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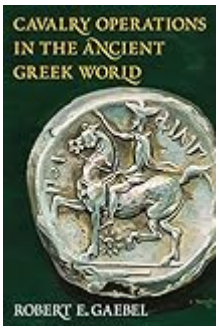

Robert E. Gaebel. *Cavalry Operations in the Ancient Greek World.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002. xiv + 345 pp. $24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8061-3365-2; $19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8061-3444-4.

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Cavalry in the Ancient Greek World

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In the introduction to his book, Gaebel makes the comment that "until recently there were no book-length treatments of ancient Greek Cavalry" (p. 8). He then mentions three books published between 1988 and 1994. Of the three, two come close to what Gaebel is trying to do, the works by I. G. Spence (1993) and L. J. Worley (1994).[1] Gaebel points out that neither of these works deals with the Hellenistic period and that Spence uses a thematic approach and contains no battle narrative (pp. 8-9). Gaebel then states, "I feel that a need remains for a chronologically arranged study of battle narratives and commentary covering the period from circa 500 to 150" (p. 9). And that is what Gaebel sets out to do.

He gives a clear chronological survey of the use of cavalry. His approach is to move battle by battle, period by period, giving a summary of the tactics of each battle with an emphasis on what each battle shows of the use of cavalry.[2] This approach allows the author to clearly show and demonstrate the change in the use of cavalry over time, and its growing importance on the battlefield. The development that Gaebel notes is generally accepted: cavalry first used as transport; then as flank protection, messengers, etc.; eventually used by Philip and Alexander as a striking force and in close combat; and then a decline in use in the Hellenistic period. Gaebel provides a fuller explanation for these developments and a more detailed discussion of how and why the changes came about than we have had before. His approach, studying the available information on each battle, gives the reader a clear understanding of the change in the use of cavalry.

Gaebel, as well as Spence and Worley, regrets the downplaying of the cavalry of the fifth century in the literature. While it is true that during that time period the hoplite phalanx dominated the battlefield, cavalry did play a very important role. By closely studying all the known battles, the author demonstrates the cavalry's importance (chapters 4-6). In this work, the fifth-century cavalry is shown to be a dynamic, vibrant force. While the hoplite phalanx was supreme on the battlefield at the time, the cavalry played an important role in protecting the flanks and rear of the phalanx, in picking off stragglers, in harassing foragers, in pursuing a retreating opponent, and in other ways. Clearly, the cavalry were not

simply bystanders. He is especially good at pointing out the use of cavalry to harass the Spartans during their invasions of Attica in the Peloponnesian War. And he gives a good account of how the Spartans were almost forced to develop a cavalry during the first ten years of that war in response to Athenian seaborne raids.

The period after the Peloponnesian War shows the growing importance, and use, of cavalry, culminating with Alexander the Great. These changes were evolutionary rather than revolutionary. Citing V. D. Hanson, Gaebel states, "military change after the Peloponnesian War was the result of incremental changes by many gifted leaders" (p. 131 with n. 10). In chapters 7-20 the author traces fourth century developments up to Philip, correctly linking the increased use of cavalry with the growing concept of a coordination of arms. This development with cavalry was slower than that with peltasts due to expense (pp. 120, 135-137). Another important factor here is the greater amount of fighting in northern Greece (p. 144) where cavalry had always been stronger than in the south. That was also true of Sicily. Gaebel gives a good example of the Syracusan cavalry, fighting near Corinth, showing a boldness, initiative, and aggressive behavior not seen before on the Greek mainland (pp. 133-135). Others picked up that spirit; and, during the fourth century, the cavalry became more involved in close quarter combat (pp. 153-154).

Gaebel sees all of these developments culminating in the activities of Alexander. Alexander's father, Philip, started out with a first-class cavalry. He increased his infantry and developed its use with cavalry, giving him a well-integrated army (pp. 147-149). One very important development here was the use of a wedge formation of cavalry, which overcame the problem of charging an infantry force (for example, p. 158). Alexander improved on what Philip had done and gave the Greek world a cavalry that was a major component of military forces. In this part of the book, Gaebel's battle narratives clearly show the cavalry's increasing engagement in close fighting. Gaebel gives details on Alexander's tactics and formations as well (pp. 179ff.). Little is really new in regard to Alexander, but Gaebel puts the material together in a clear way and explains it well.

Gaebel then moves on to the period after Alexander that saw a decline in the effectiveness of cavalry. Here Gaebel sees the main problem as a loss of coordination between cavalry and infantry which had been used so well by Alexander. He also credits the better training, discipline, and tactics of Greco-Roman armies during the period (p. 206)–hence the ability to withstand cavalry charges such as had been used by Alexander. Add to this the decline in the quality of leadership (for example, p. 230). This is a time period that had not been well studied, largely due to the lack of good sources for large parts of it. (Gaebel recognizes the problem with the information we have.) As before, he traces all the factors through a detailed study of battles for which we have information. Basically, the period shows a decrease in the importance of cavalry. This part of his study is something that has been needed.

