

CHAPTER 45 ODRYSIAN CAVALRY ARMS, EQUIPMENT, AND TACTICS

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The Odrysian Army

Although by Strabo's time Thrace had been devastated to an exceptional degree, he said that the region as a whole could send into the field 15,000 cavalry and 200,000 infantry.¹ This would corroborate Herodotus' statement that there were about a million Thracians, which allows an army 100 – 200,000 strong. It also makes credible Thucydides' claim that when the Odrysian king Sitalkes called up all Thracian troops south of the Danube, 150,000 warriors poured "like a cloud of locusts"² into Macedonia, carrying all before them. No wonder Herodotus says of the Thracians that "were they under one ruler, or united, they would... be invincible and the strongest nation on earth."³ However, the army was not paid, but lived on booty, and the majority of troops would have supplied their own equipment. Consequently armies dissolved quickly if not successful.⁴

The Odrysian army was composed mainly of peltasts and cavalry, the remainder being lighter infantry (javelin men, archers, and slingers).⁵ In Sitalkes' army, these warriors came from the Odrysai, Getae, eastern Paionians (Agrianians and Laeaeans), Treres, Tilateans, Apsinthii, Krobyzi, Dii (plus Bessi and other mountain tribes), and Thyni. None of the tribes from the Aegean coast (Edoni, Bisaltae etc) joined Sitalkes. Greek mercenaries were occasionally hired to make up for the lack of heavy infantry. Iphicrates had 8000 men in Thrace at one stage,⁶ but we cannot be sure if this was when he was in Kotys' service or when he was campaigning in the same area on Athens' behalf. Many of Iphicrates' victories were gained using peltasts as the main arm, but what Kotys needed was hoplites, and these probably formed the mainstay of his mercenary force. Unfortunately, when the Macedonians invaded, the Thracians had no such infantry capable of defeating the Macedonian phalanx.⁷

Tribes fought together as well as alone, but large agglomerations were rare. More typical were the four tribes that attacked Romans with 10,000 men in a mountainous defile in 189, or the Triballi's lone defence against Alexander the Great. Tribal fragmentation meant that most Thracian armies would have been 10-20,000 men strong.

One of the most powerful of these appeared in 400, when Seuthes II hired the 6,000 or so survivors of Xenophon's army to get his own domain on the Black sea coast.⁸ They were mainly hoplites, but included nearly 1,000 peltasts, javelinmen, and slingers, and 50 cavalry.⁹ Xenophon says simply that Seuthes had an army larger than the Greek army; and that it tripled in size as the news of its success spread. This could mean that Seuthes' army grew to a strength of around 20,000 men, including the Greeks.¹⁰ The Thracian contribution to this army would have been around 4,000 Odrysian light cavalry, 500 heavy cavalry, 500 archers and slingers, 7,000 peltasts, and 2,000 javelin-armed lighter infantry.¹¹

The army was organised along tribal lines, with each contingent commanded by its own prince or his relatives. Since the leaders expected to be in the forefront of battle, they would have had little control over their armies once battle was joined. In Sitalkes' case (when fighting the Triballi), this also meant

⁷ eg Arrian, 1.2 – 1.4.

⁸ Op.cit. VII,7,23; 1,7 – before the battle of Cunaxa there were 10,400 hoplites and 2,500 peltasts, but when they get to Thrace D. Head, in 'Thracian Troop Types', in *Slingshot*, September 1979, p 21 and J.G.P. Best, *Thracian Peltasts and their influence on Greek warfare*, 1969, p76 wrote their number had dwindled to 6,000. While *Anabasis* VII, 2 "...and with Xenophon there were about seventeen hundred hoplites and about three hundred peltasts. Xenophon was the only one who had cavalry, a force of about forty horsemen." Diodorus Siculus XIV. 31.5 says 8,300 survived to reach the Bosphorus but they then split up.

⁹ Xenophon, *Anabasis* III. 3.16; *Anabasis* VII. 3 also says "Seuthes then went off, and Timasion, with about forty Greek horsemen, went with him."

¹⁰ Xenophon, *Anabasis* 7.5.15; 7.4.20.

¹¹ These figures are based on the assumption that cavalry formed about one third of the army, peltasts formed the bulk of the troops, and the remainder were lighter infantry, with archers predominating over slingers.

¹ Strabo *Geography* 7.f47.

² Aristophanes *Acharnians*, 145 – this was in autumn 429.

³ Herodotus V.3.

⁴ This might be one explanation for the brevity of Sitalkes' campaign against Macedonia.

⁵ Thucydides 2.100; Head, *AOTMAPW*, p 29; Head D., *TTT*, pp14-17.

⁶ Polyaeus 111.9.46. This would be the largest body of mercenary troops who fought for the Thracians.

the death of the commander and loss of the battle. Commands were transmitted by trumpet calls.¹² Thracian musicians used horns for giving signals, and also trumpets of raw ox-hide that could play music like that of a harp.¹³

It is probable that different Thracian tribes favoured different fighting styles and had different proportions of troop-types in their armies. For instance, in the *Iliad*, Euphemes arrayed the Ciconians, men of the spear¹⁴, and Pryaechmes led Paeonians, armed with the bow. Mountain tribes were more warlike and favoured infantry, while those from the plains favoured cavalry. The Odrysai fielded 8,000 horse (28%) and 20,000 foot against Lysimachos.¹⁵ A detachment of Odrysians sent by Seuthes to aid the Spartans in Bithynia in 398 was composed of 200 cavalry (40%) and 300 peltasts.¹⁶ Thucydides says that the Getai and their neighbours by the Danube were all mounted archers in the Skythian style.¹⁷ However, Alexander faced a Getic army of 4000 horse and 10,000 foot, or about 28% cavalry.¹⁸ Seuthes hired 2,000 Getic light troops for use against the Athenians in the Thracian Chersonese,¹⁹ which shows they may have been a regular component of Odrysian armies. So an Odrysian royal army might contain between 25% and 40% cavalry, while the army of a single tribe or group of hill tribes might have much less.

The Odrysian Cavalry

Horse riding epitomised the Thracians. Euripides and Homer called the Thracians “a race of horsemen”, and Thrace, “the land of the Thracian horsemen”.²⁰ This description seems justified, as even though the cavalry only made up a small proportion of their army, they were quite numerous. For instance, although Sitalkes’ army was only one-third cavalry, this represented about 50,000 men. The majority of these were Odrysians and Getai.²¹ Thus the Odrysians alone could outnumber all the fifth-century Greek cities and other tribal kingdoms collectively in cavalry forces.²² However, Macedonian heavy cavalry op-

erated against them with impunity when Sitalkes invaded Macedonia. “The Macedonians... made cavalry attacks on the Thracian army when they saw their opportunity. Whenever they did so, being excellent horsemen and armed with breastplates, no one could stand up to them...”²³ This happened again during the battle of Lyginus between Alexander and the Triballi.²⁴

The cavalry were chiefly unarmoured javelin-armed skirmishers, with relatively few armoured cavalry forming a body-guard for the king.²⁵ This might explain why Sitalkes had no troops able to stand up to the heavy Macedonian cavalry. Against the Greeks, though, they seem to have had more success, with several Greek armies being wiped out during colonisation attempts. Perhaps the best evidence for the success of Thracian cavalry is the way that the mainland Greeks took up Thracian cavalry dress, and horsemanship. Athenian riders wearing Thracian boots and/or Thracian headdress can be seen on the Parthenon frieze, and wearing Thracian cloaks on Athenian pottery.²⁶

Horses were very important to Thracians, and seem to have been of good quality.²⁷ Studies of Thracian horses from fourth century tombs show that they were larger than steppe ponies and at least comparable to the breeds on the Greek mainland, which reached 1.34m or 13 hands. They had a long thick mane, a short tail, and carried their heads high.²⁸ The biggest would have been between 1.36 and 1.44m, or 14 hands at the withers, similar to stallions of the Przewalski horse.²⁹ This size, between that of a modern pony and a horse, is now called a Galloway. It was still small enough that riders who rode with their legs straight barely kept their feet off the ground.

Horses were trained and bred for racing, a prerequisite for successful cavalry warfare. Xenophon rates Thracian horses to be as good as Persian and Greek horses, and says that the Odrysians habitually ran their horse races downhill.³⁰ In the *Iliad*, a Trojan spy reports that the Thracian king Rhesus has the finest and strongest horses he has ever seen, “whiter than snow and fleetier than any wind that blows.”³¹ The Megarians asked an oracle who were better than they. The extraordinary reply received was: “Better than all other land is the land of Pelasgian Argos, Thracian mares are the best, and the Lacedaemonian women.”³² Vergil describes three Thracian horses: One had white fetlocks and “a snowy star” on the forehead; another was a piebald, while a third was dappled with white. Horses in the Kazanluk paintings do not have any markings and are different shades of brown, except for a single white

¹² Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 7.4.19.

¹³ Ibid, 7.3.32.

¹⁴ *Iliad*, Chapter 2.

¹⁵ Diodorus Siculus XVIII.14.2.

¹⁶ Xenophon, *Hellenica* III 2.2.

¹⁷ Thucydides 2.96.

¹⁸ Arrian, 1.4 – 1.5.

¹⁹ Polyaeus, *Stratagems of War* 7.38.

²⁰ Euripides, *Hecabe*, 7-10 (Penguin)

Polydorus: “To Thrace, to the palace of his old friend Polymestor, who farms the fertile plain of this peninsula and rules over a race of horsemen with his sword.”

p 84: (707-709) Hecabe: “It was my own trusted friend; the Thracian horseman, to whose house Priam had sent him secretly.”

Homer *Iliad* 13.1 (Loeb)

Now Zeus, when he had brought the Trojans and Hector to the ships, left the combatants there to have toil and woe unceasingly, but himself turned away his bright eyes, and looked afar, upon the land of the Thracian horsemen, Homer, *Iliad*, XIV

Venus now went back into the house of Jove, while Juno darted down from the summits of Olympus. She passed over Pieria and fair Emathia, and went on and on till she came to the snowy ranges of the Thracian horsemen, over whose topmost crests she sped without ever setting foot to ground.

²¹ Thucydides 2.100.

²² Archibald Z., op. cit. p 204.

²³ Thucydides II, 100.

²⁴ Arrian, 1.2 – 1.4.

²⁵ Head, *AOTMAPW*, p 29; Head, *TTT*, pp 14-17.

²⁶ Archibald Z., ibid pp 204-206; see Fig. 1.

²⁷ Although J. K. Anderson (*Ancient Greek Horsemanship*, Univ. of California Press, Berkeley, 1961, p22) deems the Thracian horse to have been “a compound of all possible faults”, I have not found any ancient sources that agree with him. His theory is that as Thrace had been scourged by numerous wars and invasions, whatever was good in the equine sense was stolen or destroyed. The same argument would make possible an improvement via a mixture of breeds from Asia; the argument about wars etc probably only applies after the Macedonian conquest.

²⁸ CAH Vol VIII, page 542.

²⁹ Archibald Z., op. cit, p 205.

³⁰ Xenophon *On Horsemanship* VIII.

³¹ Homer, *Iliad*, X

³² Theocritus *Idyl* xiv. 48.



Figure 1. 5th century Thracian light cavalryman with zeira, boots, fox skin cap, two javelins and a pelta slung on his back. Note the small size of the horse (From a red figure pelike found near Sozopol).



Figure 2a. Reconstruction of silver gilt harness ornaments 1 to 4, left to right. 1. 4th century, from Simeonovgrad, near Haskovo HM Haskovo P.49. 2. 3rd or 2nd century, from Ravnogor, near Pazardzik (found with a hair from the forelock in the hollow "horn"), HM Pazardzik A4646-4652, 4707, 157. 3. c. 400 - 350, from Letnitsa 4.4th century, from the Lukovit treasure. Archaeological Museum, Sofia. © Linda Dicmanis 2001

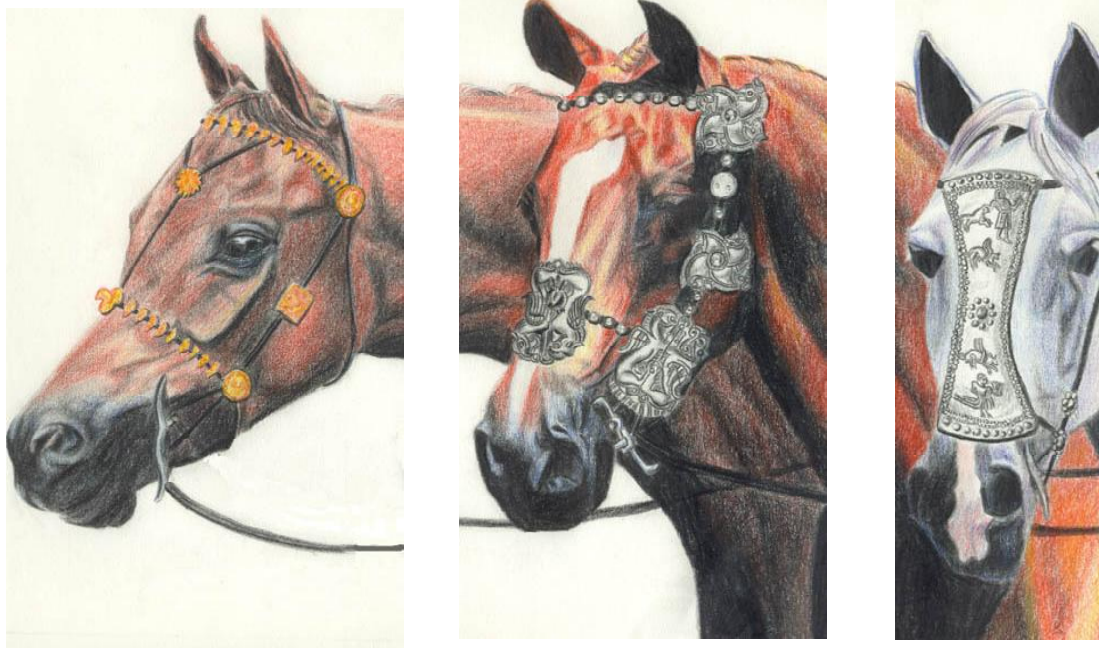


Figure 2b. Reconstruction of some other harness ornaments, by Linda Dicmanis. © Linda Dicmanis 2001. 1. Kravevo treasure, Targoviste region, turn of 4th-3rd centuries BC (probably Getic). HM Targoviste 2298-2306 2. 4th century harness ornaments from the Lukovit treasure, Archaeological Musuem, Sofia 3. The silver headstall from Mramor Moglia Panagyurishte district, 350-300., previously thought to have been a shield applique. It was found with five circular ornaments. Archaeological Museum, Sofia. It is 32 cm long, which Linda Dicmanis found to fit exactly onto a horse's head. © Linda Dicmanis 2001

