

The Royal Hypaspists in Battle: Macedonian *hamippoi*

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Diodorus (17.61.3), in his account of the battle of Gaugamela remarks that Hephaestion son of Amyntor, Alexander's closest personal friend, was wounded while "commanding the *somatophylakes* (τῶν σωματοφυλάκων ἡγούμενος)." This remark has generated some debate concerning both Hephaestion's military career and the nature of the unit he commanded. Now it has long been recognized that the term *somatophylakes* ("bodyguards") could be used to designate both the influential members of Alexander's personal security staff, often referred to as the Seven or the Bodyguard, and the members of Alexander's military guard, the so-called Royal Hypaspists or *hypaspistai basilikoi*; furthermore, even the *paides basilikoi* or *pueri regii* were engaged in *somatophylakia*.¹ It is also clear that the Seven never fought as a military unit,² although they did fight in the immediate vicinity of the King in battle. Usually, that meant that they were cavalymen,³ but there are occasions when they fought on foot.⁴ It is unlikely, however, that this small group required a leader (except perhaps Alexander himself) and nowhere in the Alexander historians do we hear of one

¹ For full discussion see W. Heckel, "Somatophylakia. A Macedonian *cursus honorum*?" *Phoenix* 40 (1986) 279-94 and *The Marshals of Alexander's Empire* (London, 1992), 244-53; cf. also the brief comments of A.B. Bosworth, *A Historical Commentary on Arrian's History of Alexander, I-III* (Oxford, 1980), 72. H. Berve, *Das Alexanderreich auf prosopographischer Grundlage*, vol. 1 (Munich, 1926), 123, notes that "Die Gleichsetzung von Leibhypaspisten und Pagen ist also unbedingt falsch." But he fails to reach what I regard as the logical conclusion, namely that, although they are not the same unit, his *Leibhypaspisten* are merely the Pages at a later stage of their careers. This will account for the similarities in function and terminology. Hammond has discussed the Pages and Bodyguards on three different occasions: "Royal Pages, Personal Pages, and Boys Trained in the Macedonian Manner during the period of the Temenid Monarchy," *Historia* 39 (1990), 261-90; "The Various Guards of Philip II and Alexander III," *Historia* 40 (1991), 396-418; and in *The Macedonian State. Origins, Institutions and History* (Oxford, 1989). The identity of the *hypaspistai basilikoi* (= *somatophylakes basilikoi*) remains a matter of dispute. In my opinion, the unit was formed out of ex-Pages and was the second stage of the Macedonian aristocrat's military education, but N. Sekunda, *Alexander the Great: His armies and campaigns, 334-323 BC* (Oxford: Osprey, 1998), 42, argues that the *agema* of the hypaspists was "the vanguard *lochos*" of the hypaspists and "known as 'The Royal (*basilikoi*) Hypaspists', and ... composed of men selected out of the whole army for their height." W.W. Tarn, *Alexander the Great*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1948), 153, believed that all hypaspists were termed "royal," that is, "the King's own" troops. I believe that the correct understanding of the unit (although I am not as certain as I once was that the *agema* and the Royal Hypaspists are one and the same) must be based on the identity of its known members; for the regular hypaspists were neither regional recruits nor members of the noble class.

² Cf. J. Reames, "The Cult of Hephaestion," in P. Cartledge and F. Greenland (eds.), *Responses to Oliver Stone's Alexander: film, history, and cultural studies* (Madison, WI, 2010), 183-216, at 190.

³ Not, however, as members of the Companion cavalry or more specifically of the *ile basilike*.

⁴ I do not understand the comments of John Keegan, *The Mask of Command* (London, 1999), 27, describing the battle of Issus: "Placing himself (unusually, dismounted), at the head of his guard infantry he [sc. Alexander] led them across the streambed into the enemy ranks, carefully choosing to attack the Persian rather than Greek mercenary infantry." See now Stephen English, *The Field Campaigns of Alexander the Great* (Barnsley, 2011) 98.

member of the Bodyguard having higher status than the others. Hence, if Hephaestion did, in fact, command the *somatophylakes*, it is likely that this unit was the Royal Hypaspists. But it is not my intention to reiterate the arguments I made some twenty-five years ago. Rather, I wish to comment briefly on how and where the Royal Hypaspists fought in Alexander's major battles.

