12 (1985), 24–38, at 33; Farrokh (n. 4), 103–4; P. Rahe, 'The military situation in western Asia on the eve of Cunaxa', *AJPh* 101 (1980) 79–96, at 94, with 79; Sekunda (n. 14), 45–50; R. Stoneman, 'The Persian empire and Alexander', in J. Romm (ed.), *The Landmark Arrian: The Campaigns of Alexander* (New York, 2010), 361–6, at 364. But cf. Devine (n. 42), 58, where they do not appear in an order of battle, though a group of infantry referred to as 'guard infantry' on the same page are merely described elsewhere in the same article (p. 48) as 'supporting infantry', and are reduced from Curtius' 40,000 at 3.9.4 to 10,000 (the strength of the Immortals!).

<sup>46</sup> Charles (n. 1 [2011]), 129. On Curtius' sources here, who could possibly have used Herodotus (if Curtius did not refer directly to the *Histories*), see Atkinson (n. 41), 12. Head (n. 18), 12 describes the passage as 'possibly ... anachronistic'.

<sup>47</sup> Charles (n. 1 [2011]), 129. But cf. P. Calmeyer, 'Greek historiography and Achaemenid reliefs', in H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and A. Kuhrt (edd.), *Achaemenid History II* (Leiden, 1987), 11–26, who includes Curtius' description among 'excellent descriptions [of Achaemenid parades] from Alexander's time' (p. 14), though he does admit that certain elements seem 'at first sight ... rather artificial or even mythical' (p. 16); see also id., 'Textual sources for the interpretation of Achaemenian palace decorations', *Iran* 18 (1979), 55–63, on understanding relief scenes depicting royal processions and similar demonstrations of power.

<sup>48</sup> Sekunda (n. 14), 57 accepts this figure, though does not adduce Curtius, yet he does so at id., 'Achaemenid military terminology', *AMI* 21 (1988), 76. Curtius, it seems, was not making up this figure by himself, for it is found in the *Deipnosophistae* of Athenaeus (4.146c), where we are told that the Great King dined with 15,000 men, and was accustomed to spend 400 talents on the feast. This information is reported as having come from Ctesias (*FGrHist* 688 F 39) and Dinon of Colophon, author of the now-lost *Persica* (*FGrHist* 690 F 24), though Athenaeus' language does not really tell us which source provided the figure of 15,000. One might suppose that Ctesias, having spent much time at the Persian court (under Artaxerxes II), would have been reasonably well informed about such matters.

<sup>49</sup> The rather inaccurate translation of J.C. Rolfe, *Quintus Curtius*, vol. 1. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA and London, 1946), 85, of 'lancers', suggests horsemen.

<sup>50</sup> On the *cognati* and *propinqui*, see Briant (n. 26), 321. On the *συγγενεῖς* in general, see 321–2, though the references adduced look at the title from a court rather than a military perspective.

odd that such a unit does not appear in the parade described above. Curtius is clearly being inconsistent, and it is quite likely that he is mixing and matching from different sources. But the reference to 3,000 guard cavalry does not seem to come directly from the same principal source used by Diodorus, usually thought of as Cleitarchus, for Diodorus clearly states that the guard cavalry was 1,000-strong, even though this, admittedly, was at the later battle of Gaugamela. Either Curtius has misinterpreted his source, or else he is using one of even lesser repute than that used by Diodorus for the strength of the *συγγενεῖς*. A 1,000-strong guard cavalry unit accords with other evidence, not least of which is (a) Herodotus' reference to an elite 1,000-strong cavalry unit at multiple *loci*, particularly Hdt. 7.55.3 and 8.113.2, where only a single unit of 1,000 horse is mentioned; and (b) the likelihood that the guard infantry unit, the *μηλοφόροι*, was also 1,000 strong. Moreover, Arrian (*An.* 3.21.1, with 3.16.1) also seems to assert that the leader of the *συγγενεῖς* was a chiliarch, so one would envisage a 1,000-strong force, just as the infantry chiliarch commanded the 1,000 *μηλοφόροι*.<sup>51</sup> A chiliarch, after all, commands 1,000 men. If Darius did indeed have 3,000 guard cavalry at Issus – bearing in mind that no other source tells us their strength for the battle – this was clearly not the king's *assueta corporis custodia*; rather, it was an unusual formation, with the 1,000 *συγγενεῖς* presumably being part of this makeshift force.