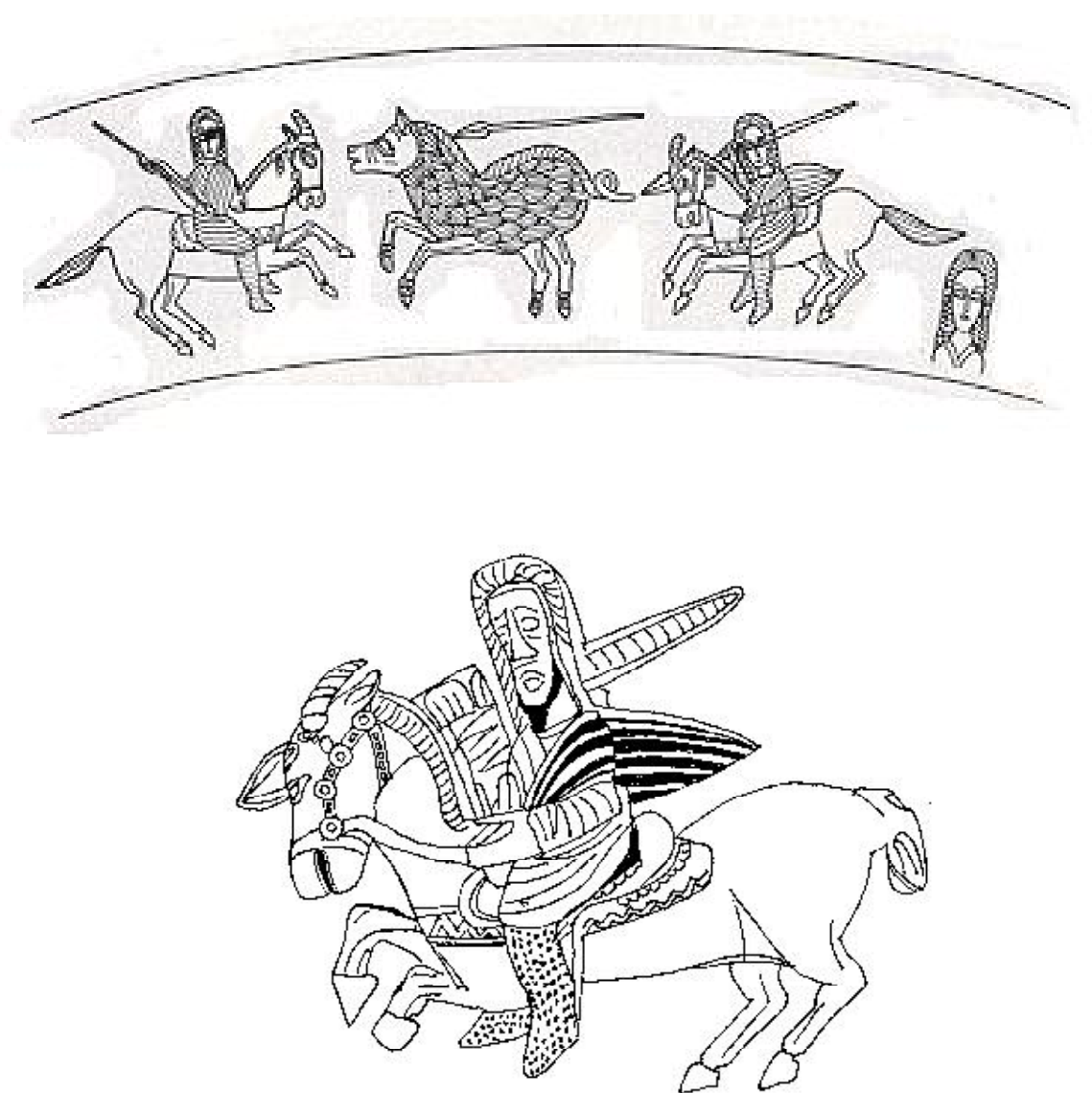


Figure 3. Triballi or Getic horsemen on Silver-gilt jug from the 4th century Rozogen treasure, National Museum of History inv. No22459. Note the saddle and chest strap decorations, and the “horn” on the horses’ heads.

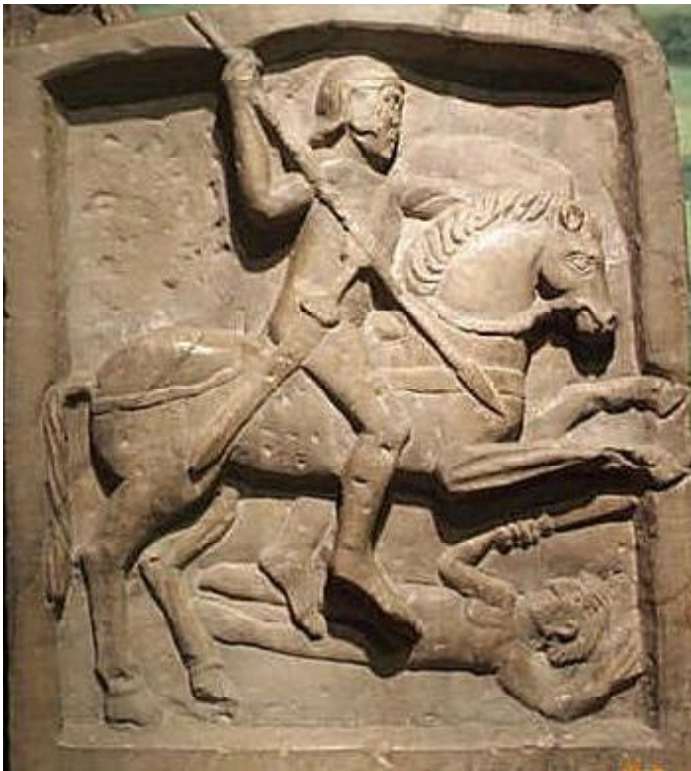


Figure 4. The tombstone of a 1st century AD Thracian auxiliary cavalryman, from Gloucester. He uses a lancea, but may also have had a case of javelins. The details of his clothes and armour were probably painted on, but have now disappeared. The inscription reads: "Rufus Sita, cavalryman of the 6th cohort of Thracians. 40 years old and 22 years of military service. His heirs erected this stone in accordance with his will. Here he lies." Author's photograph.

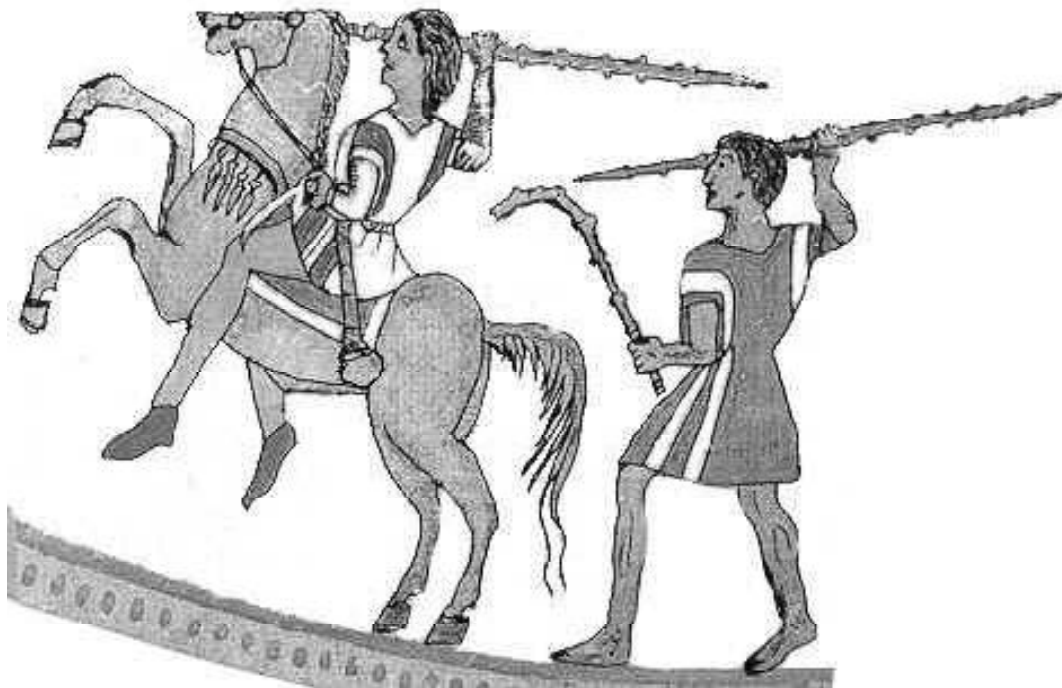


Figure 5. The Alexandrovo tomb, 400-375. It consists of two rooms - a rectangular entryway and a round chamber with a high dome. Both rooms are covered with murals: men, animals, plants and geometric motifs. Note the unusual shape to the spears, the similarities to the Kazanluk paintings, the horse trappings, and the Greek costumes.



Figure 5 (Continued).



Figure 6. Silver-gilt fourth century Thracian (probably Triballi) horse ornaments from Lukovit. The rider wears a draping chlamys and a tunic reaching to his mid-thigh. Note the bridle rings and chest strap decorations. Archaeological Museum, Sofia, No. 8214.

horse. White horses were evidently special, as one was presented to Seuthes II at the banquet attended by Xenophon.³³ In the Alexandrovo tomb, the horses are wholly painted grey, white, brown, or yellow.

It is interesting to note that Thracian horses seem to have been larger than Skythian and Saka horses, which were of the Przewalski type - small, stocky ponies with naturally short manes and long tails. Scythian horses found in permafrost graves were chestnut, browns, bays or jet black. None were dapple grey, mottled bay, skewbald, roan or grey. White patches, which are common on modern brown horses, were absent. It is thought the Skythians avoided light coloured or white marked horses, as they had a corresponding light coloured hoof that was easily injured. So apparently, it was not until the invention of the horseshoe, that we start to see white patches on horses extremities.³⁴

The horse trappings were well crafted and highly decorative, and horses wearing all the items discovered in Thracian tombs must have made a fine sight.³⁵ A variety of harnessing methods was used, some of which resembled Skythian and Persian practice. Leather bridles in red or dark brown colour consisted of side-straps, nose bands with or without chinstraps, often forehead-straps and throat-lashes. Reins were the same colour. The harness fittings (most often disks or rings,) were made of a mixture of iron, bronze, gold, and silver, or bronze and silver.

Harness fittings were adorned like the those of the Skythians, featuring real or fantastic animals, but many featured distinctive anthropomorphic motifs, including the

Thracian horseman and Thracian mythology. Sometimes hundreds of exquisitely crafted ornaments were used on a single horse. "There was a separate native tradition which nevertheless grew closer to similarly evolving Royal Skythian schemes during the fourth century. At the same time, Greek influences became increasingly more prominent."³⁶ The meaning of these ornaments has often been discussed, but apparently not their usage. The horse decorations painted in the Alexandrovo tomb now show definitely how they were worn - one on the nose, one on the forehead, and two on each side of the head. Except for the nose decoration, the Alexandrovo paintings confirm positions shown in the Kazanluk tomb paintings, which show disks in these locations.

There are a lot of similarities to the Kazanluk figures: the pose of the horses, fancy saddlecloths, clean-shaven faces, and the low shoes. The nose and forehead ornaments in the Alexandrovo tomb are significant in that similar decorations have been found in other tombs but their use had not previously been illustrated. Where more than six appliques have been found, the most likely location for the adornments would be on the chest strap and along the forehead strap. Horses with the most basic ring decorations generally only had them on each side of the head.