This brief note has its origins in a remark by Chugg, who challenges my view of Hephaestion as leader of the Royal Hypaspists at Gaugamela. "Heckel's suggestion," he says, "that command of the bodyguards meant that Hephaestion led the agema of the hypaspists is curious, since, firstly, the hypaspists were an elite infantry corps, whilst Arrian speaks specifically of a cavalry engagement."⁵ I begin with Chugg's comments because they succinctly state what I regard as one of the common misconceptions about the Royal Hypaspists and about the way in which the leaders of infantry units fought. Similarly, Jeanne Reames, in her excellent discussion of Hephaestion's career,⁶ connects the commander's role as a mounted officer with the nature of his troops: "So Heckel's theory that the Pages graduated into the Hypaspists may not have been absolutely correct; some may have gone into the Companion *agēma* instead, or they may have moved back and forth, depending" (Reames 2010: 190).⁷ The common misconception that Macedonian officers fought in the same style as the men they commanded has been effectively disproved by Graham Wrightson, who demonstrates that the phalanx commanders of the *pezhetairoi/asthetairoi* led their troops on horseback.⁸ That will have applied also to Nikanor son of Parmenion and his successors, who commanded the regular hypaspists, and it will also have been the case with the Royal Hypaspists, since their role in battle was to fight amongst the horsemen of the Companions, and particularly in the vicinity of the King, as *hamippoi*.

Our Greek sources say relatively little about *hamippoi*, and it is clear that for the Macedonians the term defines how they fought—interspersed among the cavalrymen—and is not a unit name. When the Royal Hypaspists protected the King on horseback, they did so as *hamippoi*. When he dismounted, they became protecting infantrymen and were presumably armed as hoplites. It was in this manner that Pausanias sought to win the admiration of Philip II in a battle with the Illyrians in 337/6 (Diod. 16.93.6: πρὸ τοῦ βασιλέως

⁵ Andrew Chugg, *Alexander's Lovers* (2006), 94.

⁶ For another recent, thorough, and judicious treatment of Hephaestion see Sabine Müller, "In Abhängigkeit von Alexander: Hephaestion bei den Alexanderhistoriographen," *Gymnasium* 118 (2011), 429-56.

⁷ Reames, "Cult of Hephaestion," 190 adds that "on the Alexander Sarcophagus (Istanbul Museum), if the central rider in the battle scene is Hephaestion—as has been proposed—then he may have fought on *horseback* at Issus." The rider in question may indeed be Hephaestion, but the battle in question appears to be Gaugamela (W. Heckel, "Mazaeus, Callisthenes and the Alexander Sarcophagus," *Historia* 55 [2006] 385-96).

⁸ Graham Wrightson, "The Nature of Command in the Macedonian Sarissa Phalanx," *The Ancient History Bulletin* 24 (2010), 71-92.

στὰς);⁹ and in a similar fashion, Peucestas defended Alexander at the town of the Mallians and won exceptional rewards.¹⁰ As a group the *hypaspistai basilikoi* are described as *nobiles iuvenes comitari eum* [sc. *Alexandrum*] *soliti* (Curt. 8.2.35), in a passage that deals with young men who fight on foot and are to be distinguished from Pages who accompanied the king on horseback (though not normally in battle).

Our best description of *hamippoi* (in this case Germans) comes from Caesar (*BG* 1.48.5-7):

The manner of fighting in which the Germans trained themselves was as follows. There were 6,000 cavalymen, and there were also the same number of foot soldiers. These foot soldiers, who were very fast on their feet and very courageous, the cavalymen had individually selected from the entire fighting force to provide themselves with protection, and they would be accompanied by them when they were in battle. They would fall back to them when leaving the field; the foot soldiers would swiftly assemble if there was any emergency; and they would gather around any horseman who had fallen from his mount with a serious wound. If advancing some distance or retreating swiftly was necessary, such was the speed that these men could muster, thanks to their training, that they could hoist themselves up with the horses' manes and in this way keep up with them.¹¹

Hamippoi were used by Epameinondas and the Boeotians during their brief period of hegemony, and had apparently been a feature of Boeotian warfare a half-century earlier. Thucydides says that the Boeotians had five hundred cavalry and an equal number of *hamippoi* at Mantinea in 418 (Thuc. 5.57.2).¹² Xenophon notes that cavalry without infantry are weaker than cavalry with *hamippoi* (*Hipparchicus* 5.13) and that horsemen can conceal the presence of infantry, thus creating surprise (8.19). Robert Gaebel mentions the Boeotian practice but ends his discussion with the curious remark that "they [sc. *hamippoi*] do not seem to have played much part in Greek warfare and are noticeably absent from the

⁹ For this Pausanias, not to be confused with the assassin, see W. Heckel, *Who's Who in the Age of Alexander the Great. Prosopography of Alexander's Empire* [henceforth *WW*] (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 193 [no. 2].