For Gaugamela (331 B.C.), we are fortunate to have the reasonably detailed account of Arrian, who records the Persian order of battle provided by Aristobulus.<sup>52</sup> Arrian (3.11.5) writes that the *μηλοφόροι*, the presumably 1,000-strong guard infantry, were posted together with what are described as 'the king's kinsmen' (οἱ ... *συγγενεῖς οἱ βασιλέως*) in the centre. These troops appear to be cavalry, with their close association with the king surely denoting an exalted status. Curtius (4.14.8) provides similar information, for we read that Darius was with 'the elite of his infantry and cavalry' (*delectis equitum peditumque*), though the words used provide us with little detail about the type or composition of this cavalry and infantry guard, or indeed their number – he does not mention a 3,000-strong cavalry force with the king on this occasion, as he did for Issus.<sup>53</sup> Diodorus (17.59.2) provides more useful detail. He writes that the cavalry were the first to engage the enemy and that Darius, on the left of the field,<sup>54</sup> led against the Macedonians his 'kinsmen cavalry (*συγγενεῖς ἵππεις*), chosen for their bravery

<sup>51</sup> Arrian (*An.* 3.21.1) describes Nabarzanes as 'chiliarch of the cavalry which had taken flight with Darius [from the subsequent battle of Gaugamela]' (*χιλιάρχης τῶν ξὺν Δαρείῳ φευγόντων ἵππεων*), which, as he earlier tells us, included the *συγγενεῖς* and some of the *μηλοφόροι* (*An.* 3.16.1). Cf. Arr. *An.* 3.23.4, where Nabarzanes is described as 'Darius' chiliarch' (ὁ Δαρείου χιλιάρχης). On this, see especially A. Meeus, 'Some institutional problems concerning the succession to Alexander the Great: prostaia and chiliarchy', *Historia* 58 (2009), 287–310, at 309–10.

<sup>52</sup> Aristobulus recorded a Persian order of battle that later fell into Greek hands (Arr. *An.* 3.11.3 = *FGHHist* 139 F 17). That said, E. Badian, 'Alexander in Iran', in Gershevitch (n. 26), 420–501, at 435 n. 1, has expressed doubts about whether it ever existed. Cf. Hammond (n. 42), 141.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. I. Worthington, *Alexander the Great: Man and God* (Harlow, 2004), 97, where we read that there was a '3,000-strong Royal Bodyguard of infantry and cavalry' at Gaugamela, which seems to be borrowed from Curtius' account of Issus (see 3.9.4). Note Curt. 4.15.24, where we read that the two kings were protected by 'picked troops' (*delecti*).

<sup>54</sup> This presumably Cleitarchean information, since it also appears in Curtius (4.14.8), obviously contradicts Arrian (*An.* 3.11.5), who says that Darius was positioned in the centre, although the order of battle recorded by Aristobulus might not have necessarily reflected the position of the Persian units throughout the engagement. Note, for example, the appearance of fifteen elephants in the order of battle (Arr. *An.* 3.8.6, with 3.11.6), even though they do not seem to have been encountered by Alexander's men until they reached the Persian baggage train (Arr. *An.* 3.15.4, 3.15.6). On this, see M.B. Charles, 'Alexander, elephants and Gaugamela', *Museion* 8 (series 3) (2008), 9–23; id., 'Turrets, Gaugamela and the historian's duty of care', *Scholia* 18 (2009), 29–36.

and loyalty, the 1,000 being drawn together into one formation (χιλίους ἐν μιᾷ περιειλημμένους εἴλη).<sup>55</sup> From this, it seems reasonably obvious that the συγγενεῖς were indeed cavalry, and that the whole unit was 1,000-strong. Yet it is implied by Diodorus, with his reference to the whole unit being marshalled together, that they sometimes operated in smaller groups of less than 1,000 men – as we possibly saw earlier at the Granicus (Diod. Sic. 17.20.2).<sup>56</sup> In the face of this evidence, Briant's contention that '[à] l'époque de Darius III, ils [*sc.* the συγγενεῖς] forment un corps de cavaliers d'élite, au nombre de 10 000' appears to be difficult to support, the more so since he cites the Diodoran *locus* in question.<sup>57</sup>

By way of contrast, Sekunda, referring to skirmishes and screening operations on the eve of Gaugamela, holds that 'it seems that there were at least three regiments of élite cavalry, of which at least one was composed of Kinsmen [that is, the συγγενεῖς]', while he adds: 'It may be that all three squadrons were composed of Kinsmen, out of which one was designated the Royal Regiment.'<sup>58</sup> First, Sekunda adduces the somewhat inaccurately titled 'master of the horse' Satropates and his '1,000 élite cavalry' (citing Curt. 4.9.7).<sup>59</sup> These horsemen were sent to watch the Euphrates crossing, although Satropates was killed in the process of preventing such a passage (Curt. 4.9.25). Second, just before the battle proper, the senior Persian officer Mazaeus is mentioned as 'commanding 3,000 élite' cavalry' (citing Curt. 4.12.1, 4.12.18).<sup>60</sup> Third, Sekunda adduces the 'squadron of 1,000 Kinsmen, chosen for their courage and loyalty', as per Diod. Sic. 17.59.2. Now, from this information, there is no reason to suppose that any group other than those described by Diodorus are meant to represent kinsmen cavalry or συγγενεῖς. Sekunda keeps referring to 'élite' horsemen, presumably in the modern sense of a unit with an exalted or 'guard' standing (Curtius, in fact, uses the phrase *cum mille delectis* at 4.9.7).<sup>61</sup> The *locus* at 4.12.1 mentions nothing about an elite status. Indeed, it refers to a screening activity, or securing roads that Alexander's forces were likely to use, while Curt. 4.12.18 only mentions Mazaeus having taken a position on a hill 'with his picked cavalry' (*cum delectis equitum*). Like Sekunda, Tarn also sees these men as 'guard cavalry'.<sup>62</sup> But Mazaeus had 6,000 cavalry under his overall command,

