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Edward Anson ✦ David Hollander ✦ Timothy Howe
Joseph Roisman ✦ John Vanderspoel ✦ Pat Wheatley ✦
Sabine Müller



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Elizabeth Baynham, Hugh Bowden, Franca
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Contents of volume twenty-eight

Numbers 1-2

- | | |
|----|---|
| 1 | Hugh Lindsay, <i>Strabo and the shape of his Historika Hypomnemata</i> |
| 20 | Paul McKechnie, <i>W.W. Tarn and the philosophers</i> |
| 37 | Monica D'Agostini, <i>The Shade of Andromache: Laodike of Sardis between Homer and Polybios</i> |
| 61 | John Shannahan, <i>Two Notes on the Battle of Cunaxa</i> |

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Two Notes on the Battle of Cunaxa

John Shannahan

ABSTRACT: In Xenophon's account of the battle of Cunaxa, fought between Artaxerxes II and Cyrus the Younger in 401BC, a succinct description of the soldiers facing the Greeks is provided: there were Egyptians present, carrying wooden shields reaching to the feet. No other source mentions the presence of Egyptians. Nonetheless, they warrant attention. The following establishes the trustworthiness of Xenophon, his shield vocabulary, and the relation of his description to other evidence. The second note challenges Ehrhardt's thesis of the intentional retreat of Artaxerxes' left wing at the battle, published in this journal in 1994.*

The Egyptians of *Anabasis* 1.8.9 are yet to receive anything more than passing commentary, despite their appearance in several works for the purposes of substantiation and comparison.¹ Therefore, the following considers Xenophon's description and its significance. Xenophon says that the left flank of the royal battle line began with cavalry, then there were troops with wicker shields, then there were "hoplites with wooden shields which reached to the feet. These were said to be Egyptians" (ὁπλῖται σὺν ποδήρεσι ξυλίναις ἀσπίσιν. Αἰγύπτιοι δ' οὗτοι ἐλέγοντο εἶναι). Next to the Egyptians were more cavalry and more bowmen. Curiously, while Xenophon clearly believed the hoplites were Egyptian, his description is not corroborated by Egyptian evidence. The origin of these soldiers remains a mystery. Following the discussion of the Egyptians, the second note revisits Ehrhardt's 1994 thesis of the intentional retreat of Artaxerxes' left wing at the battle.² It argues that the equipment of the Egyptians is one of many points inconsistent with the notion that the royal left flank intentionally withdrew.

* I wish to thank Prof. M. Crawford, Dr. G. Davis, A/Prof. P. McKechnie, Ms. H. Senn, and Prof. A. Spalinger for their comments on drafts of this paper. They are not responsible for the errors that remain. I also thank the anonymous reviewers who provided suggestions for this article.

¹ E.g. Delebecque at p. 65n19; C. J. Tuplin, "Xenophon and the Garrisons of the Persian Empire," *AMIran* 20 (1987): 221; they appear to serve as partial inspiration for the depiction in D. Head, *The Achaemenid Persian Army* (Stockport: Montvert Publications, 1992), pl. 4C; P. J. Stylianou, *A Historical Commentary on Diodorus Siculus, Book 15* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press, 1998), 344; Alexander K. Nefiodkin, "On the Origin of the Scythed Chariots," *Historia* 53, no. 3 (2004): 373; M. B. Charles, "Herodotus, Body Armour and Achaemenid Infantry," *Historia* 61, no. 3 (2012): 261n15.

² C. T. H. R. Ehrhardt, "Two Notes on Xenophon, *Anabasis*," *AHB* 8, no. 1 (1994): 1-4. See also G. Wylie, "Cunaxa and Xenophon," *AC* 61 (1992): 129.

1 Observations on the Egyptians at Cunaxa

1.1 Can we trust Xenophon's description?

Xenophon's reliability is a vexed question, as is the precision of ancient battle accounts in general.³ It stands to reason that one should justify trust in a feature unique to Xenophon. There are several reasons for doing so. First, Xenophon's observations were not made in the heat of battle, when they are most suspect,⁴ but before the Cyreans advance and the sources diverge.⁵ Then, after the battle, Xenophon reveals that he had opportunity to inspect the Egyptians' equipment closely. In both situations the Egyptian shields are identically described.⁶ The consistency and context suggest that Xenophon had a clear idea of what he was conveying. Secondly, the Egyptians were marshalled opposite the Cyreans, in the position most visible to Xenophon. Xenophon did not attempt to detail the right wing of the royal army – in which case one might justifiably question his veracity, given the distance – but only described what he himself, or his sources, might have observed. The discrimination would suggest that Xenophon was not inclined to lie about the appearance of the Egyptians. Thirdly, while the *Anabasis* is the only source which attests to the presence of Egyptians, we are fortunate that Xenophon was an eye-witness. Ctesias, the only other autoptic source, is fragmentary, and Diodorus wrote several centuries later. No inference should be drawn from their silence. Finally, any bias and disingenuity is limited in *Anabasis* 1.8.9. Xenophon offers no opinion on the Egyptians, he merely reports their appearance. By the time the Persian line breaks, the Egyptians are no longer singled out or criticised. Xenophon saw the Egyptian equipment before and after the battle, and notes its characteristics without any (feasibly misleading) commentary.

On this basis I accept Xenophon's description of the equipment. But can the same trust be extended to the nationality Xenophon applies to the soldiers? Unnamed people said that the troops were Egyptian. Xenophon, however, was not incredulous. Gray has shown Xenophon's nuanced use of citations in the *Anabasis*.⁷ The report on Cunaxa, especially, is replete with citations designed to validate what might be disbelieved. It is most probable that the same end was pursued in 1.8.9. Perhaps Xenophon felt the need to justify his claim because Egypt was in revolt at the time of Cyrus' march. Artaxerxes II may have been recognised as king in Egypt as late as 398, but turmoil in the province's north must have made any march from Egypt to

³ E.g. N. Whatley, "On the Possibility of Reconstructing Marathon and Other Ancient Battles," *JHS* 84 (1964): 119-39.

⁴ Whatley, "Reconstructing Marathon and Other Ancient Battles," 120-22.

⁵ H. D. Westlake, "Diodorus and the Expedition of Cyrus," *Phoenix* 41, no. 3 (1987): 244.

⁶ *Xen. An.* 1.8.9; 2.1.6.

⁷ Vivienne J. Gray, "Interventions and Citations in Xenophon, *Hellenica* and *Anabasis*," *CQ* 53, no. 1 (2003): 115-23, esp. 118-19.