¹⁰ Peucestas' case is different, of course, since it occurred after Alexander and his defenders had entered the Mallian town on ladders. He was not, however, a member of the regular hypaspists (but see Heckel, *Marshals* 264, against R.D. Milns, "A Note on Diodorus and Macedonian Military Terminology in Book XVII." *Historia* 31 [1982], 123-6, at 123), since these were drawn from the non-noble class and Peucestas' brother Amyntas was later to be appointed a *somatophylax* of Philip III Arrhidaeus (Arr. *Succ.* 1.38); see Heckel, *WW* 26 [no. 11] and 203-5 [no. 2] for Amyntas and Peucestas.

¹¹ J.C. Yardley tr. *Genus hoc erat pugnae, quo se Germani exercuerant. Equitum milia erant sex, totidem numero pedites velocissimi ac fortissimi, quos ex omni copia singuli singulos suae salutis causa delegerant; cum his in poeliis versabantur. Ad eos se equites recipiebant; hi, si quid erat durius, concurrebant; si qui gaviore vulnere accepto equo deciderat, circumstebant; si quo erat longius prodeundum aut celerius recipiendum, tanta erat horum exercitatione celeritas ut iubis equorum sublevati cursum adaequarent.*

¹² R.J. Buck, *A History of Boeotia* (Edmonton, 1979), 159, suggests that they were "mounted infantry" (see below, n.18 for the *dimachae*). J. Buckler, *The Theban Hegemony, 371-362 BC* (Cambridge, MA, 1980), 149, 217, sees them as light-armed infantry, those too poor to afford hoplite equipment.

Macedonian armies" (140; emphasis added).¹³ In fact, the Alexander Mosaic clearly shows an infantryman (apparently running) alongside the king's horse,¹⁴ and this must surely be a member of the king's guard, that is, a Royal Hypaspist acting as *hamippos*.¹⁵

The role of the *hypaspistes basilikos* as *hamippos* is clear from Curtius' description of the death of Lysimachus' brother, Philip, in Sogdiana:

After this Alexander left the phalanx behind and advanced with the cavalry to suppress the rebels. [34] At first the men somehow coped with the road, which was steep and obstructed with rocks, but soon the horses suffered exhaustion as well as worn hooves. Most could not keep up, and the line became progressively thinner as the excessive effort crushed their sense of shame, as often happens. [35] But the king, frequently changing horses, pressed the retreating enemy relentlessly. The young noblemen who formed his usual retinue¹⁶ had given up the chase, all except Philip, the brother of Lysimachus, who was in the early stages of manhood and, as was readily apparent, was a person of rare qualities. [36] Incredibly, Philip kept up with the king on foot although Alexander rode for 500 stades. Lysimachus made him frequent offers of his horse, but Philip could not be induced to leave the king, even though he was wearing a cuirass and carrying weapons. [37] On reaching a wood in which the barbarians had hidden, this same young man put up a remarkable fight and gave protection to his king when engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the enemy [38] but, after the barbarians scattered in flight and left the forest, that vital spark which had kept him going in the heat of the fight deserted him. Sweat poured suddenly from all his limbs and he leaned against the nearest tree, [39] but even that failed to hold him up; the king took him in his arms, where he collapsed and died.¹⁷

¹³ Robert E. Gaebel, *Cavalry Operations in the Ancient Greek World* (Norman, OK, 2002). 139-40. N. Sekunda, "Military Forces," in P. Sabin, H. van Wees and M. Whitby (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 2007), 329, mentions only the Agrianes as *hamippoi*. For Thracian *hamippoi* in the time of Philip II see Hammond, *Macedonian State* 111-12. I am inclined to concur with the view of Patrick Wheatley, who in private correspondence tells me that the Agrianes are unlikely to be *hamippoi*, but rather a "special-ops" unit, much like the Gurkhas during the Second World War.

¹⁴ Only the man's face is visible beside Alexander's horse, but it is highly likely that he is running and positioned on the far side of Alexander's horse. In some cases, the *hamippos* grasped the horse's tail in order to keep pace with the rider (cf. the foot soldier holding a modern cavalryman's stirrup strap [not available to the ancient *hamippos*], pictured at the end of this article); see, e.g., Godfrey Hutchinson, *Xenophon and the Art of Command* (London, 2000), 102. For attempts to reconstruct the mosaic see the webpage of Dr Werner Kruck: http://alexandermosaik.de/en/reconstruction_of_the_mosaic.html.