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Curt. 4.15.24–5. R.D. Milns, *Alexander the Great* (London, 1968), 119 omits any guard cavalry from his description of Darius' forces, but oddly holds that there were 2,000 'heavily armed Persians who formed the Royal bodyguard', with these being described as part of the 'infantry's backbone' (see p. 118, but cf. p. 120: '2,000 Royal Bodyguards'). A force of 1,000 guard cavalry is followed by W.W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1948), 1.46, 2.183 n. 7, 188 and Ashley (n. 41), 260. Fuller (n. 45), 164 claims a 'royal body-guard' of 2,000, so 1,000 would have been cavalry (as per the diagram on p. 165, where guard infantry and cavalry are shown).

<sup>56</sup> Head (n. 18), 61 conjectures that the reference to the whole 1,000 being marshalled together suggests a normally much smaller squadron size, perhaps 'a hundred-man squadron' on account of the Persians' decimal system. Diodorus (17.59.4) also writes of 'those troops belonging to the palace' (τούτοις οἷ ... περὶ τὰ βασιλεία διατρίβοντες) participating in the battle, though one cannot be sure what this means. This statement might simply refer to the μνησφόροι and συγγενεῖς being present, but without an acknowledgement of their specific unit names.

<sup>57</sup> Briant (n. 26), 321; repeated at 800.

<sup>58</sup> Sekunda (n. 14), 57.

<sup>59</sup> Curtius uses the phrase *equitum praefectum* at 4.9.7, and *praefectum equitatus Persarum* at 4.9.25.

<sup>60</sup> Sekunda (n. 48), 69–77, at 76, elsewhere refers to this group as 'another elite cavalry regiment', though he observes that its relationship with the 1,000 described at Curt. 4.9.7 is 'uncertain'.

<sup>61</sup> In another work, Sekunda (n. 60), 76 describes this *locus* as referring to 'one "select" (*delecti*) cavalry regiment numbering one thousand'.

<sup>62</sup> Tarn (n. 55), II.183 n. 7, supported by G.T. Griffith, 'Alexander's generalship at Gaugamela', *JHS* 67 (1947), 77–89, at 84 n. 26, who adds all sorts of conjecture. Tarn (n. 55), II.187–8 holds

as per Curt. 4.9.7.<sup>63</sup> This could mean that those introduced at Curt. 4.12.18 could simply be a more manageable group deemed of superior quality, or even a detachment of appropriate size for the task at hand. While the formations attested by Curtius could have been ‘elite’ in some sense, they do not seem to be a ‘guard’ unit. We do not even know whether they were formally recognized as a specific unit – the language does not allow us to draw any firm conclusions.

Finally, it is worthwhile to reflect on the fate of the elite Persian cavalry after Alexander’s victory. Arrian (*An.* 7.6.3) writes that Alexander, approaching the end of his reign, either incorporated, or else was proposing to incorporate, as Sekunda suggests, Bactrian, Sogdian, Arachotian, Zarangian, Areian and Parthyaean horsemen into his Companion cavalry, together with ‘the horsemen called the Euacae’ (οἱ Εὐάκαι καλούμενοι ἵππεις).<sup>64</sup> According to Sekunda, ‘[i]t seems reasonable to identify this regiment with the “Kinsmen”’, the more so since a precise identification of this group has proved troublesome.<sup>65</sup> Now, we do not know what the Old Persian is for ‘kinsmen’, but Sekunda, reflecting on the Sanskrit word *svaka*, proposes that it could be \**huvaka*, or just possibly \**xvaka*, if we follow Hinz.<sup>66</sup> Whatever the real form, and Sekunda eventually plumps for \**huvaka* on account of comparative linguistic grounds that we need not explore here, it could be transliterated into Greek as Εὐάκαι. This would explain Arrian’s use of the word. Of course, we have no other evidence to support this conjecture. But it is not improbable that some of the συγγενεῖς, the Great King’s premier cavalry unit, or what remained of it, were drafted into an elite formation in the Macedonian army, especially since the exalted μηλοφόροι – their infantry equivalent – were not, it seems, disbanded. Rather, they were incorporated into a joint