Babylon unlikely.⁸ So were the Egyptians settled in Babylonia?⁹ Were they mercenaries?¹⁰ Were they part of a levied military force from Egypt, dispatched before the revolt, as Xenophon indicates was exacted from Cilicia and Cyprus?¹¹ Xenophon asserts that every satrapy maintained such a force, and the practice might have resulted in an Egyptian force, loyal to the Persians, departing when the province took independence.¹² Perhaps, if Briant is correct to say that Artaxerxes was aware of Cyrus' rebellion, the Egyptians were assembled in the imperial heartland as an early move to counter Cyrus' force.¹³ Xenophon also attempts to explain their presence in Babylonia through his *Cyropaedia* (where Cyrus rewarded their valour with cities), but that should not be taken at face value, given the nature of the work.¹⁴ The limited evidence means that no definitive answer can be offered here. Nonetheless, it can be stated with certainty that Xenophon believed he was looking at Egyptians. This becomes clear after considering Xenophon's depiction of Egyptians in the *Cyropaedia*.

In the description of the Egyptians at Cunaxa, they are first contrasted against the traditional, lightly armoured Persian troops (γεροφόροι) by their denomination as ὀπλίται. The size of their shields is also noted – “reaching to the feet” (ποδήρεσι). Comments on Egyptian shield size are repeated elsewhere in Xenophon's work, and reinforce the image: the shields are shoulder height, one may crouch behind them, and they reach to the feet.¹⁵ Xenophon's description also specifies that each nation at Cunaxa was in a “full rectangle” (ἐν πλαισίῳ πλήρει). The Egyptians at Thymbrara replicate this array, as they were in a vast block of ten thousand men. The block was, we are told, their traditional method of marshalling for battle.¹⁶ This formation would also suggest that the Egyptians were not typical shield-bearers in front of archers (*sparabara*),¹⁷ a formation which retained the Assyrian ratio of fifty archers

⁸ AP 35; BMAP 12; A. Lemaire, “La fin de la première période perse en Égypte et la chronologie judéenne vers 400 av. J.-C.,” *Transeuphratène* 9 (1995): 53, 56. See comment in Amélie Kuhrt, ed. *The Persian Empire: A Corpus of Sources from the Achaemenid Period* (London: Routledge, 2007), §9, no. 57n5. See also recent discussion in Stephen Ruzicka, *Trouble in the West: Egypt and the Persian Empire, 525-332 BCE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 37-40.

⁹ Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*, trans. Peter T. Daniels (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 987.

¹⁰ Serge Yalichev, *Mercenaries of the Ancient World* (London: Constable, 1997), 134.

¹¹ Xen. Cyr. 7.4.2.

¹² Xen. Oec. 4.5-7.

¹³ Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 616-20.

¹⁴ Xen. Cyr. 7.1.45.

¹⁵ Shoulder height: Xen. Cyr. 7.1.33. Crouch: Xen. Cyr. 7.1.40. ποδήρεσι: Xen. Cyr. 6.2.10.

¹⁶ Xen. Cyr. 6.3.20, 4.17. While Cyrus first mocks their capacity to fight in such a manner, he later acknowledges the advantages offered by their armament (Xen. Cyr. 6.4.17, 7.1.33).

¹⁷ See, for example: Head, *The Achaemenid Persian Army*, 22-27; N. Sekunda, *The Persian Army 560-330BC* (Oxford: Osprey, 1992), 18-19. See also Xen. Cyr. 8.5.11-12, which appears to describe these shield-bearers (calling their shields τὰ μεγάλα γέγρα), and cf. §1.2 here. See also, on Persian shields: Stefan Bittner, *Tracht und Bewaffnung des persischen Heeres zur Zeit der Achaimeniden* (München: K. Friedrich, 1985), 158-66.

to fifty shield-bearers.¹⁸ The parallel between Thymbrara and Cunaxa is unlikely to be coincidence: it probably reflects Xenophon's confidence in his representation.¹⁹ The Egyptians certainly had a reputation for their infantry in antiquity which persisted amongst non-Xenophontic works.²⁰ The consistency of Xenophon when describing Egyptians, and his explicit connection between those of the *Cyropaedia* and those of his own day,²¹ lead me to believe he can be trusted on the matter.²² Ultimately, Xenophon was a militarily well informed eye-witness and he demonstrates faith in his identification.

1.2 The significance of Xenophon's choice of words.

Xenophon uses the term ἀσπίς to identify the shields of the Egyptians. This is important. Xenophon's vocabulary when discussing shields is not frivolous; it is rigid, predictable, and pragmatic. This is in contrast to Herodotus, for whom the term ἀσπίς, in particular, was very flexible. Greeks use ἀσπίδες in Herodotus, as do Salaminians, Assyrians, Paphlagonians, Mysians, Pisidians, Phoenicians, Egyptians, and Thessalians.²³ Persians use wicker for shields (ἀντὶ δὲ ἀσπίδων γέρρα), and take cover behind shield-barricades (γέρρα).²⁴ Xenophon, however, is rather different; the distinctions are glaring by comparison. The Persians, in the entire corpus of Xenophon's work, always use γέρρα. Even when barbarians are using large

¹⁸ Nigel Tallis, "Transport and Warfare," in *Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia*, ed. John Curtis and Nigel Tallis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 217.

¹⁹ Generally on the *Anabasis* providing information for the *Cyropaedia*: Bodil Due, *The Cyropaedia: Xenophon's Aims and Methods*, trans. Catherine Brejnholt (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1989), 141. J. K. Anderson, *Military Theory and Practice in the Age of Xenophon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 165-91 notes many links between the battle of Thymbrara in the *Cyropaedia* and that of Cunaxa; the former rectifies many errors of Cyrus the Younger. Agesilaus may have furnished Xenophon with extra detail, based on his time in Egypt, if a late date for the *Cyropaedia* is accepted: Deborah Levine Gera, *Xenophon's Cyropaedia: Style, Genre, and Literary Technique* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 23-25. Edouard Delebecque, *Essai sur la vie de Xénophon* (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1957), 423n58 rejects the association of the Egyptians at Cunaxa with those in the *Cyropaedia*, but is more prepared to consider Agesilaus' influence (pp. 404-05). Cf. the judgement of N. Sekunda, "Achaemenid Colonization in Lydia," *REA* 87 (1985): 19.

²⁰ Ach. Tat. 3.13; Hld. 9.14-20; Pl. Ti. 24b.

²¹ Xen. Cyr. 6.2.10, 7.1.33.

²² My opinion of Xenophon's depiction of the Egyptians' equipment is similar to Charles' when he considers Persian body armour: "the frequency with which body armour is associated in the *Cyropaedia* with infantry, and indeed cavalry, seems to suggest that Xenophon was very comfortable with the notion of Persian infantrymen being so equipped in a more genuinely historical context – he must have also expected no raised eyebrows on the part of his audience." Charles, "Herodotus, Body Armour and Achaemenid Infantry," 266.

²³ In listed order: Hdt. 5.112; 7.63; 7.72; 7.74; 7.76; 7.89 (Phoenicians and Egyptians); 8.27. Herodotus also gives ἀσπίδες to Mares, Colchians, Alarodians, and Saspies (7.79).