250 silver appliques from Vratsa, 206 of which were tiny heads, might have been attached to the reins, or sewn onto a saddle cloth. Apart from the use of the saddle cloth, horses were ridden bareback, as stirrups, horseshoes, and saddles were yet to be invented. Although horses are often shown without saddle cloths, this may have been artistic convention, meant to show off the lines of the horse's body. Xenophon says a man may ride bareback, but assumes saddlecloths are standard, at least for war. Most cloths were simple rectangles. The Scythians used what was essentially a cushioned saddle cloth. Leather covered cushions, stuffed with deer hair or straw, were stitched with sinew thread with wooden supports. Xenophon recommends a thick quilted saddlecloth, and the pad may derive from this.

The southern Thracians learned of the simple Skythian saddle through their northern cousins, and it seems the Odrysians were using it by the third century. One of the horses from the Kazanluk paintings has a low dark brown saddle on a cream and brown cloth. The 3rd century Sveshtari tomb shows a Hellenised king of the Getai sitting on a richly decorated saddle with four long pendants, painted red.

Many brightly coloured saddlecloths are shown on the Kazanluk and Alexandrovo paintings. One is red with yellow decoration, except that the tassels on the rear points are white. Others are straight-edged and plain red. In the Alexandrovo tomb, the saddle cloths are coloured blue and red, blue and white, or red and white. Animal-skin saddle cloths were also used.³⁷

All have simple geometrical patterns - none show the elaborate decorations used by the Skythians and Persians, who included birds and flowers in their designs. The material used for Thracian saddlecloths is unknown, but Skythian and Persian cloths were made of felt, sometimes with leather edging or backing. Wool and hemp are other possibilities. They were

³³ Xenophon, *Anabasis* 7.3.34.

³⁴ <http://members.ozemail.com.au/~ancientpersia/cavalry.html>, 20/12/01.

³⁵ See fig. 2.

³⁶ Archibald Z., *op.cit.*, pp 247-251.

³⁷ Head D., *AOTMAPW*, pp 127-128, 173-174; Webber Ch., *op. cit.*, loc. cit; one is shown on the dome of the Kazanluk tomb.



Figure 7. Tombstone of a mercenary Thracian cavalryman from Abdera, dating to the second or first century. His equipment is typical of Thracian cavalry of the late Hellenistic period. He carries a *thureos*, a long sword and a spear, and wears trousers, tunic and cloak. National Archaeological Museum Sophia Inv. 8409.

held by breast and girth straps that were knotted around toggles or spacers, buckles being unknown.

The Alexandrovo and Kazanluk tomb paintings show that carrot-like tassels sometimes hung from the chest strap. The chest strap was also often decorated with metallic disks of one sort or another. In addition, The Lukovit applique shows a chest strap decorated with a series of “X”s. An interesting decoration is worn on the forehead of two Triballi or Getic horses on a silver-gilt jug from the Rozogen treasure.³⁸ This looks like a unicorn horn bent backwards, and is similar to decorations used by Skythians. The same horse also has a saddle, and metallic ornaments on the cheek and throat straps.

Most Thracian bits were quite severe and consisted of two S-shaped branches with two or three rings or holes connected by a chain. These can be seen on the Alexandrovo tomb, though on the Kazanluk tomb the outside branches are straight with curved ends. Thracian bits are usually made of iron, or iron covered with silver foil, although some may also have been of bronze. The extent to which the Greek type (the ‘hard’ bit) replaced or supplemented the native ones in Odrysian territories has still to be clarified, but this bit was rarely used before the mid-fourth century. The Greek bit usually consists of bronze parts fitted around an iron core with bronze links. It helps the horse to salivate and makes it far easier to manoeuvre.³⁹

³⁸ National Museum of History inv. No. 22459 (AG plate 83; AG Helsinki No. 33); See Fig. 3.

Later cavalry developments

The fourth century saw the start of many changes in cavalry dress and equipment. The distinctive Thracian dress was discarded, additional armour of new types was worn, shields and saddles came into use, and light infantry was trained to support cavalry.⁴⁰ Light cavalry was now likely to have the basic protection of helmet and shield, while heavy cavalry took to wearing iron helmets and composite corselets.

Early 2nd century Thracian noble cavalry had a force of light infantry attached to them.⁴¹ These may have been trained to fight alongside the cavalry and to hamstring the enemy horses. Bithynian cavalry too seem to have been closely supported by attached infantry. This is not recorded before the early 3rd century and is probably a result of Hellenistic influence, as Greek and Macedonian generals were using light infantry in close support of their cavalry long before.⁴²

From the late fourth century onwards, Odrysian cavalry operated mostly as allied or subject troops. In particular, Thracian troops were critical to the success of Alexander the Great. They formed about one fifth of his army (25% of the infantry and 20% of the cavalry to begin with) and took part in almost all his battles. Of the forces that crossed to Asia, there were 7,000 Odrysians, Triballi and Illyrians plus 1,000 archers and Agrianians (a Paionian tribe) out of a total of 32,000 foot soldiers.⁴³ There were also 900 Thracian and Paeonian scouts, out a total of 4,500 cavalry. A further 500 Thracian cavalry joined Alexander’s army while it was at Memphis.⁴⁴ A body of Odrysian horse (probably heavy cavalry), commanded by Sitalkes, an Odrysian prince, was likewise present.⁴⁵ 600 Thracian cavalry and 3,500 Trallians joined Alexander after he left Babylon.⁴⁶

At the battle of the Granicus in 334, Alexander deployed the Thracians on his left flank, but they were not engaged during the battle.⁴⁷ Thracian cavalry took part in Alexander’s rapid march to Miletus,⁴⁸ and Thracian javelinmen screened the Macedonian left flank in battle against the Pisidians.⁴⁹ Before the Battle of Issos (333) we find Alexander using the “light armed Thracians” to reconnoitre the mountainous surroundings of the Cilician Gates.⁵⁰

At the subsequent battle the Thracians were initially in the van of the army,⁵¹ then they were again posted on the left wing, brigaded with Cretan archers.⁵² They were also on the left wing at Gaugamela (331), when the savage Thracians (cavalry and infantry) helped beat off a sustained attack by superior numbers of Persian cavalry.⁵³ However, the Thracian infantry had mixed success defending the baggage against the Indian

³⁹ Archibald Z., op.cit., pp 247-251.

⁴⁰ Head D., *AOTMAPW*, pp 51, 127- 129.

⁴¹ Livy XLII.52.

⁴² Head D., *AOTMAPW*, p 51.

⁴³ Diod. Sic. 17.17.4.

⁴⁴ Arrian 3.5.

⁴⁵ Arrian 3.13.

⁴⁶ Diod. Sic. 17.65.1.

⁴⁷ Arrian 1.14.

⁴⁸ Arrian 1.18.

⁴⁹ Arrian 1.29.

⁵⁰ Curtius III. 4.

⁵¹ Curtius III.9.9.

⁵² Arrian 2.9.

cavalry. Although many other troops were allowed to return home before or during the march to India, the Thracians stayed on. 3,000 infantry and 500 horsemen would be left as a garrison on the Indus river near the present day city of Rawalpindi.⁵⁴ At the battle of the Hydaspes (326), the Thracian light infantry attacked the Indian elephants with “*copides*” (curved swords or *rhomphaias*).⁵⁵ The Agrianians in particular were given many critical missions.⁵⁶

Many other battles in the struggle for Alexander’s empire involved Thracian troops. Eumenes deployed Thracians on his left flank at the battle of the Hellespont in 321.⁵⁷ At Paraitakene (317), 500 Thracian cavalry fought on one side and 1000 cavalry fought on the other (possibly colonist Thracians versus native Thracians – the native Thracians won).⁵⁸

Thracian cavalry next rose to prominence in the wars with the Romans. In 171 Perseus was joined by Kotys, king of the Odrysai with 1,000 picked cavalry and about 1,000 infantry.⁵⁹ Perseus already had 3,000 “free Thracians under their own commander” in his forces.⁶⁰ These fought “like wild beasts who had long been kept caged”⁶¹ at the Kallinikos skirmish that year, defeating the Roman allied cavalry. They returned from battle singing, with severed heads as trophies. Their performance at the Battle of Pydna (168) was less remarkable – they are only mentioned when running away⁶² Thracian cavalry are recorded switching sides in 109, when two mercenary squadrons were bribed to let Jugurtha into a Roman camp.⁶³ The last significant instance of the use of Thracian horsemen seems to be in 71 – while Lucullus was campaigning in Pontus, he used Thracian cavalry to successfully charge Armenian cataphracts in the flank.⁶⁴

However, Thracian cavalry continued in use. In 48 at the Battle of Pharsalus, Kotys, the Odrysian king sent around 500 cavalry with his son Sadalas to join Pompey’s army in Greece. Among Pompey’s infantry were members of the Bessi tribe, some of them mercenaries, others conscripted or volunteers. Pompey’s camp was “zealously defended by the Roman cohorts left to guard it, but more fiercely still by the Thracian

auxiliaries.”⁶⁵ but Pompey was defeated by Caesar. 2,000 Thracian, Illyrian, Parthian, and Thessalian cavalry were at Philippi in 42,⁶⁶ while Thracian mercenaries and allies also participated on the losing side in 31 at the Battle of Actium, when Octavian defeated Mark Antony.⁶⁷

After Thrace became a province in 46 AD, troops raised there fought throughout the Roman world, including Britain. The tombstone of a 1st century AD Thracian cavalryman, Rufus Sita (presumably he had red hair like his ancestors), was found in Gloucester and is now on show in the city museum, and a Thracian shrine has been excavated in Dorset. Another Thracian cavalryman has his tombstone from Wroxeter on display in Shrewsbury’s Rowley House museum.⁶⁸ At the other end of the empire, in the Crimea, Lucius Furius Seuthes left his equestrian tombstone.⁶⁹

Costume

From the 7th to the 4th centuries, Thracian light cavalry wore a tunic, cloak (*zeira*), cap (*alopekis*) and boots (*embades*).⁷⁰ Thracian warriors with this dress are common in 6th-5th century Greek art, and still described by Xenophon in the early 4th.⁷¹ Other less sophisticated examples of Greek pots show Thracian cavalry dressed very simply in a pointed hat and long flowing tunic, and they are indistinguishable from Skythian cavalry. This costume would probably still be in use in middle of the fourth century, as the costume is still worn by the Thracian warrior goddess Bendis on an Athenian relief of about 350 – though newer styles had already begun to supplant it.⁷² Some 4th century Thracian metalwork shows the cavalryman bare-headed and with bare feet, a medium length flowing cloak and simple tunic. The exact colours of earlier Thracian costume, although described as brightly coloured, are unknown. The tomb paintings use rather dull colours, and are not much help prior to 350. Thracian clothing was made of hemp, flax, or wool and was well regarded for its fine quality and texture.⁷³ Outer garments were sewn, naturally or artificially dyed, with woven or embroidered decoration. The way in which the clothes were worn depended on the season and on the type of work practiced, with certain regional differences.⁷⁴ The northern Thracians wore narrow trousers and a short shirt tucked into them, combined with an outer tunic, tied at the waist.⁷⁵ Over

⁵³ Arrian 3.13 – 3.15.

⁵⁴ They remained in India until 317, after which they came back to Asia Minor, where they joined the mercenary armies of Alexander’s successors. Florov & Florov, op. cit. p 47.

⁵⁵ Curtius VIII. 14, 24-30

⁵⁶ eg the flank attack on the Persian Gates (Arrian 3.18); During the siege of Tyre Alexander took only “the shield bearing guards and the Agrianians and set out to Sidon” (Arrian 2.19). They were also on the right flank in nearly all the battles, usually brigaded near the Companions or Royal Guards.

⁵⁷ Diodorus XVIII 30-32; Plutarch, *Eumenes*.

⁵⁸ Diodorus Siculus, XIX. 27.5 and 29.3. At the same time, Diodorus XIX 14.5 says that Peucestes, Satrap of Persia had 600 Greek and Thracian cavalry.

⁵⁹ Livy XLII.52.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Livy XLII.52.

⁶² Livy XLIV, 42: nevertheless, the cavalry (deployed on the Macedonian right) survived the battle virtually unscathed, which means that they either ran away without a fight, or must have made a good account of themselves, as they were outnumbered and probably had to face the more heavily armoured Pergamene cavalry.

⁶³ Sallust, *Jugurthine War*, XXXVIII. There are several other recorded instances of Thracian troops switching sides in the middle of a battle.

⁶⁴ Plutarch, *Lucullus*.

⁶⁵ Caesar, *Civil Wars*, II.95

⁶⁶ Appian, *The Civil Wars*, IV, XI, 87-88; Kotys, king of the Sapaioi, hedged his bets on this battle – he sent one of his sons, Raskos, to the camp of the Caesarians, and the other one, Raskouporis, to the republicans.

⁶⁷ Plutarch, *Mark Antony*: King Sadalas of Thrace came to his support, but Dicomus, king of the Getae only promised his support. King Rhoemetalkes supported Octavian at this battle.

⁶⁸ See Fig. 4.

⁶⁹ Sokolov G., *Antique Art on the Northern Black Sea Coast*, Leningrad, 1974, Fig 172.

⁷⁰ Herodotus VII.75; see fig 1.

⁷¹ Xenophon, *Anabasis* VII.4.

⁷² See fig. 5. None of the people painted on the walls of the Alexandrovo tomb wear this costume.

⁷³ Herodotus IV, 74; Euripides, *Hecabe*, 1153-1155 p 98 (Penguin).