that the guard cavalry charged at Gaugamela. His interpretation of Arr. *An.* 3.14.5, where Indian and Persian cavalry are mentioned, is that ‘no other body of horse but the Guard is possible’ (p. 187). Cf. Mazaeus’ plundering of Alexander’s camp early in the battle at Curt. 4.15.5 (with 1,000 men), Diod. Sic. 17.59.5 (with 2,000 Cadusii and 1,000 ‘picked’ Scythians, witness χιλίου τῶν Σκυθῶν ἵππεις ἐπιλέκτους) and Plut. *Alex.* 32.3. This, according to Tarn (n. 55), II.182, is ‘taken from the charge of the Persian Guard later’, though he does not explain how the guard cavalry become Cadusii and Scythians in Diodorus. On this issue, see especially A.R. Burn, ‘Notes on Alexander’s campaigns’, *JHS* 72 (1952), 81–91, at 88–90, who rejects the notion of guard cavalry overrunning Alexander’s camp, as an interpretation of Arrian might suggest. He asserts that it is much easier to accept Diodorus’ story that the camp was attacked by ‘Scythian and Kadousian’ cavalry; cf. Griffith (above), 84–5 with n. 26. Note that, at Diod. Sic. 17.59.5, Mazaeus is on the right wing ‘with the best of the cavalry’ (μετὰ τῶν ἀρίστων ἵππέων), and at 17.60.5, ‘with the greatest portion and the best of the cavalry’ (πλείστους ἔχων καὶ κρατίστους ἵππεις), but this need not include the συγγενεῖς, especially since they could hardly protect Darius, in the centre of the field, from this position; see also Curt. 4.16.1, 4.16.4. Unfortunately, Arrian’s account is somewhat lacunose at this point.

<sup>63</sup> Arrian, however, gives 3,000 cavalry at *An.* 3.7.1, together with an unspecified amount of infantry (there is a *lacuna*), including 2,000 Greek mercenaries; on this *locus*, see Bosworth (n. 40), 286.

<sup>64</sup> Sekunda (n. 60), 76. On the Companion cavalry (ἑταῖροι), see Badian (n. 52), 424, who stresses an ‘aristocratic’ origin. At the beginning of Alexander’s reign, they were divided into eight squadrons, one being the king’s personal horse guards (ἄγημα), and numbered 1,800 *in toto*, but ‘later they were reinforced and reorganized’.

<sup>65</sup> Sekunda (n. 60), 76, followed by A.W. Collins, ‘The office of Chiliarch under the Successors’, *Phoenix* 55 (2001), 259–83, at 271 n. 61; Head (n. 18), 12. Cf. A.B. Bosworth, ‘Alexander and the Iranians’, *JHS* 100 (1980), 1–2, at 15 n. 125: ‘they may be a picked unit’. Badian (n. 52), 482 conjectures that some Iranians did indeed join the Companions, though he confesses himself unsure regarding the origins of the Εὐάκαι. He contends that the Iranians drawn into the Companions probably ‘fought in a separate unit’. The Companions were eventually organized into five regiments, one being of Iranian troops, with the senior officers ‘presumably’ being Macedonian. Iranians were eventually even admitted into the ἄγημα, with eight such men, including the non-Persian brother of Alexander’s wife Roxane, being referred to by Arrian (*An.* 7.6.5).

<sup>66</sup> W. Hinz, *Neue Wege im Altpersischen* (Wiesbaden, 1973), 29.

Persian and Macedonian guard infantry formation, at least if Phylarchus' testimony (*FGrHist* 81 F 41 = Ath. 12.539e) is given credence.<sup>67</sup>

#### 4. BROADER IMPLICATIONS

From the literary material presented above, there appears to be only one group of 1,000 cavalry that can be consistently identified throughout the Achaemenid period as being closely associated with the Great King, even if this identification can only be connected to two isolated periods in Achaemenid history, these being (a) Xerxes' preparation for his invasion of Greece in 480 B.C., and (b) during Darius III's attempted repulse of Alexander the Great's expeditionary army in 333–331 B.C. Who these men were, and who commanded them, therefore warrants some consideration, together with their relationship to other cavalry units in Persian service.

Let us first consider the unit's composition. The very name of the *συγγενεῖς*, literally 'the [king's] kinsmen', would suggest that there were drawn from the upper echelon of Persian society. But the nomenclature used in the Greek sources has occasioned some debate. Hammond describes the *συγγενεῖς* as 'nobles', perhaps reflecting Xenophon's use of the word at *Cyr.* 8.3.13 to refer to a social class – and not a cavalry unit.<sup>68</sup> Strack once suggested, not unreasonably, that Greco-Roman writers confused this social class, as described by Xenophon, with the Persian guard cavalry.<sup>69</sup> He contends that *loci* such as Diod. Sic. 17.59.2, 17.20.2 and Arr. *An.* 3.11.5, with their use of *συγγενεῖς*, do indeed refer to an elite cavalry unit, while the word's appearance at Diod. Sic. 17.35.2–3 and Arr. *An.* 7.11.1 refers to those 'in der Nähe des Königs' – which does not necessarily mean members of a military unit. Perhaps Sekunda has the best means to deal with the problem.<sup>70</sup> He suggests that the *συγγενεῖς ἵππεις* were drawn from the aforementioned social group, which was allegedly 15,000-strong, as per Ath. 4.146c and Curt. 3.3.14, and was known by Greek writers as the *συγγενεῖς*.<sup>71</sup> The unit was therefore comprised of the sons of the Persian social elite, with service in the *συγγενεῖς* perhaps constituting a kind of military apprenticeship before its members moved on to other military or civil positions – as might service in the *μηλοφόροι*, their infantry equivalent.<sup>72</sup> This