²⁴ Wicker for shields: Hdt. 7.61. Barricades: Hdt. 9.61-62, 99, 102.

shields, they are γέρρα.²⁵ The Egyptians are the only non-Greeks to regularly employ ἀσπίδες.²⁶ While many Easterners in Herodotus use small ἀσπίδες, or ox-hide ἀσπίδες, or leather ἀσπίδες, Xenophon employs a vocabulary with greater specificity.²⁷ Chaldeans use γέρρα μακρά, other barbarians use ox-hide γέρρα, Cyrus the Great's soldiers use μεγάλα γέρρα, and Thracians use πέλται, as do Paphlagonians and a corps of Croesus.²⁸ The only exception is a group of Carians, who employ λευκάσπιδας, reflecting Carian use of white armour in this period.²⁹ Xenophon's terminology is specific to size, material, and type. Accordingly, the language dealing with the Egyptians is at odds with his usual terminology for non-Greeks, and is not idle wordplay. By applying terminology normally reserved for Hellenic forces to the Egyptians, Xenophon seems to indicate that the Egyptians held more similarities to the Cyreans than the other forces in the royal battle line. The *Cyropaedia* also acknowledges the distinction by explicitly contrasting the Persian θώραξ and γέρρον against the Egyptian ἀσπίς.³⁰ Xenophon's military experience should work in his favour here; he was aware of the types of equipment available and their application, and he has a long standing reputation for a technical vocabulary.³¹

1.3 What do we know of fifth century Egyptian shields?

There is comparatively little attention afforded to Egyptian shields of the Persian period in current literature. Fortunately, however, there is ample artistic evidence showing trends from the New Kingdom onwards on which to base general remarks in relation to *Anabasis* 1.8.9.

In terms of construction, Greek and Egyptian shields were not entirely dissimilar; one can see why Xenophon thought Greek and Egyptian shields distinct from the lighter Persian wicker. Both were wooden, and covered in an external layer – the Egyptians preferred hide, the Hellenes bronze.³² It is significant that Xenophon should identify the Egyptian shields as

²⁵ Xen. *An.* 4.3.4.

²⁶ Xen. *An.* 1.8.9, 2.1.6; *Cyr.* 6.4.17, 7.1.33 (twice), 40.

²⁷ In listed order: *Hdt.* 7.72, 74; 7.76, 79 (both ox-hide and leather).

²⁸ In listed order: Xen. *An.* 4.3.4, 7.22-23, 5.4.12; *Cyr.* 8.5.11; *Mem.* 3.9.2; *Ages.* 3.4; *Cyr.* 7.1.24.

²⁹ Xen. *Hell.* 3.2.15. These Carians serve Tissaphernes. Tissaphernes' cavalry at Cunaxa also wears white cuirasses (Xen. *An.* 1.8.9).

³⁰ Xen. *Cyr.* 7.1.33.

³¹ E.g. Léopold Gautier, *La langue de Xénophon* (Genève: Georg & Co., 1911), 150-53.

³² See, on Egyptian shields: Anthony John Spalinger, "Notes on the Military in Egypt during the XXVth Dynasty," *JSSEA* 11 (1981): 32-58. See also general comments in Ian Shaw, *Egyptian Warfare and Weapons* (Buckinghamshire: Shire, 1991), 31-44; Alessandra Nibbi, "Some Remarks on the Ancient Egyptian Shield," *ZÄS* 130, no. 2 (2003): 170-81. On Greek shields see, for example: N. Sekunda, *Greek Hoplite 480-323*, Warrior 27 (Oxford: Osprey, 2000), 10; Hans Van Wees, *Greek Warfare: Myths and Realities* (London: Duckworth, 2004), 48; Peter Krentz, "War," in *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare*, ed. Philip A. Sabin, Hans van Wees, and Michael J. Whitby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 151; Eero Jarva, "Arms and Armor: Part I Arming Greeks for Battle," in *The Oxford Handbook of Warfare in the Classical World*, ed. Brian Campbell and Lawrence A. Tritle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 397-400.

wooden (ξύλιναις), as opposed to typical Persian wicker. The shields Xenophon saw were closely related to those he knew, and he was not the first to note the similarities: Herodotus credits the Egyptians with introducing the Greeks to their shields.³³ Historically, the greatest difference was in their shape: flat-bottomed and round topped for the Egyptians (though see below), circular for the Greeks. Xenophon's terminological distinctions appear to reflect real characteristics.

Shields "reaching to the feet" (ποδήρεσι) were common in the Near East, and appear with some regularity in art. These are commonly termed "tower shields."³⁴ The Assyrians and Egyptians, in particular, were associated with their operation; Persian *sparabara* may have been inherited from the Assyrians,³⁵ who utilised such shields in the seventh century, predominantly in siege settings.³⁶ The Egyptians, on the other hand, are generally considered to have lagged behind their Asiatic neighbours in the realms of military technology.³⁷ Shields shrank as armour improved; as the Egyptians were slow to adopt such changes, their shields remained large enough to protect their bodies. Resistance to hot, constrictive armour may have also been a product of the climate. The minimal armour worn with tower shields may also allay doubt that Xenophon's terse description in the *Anabasis* omitted important details – Egyptians historically wore little heavy body armour. When armour was worn, it may have been linen; recent research has shown linen compared favourably to metal armour, and (perhaps most relevantly for Egyptian soldiers) fared better in hot climates.³⁸ Artistic examples of tower shields from the Old and Middle Kingdom are commonplace.³⁹

³³ Hdt. 4.180; cf. 1.171.

³⁴ T. A. Madhloom, *The Chronology of Neo-Assyrian Art* (London: Athlone, 1970), 54-58; Amy E. Barron, *Late Assyrian Arms and Armour: Art Versus Artifact* (University of Toronto: Doctoral Thesis, 2010), §IV.2. The Greeks also employed such shields in their past; recall Telemonian Ajax: Hom. *Il.* 15.644-47; cf. Van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 250-51.

³⁵ Anne Bovon, "La représentation des guerriers perses et la notion de Barbare dans la première moitié du Ve siècle," *BCH* 87 (1963): 596.

³⁶ Barron, *Assyrian Arms and Armour*, 133; Tamás Dezső, *The Assyrian Army, I: The Structure of the Neo-Assyrian Army, 1: Infantry* (Budapest: Eötvös University Press, 2012), 100-02, 115. Herodotus (7.63) links Assyrian and Egyptian armature.

³⁷ Yigael Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands in the Light of Archaeological Study*, trans. M. Pearlman (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 64-65; Shaw, *Egyptian Warfare*, 31-32; Anthony John Spalinger, *War in Ancient Egypt: The New Kingdom* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2005), 16.