⁷⁴ Georgieva R., Spiridonov T., & Rekho M. *Thracian Ethnology*, Univ. Press “Sv. Kliment Ohridski”, Sofia, 1999: English summary at http://members.tripod.com/~Grozniyat/thrac/ethno/thrac_ethnol.html.

this clothing, cloaks, fur coats and the characteristic Thracian *zeira* were used. These were decorated with fibulae, leather or textile belts, and various other articles of adornment.⁷⁶ The total effect was quite impressive – Plato says he thought the Thracian contingent marching in an Athenian religious festival put on a better show than the citizens (they must have looked really good, as this is saying that barbarians are better than citizens, even in a small way).⁷⁷

The cap was called *alopekis*, meaning fox-skin, in Greek. Art shows a wide variety of Thracian caps, in three main styles. One was clearly made of a fox's skin, its face perched above the wearer's forehead, with neck- and cheek-flaps of patterned cloth. A second style shows the same neck- and cheek-flaps attached to a low-crowned cap of cloth or felt, or sometimes perhaps dappled cowhide. The third style is a simple high-crowned "Phrygian" cap, again with neck and cheek-flaps all apparently made in one piece.⁷⁸

Noble Odrysian cavalry may have worn tattoos. Tattooing was a sign of birth, though there is no evidence that it was practiced by Odrysian men.⁷⁹ Noble Thracian women showed off their status by wearing richer and more brightly coloured designs, some of which are shown on the Vratsa greave.⁸⁰ They were tattooed on their faces and with spots on their arms, supposedly to commemorate the murder of Orpheus (by Thracian women).⁸¹ Although there are no known depictions of tattooed Thracian warriors, the noblemen may have adopted this practice, for the Agathyrsi (a Skythian tribe near the Thracians with some Thracian customs) are said to have tattooed both their faces and their limbs with distinctive tribal marks. The sort of tattoos worn were probably similar to the spirals and animal motifs worn by Skythian chiefs.⁸² The Getai, being under heavy Skythian influence, are especially likely to have followed this custom.

There are, however, lots of paintings of the Thracian tunic and cloak. The Thracian tunic was knee-length and sleeveless. It was tied at the waist, and belt buckles with wolf motifs were common.⁸³ The tunic was frequently patterned like the cloak, but sometimes was unmarked or patterned at the hem only. The cloak (*zeira*) was worn over the top of the tunic and was the most striking article of Thracian dress. The peltasts and cavalry wore it, but probably not the lighter infantry. It covered the whole body like a blanket, and seems to have been of heavy material, since the paintings show it as stiff and not

hanging in folds. This would suit the mountain tribes, who had to deal with very cold winters and cool nights during the summer. It was very long, often reaching to the feet. The top portion could be folded over as a sort of collar, or the top corners could be turned in to hang over the chest or thrown back over the shoulders. It was held on by a single fibula or brooch at the left shoulder, and was often worn like a Greek cloak (draped over the left shoulder, leaving the right arm free). The cloak was boldly patterned with lozenges, zig-zag and castellated lines, and other geometric motifs.⁸⁴ Like the clothes worn by Balkan people until recently, the patterns probably indicated the owner's tribe and region of origin, and groups of warriors from the same area probably wore similar patterns (though this is hard to establish as few Greek vases show groups of Thracians).⁸⁵

Thracian boots (*embades*) were another distinctive feature. They were made from fawnskin, and (in contrast to Greek and Roman styles) entirely covered the feet and part of the lower leg. The boots were laced up at the front, usually with a number of flaps hanging down from the top. These boots were ideal for the colder climate of the mountains, or for cavalry use. They may even have provided some protection for the legs against wounds.⁸⁶

Thracian costume of the Hellenistic and Roman eras

A dramatic change in appearance began during the fourth century, reflecting Greek influence. The evidence comes from wall paintings in tombs near Kazanluk (early 3rd century), Alexandrovo (early 4th century), and Sveshtari (3rd century). These also provide the first colour references. They show that the beards, tattoos, cloaks, boots, hats, and top-knots have all disappeared. At this time also, archaeological evidence proves that some Thracians began to wear (usually three) bronze or gold torcs around their necks.⁸⁷ Bare feet, sandals, or yellowish or red-brown shoes with turned-up toes replaced the boots. As a result of these changes, the Thracians who fought for Alexander would have been very similar in appearance to the Macedonians and Greeks in his army.⁸⁸

Most tunics at Kazanluk are simple, single colour garments, either with patterned borders, or free of any decoration. Some are short-sleeved, and others are sleeveless. In the latter case it was probably fastened at the shoulder with pins, as it is occasionally shown leaving the right shoulder and chest bare. The colours of the cloaks and tunics at Kazanluk include red,

⁷⁵ See fig. 3.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Plato *Republic* 327a.

⁷⁸ Head D., 'Thracian Troop Types', *Slingshot*, No 85, September 1979, p 14 – only mentions two types but Duncan now agrees with me that there were three. See www.the-thracians.com/appearan.htm.

⁷⁹ Herodotus V.6.

⁸⁰ Levi P., *Atlas of the Greek World*, 1987, P 127.

⁸¹ Head D., 'Thracian Troop Types', *Slingshot*, No 85, September 1979, p 15.

⁸² Trippett F., *The First Horsemen*, Time Life Books, 1980, p 113 shows these tattoos; however M E Durham *Some Origins, Laws & Customs of the Balkans*, London, 1928, (Figure 3, p 103 & figure 4, p 105) suggests that sun and moon symbols were the most common, as sun worship was a prominent Thracian religion.

⁸³ Paunova V., *Warrior's Belt Appliques from Thrace (6th-4th Century BC)*, in *Archaeologia Bulgarica*, Vol 3, No. 2, 1999, pp 15-29..

⁸⁴ See Fig 1.

⁸⁵ Herodotus VII.75; Xenophon, *Anabasis* VII.4; Duncan Head, op. cit. p 15; Archibald, op. cit. pp 207-208; Warry, op. cit. p 50; Georgieva et al. – summary.

⁸⁶ Herodotus VII.75; Xenophon, *Anabasis* VII.4; Head, op. cit. p 15; Archibald, op. cit. pp 207-208. See fig. 1.

⁸⁷ eg Marazov I. (ed), op. cit. plate 200 (p 234); Fol A. (ed) *Ancient Thrace, Gold and Silver Treasures from Bulgaria 5000 BC- 300AD*, (catalogue of the Helsinki exhibition) 2000, Item 40, p 80.

⁸⁸ Zhivkova L., *The Kazanluk Tomb*, Recklinghausen, 1975, plates 14-18; A. Fol et al *The Thracian Tomb Near the Village of Sveshtari*, Sofia, 1986, pp 110-113; Webber Ch., 'The Alexandrovo Tomb and Other Recent Discoveries', *Slingshot* 216, July 2001, pp 47-50; www.the-thracians.com/alexandrovo_tomb.htm; http://members.tripod.com/~Grozniyat/thrac/aleksandrovo_1.htm; www.the-thracians.com/kazanluk.htm. The Alexandrovo tomb is not yet published. See Fig. 3.

white, red-brown, pale blue, pale green, cream, light blue, and off-white. At Alexandrovo there is one tunic that is brown with two white vertical stripes down both sides. It is like the tunic of one servant on the dome of the Kazanluk tomb. It is red-brown with one white stripe on each sleeve and two down each side. Another Alexandrovo cavalier wears a red tunic; another wears a white tunic decorated with a few vertical thin orange lines, and a third wears a white tunic decorated with thick brown vertical lines down the sides. They are clean-shaven, two with short hair and one with long hair. The cavalryman in the white tunic might have a Greek petasos hat on, but it is more likely just a random white splotch instead. The Sveshtari horseman (a Getic king) is wears an unmarked short tunic and chlamys, but the colour cannot be determined. The Thracians at the battle of Pydna (168) wore black tunics.⁸⁹ Few of the infantry at Kazanluk, and none of the figures at Alexandrovo wear cloaks.⁹⁰

One of the riders in the Alexandrovo tomb wears a long-sleeved blue top under his white tunic (which is decorated with a few thin vertical orange lines). This figure's combination of long sleeves showing under the short-sleeved tunic is similar to Dacian dress centuries later. It may have been inspired by the Persians. On both the Alexander Mosaic and Sarcophagus (including the Hunt Frieze from Philip II's tomb and several other visual sources) long sleeved tunics are shown being worn by Philip, Alexander and aristocratic cavalrymen - this is also repeated on bronze and terracotta figures. Such tunics may have been borrowed by the Macedonian court, inspired or influenced by high ranking Persian dress (along with purple cloaks). But then again, perhaps the Thracian nobles took the fashion from the Persians first, and it was in turn taken up by their neighbours, the Macedonians. It seems that vertically striped tunics became all the rage during the 4th century in this general part of the world. A figure on the Alexander Sarcophagus (often identified as a servant) wears a tunic with two thin vertical stripes - and a number of servants (and / or grooms?) appear to the left of the solidier symposium tomb painting from Agios Athanasios (near Thessaloniki) wearing similar tunics - not dissimilar to those worn by figures from both Kazanluk and Alexandrovo.⁹¹

Since the paintings are early 4th century, they help to answer the perennial question of what Alexander's Thracians may have looked like - his armies are located chronologically in between Kazanluk (and Sveshtari) and Alexandrovo. It looks like the Hellenisation of the Thracians began much earlier than previously thought, and had a longer time to percolate down to the lower levels of society.

Thracian heroes and gods carved in stone and metalwork during the early Roman era show that the Thracians took to wearing Roman and Celtic dress. Some also wore trousers. They had curly hair, may have worn torcs, and a tunic or cloak held on by a single circular brooch on the left shoulder.⁹² The tunic is in some cases folded and pleated many times vertically and tucked in around the waist. The folds almost concealed a belt that was won together with a baldric. In this case, the length of the tunic was adjusted by pulling it up through the

belt.⁹³

Armour

Armour was initially restricted to the noble cavalry, but in the fourth century many troops began wearing helmets, and peltasts started wearing greaves. There was a marked difference between northern and southern Thrace, with the northern Thracians wearing Skythian-style panoplies, and the southern Thracians wearing Greek equipment (with Thracian alterations). Thracian warriors commonly used armour that was older than the rest of their equipment, or a mixture of armour and weapons from different styles and periods.⁹⁴ Some types of armour persisted long after they ceased to be used elsewhere. Assuming burials reflected actual practice, Thracians in this period often wore a mixture of Thracian and Greek equipment, and only one or two pieces of armour, not a complete panoply.⁹⁵ Finally, Thracian troops of the Thracian client-kingdom were equipped "in the Roman style",⁹⁶ which may have meant that they wore Roman mail shirts and helmets, and carried Roman shields. They continued to use these when they became Thracian auxiliaries in Roman service.⁹⁷

Shields

Thracian light cavalry are sometimes shown with a *pelte* strapped to their back.⁹⁸ Although Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata*⁹⁹ asserts that the Thracians were the first to use shields on horseback, it is assumed that the shield protected against attacks from the rear, as they are not depicted using them in battle. The cavalry only used their shields (if they had any) for dismounted action, until the 3rd century.¹⁰⁰ Until then, it seems even the heavy cavalry used a *pelte*.

The *pelte*¹⁰¹ was usually crescent-shaped but which might also be circular or oval.¹⁰² Greek pots provide our only visual record of *peltai*. Some sources mention bronze and even gold as materials used in their construction.¹⁰³ However, for the most

⁹³ Barker Ph., *Armies and Enemies of the Macedonian and Punic Wars*, 1st edition, 1971. See fig. 6.

⁹⁴ Archibald Z., op. cit. p 197.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Florus II, XXVII.

⁹⁷ Cheshire, op. cit p 13.

⁹⁸ eg 4th century red figure vase from Sozopol shown on p 46, A Fol, AT - see fig. 7.

⁹⁹ From Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata* ("Miscellanies"), Chap. XVI. The Inventors of Other Arts were Mostly Barbarians: "The Thracians first invented what is called a scimitar (*arph* [?]) - it is a curved sword, - and were the first to use shields on horseback. Similarly also the Illyrians invented the shield (*pelta*)...and that Itanus (he was a Samnite) first fashioned the oblong shield (*thureous*)...The Carthaginians were the first that constructed a tritereme ...and the Sidonians the first to construct a trireme...These things [a whole host of inventions are described, covering all manner of objects] are reported by Seame of Mytilene, Theophrastus of Ephesus, Cydippus of Mantinea, also Antiphanes, Aristodemos, and Aristotle and besides these, Philostephanus, and also Strato the Periapatetic, in his book *Concerning Inventions*."

¹⁰⁰ Head D., *AOTMAPW*, pp 127- 129 - the use of cavalry shields is thought to have spread from the Tarantines.

¹⁰¹ It was called the *pelte* (plural *peltai*) in Greek, or *pelta* (plural *peltae*) in Latin.

¹⁰² Best J.G.P., op. cit. pp 9-11; Head D., loc. cit .

¹⁰³ Best J.G.P., op. cit. p3; Grant Ch., op. cit.; Archibald Z., op. cit.

⁸⁹ Plutarch, *Aemilius Paulus* 18.

⁹⁰ Webber Ch. , op. cit, pp 47-49; Head, op. cit, p 17; Head D., *AOTMAPW*, pp 124-129.

⁹¹ This information supplied by David Karunanithy from his research for his forthcoming book on the Macedonians.

⁹² See above.