The last chapter is on Hannibal and may seem out of place in this book, since Hannibal is not a Greek. In it the author contrasts Hannibal's ability to use cavalry against massed infantry with the lack of such ability in Hellenistic generals.

This book deals with several debated points that deserve mention. First, it is a commonplace that the lack of a saddle, stirrups, and horseshoes greatly limited ancient Greek cavalry. Gaebel (and Spence) dispute this. Gaebel, drawing on his own experience of riding and on relatively modern examples, does not see the lack of saddle and stirrups or horseshoes as a major problem (pp. 11-12, 165 with n. 127; stirrups permit the use of inferiorly trained horsemen, p. 166 n. 29). In fact, he claims that there is evidence that bareback riders have a better seat (pp. 91, 165). He sees the skill of the rider as being most important (p. 28). The best evidence, of course, is simply the effective use of horse by the ancient Greeks. As for horseshoes, "the hot, dry summer climate of the Mediterranean region would condition the hooves naturally, and it is obvious that the lack of horseshoes did not unduly limit the use of the horse in battle" (p. 28).[3] Gaebel argues well that the problems have been exaggerated.

Another problem is with the use of weapons by the cavalry. For early periods, the evidence is uncertain but it seems that the weapons were generally javelins and swords. The dispute comes with the cavalry of Philip and Alexander. Spence and Worley argue for the use of the *sarissa* by the Macedonian cavalry, but Gaebel disagrees (pp. 161-172).[4] Spence and Worley follow the arguments of M. M. Merkel to support their view. Gaebel refutes Merkel's views, arguing for a lance and sword, reasoning that the *sarissa* would be too unwieldy and not compatible with the close fighting of the Macedonian cavalry. Gaebel also notes that there is no evidence in the ancient literature that the main Macedonian cavalry used the *sarissa*. On the whole, I think that Gaebel has

the better argument.

Above I wrote "main Macedonian cavalry" because of the question of the *prodromoi*. They are also called "*sarissaphoroi*," obviously meaning that they carried the *sarissa*. The difference is probably due to their function. They seem to have been used mainly as scouts and also, in Gaebel's view, as a force to soften up an enemy line. So they were not used for the close combat that the main cavalry was involved in.[5] Spence limits their use to scouts. Gaebel gives them an active role in fighting, proving his point through careful examination of particular battles, such as Granicus and Gaugamela (pp. 172-177, 184-187). Gaebel's examples prove that they were not used only as scouts.

The maps in *Cavalry Operations in the Ancient Greek World* are good, especially since they indicate which battles involved a significant use of cavalry. Unlike Worley, he does not give diagrams of the various formations mentioned. He is also weak on diagrams of battles. Such diagrams would have made his points clearer. Gaebel also does not include the artistic evidence for the use of weapons as Spence and Worley do.

On the whole, this book is an excellent chronological survey of the use of cavalry in battle. The meticulous battle descriptions clearly show how the cavalry was used at any given time and how it grew in importance and became an extremely important element. Gaebel also does a good job of showing how the cavalrŷÃs use declined after the time of Alexander. Some will prefer this strict chronological approach, although Spence's thematic approach also has its merits. Spence should be read along with Gaebel for a complete understanding of the use of cavalry at the time.

Notes

[1]. I. G. Spence, *The Cavalry of Classical Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); L. J. Worley, *Hippeis: The Cavalry of Ancient Greece* (Boulder and Oxford: Westview Press, 1994). Spence covers the period to 300 BC; Worley ends with the battle of Issus. The third book is G. R. Bugh, *The Horsemen of Athens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). Gaebel points out that this work solely concerns Athens and does not really deal with fighting. Bugh is mainly concerned with administrative and financial matters, not the issues addressed by Gaebel, Spence, and Worley.

[2]. Worley uses the same approach, but his battle narratives tend to lose the focus on the cavalry. See, for example, his discussion of Sicily (pp. 100-119). Spence also discusses battles, but only in regard to how they pertain to the particular theme he is discussing at the time.

[3]. Spence agrees (pp. 42-49 on stirrups; pp. 41-42 on horseshoes). Spence puts even more stress on the training and skill of the rider than Gaebel does (pp. 46-47, 117). Both Gaebel and Spence use Xenophon extensively for these points.

[4]. Worley, pp. 156, 172, 215; Spence, pp. 108, 109, 118.

[5]. Spence (e.g., pp. 27 and 33) has the *prodromoi* solely used as scouts, a view that he also maintains in his *Historical Dictionary of Ancient Greek Warfare* (Lanham and London: The Scarecrow Press, 2002).