³⁸ Gregory S. Aldrete, Scott Bartell, and Alicia Aldrete, *Reconstructing Ancient Linen Body Armor: Unraveling the Linethorax Mystery* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 125-28.

³⁹ E.g. John Coleman Darnell and Deborah Darnell, *Theban Desert Road Survey in the Egyptian Western Desert*, vol. 1 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2002), 74-75. See general comments in Robert B. Partridge, *Fighting Pharaohs: Weapons and Warfare in Ancient Egypt* (Manchester: Peartree, 2002), 52-53; Bridget McDermott, *Warfare in Ancient Egypt* (Gloucestershire: Sutton, 2004), 53.

The problem is that Egyptian design had been trending away from tower shields prior to the fifth century. From the New Kingdom, there was a rise in the prevalence of body armour and helmets.⁴⁰ Correspondingly, shields became smaller.⁴¹ By the seventh century, soldiers of Egypt were employing shields comparable in size to the typical Greek ἄσπίς (if not smaller),⁴² and circular shields.⁴³ This is not to suggest that variations in shield size were impossible, but rather that tower shields were uncommon. On the other hand, on a statuette of Reshep held in the Louvre, a large shield is found.⁴⁴ There, however, Reshep is also holding bow and arrows – the figure would be more comparable to the Persian *sparabara* than the Egyptians of Xenophon's work. The key word in Xenophon's description of Egyptian soldiers is ποδήρεσι. The most prevalent shields of Egyptian evidence cannot be considered to reach to the feet.⁴⁵ They are similar in size to a typical Greek hoplite's shield. Yet Xenophon never describes Greek hoplites' shields as ποδήρεσι. Therefore, neither would Xenophon describe the shields of the Piye Stela, for example, as ποδήρεσι. It logically follows that the shields Xenophon saw at Cunaxa were larger than the Cyreans' shields and the shields of the Egyptian evidence. Herodotus' description of Egyptian shields also matches the artistic evidence more closely than Xenophon's report: Egyptians used large spears and hollow shields with broad rims (ἄσπίδας δὲ κοίλας, τὰς ἵτους μεγάλας).⁴⁶ Admittedly, Herodotus has recently been shown to generalise and misrepresent Persian armour, which precludes his use as deciding evidence here.⁴⁷ But the evidence is clear: there is a gap of several centuries between the peak in use of shields reaching to the feet and the battle of Cunaxa. The shields Xenophon describes parallel

⁴⁰ Yadin, *Art of Warfare*, 83-85; Shaw, *Egyptian Warfare*, 31-32, 42; Spalinger, *War in Ancient Egypt*, 120.

⁴¹ See, for example, the shields found in Tutankhamun's tomb, measuring at their largest 72.5 cm by 51.5 cm: Bertha Porter and Rosalind L. B. Moss, *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings*, vol. 1.2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 581 contains bibliography and museum catalogue numbers. See also the shields portrayed at Medinet Habu (reign of Ramesses III): Harold H. Nelson, *Medinet Habu: Volume 1. Earlier Historical Records of Ramses III*, Oriental Institute Publications 8 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930), pls. 31-32, 34-40.

⁴² Spalinger, "Notes," 32-58, esp. 45-46.

⁴³ See Timothy Kendall, *Gebel Barkal Epigraphic Survey: 1986* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1986), fig. 10. Cf. W. B. Emery and L. P. Kirwan, *The Royal Tombs of Ballana and Qustul*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Government Press, 1938), 249, 372-73. See also the (unique) Egyptian production of Hittite-style shields in the reign of Ramesses II: E. B. Pusch, "'Pi-Ramesses-Beloved-of-Amun, Headquarters of thy Chariotry' - Egyptians and Hittites in the Delta Residence of the Ramessides," in *Pelizaeus Museum Hildesheim: The Egyptian Collection*, ed. Arne Eggebrecht and Robert Steven Bianchi (Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1996), 144, figs. 135-38.

⁴⁴ E 10486.

⁴⁵ Anderson, *Military Theory and Practice*, 167n9 also notes the absence of tower shields in contemporary Egyptian artwork.

⁴⁶ Hdt. 7.89.

⁴⁷ Charles, "Herodotus, Body Armour and Achaemenid Infantry," 257-69; Roel Konijnendijk, "Neither the Less Valorous Nor the Weaker": Persian Military Might and the Battle of Plataia," *Historia* 61, no. 1 (2012): 1-17. See also, on Herodotus and Egyptians: Christelle Fischer-Bovet, "Egyptian Warriors: The Machimoi of Herodotus and the Ptolemaic Army," *CQ* 63, no. 1 (2013): 209-36.

Old and Middle Kingdom designs, but are drastically different to the shields popular from the New Kingdom onwards.

What, then, can be concluded from this consideration of the Egyptians at Cunaxa? Perhaps their shields are a throw-back to archaic Egyptian shields, akin to Assyrian use of earlier technology.⁴⁸ But this would be a throwback of several centuries, which surely goes beyond the realms of credibility. Perhaps they were simply an uncommon variety of Egyptian soldier. But then how did the soldiers themselves get to Cunaxa when Egypt was in revolt? We are left with two inconvenient and contradictory facts: (1) Xenophon believed he described Egyptians at Cunaxa. (2) The seventh and sixth century evidence from Egypt demonstrates that tower shields were no longer favoured among infantrymen in the fifth century. They had begun to use armour, and shields which cannot be considered to reach near the feet. The most logical conclusion is that Xenophon was mistaken. He did not see Egyptians at Cunaxa. But he did see that equipment. Based on the tradition of tower shields in Mesopotamia as late as the seventh century, I suspect they originated east of the Mediterranean, for there is little evidence for the use of such shields at this time in the West. These soldiers must be treated with great care if their nationality is important to any point in scholarship.

2 Royal Tactics at Cunaxa

The second topic for discussion here concerns the royal tactics at Cunaxa. Was the royal plan more complex than our accounts suggest? Do these “Egyptians” have bearing on our understanding?

The battle itself has received numerous treatments over the years.⁴⁹ Few question the royal army’s tactics in the battle. There is a reason for this: the sources say very little on the matter. The battle lines in the *Anabasis* are straightforward.⁵⁰ On Cyrus’ line, the Greeks held the right flank, with Paphlagonian cavalry between their side and the Euphrates. Peltasts stood beside the Greeks. Cyrus was in the centre of the line, also with cavalry. To his left were the

⁴⁸ Barron, *Assyrian Arms and Armour*, 134.