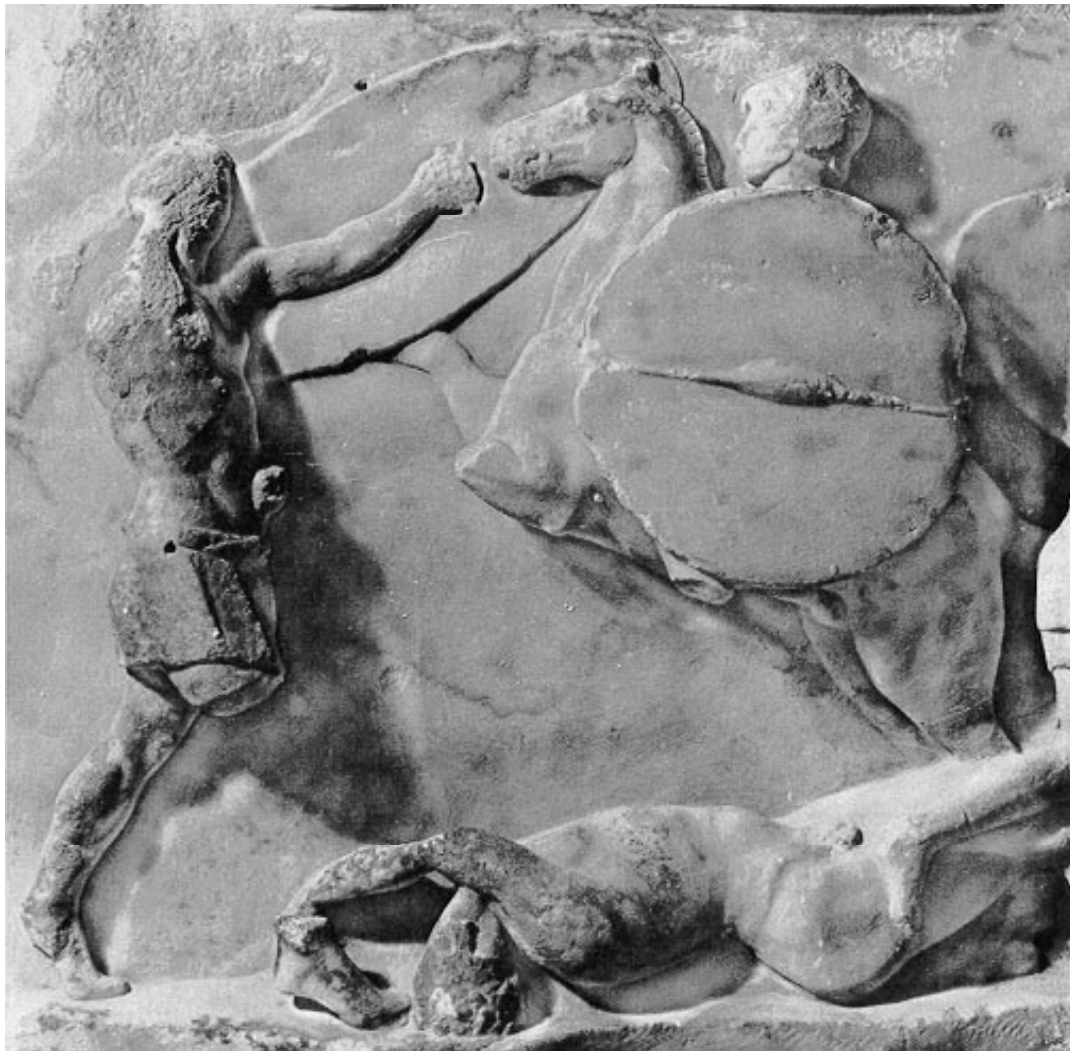


Figure 8. A Thracian cavalryman with a large ribbed circular shield, from the Pydna monument.

part these small shields lacked a rim or any kind of bronze facing, and were made of perishable materials (generally a wood or wicker frame covered with goat or sheep skins).¹⁰⁴ Traces of such a shield made of some organic material, fixed with bronze nails, have been found in a tumulus near Debnevo in the Lovech district.¹⁰⁵

Most vase-paintings show the *pelte* decorated, either with a simple face, animals, or with more complex designs quite different to those on hoplite shields.¹⁰⁶ The *pelte* was usually carried with an arm-strap and a leather or cord handle at the rim, or slung on the back using a back strap.¹⁰⁷ Although the arm-strap is sometimes shown as indistinguishable from the bronze *porpax* of the hoplite shield, this could be a heroic artistic convention on the part of Greek vase painters.¹⁰⁸ The single central grip would then have been more common. Xenophon describes a Thracian whose slung *pelte* caught between the stakes of a fence he was trying to clamber over.¹⁰⁹

Thracian cavalry appear to have followed the Greeks in

adopting shields around 275.¹¹⁰ Cavalry shields could be round with a central boss, (shown on 1st century carvings of the Thracian hero) oval like the *thureos* (shown on the Abdera tombstone),¹¹¹ or very large and circular with a spine boss (the style on the Pydna monument).¹¹² Greek hoplite shields were rare in Thrace. Parts of only two have been found: a bronze rim and palmetto-decorated handgrip were found in a fourth century tomb near Topolovgrad, and a fragment of a similar rim (plus armour) was in a grave at Svetlen.¹¹³ The late fifth century silver-gilt belt from Lovets apparently depicts armoured riders carrying hoplite shields, but it is more likely that these are just dents or other damage.

Other large circular shields are shown on a relief from the Apadana, Persepolis, on a stag head gold rhyton from the Panagyurishte treasure, and on a Bithynian coin. None of these are shown in use by cavalry. The Persepolis shield is very

pp 203-204.

¹⁰⁴ Warry J., pp 50-51, 61.

¹⁰⁵ Archibald Z., op.cit. pp 203-204.

¹⁰⁶ See Fig. 8.

¹⁰⁷ Head D., loc. cit.

¹⁰⁸ Connolly P., op. cit. p 48.

¹⁰⁹ Xenophon, *Anabasis* 7.4.17.

¹¹⁰ Head D., *AOTMAPW*, p 127. Thracian cavalry on the Pydna monument, the Abdera tombstone, and some (later) depictions of the Thracian hero all carry shields. All these artifacts are dated to the 3rd century or later.

¹¹¹ Sekunda N., *The Seleucid Army*, Montvert Publications, Stockport, 1994, pp 72, 17-18, and fig. 7.

¹¹² See Fig 2.

¹¹³ Archibald Z., op. cit. p 204.

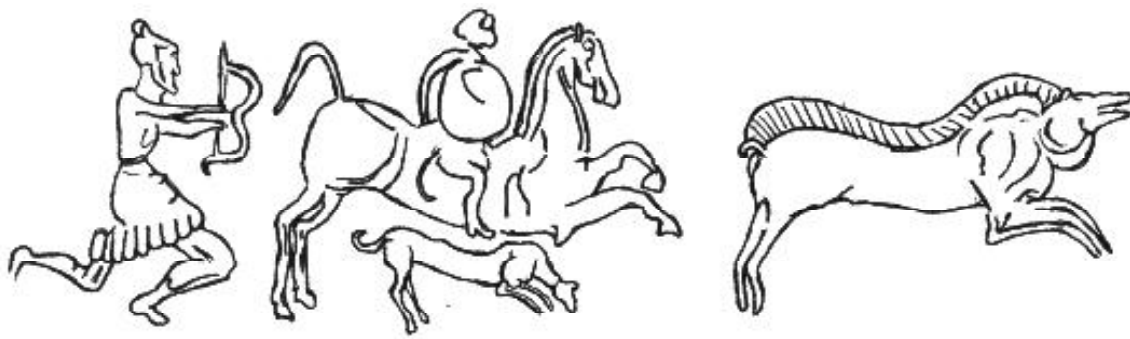


Figure 9. 5th century silver gilt belt from Lovech depicting heavy cavalry in leather armour with pteryges. The left-hand rider appears to be wearing a Corinthian helmet and carrying a shield, though the latter is unlikely as he would be carrying it in his right hand. Archaeological Museum Sofia inv. No. 6617. Drawing © Daniella Carlsson 2001



Figure 9 (Continued).



Figure 10. Reconstruction of a late 5th century Thracian noble cavalryman in bell cuirass and Chalkidian helmet, © Johnny Shumate 2001.

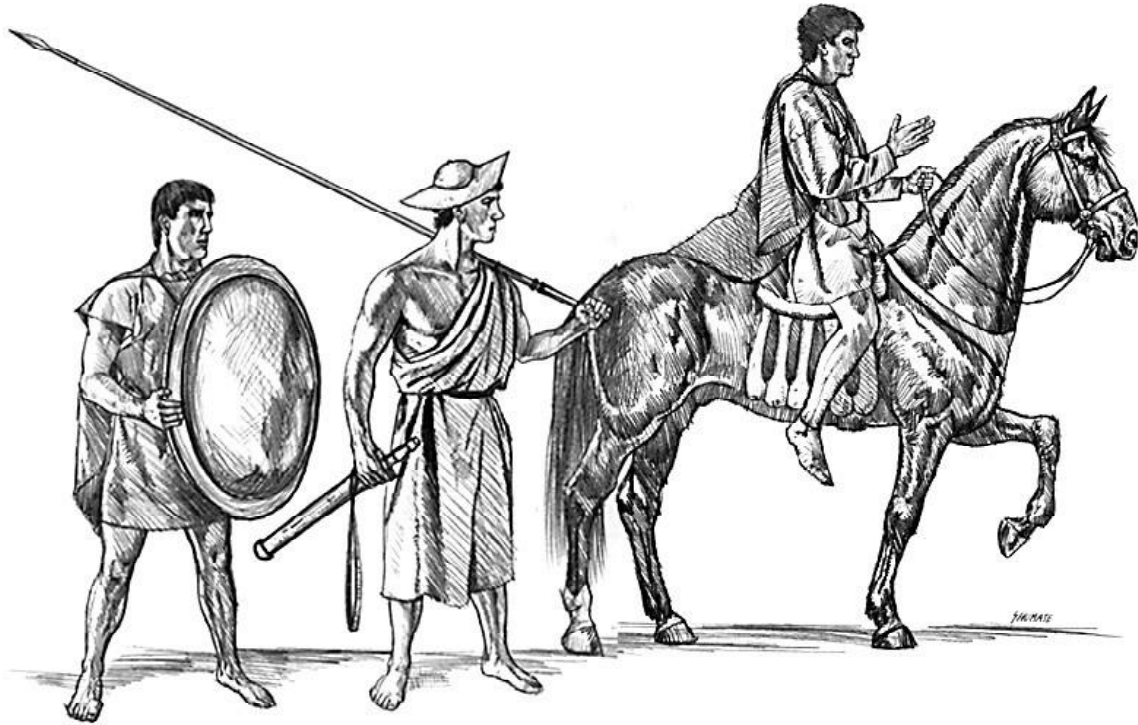


Figure 11. The procession drawn on the lunette (back wall) of the 3rd century Sveshtari tomb. The drawing is in charcoal, as the tomb was unfinished. It shows a Hellenised king of the Getai being crowned by the Thracian mother goddess. The richly decorated saddle has four long pendants, painted red. The horseman is wearing a short tunic and chlamys. His right hand is outstretched towards the Goddess. Behind his ear there is a ram's horn, like those of other 3rd century monarchs. Two men, probably servants, walk behind the horseman. The first man, wearing a strange hat that may be a helmet or pilos, carries a long spear over his left shoulder, while his right hand holds a scabbard, from which dangles the shoulder-strap. The second man, dressed in a knee-length garment, holds a shield in his right hand.



Figure 12. Kazanluk tomb.

convex in section, and apparently made of uncovered wicker.¹¹⁴ The Nikomedes I (279-255) Bithynian coin shows a large round shield, slightly smaller than an *aspis*, carried by the goddess Bendis, along with two javelins and a straight sword with scabbard and baldric. The shield is either decorated with circles of rivets, or perhaps has an embossed metal facing.¹¹⁵ Athena's circular shield on the rhyton (circa 300 BC), has a sunburst design, and a wide rim similar to an *aspis*. This indicates that it is a standard depiction of Athena, who wears Greek dress, so this probably does not indicate Thracian use (even though two other figures on the rhyton wear Thracian or Phrygian dress).¹¹⁶ The *thureos* may have been borrowed from the Illyrians, who had been carrying similar shields from at least the 7th century.¹¹⁷ The Kazanluk friezes, which predate the Celtic invasions in 279, show several examples of long flat oval shields being used

¹¹⁴ Head D., *TTT*, p 15.

¹¹⁵ Davis N. & C.M Kraay, *The Hellenistic Kingdoms*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1973, plates 186, 187, 190.

¹¹⁶ Venedikov I., op. cit. No 363 and Marazov I., op. cit. Plate 73.

See www.the-thracians.com/armour.htm (shields).

¹¹⁷ Head D., *AOMAPW*, p 126.

by Thracian foot warriors. One of these has the distinctive rib of the *thureos*, but the others do not and it is possible they may represent a flat ribless shield. A large, flat, oval-shaped fourth century shield found near Kyustendil was faced with bronze, which glitters even today.¹¹⁸ This may have been the type of shield carried by the Kazanluk men. Alternatively the Kazanluk shields might have been wicker, as they are painted rimless, wicker-coloured and flat. They have three loops hanging down on the inside, used for a single hand grip, or perhaps for slinging on the back.