<sup>67</sup> At this *locus*, Alexander's guard was made up of 500 Persian *μηλοφόροι* and 500 Macedonian *ἀργυράσπιδες*. In addition, Arrian (*An.* 7.29.4) writes that Alexander introduced the *μηλοφόροι* into the Macedonian army. In the view of Collins (n. 65), 264–5, this could relate to (a) Diodorus' claim (17.110.1) that 1,000 Persians were admitted into the hypaspists attached to the court (an event which occurred after Alexander's discharge of Macedonian veterans in 324 B.C.), and (b) Justin's broadly similar material at 12.12.4. On this, see also C. Tuplin, 'Persian decor in *Cyropaedia*: some observations', in H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and J. W. Drijvers (edd.), *Achaemenid History V* (Leiden, 1990), 17–29, at 22, with Charles (n. 1 [2011]), 128–9. Arrian (*An.* 7.11.1) also tells us that Alexander, again near his death, only allowed those he called his kinsmen (*συγγενεῖς*) to kiss him, seemingly in emulation of Persian practice – something which shocked the Macedonians. This, of course, does not mean that those so honoured constituted an elite cavalry unit, for we are told that he divided the commands of his units among this picked group (witness τῶν Περσῶν τοὺς ἐπιλέκτους).

<sup>68</sup> Hammond (n. 42), 141.

<sup>69</sup> M.L. Strack, 'Griechische Titel im Ptolemäerreich', *RhM* 55 (1900), 161–90, at 173 n. 2.

<sup>70</sup> Sekunda (n. 4), 85.

<sup>71</sup> See also Bosworth (n. 40), 298.

<sup>72</sup> It is possible, as I have argued at Charles (n. 1 [2011]), 121 n. 28, that the future Darius I served with this unit during Cambyses' Egyptian campaign, for Herodotus describes him as a *δορυφόρος* at 3.139.2.



view, of course, must remain conjecture, but it does at least seem to fit the available evidence.

Who commanded the *συγγενεῖς*? Alexander Meeus has recently contended that the command of the *συγγενεῖς* was one of two important chiliarchies. These were (a) command of the *μηλοφόροι* (that is, the office of \**hazarapatiš*), this being the official credited by Greek writers with controlling access to the Great King, and (b) command of the *συγγενεῖς ἰππεῖς*.<sup>73</sup> He adds that, at Gaugamela, Nabarzanes was the ‘equestrian chiliarch’, a view supported by Welles and Lewis.<sup>74</sup> But Collins has recently refuted this argument by adducing evidence suggesting that the commander of the *μηλοφόροι* was indeed the chiliarch *par excellence*, and that the commander of the *συγγενεῖς* was merely one of many chiliarchs, or ‘commanders of a thousand’.<sup>75</sup> One might still wonder, however, why it is the infantry guard commander rather than his cavalry equivalent who is normally assumed to enjoy the pre-eminent role, the more so given that it is often thought that cavalry rather than infantry was the pre-eminent Achaemenid military arm.<sup>76</sup>

The answer to this conundrum might very well lie in Tuplin’s recent treatment of the Achaemenid cavalry, and particularly his discovery, gleaned from an exhaustive exposition of various sources from both within and outside the Persian empire, that cavalry are not given any particular prominence in the kinds of sources that might matter most, such as iconography.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, Tuplin asserts that, despite an increase in the use of cavalry – both Iranian and allied – as the empire evolved, the status of cavalry *vis-à-vis* infantry is unlikely to have changed during the period of importance to us; that is, from Xerxes through to Darius III. As Collins admits, the *συγγενεῖς* ‘were no doubt commanded by a chiliarch of some sort’, being a unit composed of a 1,000 men, but there is no certainty that this commander was necessarily equivalent in importance to the exalted commander of the *μηλοφόροι*.<sup>78</sup> This matter surely warrants a more detailed treatment elsewhere.

<sup>73</sup> Meeus (n. 51), 309 (with 310). On controlling access to the king, see especially Plut. *Them.* 27.2.

<sup>74</sup> Meeus (n. 51), 309, with C.B. Welles (trans.), *Diodorus Siculus: Library of History*, vol. 8. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA and London, 1963), 286–7 n. 1; D.M. Lewis, *Sparta and Persia* (Leiden, 1977), 17. For references, see Arr. *An.* 3.21.1, with 3.16.1 and 3.23.4.