⁴⁹ Marie Pancritius, *Studien über die Schlacht bei Kunaxa* (Berlin: Alexander Duncker, 1906), 31-43; Johannes Kromayer and Georg Veith, *Antike Schlachtfelder: Bausteine zu einer antiken Kriegsgeschichte*, vol. 4 (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1924-31), 235-42; Otto Lendle, "Der Bericht Xenophons über die Schlacht von Kunaxa," *Gymnasium* 73 (1966): 429-52; H. Gugel, "Die Aufstellung von Kyros' Heer in der Schlacht von Kunaxa," *Gymnasium* 78 (1971): 241-43; J. M. Bigwood, "The Ancient Accounts of the Battle of Cunaxa," *AJPh* 104, no. 4 (1983): 340-57; Westlake, "Diodorus and the Expedition," 241-54; Wylie, "Cunaxa and Xenophon," 119-34; Ehrhardt, "Two Notes," 1-4; Sherylee R. Bassett, "The Death of Cyrus the Younger," *CQ* 49, no. 2 (1999): 473-83.

⁵⁰ Xen. *An.* 1.7-8, 10. See also Lendle, "Der Bericht Xenophons," 448-49; Otto Lendle, *Kommentar zu Xenophons Anabasis (Bücher 1-7)* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995), 65.

Persian contingents, with Ariaeus in command.⁵¹ The royal army's centre was reportedly outside Cyrus' left flank, but this is preposterous.⁵² It is more likely that Artaxerxes was simply beyond the Greeks' left. We know nothing of what was marshalled against Ariaeus, but we know that the king was in the centre, with cavalry (the six thousand routed by Cyrus is probably an exaggeration, but there were undoubtedly some present⁵³). Various attempts have been made to quantify the armies at Cunaxa.⁵⁴ Gabrielli's efforts remain the clearest, but Wylie provides the best illustration of the ancient sources' fallacies: he calculates that a battle line of 400,000 royal soldiers (as in Diodorus) would have stretched twenty-eight miles.⁵⁵ Briant's pessimism regarding our chances of estimating the armies is hard to argue against; it is unlikely that we can ever know with any certainty.⁵⁶ Facing the Greeks, on the far left flank of the royal army, were horsemen in white cuirasses (under the command of Tissaphernes, supposedly) – perhaps a reference to Anahita.⁵⁷ Next to them were troops with wicker shields (γερροφόροι). Beside the γερροφόροι were hoplites with wooden shields reaching to their feet, reportedly Egyptians.⁵⁸ Then, there were more horsemen, and bowmen between these forces and the centre.⁵⁹ The formations were divided by nation. In front of the line were 150 scythe-bearing chariots.

As the armies closed, the Greeks' line billowed and they began to run. The scythe-bearing chariots were allowed to pass through the Greek line, and others plunged through the royal line. The Egyptians broke and fled. Similarly, the royal cavalry charge was of limited effectiveness; the horsemen charged the peltasts, who split, inflicting severe casualties, and the cavalry continued on to plunder Cyrus' camp. The Greeks chased their foes from the battlefield, effectively removing themselves as a threat. While the Paphlagonian cavalry is not mentioned, Lendle has plausibly proposed that they, as the Greeks advanced, moved to the centre to protect Cyrus' now-exposed right flank.⁶⁰

⁵¹ On Ariaeus – who in Ctesias (*FGrH* 688) F20 (= Plut. *Art.* 11.1) is at Cyrus' side, but in Xenophon (*An.* 1.8.5) and Diodorus (14.22.5) is on Cyrus' left wing – see C. J. Tuplin, "Ctesias as Military Historian," in *Die Welt des Ktesias / Ctesias' World*, ed. Josef Wiesehofer, R. Rollinger, and G. B. Lanfranchi, *Classica et Orientalia* 1 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 477.

⁵² Xen. *An.* 1.8.13. Bigwood, "Ancient Accounts," 342.

⁵³ Xen. *An.* 1.8.24–25.

⁵⁴ See Kromayer and Veith, *Antike Schlachtfelder*, 230–35; Bigwood, "Ancient Accounts," 341–42.

⁵⁵ Marcel Gabrielli, "Transports et logistique militaire dans l'*Anabase*," in *Dans les pas des Dix-Mille: peuples et pays du Proche-Orient vus par un Grec*, ed. Pierre Briant (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 1995), 111–14; Wylie, "Cunaxa and Xenophon," 123.

⁵⁶ Briant, *Cyrus to Alexander*, 629.

⁵⁷ N. Sekunda, "The Persians," in *Warfare in the Ancient World*, ed. John Hackett (London: Guild Publishing, 1989), 95.

⁵⁸ Xen. *An.* 1.8.9.

⁵⁹ See C. J. Tuplin, "All the King's Horse: In Search of Achaemenid Persian Cavalry," in *New Perspectives on Ancient Warfare*, ed. Garrett G. Fagan and Matthew Trundle, *History of Warfare* 59 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), 167–70 on the cavalry armour.

⁶⁰ Lendle, "Der Bericht Xenophons," 444.

Although the Greeks were successful, Cyrus' left wing was defeated.⁶¹ The cavalry charge of Cyrus in the centre, while damaging, was mitigated by rallying of the troops (by Tissaphernes, in Diodorus⁶²).

Xenophon's version is the most detailed of surviving accounts.⁶³ While the sources differ on a number of details, they do not contradict each other in the armies' movements.⁶⁴ Cyrus' right flank was against the Euphrates,⁶⁵ Artaxerxes placed chariots in front of his line,⁶⁶ and Cyrus charged his brother.⁶⁷ The Greeks first marched slowly towards their opponents, then ran,⁶⁸ routed them,⁶⁹ and pursued them from the field.⁷⁰ Cyrus' left flank was overcome.⁷¹ While the cavalry charge through Cyrus' flank is absent from Diodorus' account, it did occur.⁷² The consistency between Xenophon and Diodorus is significant, because Diodorus probably derived his material from Ctesias' version.⁷³ What survives of Ctesias in Plutarch also corroborates Xenophon's portrait of tactics. Nor does Plutarch, who was always prepared to note Ctesias' failings,⁷⁴ suggest that Xenophon and Ctesias came into conflict on this matter. Based on the consistency between accounts, and the broader comments made above in §1.1, the following accepts Xenophon's depiction of movements by Cyrus' right wing. While Xenophon does not provide a picture of the royal right flank or Cyrus' left flank, he provides sufficient information on the forces against the Euphrates for the following discussion.

⁶¹ *Contra* Joseph William Hewitt, "The Second Phase of the Battle of Cunaxa," *CJ* 15, no. 2 (1919): 83-93, supporting Boucher's theory of the almost total defeat of the royal army. Boucher has no support in recent literature.

⁶² Diod. 14.23.6.

⁶³ Other versions are in Diod. 14.22-24 and Plut. *Art.* 7-13. Plutarch preserves Ctes. (*FGrH* 688) F16.64, F18-26, and Dein. (*FGrH* 690) F16-17.