The *thureos* shown in use by the cavalryman on the Abdera tombstone was made of wood, with a central wooden spine and usually an iron boss.¹¹⁹ It could be oval or rectangular in shape, covered in leather, and painted. The thick rim sometimes depicted was probably the leather covering doubled over at the edges. The shield's strong construction and central handgrip may have allowed it to be used as a weapon to crush an opponent.¹²⁰ Sekunda¹²¹ says that a mid-2nd century version of this shield from Sidon seems to have had a metal rim (perhaps bronze, not iron) and with a metal spine on top of, or even replacing, the wooden one. However there is no evidence that the Thracians used this later type, which would have made skirmishing difficult. A c. 2nd century *stèle* from Phrygia shows two more likely possibilities.¹²² It displays two men who have been killed by the Bithynian Menas. One has a conventional ribbed oval *thureos*, while the other has a ribbed rectangular *thureos*. One of these two men, but we don't know which, is a Thracian. Another grave stone from Bithynia also shows

¹¹⁸ In the Kystendil museum, where I found it. See www.the-thracians.com/armour.htm (shields).

¹¹⁹ Connolly P., op. cit. pp 118-120.

¹²⁰ I gained this insight from discussions with dark age re-enactors, who used similar shields for this purpose.

¹²¹ Sekunda N., *The Ptolemaic Army*, Montvert Publications, Stockport 1995, p 22.

¹²² Bar-Kochva B., 'Menas' Inscription and Corupedion', *Scripta Classica Isrealica* 1, 1974, p 14.



Figure 12a. The Chariot horses from the dome of the Kazanluk tomb. Note their harness ornaments.



Figure 12b. Kazanluk tomb.

Bithynian infantry with the oval *thureos*, so the oval shield is more likely.¹²³ A 2nd century Bithynian warrior's tombstone from Alexandria also shows a (yellowish or white) oval *thureos* with a spine boss.¹²⁴ Menas' stele is close in date to the battle of Pydna (168), so perhaps the Thracian infantry at Pydna carried one of these types of shield.

Helmets

The most important Thracian helmets styles were Chalkidian, Corinthian, Thracian, Attic, and Skythian (or Northern).¹²⁵ Helmet styles continued in use in Thrace after they had gone out of fashion elsewhere, and it took some time before newer versions were taken up by Thracian troops. A lot of helmets found in Thrace show signs of repeated wear and tear, with riveted inserts and tenons.¹²⁶ Many hybrids and variants also occur; one Thraco-Boeotian model, from Moldavia, has the skull of the former and the downswept brim of the latter.¹²⁷ Helmets were lined in felt or leather, or worn over caps, as the remains of a felt cap have been found inside a Thracian helmet from Pletena, and leather remains inside other helmets.¹²⁸

The Chalkidian helmet (in two models) was the most

common found in central and southern Thrace.¹²⁹ Before 350 the most frequently used form was the simple version, with engraved, stylised eyebrows. This has a slight ridge separating the skull and sides, the neckguard recessed inwards; a curved opening for the ears; deep, rounded cheekpieces hammered out from the sides, and a short nosepiece. An advanced late fifth-century version from Rouets has a relatively high crown, longer, sickle-shaped cheekpieces, and long, pronounced eyebrows meeting in a curved "V"-shape across the front. Two bands of engraved ornament separate the skull from the sides.¹³⁰ Another late fifth century example of unknown provenance is decorated with griffins on both sides of the crown, and palmettos on the eyebrows. It may have had iron cheek pieces but it is badly damaged and these have disappeared.¹³¹

After 350, a new version of the Chalkidian helmet came into use. The new type had two variants, with fixed or hinged cheekpieces.¹³² One fabulous example of this later construction is all bronze except for iron cheek pieces. It looks like a Hollywood barbarian's helmet, as it has tall bronze horns and fittings for a Greek style horsehair crest. It was found in a 4th century grave at Bryastovets near the Black Sea.¹³³ In the fixed form, "the neckguard, shaped to fit the back of the neck, extends towards the shoulders, while the broad cheekpieces have vertical sides toward the cheeks, curving up at the back and over the ears. The brows are lightly profiled and there is a vestigial nosepiece. The crown is raked back sharply from the

¹²⁹ Archibald, op.cit, p 201

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ National Archaeological Museum Inv. No. 4013; *Gold der Thraker* No. 187.

¹³² Archibald, op.cit, p 201.

¹³³ I. Venedikov, *Thracian Treasures from Bulgaria*, 1976, item. 246, p55; *Gold der Thraker*, 1980, item 242; Head, op.cit. p21.

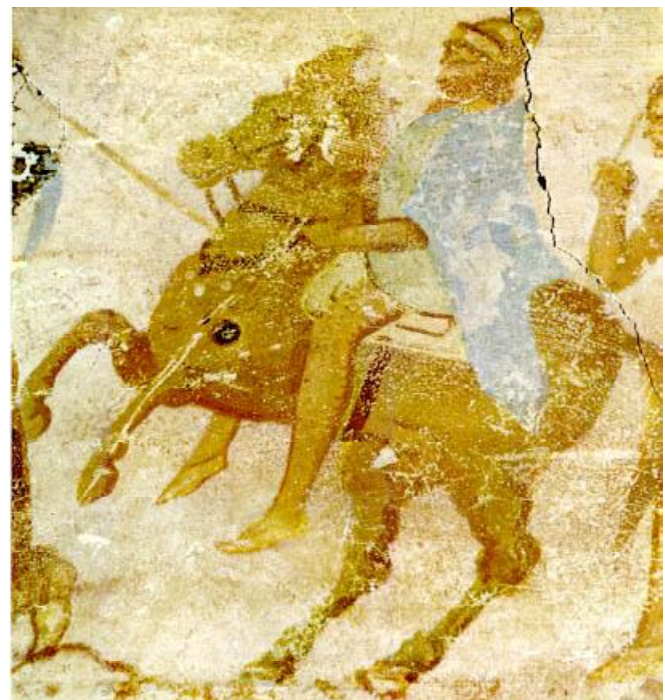


Figure 12c. The figure supposed to be Seuthes III from the western side of the dromos of the Kazanluk tomb – note how he holds his spear.

¹²³ Rumscheid F. & W. Held 'Erinnerungen an Mokazis', *1st Mitt* 44, 1994, pp89-106, Tafel 20. This shows an early 2nd century Bithynian funerary banquet, battle scene, and hunting scene on a grave monument for members of an indigenous family of notables, with Thraco-Bithynian names. It was found under 8m of sediment at Adliye on the Sangarius, thought to be the site of ancient Tarsos.

¹²⁴ Sekunda N., op. cit. Fig 77.

¹²⁵ Archibald Z., loc. cit.

¹²⁶ Archibald Z., op. cit. p 252.

¹²⁷ Head D., *TTT*, p 18; Best J.G.P., op. cit, plate 6. See www.the-thracians.com/helmets_main.htm.

¹²⁸ Salminen T. (ed), *Ancient Thrace: Descriptions of the exhibits, Exhibition in the Amos Anderson Art Museum, Helsinki, January 22-April 16, 2000* p 13.



Figure 12d. Reconstruction of peace negotiations between two belligerents in the eastern frieze from the dromos of the Kazanluk tomb. The figures on the left side are thought to be from a Macedonian army. Note their long lances, all carried underarm. © Johnny Shumate 2001



Figure 12e. Reconstruction of the battle scene on the western side of the western frieze from the entrance corridor (dromos) of the late fourth to early third century Kazanluk tomb. Many of the figures are badly damaged, and their appearance is conjectural. The soldiers in both friezes are lightly armed and have almost the same weapons - long spears, curved swords (some possibly rhomphaia) and oval shields. © Johnny Shumate 2001



Figure 13. *Phalera* (bridle cheekpiece) 7cm diameter, from Letnitsa, mid-fourth century BC. This shows clearly how horses were harnessed. Museum of History, Lovech, inv. No. 591.

sides.”¹³⁴ “On helmets with hinged cheekpieces, there is a high, well-rounded crown from front to back. A gentle curve separates the skull from the straight neckguard, shaped at the lower edge, and the tongue-shaped cheekpieces are longer.”¹³⁵ These more complicated helmets are likely to have belonged to the noble cavalry and Thracian commanding officers, who also wore elaborate Greek parade helmets, including a sheet gold composite version found at Panagyurishte.¹³⁶

After the Macedonian conquest, many of the helmets mimicked the Thracian caps, so that these helmets are known as Phrygian (or Thracian) helmets. The “Thracian” helmet appeared in Greece in the middle of the 5th Century, but strangely enough, although more of this type have been found in Thrace than anywhere else, it is rarely found in Thracian burials before the Hellenistic era.¹³⁷ It was distinguished by a peak to shade and protect the eyes, a short neck guard, and long cheekpieces shaped to fit the face, pointed at the chin, and was sometimes decorated with a stylised beard and moustache in relief. The skull shape varied enormously; sometimes it was low and rounded, sometimes conical, but the most spectacular and distinctive was the Phrygian type with a high, forward sweeping metal ridge, very similar to the shape of the traditional cap. They were made mostly from bronze (often in a single piece), but some included iron. A Phrygian style helmet found at Pletena, in the Rhodopes mountains of Bulgaria (with a *rhomphaia*) was made with a sheet of bronze to cover the lower face, moulded to imitate beard locks and a moustache. The top part of the helmet was made of iron sheets joined together with

the aid of iron bands and rivets.¹³⁸ Such helmets were often crested and sometimes had extra crests or feathers as side-ornaments. A recently discovered early 4th century Thracian example from Pletena is also extensively decorated with silver appliques.¹³⁹ In the Kazanluk tomb paintings, the Thracian helmet is commonest but two warriors wear strange yellow circular flat-topped hats. These may be from an unknown Thracian tribe, but it is more likely that they are Macedonian nobles wearing variants of their distinctive leather cap, the *kausia*.¹⁴⁰ One figure however is bare-headed and long-haired, like another figure at Alexandrovo. Other infantrymen in the Kazanluk paintings wear bronze Attic helmets, most with a pale blue crests.¹⁴¹

Body Armour

Body armour is rare in Thracian graves, although it is also rare in tombs from coastal Macedonia and Chalkidike, which clearly does not match the real-life situation there.¹⁴² It was limited to Thracian commanders and nobles, such as Seuthes’ heavy cavalry bodyguard, until the presumed wider introduction of mail shirts for infantry by the Roman client-kingdom. There were two traditions, from northern and southern Thrace. Initially, the armour was made of leather and/or bronze, but

¹³⁸ Salminen T. (ed), op. cit. p13.

¹³⁹ Fol A. (ed), op.cit, No. 34, p79.

¹⁴⁰ Saatsoglu-Paliadeli C., ‘Aspects of Ancient Macedonian Costume’, *JHS* 1993, p 136; Head, *AOTMAPW*, p135, says the *kausia* –like caps are painted in the ochre used for bronze, so they could be some type of helmet, but this seems unlikely.

¹⁴¹ Head D., ‘The Rhomphaia Lives!’, *Slingshot* 77, May 1978, p 10.

¹⁴² Archibald Z., op. cit, p 204.

¹³⁴ Archibald Z., op. cit. p 253.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid, p 254.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

iron armour started to appear in the fourth century.

Descriptions of Homeric Thracians, and archaeological evidence show that Greek armour was in use in Thrace long before the classical period. Rhesus had “marvellous golden armour, of the rarest workmanship.”¹⁴³ His sleeping bodyguard laid their splendid armour on the ground beside them in an orderly three rows. The “bell” corselet was used in Thrace until the fifth century, when it was obsolete in Greece. The most interesting example is a fifth century bronze bell cuirass from Rouets. It has an abdominal plate or mitre still attached by means of silvered nails to the bottom of the breastplate. This attachment is unique in Thrace; indeed it has rarely been found outside Crete. It is unlikely to have been used except for dismounted action as the mitre would have made riding extremely uncomfortable.¹⁴⁴

The primitive “bell” type made few allowances for comfort and ease of movement. “The armholes were rather sharp, and there was a pronounced waist band with rolled edges projecting outwards at the lower end.”¹⁴⁵ They were decorated simply, with the chest muscles ending in three-petalled lotuses, fish’s tails, or engraved marine monsters, and with other anatomical details enhanced by seven- and nine-petalled palmettoes. The marine monsters (*ketoi*) had a long snout, snapping jaws, and spiky mane—rather like a Chinese dragon. Unlike Greek examples, which were worn with *pteryges* attached to an undergarment, the Thracian cuirasses have a row of holes along the edges to take a lining, which indicates they were worn without *pteryges*.¹⁴⁶

Other, non-metallic armour was in use at the same time. It is possible that groups of gilded silver appliques found in fifth century Thracian tombs were originally attached to a leather parade corselet, similar to the later iron corselets from Vergina and Prodromion. These were decorated with sheet gold ornaments (gorgons and lions’ head masks). Something similar belonging to a composite outfit may have been found at Panagyurishte. There, the armour had rusted away, leaving gold strips and studs, as well as six rectangular silver appliques with the head of Apollo, and two low-relief silver discs showing Heracles and the Nemean lion.¹⁴⁷ Another leather jerkin found near Lovets had a belt to which were attached thongs for a scabbard. This was fixed with a bronze ring decorated with a reclining doe.¹⁴⁸ A late 2nd century coin of Mostis, a Thracian king, shows a smooth corselet with short sleeves, but no other detail is discernable.¹⁴⁹ The mounted warriors on the 5th–6th century Lovech silver gilt belt wear leather armour with

pteryges.¹⁵⁰ Other warriors wore broad scale iron belts, two of which have been found in Thrace. These belts are like Uratian bronze belts of around 600, used later by the Skythians and in various parts of the Achaemenid Empire, so it may be that Thracian warriors wore something similar. They were originally fixed to some organic substance, either leather or linen. It is not clear whether such a belt would have been worn below the cuirass, or as an alternative to it.¹⁵¹ At the Battle of Issus (333) one translation of Curtius III.9.9 says of the Thracians “these too were in light armour”.¹⁵² This has been used to suggest they wore non-metallic corselets, but the Penguin translation says “who were also light armed”, which seems more likely.