<sup>75</sup> Collins (n. 65), 271 and id. (n. 42), 162–3. A. Keaveney, ‘The chiliarch and the person of the King’, in B. Jacobs and R. Rollinger (edd.), *Der Achämenidenhof. The Achaemenid Court: Akten des 2. Internationalen Kolloquiums zum Thema ‘Vorderasien im Spannungsfeld klassischer und altorientalischer Überlieferungen’* (Wiesbaden, 2010), 499–508, at 499, following on from his discussion at id. (n. 4), 119–29, also argues that there was only one chiliarch *par excellence*. Cf. P. Briant, ‘Sources gréco-hellénistiques, institutions perses et institutions macédoniennes: continuités, changements et bricolages’, in H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, A. Kuhrt and M. Cool Root (edd.), *Achaemenid History VIII* (Leiden, 1994), 283–310, at 295 n. 31, who oddly thinks that the *μηλοφόροι* at Gaugamela were cavalry (‘les cavaliers’).

<sup>76</sup> At Diod. Sic. 11.69.1, the commander of the *δορυφόροι* (presumably = *μηλοφόροι*) is assumed to be most influential with the king. On the importance of cavalry over infantry, see e.g. P. Hunt, ‘Military forces’, in P. Sabin, H. van Wees and M. Whitby (edd.), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare*, vol. 1: *Greece, The Hellenistic World and the Rise of Rome* (Cambridge, 2007), 108–46, at 126. Evans (n. 11), 99, emphasizes the importance of Persian cavalry to the Great King’s army, but does not go as far as Hunt.

<sup>77</sup> Tuplin (n. 3), 179–82. Tuplin even observes, quite tellingly (p. 180), that ‘[t]here is remarkably little sign that the Greeks found Persian cavalry inherently exotic or awesome, and there is no perceptible demonizing of the Iranian horseman’. Cf. R. Konijnendijk, ‘“Neither the less valorous nor the weaker”: Persian military might and the battle of Plataia’, *Historia* 61 (2012), 1–17, at 9, who stresses that Greek soldiers were fearful of specialist horsemen, with the defeat of the latter normally being described as ‘a great achievement’. This need not necessarily contradict Tuplin, for one might assume that the Greeks had a high regard for the fighting abilities of the Persian cavalry throughout our period.

<sup>78</sup> Collins (n. 42), 162–3.

Suffice it to say here that, on the face of it, there is no reason to assume that the συγγενεῖς and their commander enjoyed greater or equivalent seniority to the μηλοφόροι and their respective commander. In fact, if one extrapolates from the conclusions advanced by Tuplin regarding Achaemenid cavalry in an admittedly general sense, there is some cause to believe that the συγγενεῖς could even have been the inferior of the two guard units, the second among equals.

This leads us to the issue of the 10,000 Persian cavalry found in Herodotus, and how these relate to the συγγενεῖς, or indeed other cavalry in Persian service, such as those in satrapal service. Determining who these men were is a difficult exercise, and largely depends on whether we accept them as cavalry troopers from the Persian heartland, or from elsewhere, including satrapies outside this area, as per Cawkwell's view.<sup>79</sup> If one considers all of Herodotus' lengthy exposition of the forces of Xerxes immediately before his Greek campaign, it should become readily apparent that Herodotus makes a clear division between those forces whom he understands as being truly Persian, or at least Iranian, and those who emanated from other parts of the Great King's empire. Hence, we are meant to understand the troops described at Hdt. 7.40–1 as *Persian* cavalry, or at least Iranian, rather than an amalgam of peoples from various parts of the empire. If so, the Herodotean 10,000 seem to be regarded, on the surface, as being analogous to the 10,000 infantry, whom we generally refer to as the Immortals or ἄθάνατοι. But do two groupings of 10,000 standing infantry and 10,000 standing cavalry really make sense? By striving for symmetry, Herodotus could possibly be privileging the trope that Persian cavalry were of especial importance compared to the infantry, a view which also presumably influenced Xenophon's reference to 'the first-formed 10,000 cavalry' (ἵππεῖς οἱ πρῶτοι γενόμενοι μύριοι) in the historical romance of the *Cyropaedia* (8.3.16) – a numbering which could possibly stem, in any case, from the Herodotean tradition. This is especially so given that Xenophon, as we saw in the rather more factually based *Anabasis*, did not seem to recognize an extant formation of 10,000 'palatine' cavalry in the Great King's service on the eve of the fourth century B.C. Yet maintaining the standing cavalry of an empire at precisely the same strength as its standing infantry is an unusual circumstance at any point in history. This is particularly so given the greater logistical needs associated with maintaining cavalry, especially in the field, where forage might not always be available owing to climactic conditions or enemy harassment.<sup>80</sup>

In his survey of the evidence pertaining to Achaemenid cavalry, Tuplin points to a general view among our sources that the Great King's cavalry were either from the Persian heartland (Elam, Persia and Media), or 'points east', the other possibilities being Armenia and Cappadocia, at least by the era of Darius III.<sup>81</sup> This brings us to cavalry sourced from the satrapies. If the amount of truly Iranian cavalry was not as large as some have previously imagined, it is likely that a substantial portion of those

<sup>79</sup> Cawkwell (n. 6), 239.