⁶⁴ One difference is the number of soldiers present. On this matter, Whatley's comment is worth noting—exact numbers are not so important in reconstructing such battles; it is relative size that contributes most to understanding, and our sources provide that information: Whatley, "Reconstructing Marathon and Other Ancient Battles," 127. On τὸ πλῆθος τῶν βαρβάρων in Plutarch, see Thomas S. Schmidt, *Plutarque et les barbares: la rhétorique d'une image* (Louvain: Peeters, 1999), chap. 4. They also differ in the detail offered on the death of Cyrus: Bassett, "Death of Cyrus," 476; Tuplin, "Ctesias as Military Historian," 471-79 (see also general remarks on pp. 471-72).

⁶⁵ Diod. 14.22.5; Plut. *Art.* 8.3; Xen. *An.* 1.8.4.

⁶⁶ Diod. 14.22.7; Xen. *An.* 1.8.10.

⁶⁷ Diod. 14.23.5-7; Plut. *Art.* 8.3, 10.1; Xen. *An.* 1.8.24-26.

⁶⁸ Diod. 14.23.1; Xen. *An.* 1.8.17-18.

⁶⁹ Diod. 14.23.1; Polyæn. 2.2.3; Xen. *An.* 1.8.19.

⁷⁰ Diod. 14.23.3-4; Plut. *Art.* 9.1; Xen. *An.* 1.8.19.

⁷¹ Diod. 14.24.1; Xen. *An.* 1.10.1. Cf. Frontin. *Str.* 2.3.6.

⁷² Xen. *An.* 1.10.6-7; Wylie, "Cunaxa and Xenophon," 126.

⁷³ Bigwood, "Ancient Accounts," 352-54.

⁷⁴ E.g. Plut. *Art.* 1.2; 13.3-4; 18.4-5.

Because of the straightforward manoeuvring of the armies in this battle, it has generally been accepted at face value. In the 1990s, however, a new approach to royal tactics was conceived. In these revisions, it was suggested that the retreat of the Persians was intentional – the Greeks were lured from the field of battle in order to negate their influence:

It must be that he [Tissaphernes] gave orders to his infantry to flee as soon as the Greek charge had begun, and that the apparent conflict was a feint, to remove the Greeks from the battlefield. Tissaphernes himself and his cavalry broke through the light-armed Greeks and their supporting 'barbarian' cavalry on Cyrus' extreme right, beside the Euphrates (*Anab.* I 10. 7), and so could have encircled the Greeks, as Clearchus feared (*ib.* 8. 13), or have attacked their unshielded right, but he did neither; instead, he rode straight on to seize Cyrus' camp (I 10. 8). If he had forced the Greeks to halt, they might still have intervened in the decisive phase of the battle. [...] It is reasonable to suppose that the chariots were there to attack and disorder the Greek force if it tried to change its position from the right wing: to move diagonally towards the centre of the King's force, as Cyrus wanted (*Anab.* I 8. 12), it would have to offer its right, unshielded side to the chariots.⁷⁵

Here I wish to reopen discussion of tactics in the battle by offering some points of contention in Ehrhardt's proposal: there is reason to doubt the 'intentional retreat' hypothesis. As Wylie's comments were an aside, the following will deal primarily with Ehrhardt's more complete theorizing. I identify three main problems with the thesis: the tactical risks and inconsistencies involved in the plan, the behaviour of the cavalry and chariots, and the equipment of the Egyptians.

First, one may consider the immediate tactical difficulties of the tactic. The move was an enormous gamble on the part of the royal Persians. The plan required nullifying both a contingent of cavalry and the scythed chariots. It also exposed Artaxerxes (in the centre) to attack, as there was no guarantee that the Greeks would pursue their opponents. It is for this reason that one should not consider the plan an improvisation. What would have happened if the Greeks stayed on the field and simply attacked the centre with no opposition? If Tissaphernes enacted the plan without notifying the king, what would Artaxerxes have thought, seeing his left flank retreat? It might prompt a response which would lose the battle. Ehrhardt addresses this question with a hypothesis of the chariots' role; his point will be answered below. In a battle for the control of the empire, it seems unnecessary to make such a move when one already greatly outnumbers the opposition. The horsemen, especially, might have been better employed elsewhere: it seems most unlikely that the king should nullify such valuable forces, rather than deploy them against the far more numerous troops on his right flank under Ariaeus – we should not forget that the Greeks made up only a small portion of

⁷⁵ Ehrhardt, "Two Notes," 2. See also Wylie, "Cunaxa and Xenophon," 129. This hypothesis has been most recently repeated in Robin Waterfield, *Xenophon's Retreat: Greece, Persia, and the End of the Golden Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard, 2006), 18.

Cyrus' total force (approximately thirty per cent).⁷⁶ Nor did the royal cavalry attempt to counter the Paphlagonian cavalry of Cyrus (or had that manoeuvre been precluded by the Paphlagonians' move towards Cyrus' centre?⁷⁷). Nor does Wylie's comment on the value of the left flank preclude the risk of withdrawing it. He states that "the notable lack of resistance of the king's left wing to the Greek attack may have been due to placement of the weakest troops there (e.g. Libyans, Ethiopians, Arabians)."⁷⁸ Thus, the left flank was not vital, or an unexpected loss? I am unsure if this statement derives from Diodorus, or if it is related to standard Greek practice of placing the strongest forces on the right flank. If the former, it should be cautioned that Diodorus' account is less reliable than Xenophon's.⁷⁹ If the latter, some further consideration is necessary. The Greek battle order fundamentally derives from how a hoplite would naturally edge towards his neighbour's shield in an unconscious effort to remain within its protection.⁸⁰ The motion resulted in hoplite armies effectively sliding across one another, causing each army's left flank to be overlapped, which often resulted in the defeat of that wing. Accordingly, the left wing was considered to be naturally weaker and prone to defeat by its opponents on the right wing of the enemy. Conversely, the right wing required stronger forces to resist the motion, drive home a victory, and be comfortable with an exposed, difficult-to-defend flank. Whether *γεppοφόροι* adhered to such a fighting model is a question in itself – they, after all, did not form phalanxes like the Greeks. On the basis of the left flank's natural deficiencies, Wylie's point is reasonable, and perhaps one may argue for an 'intentional sacrifice' of the left flank at Cunaxa (imitated by the Spartans at Nemea?⁸¹). Yet an intentional sacrifice is not the same as an intentional retreat. We must also remember that the second and third bravest divisions were positioned on each side of the left wing.⁸² Just because the right flank is strong does not mean the left flank must be abandoned.

As an aside, which may have bearing if true, Artaxerxes may have been aware of Cyrus' battle line prior to the engagement, in which case he ignored intelligence by formulating a

⁷⁶ Xen. An. 1.7.11; Bigwood, "Ancient Accounts," 341n5; Gabrielli, "Transports et logistique militaire dans l'*Anabase*," 111-14; G. L. Cawkwell, *The Greek Wars: The Failure of Persia* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 248-49.

⁷⁷ Lendle, "Der Bericht Xenophons," 444; Lendle, *Kommentar*, 65.