Xenophon records Seuthes’ Odrysian cavalry “wearing their breastplates” in 400.¹⁵³ This probably represents an armoured bodyguard rather than suggesting that all Thracian cavalry were armoured.¹⁵⁴ They most likely wore the late improved version of the “bell” type bronze plate cuirass. This was used in Thrace until the middle of the 4th century. The waist band disappeared, replaced by a narrow out-turned flange, and more carefully modelled anatomical relief lines. Instead of an upstanding collar to protect the throat, the neck was cut low, leaving the upper chest exposed. This was covered by a crescent shaped pectoral of silver-plated gilded iron, decorated with bands of relief vegetal ornamentation.¹⁵⁵ It had a forward collar, and was held on by a narrow hinged strip fastened round the back of the neck with some form of catchplate.¹⁵⁶

Such iron-backed collars were worn both in Thrace and Macedon, but seem to have had a longer tradition in Thrace. They were designed to be symbols of rank. There may have been two types of collar, one for parade, and one for battle, as a gorget of sheet gold was found with a plain iron collar in a Macedonian tomb at Vergina. Also, two other collars (from the 4th century Mal tepe tumulus and Vurbitsa), were found without cuirasses. At Gaugamela Alexander wore an iron gorget, quite probably of the same type as these pectorals.¹⁵⁷ A c. 350 advanced form of iron pectoral with sheet metal inlay from Katerini was worn over a composite cuirass decorated with gilded silver appliques. This contrasts to a more workmanlike Macedonian gorget of bronze scales on leather that is dated from around the same time.¹⁵⁸ It is not known what armour was worn when the “bell” style went out of fashion, but a composite iron type with iron collar seems likely, to be replaced later amongst officers by the muscled cuirass.¹⁵⁹

Greaves

Only a few early Thracian cavalry (possibly only the officers)

¹⁴³ Homer, *Iliad*, X.

¹⁴⁴ Archibald Z., *ibid.*, p 198; Head D., *op. cit.*, p19; National History Museum, Sofia guide, 1986, No. 68; Venedikov I., *op. cit.*, pp 50-51.

¹⁴⁵ Archibald Z., *op. cit.* p 197.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 197-198.

¹⁴⁷ Z. Archibald (pp 199, 256) does not show these, but mid 5th century silver-gilt appliques from another suit of armour were found in Golyamata Mound, Douvanli (north of Plovdiv) – 5 lions’ heads, a gorgon’s head, and two showing winged Nike on a chariot. Ognenova-Marinova L. “L’Armure des Thraces”, *Archaeologia Bulgarica* 3/2000, p16 has a reconstruction; while the best pictures of the appliques are in Venedikov I. & T. Gerassimov *Thrakische Kunst*, Leipzig, 1976, figs 226-228.

¹⁴⁸ Archibald Z., *ibid.*, p199, pp 256-257.

¹⁴⁹ Youroukova Y., *op. cit.* pp 34-38.

¹⁵⁰ Archibald Z., *op. cit.*; Marazov I., *op. cit.* p175; Venedikov I. & Gerassimov T., *op. cit.* Figs 248 & 250; see fig. 9.

¹⁵¹ Archibald Z., *op. cit.*

¹⁵² Grant Ch., ‘The Thracians’, *Military Modelling*, December 1976.

¹⁵³ Xenophon *Anabasis* 7.3.40.

¹⁵⁴ Head D., *TTT*, p 18.

¹⁵⁵ See www.the-thracians.com/armour.htm (click on Body Armour).

¹⁵⁶ Head D., *AOTMAPW*, p 128; D Head, *TTT*, p18; Archibald, *op. cit.* p 198.

¹⁵⁷ Plutarch, *Alexander*, 32 (Penguin translation) says it was a steel gorget set with precious stones.

¹⁵⁸ Archibald Z., *op. cit.*, pp 255-257; Head D., *AOTMAPW*, p 128.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

wore greaves. There is no evidence that any Thracian infantry wore greaves until the fourth century. One pair was found near Kyustendil with fourth century infantry gear (including an oval shield), and probably belonged to a Thracian mercenary, or a Macedonian.¹⁶⁰ Greaves later became more popular - At Pydna (168) "First marched the Thracians, who ... inspired... the most terror; they were of great stature, with white [or bright] and glittering shields [*thureoi*] and black tunics under them, their legs armed with greaves."¹⁶¹

There were two types of greave found in Thrace- the native and Greek types. Two elaborately decorated silver gilt Thracian ceremonial greaves have been found, one at Vratsa in Triballian territory, and one at Agighiol, on Getic land.¹⁶² They show the face of the Thracian mother goddess at the knee. An armoured Thracian horseman wearing the same greaves is on one of the Letnitsa plaques. As these greaves gleam with white and glittering metal, "white and glittering shields (*thureoi*) and greaves" could possibly mean that both the shields and greaves worn at Pydna were faced with polished white metal - silver or tin laid over the bronze.¹⁶³ A pair of 5th century greaves found at Starosel in 2000 (possibly in Sitalkes' tomb) were decorated with double axe-heads, the symbol of royalty.¹⁶⁴ Greaves of Greek type were rarer than other pieces of imported armour. Only four pairs have been found in Thrace. Two pairs of these greaves (from different locations) had been repaired. One pair had been lengthened in the process, and the left one had originally been made for the right leg. This pair had also been fitted with iron chains at the back.¹⁶⁵ Most were held in place by their own elasticity, except for some Hellenistic examples, which were strapped.¹⁶⁶ A 4th century pair from Pletena has traces of the tying straps below the knee and above the ankle.¹⁶⁷

Weapons

Spears

Thracian cavalry would be mainly armed with sword, (usually the *kopis*) and 2 cornel wood javelins, or the composite bow (kept in a leather *gorytos*) if they were Getai.¹⁶⁸ They are always illustrated with only one or two javelins, but it is clear from battle accounts that the infantry carried more, the number

depending on their length (between 1.1m and 2m).¹⁶⁹ Odrysian Cavalry javelins were 1.5 to 1.8 metres in length, and tipped with iron or bronze heads. They could be thrown immediately before contact or used as a thrusting weapon. Xenophon appears to have favoured this arrangement -two short javelins, one to be thrown, and the other kept for hand-to-hand combat.¹⁷⁰

There are references in Greek texts to "Thracian spears",¹⁷¹ but these are unfortunately not further described. Most warrior burials contained multiple spearheads with blades of varying lengths. The principal forms were derived from older Iron Age types, though the total length is often equal to or smaller than the blades of their early predecessors. Sixth-century and later examples tend to be much shorter and narrower. Javelin heads tended to be smaller, thinner, and longer than other spear heads, though often there is no difference. Some javelin heads were obviously specifically designed for throwing rather than used hand to hand.¹⁷²

Three principal shapes were in use between the fifth and third centuries. The straight -sided type had a pronounced midrib, the blade base jutting sharply away from the socket. This was the commonest form used by the Getai. With the leaf-shaped type, the blade base curved smoothly into the socket. The third type was the barbed Skythian type of javelin head. The number and range of types increased in the later fourth and during the third century.¹⁷³

Xenophon says that the javelin should be hurled from horseback as far away as possible, in order to give enough time for the horse to turn around and for the transfer of the second javelin to the right hand. "The horseman should throw forward his left side, while drawing back his right; then rising bodily from the thighs, he should let fly the missile with the point slightly upwards. The dart so discharged will carry with the greatest force and to the farthest distance; we may add, too, with the truest aim, if at the moment of discharge the lance is steadily eyeing the mark at the instant of discharge"¹⁷⁴ In the Alexandrovo tomb, the riders are armed with a single knobbed spear (with a butt spike) and a straight sword, hanging from the left hip. All the spears are wielded over arm. The presence of the butt spike is really interesting as it indicates that this spear was not meant to be thrown, but used in hand-to-hand combat, like the Macedonian *xyston* or the Greek *kamax*.¹⁷⁵ Two such weapons, about 2m long, one possibly with a butt spike, are also held by a helmeted groom painted on the dome of the Kazanluk tomb. Alexander at the battle of the Granicus is described as using the *xyston*, which had a narrow blade like a spear and had a butt spike which could be used in a pinch if the spear was shattered in combat.¹⁷⁶ He is described as using the *xyston* overhand much like the Hoplite fighting style to thrust at the necks and faces of his foes. The (probably Macedonian)

¹⁶⁹ Warry, loc. cit.

¹⁷⁰ Xenophon, *On Horsemanship*, XII.

¹⁷¹ eg Euripides *Hecuba* 1155.

¹⁷² Archibald Z., op. cit., p 202.

¹⁷³ Ibid., pp 202-203, 257.

¹⁷⁴ Xenophon, *On Horsemanship*, XII

¹⁷⁵ Spence I.G., *The Cavalry of Classical Greece*, Oxford, 1995, p53. It is possible that this was a special spear used for the boar hunt- the closeness implied by its use being a suitably heroic climax to the hunt.

¹⁷⁶ Arrian 1.15.

¹⁶⁰ This is the pair I photographed in Kyustendil museum; it is not mentioned elsewhere - the description comes from Evgeni Paunov, and another description of the associated helmet in the Helsinki exhibition catalogue.

¹⁶¹ Plutarch *Aemilius Paulus* 18.

¹⁶² Fol A., *T&TT*, pp 41, 87, & 96; www.the-thracians.com/greaves_main.htm; Archibald Z., op. cit. p255; items 151 and 152 from *I Daci*; D Head, *TTT*, pp18-19.

¹⁶³ These suggestions and alternative translations were supplied by Duncan Head during discussion about this book.

¹⁶⁴ Webber Ch., 'The Alexandrovo Tomb and Other Recent Discoveries', *Slingshot* 216, July 2001, p 50; www.the-thracians.com/alexandrovo_tomb.htm; <http://www.geocities.com/vakarr>.

¹⁶⁵ Fol A., *AT Helsinki*, Nos. 38-39, pp79-80; Archibald Z., op. cit, p 255.

¹⁶⁶ Snodgrass A.M., *Arms and Armour of the Greeks*, John Hopkins, Baltimore, 1999, p 53.

¹⁶⁷ Archibald Z., op. cit, p 255.

¹⁶⁸ Head D., *AOTMAPW*, pp 127- 129; Head D., *TTT*, pp 17-20; Grant Ch., loc. cit; Barker Ph., op. cit, fig. 5.

cavalry on the left-hand side of the eastern frieze of the Kazanluk tomb *dromos* are all armed with this weapon, wielded underarm. The other cavalry figures in the *dromos* paintings all brandish their spears overarm except for the figure supposed to be Seuthes III, who wields his spear underarm. Unfortunately the presence of butt spikes can't be determined due to position of the figures and the poor state of the painting.

The knobbed spear shafts are new - they look almost like cane. A similar knobby-shafted javelin can be seen on the *Alexander Mosaic, fallen to the ground*.¹⁷⁷ That is usually identified as Persian, but the prevalence of these weapons on the Alexandrovo paintings means the mosaic javelin could have belonged to one of Alexander's Balkan troops. However, the mosaic javelin looks quite different - it is thorny, not knobby, so this is highly speculative. One of the gold amphora-rhytons from the 4th century Panagyurishte treasure shows similar knobby philosopher's staffs, but otherwise these types of spear shafts are unknown. Probably they are still made from cornel wood, known for its exceptionally strength and durability (though apparently it was best used after nine years' seasoning). The cornel tree is short but long enough to be used for spear shafts.¹⁷⁸ Perhaps only cornel wood trees from the Alexandrovo area produce wood with this knobby appearance, or else the spear shafts shown were produced in a hurry, perhaps during the hunt. Hawthorn is another possibility.