¹⁵ Whether the infantrymen, depicted as fighting amongst the cavalry on the Alexander Sarcophagus from Sidon, are meant to be *hamippoi* or regular hypaspists is unclear. Regular and Royal Hypaspists must have been armed in the same fashion, though Hammond (*Macedonian State* 151) mistakenly asserts that they "were part of the phalanx of pikemen in a set battle ... and they were obviously armed with the pike in that situation"; Edward Anson, "The Asthetairoi: Macedonia's Hoplitai," in Elizabeth Carney and Daniel Ogden (eds.), *Philip II and Alexander the Great: Father and Son, Lives and Afterlives* (Oxford, 2010), 81-90, demonstrates that even the *asthetairoi*, who were certainly part of the phalanx, generally fought without the *sarissa*.

¹⁶ *Nobiles iuvenes comitari eum soliti*. Later Philip is described as *tum primum adultus*. See Heckel, *Marshals* 298, *WW* 213 [no. 7].

¹⁷ Curt. 8.2.33-39, translated by J.C. Yardley (*Quintus Curtius Rufus, The History of Alexander*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1984). A similar story is told of Lysimachus himself by Justin 15.3.11-14: "in India, when the king was in pursuit of some enemy stragglers and became separated from his troop of

This account leaves little doubt that Philip was one of Alexander's *hypaspistai basilikoi* and that his role was to accompany the king, on foot and in full armor (*cum lorica indutus arma gestaret*), in order to protect him when battle came (*regemque comminus cum hoste dimicantem protexit*). In the major battles, these young men must have been interspersed amongst the *ile basilike*, and it was the role of Cleitus to command the horsemen and of Hephaestion (at least, at Gaugamela) to direct the *hamippoi*. In every situation, the *hypaspistes basilikos* had the obligation to defend the king and the opportunity of proving his worth with a view to military promotion.

One might add one other disregarded notice of royal hypaspists serving as *hamippoi*. In the Illyrian campaign of 335, Alexander “ordered his Bodyguards and the Companions with him (τοῖς σωματοφύλαξι καὶ τοῖς ἀμφ’ αὐτὸν ἑταίροις) to take up shields, mount their horses, and ride to the hill. If when they got there they encountered resistance from the enemy occupying the place, half of them should dismount and fight on foot in between their mounted colleagues.”¹⁸ The Royal Hypaspists had been trained in horsemanship during their years as *paides basilikoi* (Arr. 4.13.1); at this stage of their careers they were expected to fight as infantrymen, very often as *hamippoi*.

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attendants because his horse was so fast, it was Lysimachus alone who accompanied him across huge sand-dunes. Before this Lysimachus' brother Philip had volunteered to perform the same service, but he had died in the king's arms. Now, however, as Alexander dismounted, he accidentally wounded Lysimachus on the forehead with the tip of his spear, so seriously that the only way of staunching the flow of blood was by the king taking his diadem from his own head and putting it on Lysimachus' in order to close up the wound. This was the first omen that royal authority was to come to Lysimachus" (see J.C. Yardley, Pat Wheatley and Waldemar Heckel, *Justin, The Epitome of Pompeius Trogus*, vol. 2 [Oxford, 2011], 38-9, with 261-2). The story is clearly a reworking of the version preserved in Curtius, though from a common source, in order to provide an omen of Lysimachus' future greatness. The version presented by Trogus/Justin is clumsy and implausible. See also H.S. Lund, *Lysimachus. A Study in Hellenistic Kingship* (London, 1992), 3.

¹⁸ Thus the excellent new translation of Martin Hammond in *Arrian, Alexander the Great. The Anabasis and the Indica* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2013), with Introduction and Notes by J.E. Atkinson. Atkinson's note (p. 279) takes the "Bodyguard and ... Companions" to refer to "the elite group of seven Bodyguards and men of the next tier down in the hierarchy." If by "the next tier" he means the *hypaspistai basilikoi*, I would agree with the second half of his interpretation. P.A. Brunt, *Arrian* (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, Heinemann, 1976), 27 n.1 identifies these *somatophylakes* as hypaspists. Bosworth 1980: 72 believes that in this battle "the troops with him [Alexander] were few and entirely cavalry" and that the *somatophylakes* named here are the Seven. Perhaps this is an early example of Alexander's use of *dimachae*, mounted infantrymen who rode to battle but dismounted before fighting (Curt. 5.13.8; Heckel, *Marshals* 300 n.1).



Twentieth century *hamippos*. The “Stirrup Charge” of Black Watch with Scots Greys at St. Quentin: *War Illustrated* (19 September, 1914).¹⁹

¹⁹ I thank my friend, Larry Tritle, for bringing this picture to my attention. I am also grateful to Ed Anson, John Vanderspoel, and Pat Wheatley for reading this paper and offering their criticisms. Professor Anson notes that Diodorus uses the term *somatophylakes* to mean different things in the course of his history, but the only other use of the term in Book 17 (93.3) is ambiguous: it could refer to the Royal Hypaspists or to the Seven.