<sup>80</sup> On this point, and with reference to Achaemenid cavalry, see Evans (n. 11), 102–4. The substantial cost associated with keeping a large number of cavalry under arms is also suggested by Xenophon. At *Oec.* 4.5, he makes Socrates claim that the governors of those regions providing tribute to the Great King supplied maintenance (τροφή) for a specified number of horsemen, among other types of soldier; see also *Oec.* 4.6, with commentary by Hirsch (n. 10), 9–11.

<sup>81</sup> Tuplin (n. 3), 153–6, with *Arr. An.* 3.11.3–7. Libya is also recorded as providing horsemen at Hdt. 7.86.2, though these are described as charioteers. Herodotus observes (7.84) that horsemen are found in the various nations under Persian sway, but only a small number furnished cavalry for the expeditionary force – 80,000 horsemen were supposedly assembled (Hdt. 7.87).

cavalrymen serving in Persian armies not directly under the Great King's command hailed from the satrapies, particularly the eastern ones. The degree to which any of these men could be considered elite is difficult to ascertain; that said, it is clear that some cavalry formations emanating from outside the Persian homeland were regarded as superior to others. For example, at Gaugamela, Mazaeus, who commanded the Persian right, including 'the best of the cavalry' (witness μετὰ τῶν ἀρίστων ἵππέων), is said to have entrusted 2,000 Cadusii and 'a 1,000 picked Scythian horsemen' (χιλίους Σκυθῶν ἵππεις ἐπιλέκτους) to undertake the critical manoeuvre of sacking Alexander's heavily guarded baggage (Diod. Sic. 17.59.5).<sup>82</sup> Moreover, it would not be entirely unwise to posit that each satrap had a small permanent cavalry force that acted as a kind of 'satrapal guard'.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps the 600 trusted cavalry under Cyrus the Younger's immediate command at Cunaxa was an example of such a unit (Xen. An. 1.8.24).<sup>84</sup> If such a force did indeed exist, it would clearly have formed a very important part of satrapal forces, either singularly, or combined, as was the case at the Granicus, and presumably would have been counted among the Great King's more useful units in the great battles of the era.

So, it appears that there might not have been a particularly large number of truly Persian or Iranian cavalry available to the Great King, particularly given that, as Evans points out, it cannot be assumed that each cavalryman only required one horse.<sup>85</sup> Herodotus' cavalry myriad, instead of being a clearly defined formation composed exclusively of ethnic Persians, as he asserts, might therefore have been a force cobbled together from a number of areas with cognate fighting styles for the purpose of the campaign in question. If this was the case, the view that the Herodotean 10,000 cavalry must correspond exactly to the 'palatine' nature of the 10,000 infantry, a force whose strength seems to be less disputable, could well be mistaken. All this, of course, must remain speculation, but does at least help to explain why the cavalry myriad is never referred to again in our sources (aside from the rather dubious *Cyropaedia*), at least as a defined unit or formation. Moreover, it explains why the formation never receives special descriptive attention from Herodotus, unlike the ἀθάνατοι, who are named at several points in his narrative.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, it is an infantry formation that was always kept to a precise strength of 10,000 men – not a cavalry unit (Hdt. 7.83.1). A possible implication is that the Herodotean cavalry myriad was a rather more ad hoc formation, and one assembled for a specific purpose, this being Xerxes' Greek

<sup>82</sup> On this episode, see n. 62. The overall excellence of the cavalry under Mazaeus, which obviously did not include the συγγενεῖς, is also asserted at Diod. Sic. 17.60.5. Cf. An. 3.15.2, where Arrian claims that the best cavalry in the army – and the most numerous – were Persians.

<sup>83</sup> Perhaps these are the cavalrymen described by Arrian (An. 1.15.2) as 'the best of the Persian horse' (τὸ κράτιστον τῆς Περσικῆς ἵππου) at the Granicus. In a similar way, one might imagine that Cyrus the Younger's 600 picked cavalry, which accompanied him in the centre at Cunaxa, were regarded as superior to the 1,000 Paphlagonian cavalry positioned on the right wing; see Xen. An. 1.8.5–6. I thank *CQ*'s anonymous referee for this observation pertaining to satrapal cavalry.

<sup>84</sup> Given the existence of a cavalry and infantry royal guard (namely, the συγγενεῖς and μηλοφόροι), one imagines that a satrap might also have been able to count upon a cognate infantry formation. Such units are perhaps alluded to at Xen. Oec. 4.5–7, though the details are unclear.

<sup>85</sup> Evans (n. 11), 101.