⁷⁸ Wylie, "Cunaxa and Xenophon," 129.

⁷⁹ Diod. 14.23.4. On Diodorus' worth, see the conclusion of Bigwood, "Ancient Accounts," 355; Westlake, "Diodorus and the Expedition," 254.

⁸⁰ Thuc. 5.71; W. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974-), 2: 192; J. Lazenby, "The Killing Zone," in *Hoplites: The Classical Greek Battle Experience*, ed. Victor Davis Hanson (London: Routledge, 1991), 91-92. On this phenomenon and its practicalities, based on modern experimentation, see K. Randall, "Hoplite Phalanx Mechanics: Investigation of Footwork, Spacing and Shield Coverage," *Journal of Greco-Roman Studies* (서양고전학연구) 44 (2011): 124-27.

⁸¹ Xen. Hell. 4.2.22; J. Lazenby, *The Spartan Army* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1985), 139-43.

⁸² Asclepiodotus 3.1; Hdt. 9.26-27; Hom. Il. 4.299; Pritchett, *Greek State at War*, 2: 192-93. Cf. examples in Frontin. Str. 2.3.1-9, 21-22.

battle line as Wylie imagines. Cyrus' battle line was predetermined, and he marched in that order for one stage, three parasangs.⁸³ Royal scouts may have relayed that information prior to the battle, for a scouting party or vanguard was active at this time.⁸⁴ The activity of scouts is a contentious issue, but there was a marked increase in the practice beginning in the early fourth century.⁸⁵ The examples cited above from the *Anabasis* satisfy my belief that some forward force was employed by both sides in order to monitor the enemy and/or prevent ambush. It may have informed the king of Cyrus' plans: as will be further expounded below, the battle line Artaxerxes created was structured to counter the opposition in a manner which is not consistent with the intentional withdrawal of the left wing.

Setting aside the question of ancient military intelligence, when Artaxerxes forced battle upon his brother, he selected a location and time best suited to his own forces. Artaxerxes did not fight at the trench, where it was expected.⁸⁶ The king marched onto Cyrus' force when it was unprepared, maintaining utmost order (in contradiction to Cyrus' warning of clamour).⁸⁷ While the Euphrates on Cyrus' right prevented an enveloping manoeuvre around the rebel flanks, it also was advantageous to Artaxerxes. The river would limit the natural motion of Cyrus' army towards the right, and would therefore mitigate advantages over the royal left flank gained by the motion. To propose, therefore, that Artaxerxes wasted choice of battle ground by placing his weakest troops against the Cyreans seems inconsistent with the evidence.

A faux-retreat would also necessitate abandonment of standard tactical theory, as Artaxerxes did not attempt any ambush after the Greeks became excited and disorganised by their pursuit. Albeit that the landscape made any ambush difficult to execute, it was the accepted purpose of luring any force away with a planned retreat.⁸⁸ And the Persians may have attempted to employ the tactic properly later: after the battle when Cyrus' camp was raided, a retreat of infantry was performed, which drew the Greeks towards a hill covered in a mass of Persian cavalry. When the Greeks pursued in order, and stopped before the hill, the tactic was abandoned. The Cyreans did not break their ranks as they did in the battle earlier and so were much more difficult to attack.⁸⁹ On the other hand, this hill could be the one to which Artaxerxes withdrew after being wounded, if the royal standard was correctly identified.⁹⁰

⁸³ Xen. *An.* 1.7.1-2, 14.

⁸⁴ Xen. *An.* 1.6.1, 8.1; Diod. 14.22.3.

⁸⁵ Pritchett, *Greek State at War*, 1: 132; Frank Russell, "Finding the Enemy: Military Intelligence," in *The Oxford Handbook of Warfare in the Classical World*, ed. Brian Campbell and Lawrence A. Tritle (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 476.

⁸⁶ Xen. *An.* 1.7.14-17.

⁸⁷ Xen. *An.* 1.8.1-8, 11.

⁸⁸ Hdt. 7.211; Frontin. *Str.* 3.11.

⁸⁹ Xen. *An.* 1.10.11-15.

⁹⁰ On which, see Campbell Bonner, "The Standard of Artaxerxes II," *CR* 61, no. 1 (1947): 9-10; Lendle, *Kommentar*, 89; Günther Martin, "Xenophon *Anabasis* 1.10.12: The Shield That Became a Lance," *Mnemosyne* 60, no. 1 (2007): 112-16.

Thus, he might have had no intention of engaging the Cyreans here.⁹¹ In reality, theory differed greatly from practice, so I do not place great weight on this aspect.

On the cavalry and chariots, there are two facts inconsistent with the hypothesis of Ehrhardt. The first is the positioning of the chariots. Ehrhardt argues that the chariots were there to attack and disorder "the Greek force if it tried to change its position from the right wing [...] once it was certain that the Greeks would not move away from the river, Tissaphernes had to get the chariots out of the way as quickly as possible, and did so."⁹² This seems to be an extraordinary waste of the weapon which Ehrhardt recognises as so potent when employed by Pharnabazus.⁹³ There can be no doubt that restricting the chariots' capacity to charge ignores the purpose of scythed chariots: to break up masses of heavy infantry.⁹⁴ Chariots must be permitted to advance; they are pointless if defensive and reactionary. One must wonder why the chariots were not employed elsewhere if they were to serve no offensive role.

Also inconsistent with the intentional retreat hypothesis is the behaviour of the cavalry. Why would cavalry charge peltasts (less encumbered than a hoplite, often armed with missiles, and thus able to dodge cavalry while posing danger of counter damage⁹⁵) instead of the disorganised hoplites? Ehrhardt proposes that Tissaphernes' cavalry broke through the Greek ranks, but did not attack the Cyreans' rear as they did not wish to keep the Greeks on the battlefield. Yet, if it was an intentional retreat, and the cavalry were aware of the prearranged plan, why send them to take the camp? Why not order the cavalry to wheel about once the Greeks began their pursuit and their ranks loosened? The cavalry could harass the Greek rear as they pursued their opponents, and push the Cyreans farther afield. At the battle of Cunaxa, if there was a plan to lure the Greeks from the field, the cavalry was entirely wasted. The Greeks did get as far as thirty stadia from the king in the end – surely at some point during that long pursuit the cavalry might have been better employed assisting in their dispersal and hindering their re-formation into a highly defensible force. It is of little value to assault the camp when one has already committed the wing to an intentional retreat; the cavalry could have been used as part of a prearranged plan to defeat the Greeks. Cyrus' greatest fear was certainly that his brother would get into the rear of them.⁹⁶ Xenophon reports that the Greek line spread out, and allowed gaps to form whenever chariots approached.⁹⁷ This would have been the ideal opportunity for the cavalry to regroup and attempt to drive away the Greeks. Parenthetically, one may also note that incautious pursuit by one wing could bring about the

⁹¹ Xen. *An.* 1.10.12-13; Plut. *Art.* 13.1.