Swords & Knives

The Thracians were famous for their forward curved swords, but they also used a long sword and the Skythian *akinakes*.¹⁷⁹ Swords were most often only secondary weapons and to begin with, only nobles could afford them; the rest of the troops made do with curved daggers. Later on, though, swords became more common. From an early date there was a typically Thracian sword known for being longer than other swords.¹⁸⁰ The *Iliad* says: "Helenus then struck Deipyrus with a great Thracian sword..."¹⁸¹ The *Iliad* also mentions a "silver-studded sword - a goodly Thracian sword"¹⁸² and Ovid says that Polydorus is "killed, disfigured with deep wounds of Thracian swords."¹⁸³

An unpublished fourth century Thracian tomb excavated near Shipka in Bulgaria in 1993 contains paintings of two long straight swords that would be good candidates.¹⁸⁴ These longer swords may have inspired Iphicrates to introduce longer swords for his Greek troops. Despite the apparent similarity to Celtic swords, and the large numbers of long Celtic swords in Bulgarian museums, it is unlikely that the Celtic swords influenced the Thracians.¹⁸⁵ Length or the curved blade may be what dis-

tinguished Thracian swords from other early (Greek) swords. The straight Greek *xiphos* was commoner in Thrace during the fourth century and was widespread in soldiers' graves of the third. In the Hellenistic period, a straight Macedonian style was also widespread - this had a bone or ivory handle, and the hilt and pommel were cast in one piece with the blade.¹⁸⁶ Swords would probably be worn from a baldric.¹⁸⁷

There are a few instances of Thracians using swords as their primary weapon, instead of just as a sidearm. The Dii hill tribesmen are always referred to by Thucydides as "swordsmen" or "armed with swords" (*machairophoroi*).¹⁸⁸ The only other time that Thracian swordsmen are mentioned is when Croesus hired "many Thracian swordsmen"¹⁸⁹ for the Lydian army. Thracian infantry probably continued to use a variety of native sword styles until the Roman conquest.

Thracian cavalry, however, are always shown on metalwork, tomb paintings, and reliefs with long, straight swords (probably the *xiphos*) from around the 3rd century onwards. For instance, in the Alexandrovo tomb, the rider in the white tunic has a long, straight sword in a scabbard of a ridiculously large size. This scabbard is very like those found elsewhere with the *xiphos*. The bulbous shape of the *xiphos* meant it worked reasonably well both as a slashing and stabbing sword, in contrast to the curved sword, which could only be used for slashing. Nevertheless, the change to the straight sword is curious. Xenophon recommends the *kopis* for cavalry use, and modern experiments have shown that the chief advantage a cavalryman has over an infantryman is in the downward stroke of his sword, which has greater force with a curved blade.¹⁹⁰

For fighting other cavalry it seems that swords were only used as a last resort. Livy relates that the Macedonians were surprised and disheartened when they saw the unusually severe wounds caused by the Roman "Spanish" swords to Macedonian cavalrymen - "They had seen wounds caused by spears, arrows, and rarely, by lances, since they were accustomed to fighting with Greeks and Illyrians".¹⁹¹ It is quite likely that the Thracians fought in the same style as the Greeks and Illyrians.

The Machaira, or Kopis, and Other Thracian Curved Swords

The *kopis*, or *machaira*, was a heavy slashing sword with the cutting edge on the inside of a long, slightly curved, blade. It came into general use in Greece early in the fifth century.¹⁹² A well-preserved example equipped with an ivory-decorated hilt was found near Duvanli.¹⁹³ However, this sword was rare in classical Thrace. Only two other pre-Hellenistic examples have been found there. During that time this weapon was reserved for use by the noble heavy cavalry, and had considerable pres-

¹⁷⁷ This was brought to my notice by Duncan Head, author of AOTMAPW.

¹⁷⁸ Florov I. & N. Florov, the authors of *The 3000 year old hat*, in an email received 26 November 2001.

¹⁷⁹ See www.the-thracians.com/swords.htm

¹⁸⁰ C S Grant 'The Peltast' *Slingshot* 51 pp 9-17 & 20-21.

¹⁸¹ Homer, *Iliad*, XIII.

¹⁸² Homer *Iliad* 23.805.

¹⁸³ Ovid *Metamorphoses* 13.778.

¹⁸⁴ This information was supplied by Evgeni Paunov during a visit to the area. He said that unfortunately a large number of tombs that were excavated decades ago still have not been published.

¹⁸⁵ There are also many fine, long, bronze rapiers and other bronze age swords.

¹⁸⁶ Archibald Z., op. cit, p 257-258.

¹⁸⁷ Head D., AOTMAPW, p 126; Snodgrass A.M., op. cit p85.

¹⁸⁸ Thucydides 2.98, 2.100, 7.27.

¹⁸⁹ Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 6.2.10

¹⁹⁰ Xenophon, *On Horsemanship* XII.

¹⁹¹ XXXI.35, 200 BC.

¹⁹² Sekunda N., 'Greek Swords and Swordsmanship', *Osprey Military Journal* Vol 3, Issue 1 2001 pp 34-42; Snodgrass A.M. pp84-85; Connolly P., op. cit. p63; Archibald Z., op. cit. p203.

¹⁹³ 82 cm long, from the Golyana tumulus at Duvanli. Archibald Z., loc. cit; Hodinott R.F., op. cit, p63, figure 4.

tige value. One 3rd century *kopis* found in Thrace is 46cm long and 5.5cm wide. It is decorated with a longitudinal groove in the centre and a band of engraved circles with central dots arranged between the groove and the outer edge.¹⁹⁴

Mercenary Thracian cavalry of the late Hellenistic period also used the *sica*, a large curved sword. This seems to be the Roman name for any curved sword or knife, as it was also used for the sword of the Thracian style of gladiator, and for Celtic knives, so the cavalry *sica* was probably like the *kopis* or the traditional Thracian curved swords. In 130 a Thracian cavalryman fighting for a Pergamene pretender cut off the head of the Roman consul Crassus with a single blow from his *sica*. In 163 at the battle of Marissa, a Thracian cavalryman (probably using a *sica*) chopped an arm off a Jewish rebel, also with a single blow.¹⁹⁵

Several styles of curved blades have been found all over Thrace. Similarly, the Kazanluk paintings show a mixture of strange long curved swords being used by infantry- perhaps these are what Thucydides is calling “*machaira*”, that being the nearest Greek equivalent. These swords are curved both ways, and look unlike any other Greek or Roman sword (some may in fact be *rhomphaia*s).

The light cavalry were probably armed only with curved knives as their secondary weapon, at least until the end of the classical era. Knives are not often depicted in art, but the most common found in Thrace are the curved, tanged dagger and the T-shaped knife. The single-edged curved knife was a popular weapon that even penetrated into the Pontic regions in the second half of the fourth century.¹⁹⁶

Tactics & Formations

Not much is known about Thracian cavalry tactics. Xenophon describes how the cavalry was moved to the rear for a night march, and also how the cavalry charged to the rescue when he was attacked, trumpet sounding. Iphicrates describes Odrysian cavalry being kept back by torches being put into the horses' faces.¹⁹⁷ Iphicrates switched sides, and was soon carrying off a great deal of loot from Odrysian territory, pursued by a large cavalry force. Having few horsemen himself, he gave them burning torches and told them to charge the Thracians. The Odrysian horses could not stand the flames, and fled.¹⁹⁸

Thracian cavalry in Macedonian service were usually deployed on the left flank, but when fighting for their own king it can safely be assumed that the king and his bodyguard fought on the right flank like Alexander, with the lighter cavalry forming up on both flanks of the army where terrain permitted.

Thracian cavalry were skilled in both skirmish and close combat fighting. When skirmishing with the enemy, small independent squadrons would ride along the front or flanks of the enemy discharging volleys of javelins, then wheel away to

return to their battle line and replenish their ammunition. When engaging both infantry or cavalry in hand to hand combat, they formed closely packed formations, several ranks deep and charged the enemy. When fighting against other cavalry the Thracians would advance and retreat alternately, discharging their weapons and then retiring¹⁹⁹. Alternatively, the heavy cavalry may have thrown one javelin, then attacked with the kamax..

The Thracians were exceptionally mobile and able to rely on heavy javelin and some archery fire.²⁰⁰ At the battle of the Hydaspes, Curtius says “Alexander sent the Agrianes and Thracian light-armed against the elephants, for they were better at skirmishing than fighting at close quarters. These released a thick barrage of missiles on both elephants and drivers...”²⁰¹ Hence their preferred tactic was to skirmish; their wooded and hilly terrain was well suited to this ploy.²⁰² These tactics were often successful, mainly when their opponents lacked light troops, they outnumbered their opponents, or caught them in suitable terrain. They liked ambushes like that on the Roman column after Magnesia, or night attacks under cover of darkness, like that on Mardonius' Persians.

The encounter between Xenophon's 10,000 and a combined Bithynian-Persian army in 401²⁰³ is another good example of the strengths and weaknesses of Thracian armies. In this battle, the Greek peltasts were placed on the flanks of the phalanx, but charged ahead of the main body. They were met by Persian cavalry and the Bithynians (peltasts and light cavalry), and driven back. However, when the hoplites came up, sang the *paean*, and raised a shout as they brought their spears down for the attack, the Bithynians and Persians ran away.

Little is known about Thracian formations and deployment. The cavalry formed into a wedge, which made a charge more effective. The Thracians learnt this formation from the Skythians, and the Macedonians learnt it from the Thracians.²⁰⁴ In one battle, the Triballi drew up their forces in four ranks. In the first rank were placed the weaker men, and behind them, the stronger men. The cavalry formed the third rank but the rear rank was of women, who, if the men wavered, rallied them with cries and taunts!²⁰⁵

Night attacks were a favourite Thracian tactic. The Brygi night attack on the Persians²⁰⁶ was so successful that (in combination with the loss of the Persian fleet) it induced the Persians to retreat. It seems to have been a Thracian custom to march to battle drunk, as well.

“Clearchus... encamped near the mountains of Thrace. When the Thracians gathered, he knew that, drunk and rushing

¹⁹⁴ Fol A., *AT Helsinki*, Item 45, p81.

¹⁹⁵ Sekunda N., op.cit., p18. He suggests that the *sica* may have been similar to the *Rhomphaia* when used in Thracian hands, but the *rhomphaia* would have been too unwieldy for cavalry use, so a curved sword is more likely.

¹⁹⁶ Archibald Z., loc. cit.

¹⁹⁷ Demosthenes, *Against Aristocrates* 8.

¹⁹⁸ Polyaneus *Stratagems* 3.9.60

¹⁹⁹ Livy XXXI.36; although this describes later Macedonian cavalry it is likely that Thracian cavalry used the same methods.

²⁰⁰ Cheshire I., op. cit. p15.

²⁰¹ Curtius VIII.14, 24-30.

²⁰² Cheshire I., *ibid*; Head D., *AOTMAPW*, p 51; regarding the terrain, Livy XL.22 (181 BC) says that Philip V tried to climb Mount Heamus but “as they reached the high levels they were increasingly faced with wooded and often impassable ground. Eventually they came upon a track so shaded that it was scarcely possible to see the sky for the density of the trees and the interlacing branches.”

²⁰³ Xenophon *Anabasis* VI.5.

²⁰⁴ Arrian, *Taktika* 16, 6-9.

²⁰⁵ Nicolaus of Damascus in his *Collection of Strange Customs* [Nic. Damas. Mor. Mirab. frag. 116J].

²⁰⁶ Herodotus VI. 46.

from the mountains, they would attack at night.²⁰⁷

Polyaenus mentions many stratagems employed by generals such as Iphicrates and Clearchus to defeat Thracian night attacks.²⁰⁸ One of these included the Thracian practice of banging your weapons together even when engaged in a night attack.²⁰⁹ Xenophon also says that Seuthes regarded night marches as commonplace. However, he also relates that even a small force of Thracians that marched at night would often become disorganised - the cavalry would get separated from the infantry.²¹⁰ It may be that their success led to the adoption of this tactic by the Greeks, and the disastrous (but almost successful) night attack on Syracuse by Demosthenes.²¹¹

The Roman client-king of Thrace, King Rhoemetals, accustomed the Thracians to the use of Roman weapons, military standards, and discipline.²¹² Assuming that his infantry were trained as Roman-style auxiliaries rather than legionaries, they may have practiced a more disciplined version of the same basic tactics. Only a proportion would have received such training - the rest would have remained untamed savages. An account of Thracian auxiliaries destroying a Gallic force on a mountain top shows that they retained their effectiveness while in Roman service.²¹³

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE NOTES

- AOTMAPW - Duncan Head, *Armies of the Macedonian and Punic Wars*, 2nd Edition, W R G, Devizes, 1982
- AG - Ivan Marazov (Ed), *Ancient Gold. The Wealth of the Thracians. Treasures from the Republic of Bulgaria*, Harry N Abrams, New York, 1998
- AG Helsinki - Alexander Fol, (ed) *Ancient Thrace*, F G Lonnberg, Helsinki, 2000- catalogue of the 2000 Helsinki exhibition (with descriptions of the items supplied separately by Timo Saleminen of the Amos Anderson museum)
- AT - Alexander Fol (ed), *Ancient Thrace* Elektra Publications (International Foundation Europa Antiqua), 2000
- T & TT - Alexander Fol & Ivan Marazov, *Thrace and the Thracians*, St Martin's Press, New York, 1977
- TAG - NV Sekunda, *The Ancient Greeks*, Osprey Elite Series, London, 1996
- TT - Charles Grant, *The Thracians*, in *Military Modelling*, November & December 1976
- TTT - D. Head, *Thracian Troop Types*, Slingshot, September 1978
- TP - Charles Grant *The Peltast Slingshot* 51 pp 9-17 & 20-21.

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²⁰⁷ Polyaenus, *Stratagems* 2.2.6.

²⁰⁸ eg Polyaenus *Stratagems* 2.2.6, 16.2, 2.2.10, 3.9.50, 31.3.

²⁰⁹ Polyaenus *Stratagems* 2.2.6.

²¹⁰ Xenophon, *Anabasis* VII, 3.

²¹¹ Best J.G.P., op. cit, pp 17-29.

²¹² Florus, II, XXVII *The Thracian War*.

²¹³ Tacitus, *Histories*.

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