<sup>86</sup> The *locus classicus* is Hdt. 7.83.1–2. The word is also used at Hdt. 7.211.1, where members of the ἀθάνατοι fought at Thermopylae (479 B.C.), quite obviously as infantry given the context (see also Diod. Sic. 11.7.4), and at Hdt. 8.113.2. It is, of course, curious that the word ἀθάνατοι is not used when the infantry myriad is introduced at Hdt. 7.41.1, nor at 7.55.2, but this could be the result of Herodotus using different underlying sources for different parts of the narrative. Cf. Hdt. 7.31.

expedition. Yet Xenophon (*Oec.* 4.5), who we might presume was not entirely ignorant of Persian institutional arrangements on account of his friendship with Cyrus the Younger, suggests that there was at least *some* permanent cavalry, these being paid for by those nations accustomed to give tribute to the Great King, though no numbers are advanced.<sup>87</sup> Regardless, we seem to be left with a ‘palatine’ ethnic Persian force of cavalry and infantry that is rather smaller than what has previously been envisaged, with the *συγγενεῖς* being the only clearly defined standing cavalry unit of royal significance. This unit continued intact through to the era of Darius III, in a similar way to the infantry *μηλοφόροι*.

## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In sum, our discussion of the Persian elite cavalry provides additional evidence to support the claim that the truly Persian army of Xerxes was not a particularly large force.<sup>88</sup> If we accept Herodotus’ figures, the 10,000 cavalry and 1,000 guard cavalry or *συγγενεῖς* supposedly formed a kind of combined Persian (or at least Iranian) force that accompanied the Great King in the field, just as the 10,000 *ἄθάνατοι* and the 1,000 *μηλοφόροι* constituted his central infantry force. If one follows my earlier lead with the elite infantry, it is possible to argue that Herodotus’ 10,000 Persian cavalry, regardless of whether they were a standing force or otherwise, were not really elite or ‘select’ in the modern sense of the word, much less of ‘guard’ status. Rather, they constituted the combined Persian or Iranian cavalry for Xerxes’ Greek campaign. The numbers alone surely require this conclusion, for the existence of a ‘guard’ cavalry unit of 10,000 is unheard of in any period of antiquity.<sup>89</sup> To compare with the Roman empire, the *equites singulares Augusti*, the elite cavalry of the Caesars, numbered somewhere in the vicinity of 1,000 in the late first century A.D., rising to 2,000 in the early third century A.D., while their Eastern Roman empire equivalent in the fourth to sixth century A.D., the *scholae*, had a paper strength of 3,500, being comprised of seven 500-strong units – and this at time when cavalry was becoming the main force on the battlefield.<sup>90</sup> If one accepts an ‘elite’, or even ‘palatine’, force of 10,000 cavalry, a considerably larger non-elite or satrapal force must be posited. This, however, is something which, on the face of it, looks rather implausible, the more so in view of recent work suggesting that the infantry constituted the core of Achaemenid armies throughout the period in question.<sup>91</sup> Herodotus’ 10,000 Persian cavalry, if they *did* number 10,000 for the Greek expedition, were elite only in the sense that they were more closely associated with the Great King than any other cavalry forces brought along for the campaign, save the guard cavalry proper – that is, the *συγγενεῖς*. Despite Herodotus’ statement

<sup>87</sup> It is not entirely clear if Xenophon, here, is referring to satrapal cavalry, or to what might be termed ‘palatine’ cavalry. The context, being a Socratic dialogue, does not necessarily inspire complete confidence in the material.

<sup>88</sup> On this claim, see especially the Persian source described in n. 19.

<sup>89</sup> Charles (n. 1 [2011]), 131.

<sup>90</sup> On the doubling of the *singulares*, see M. Durry, *Les cohortes prétoriennes* (repr. of the 1938 edn, Paris, 1968), 88; on Constantine’s formation of the *scholae*, see M.P. Speidel, *Riding for Caesar: The Roman Emperors’ Horse Guards* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), 75–6; for the seven cavalry *scholae* of the Eastern empire, see *Not. Dign. Or.* 11.4–10 (the eastern part of the *Notitia* presumably dates to the early part of the fifth century A.D.).

<sup>91</sup> See especially Tuplin (n. 3), 180.

(7.40.1–41.2) that there were two 1,000-strong units of picked cavalry, a detail which he himself seems to refute later in his narrative, there seems to have been only *one* unit of royal guard cavalry in our period. Despite some thoughts to the contrary, largely prompted by Curtius' largely inexplicable reference (at 3.9.4) to a 3,000-strong cavalry force accompanying the king, their nominal strength was 1,000. These men, evidently of high social standing, and presumably well trained, therefore constituted the premier cavalry unit of Achaemenid Persia.<sup>92</sup> They could presumably operate in small groups, especially when the Great King was absent, perhaps so as to provide a 'royal' presence and thereby instil confidence in lesser formations, but they could also be massed together, as reportedly occurred at Gaugamela.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> On the 'full-time' nature of the 'guard units', see Barkworth (n. 2), 161. One might infer that they were well trained in comparison with other units.

<sup>93</sup> According to Lewis (n. 74), 17 n. 90, they were 'on detachment' at the Granicus.