⁹² Ehrhardt, "Two Notes," 2.

⁹³ Ehrhardt, "Two Notes," 2.

⁹⁴ Nefiodkin, "On the Origin of the Scythed Chariots," 372-73.

⁹⁵ Paul A. Rahe, "The Military Situation in Western Asia on the Eve of Cunaxa," *AJPh* 101, no. 1 (1980): 83.

⁹⁶ Xen. *An.* 1.8.24.

⁹⁷ Xen. *An.* 1.8.18-20.

defeat of that wing's entire army.⁹⁸ Cavalry had especial value once the enemy was displaced from its phalanx,⁹⁹ which Pharnabazus demonstrated in the 390s.¹⁰⁰ On the other hand, if the retreat was not intentional, the cavalry manoeuvring makes sense. Discouraged by the failures of the chariots and their infantry support, they fled the field. Since it was apparently intentional, however, it is confusing. There would now be two distractions – soldiers fleeing in front and the cavalry behind. The Cyreans could not have engaged both, nor was either manoeuvre in itself valuable for defeating Cyrus' army. The behaviour is not consistent with a prearranged plan.¹⁰¹

The equipment of the "Egyptian" hoplites only strengthens this doubt. Equipped as they were, the hoplites were a natural counterweight to Greek infantry. A key point of Ehrhardt was that Tissaphernes "knew that the King had no infantry which could withstand hoplites."¹⁰² Recent study has shown that the Persian army was not so poorly matched against the Greek hoplite as the Greek sources might have us think.¹⁰³ Regardless, the above discussion of the "Egyptians" demonstrates that they held heavier equipment than other Achaemenid forces at the battle. Their equipment was closer to the traditional Greek armature than any other attested force at Cunaxa. If the retreat was intentional, why would Artaxerxes have placed such troops here, and expected them to be capable of withdrawing? Surely they could have been utilised at another point in the line, and not wasted. If the retreat was planned, the most viable option was to utilise the *γεppοφόροι*, who might have been capable of retreating in some semblance of order, or flee and regroup more easily without tiring, given their lighter equipment (wicker vs. wood). The "Egyptian" hoplites at Cunaxa were not expected to flee.

Rather, the most straightforward scenario is the most likely. Royal strengths were placed against the greatest strength of Cyrus. The scythed chariots were present to break up the Greek phalanx and permit a cavalry assault. Xenophon explicitly identifies the "Egyptians" by way of comparison with the standard Persian troops. The latter are *γεppοφόροι*, equipped with wicker shields. By contrast, the former are equipped with wooden (that is, material stronger than wicker) shields, reaching down to their feet. The size and weight of the hoplites' outfitting gives a firm indication of their purpose in the battle. I argue that the hoplites were present to hold fast against the Greeks. They would allow the charioteers and cavalry men to

⁹⁸ See Pritchett, *Greek State at War*, 2: 201, with examples.

⁹⁹ Rahe, "Military Situation," 86-87.

¹⁰⁰ *Xen. Hell.* 4.1.17-19. See also Polyae. 7.14.3.

¹⁰¹ One foreseeable counterargument may be that the royal cavalry sought to distract the Paphlagonian cavalry, rather than the Cyreans. I believe this again ignores the value of the cavalry in harassing the hoplites. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that the Paphlagonians would be greatly concerned by the camp if they could win the battle itself. Regardless, given the disappearance of the Paphlagonians, it is entirely speculative to discuss their behaviour in depth.

¹⁰² Ehrhardt, "Two Notes," 2. See also Rahe, "Military Situation," 80-83; Wylie, "Cunaxa and Xenophon," 119.

¹⁰³ Konijnendijk, "Persian Military Might," 7-10; cf. Christopher Matthew, "Towards the Hot Gates: The Events Leading to the Battle of Thermopylae," in *Beyond the Gates of Fire*, ed. Christopher Matthew and Matthew Trundle (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2013), 55-56.

break up and disperse the Greek phalanx, while the bowmen rained arrows upon the enemy. Unfortunately (for the royal army), this plan was not at all effective. The bowmen apparently fled before the Cyreans came within bowshot (after the Greeks advanced at a rapid rate¹⁰⁴); the chariots failed to adequately break up the Greeks; the cavalry had no impact; the hoplites' courage failed and they were easily routed.

On the left flank of the royal army, then, the Greeks broke ranks and pursued their foes. Meanwhile, the Persian cavalry continued through Cyrus' line and on to his camp. The battle continued with both armies missing a flank. This played into Artaxerxes' hands. It would be unreasonable to suggest that drawing off the Greeks was an intentional ploy, but it worked fantastically well. The greatest threat to the royal army was now removed; the Greeks were a trump card, a professional force Artaxerxes could not easily combat. With the Greeks out of the equation, Cyrus was greatly outnumbered, easily outmanoeuvred, and soon defeated. Although it is fair to acknowledge that if Clearchus was responsible for the defeat, Parysatis would hardly have continued affection for him, it is clear that the Greeks made a mistake.¹⁰⁵ Their haphazard chase was excessive. The pursuit should have been restricted enough to allow for a return to the battle once their opposition was seen from the field, which would have allowed them to have at least partially fulfilled Cyrus' request to attack the centre.¹⁰⁶ Cyrus, seeing the Greeks advancing, charged the centre of the king's line, where he was killed. Tissaphernes was then rewarded for his long-standing loyalty to Artaxerxes and the warning he provided to the king of the impending revolt.

Summary

The analysis of the "Egyptian" soldiers at Cunaxa reveals several points of interest. First, Xenophon, when discussing shields, further extends his reputation for military expertise through his employment of a technical vocabulary specific to type and material. He isolated the Egyptians as the only regular non-Greek users of the ἀσπίς. Xenophon firmly believed that he saw Egyptians. Secondly, Egyptian evidence contradicts Xenophon's distinctions. Egyptians may have used such large shields in the past, but the evidence closest to the fifth century shows that Egyptians at this time preferred round shields, similar to the typical Greek design. Thirdly, the equipment may help undermine reconstructions of the tactics employed in the battle. As it stands, there are persistent questions regarding the 'intentional retreat' hypothesis. On the other hand, Xenophon and Diodorus present such a confused reckoning of the battle that no interpretation can be entirely satisfactory: one can only pose questions and discuss possibilities. On the basis of the above observations, I argue that we should avoid

¹⁰⁴ Xen. An. 1.8.17-18.

¹⁰⁵ Plut. Art. 18.3; Ctes. (FGrH 688) F27.69. Wylie, "Cunaxa and Xenophon," 125n14.

¹⁰⁶ Xen. An. 1.8.12.

airbrushing the actions of the royal army's left flank and recognise its failure, while the right flank performed admirably.¹⁰⁷

JOHN SHANNAHAN
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

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