THE PERSIAN CAVALRY AT MARATHON

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THE attempt to understand the battle of Marathon is full of pitfalls. One that has received little attention has been the theoretical presupposition that cavalry always has an enormous advantage over infantry. The truth is that their relative strengths changed throughout antiquity. Cavalry had been less formidable before the Macedonian introduction of units of lancers that could charge home against almost any formation of infantry.[1] The battle of Adrianople, fought in A.D. 378, finally established the complete superiority of cavalry until the fourteenth century.[2] Six hundred years after Adrianople, some notes on the battle of Marathon were set down in a lexicon by a Byzantine scholar. To a Byzantine, the story to be found in Herodotus, claiming that unsupported and out-numbered infantry had charged out into an open plain, engaged, and defeated its enemy, will have seemed possible only if the enemy cavalry were absent. Therefore, to find in this lexicon, which we now call *The Suda*, an attempt to remove the Persian cavalry from the scene is not sur-prising.

χωρὶς ἱππεῖς, says the note, Δάτιδος ἐμβαλόντος εἰς τὴν ᾿Αττικὴν τοὺς ᾿Ιωνάς φασιν, ἀναχωρήσαντος αὐτοῦ, ἀνελθόντας ἐπὶ τὰ δένδρα σημαίνειν τοῖς ᾿Αθηναίοις, ὡς εἶεν χωρὶς οἱ ἱππεῖς. καὶ Μιλτιάδην συνιέντα τὴν ἀποχώρησιν αὐτῶν συμβαλεῖν οὕτως καὶ νικῆσαι. ὅθεν καὶ τὴν παροιμίαν λεχθῆναι ἐπὶ τῶν τάξιν διαλυόντων.[3] R. W. Macan, in his excellent analysis of the literary sources, comments: "It is certainly remarkable that with the authority which is chronologi-cally the end of the *catena*, one new grain of gold is added to the circle of tradition."[4] But is it really a "grain of gold" and not just an amusing

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[1]M. M. Markle III, "The Macedonian Sarissa, Spear, and Related Armor," *AJA* 81 (1977) 323–329. It will be convenient to refer to two discussions of Marathon by abbrevi-ation alone: Macan = R. W. Macan, *Herodotus* 1 (London and New York 1895) 149–248; Hammond = N. G. L. Hammond, "The Campaign and Battle of Marathon," *JHS* 88 (1968) 13–57.

[2]Ferdinand Lot, *The End of the Ancient World and the Beginnings of the Middle Ages*, tr. P. Leon and M. Leon (London 1931) 195.

[3]*Suidae Lexicon* 4, ed. A. Adler (Stuttgart 1935) s. χωρὶς ἱππεῖς. A Byzantine might also have found disturbing the stand of the Spartans and Tegeans against the cavalry at Plataea. The "problem" for him would have been mitigated by the following con-siderations: there were some 35,000 light-armed troops (peltasts?, cf. Hdt. 9.28.2, 9.29.2) present with the Spartans; the Spartans were on hilly terrain (9.56.2); they were attacked by the Persian infantry rather than *vice versa* as at Marathon (9.59).

[4]Macan 230; W. K. Pritchett, *Marathon* (Berkeley 1960) 170, *Studies in Ancient Greek Topography* 2 (*Battlefields*) (Berkeley 1969) 8–9, where he summarizes his defence of *The Suda*: "Such a story has the advantage of accounting not only for the absence

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demonstration of Byzantine historical ineptitude? Datis invaded, it informs us, and then he withdrew, now the Ionians (presumably brought by Datis to Marathon) having been conveniently left behind by Datis, either climb up the trees or go up to the trees (presumably trees among which the Athenians are encamped) and signal or signify not that Datis had gone, but that the cavalry are separate. Fortunately, Miltiades was good at riddles and he understands this to mean that "they have gone" τὴν ἀποχώρησιν αὐτῶν. Accordingly he strikes, but whom does he attack, since the same Datis who invaded Attica in line one has withdrawn, in line two, leaving on the plain some Ionians? Surely it was not they whom Miltiades attacked. Other criticisms might be offered, but the main point is simple enough: χωρὶς ἱππεῖς, in early classical Greek means "the cavalry are apart," not "the cavalry has departed." It is not until the time of Polybius that χωρίζω, in the passive, can mean the same as ἀποχωρέω, and that a χωρισμός can be a departure, an ἀποχωρισμός. To *The Suda* χωρὶς ἱππεῖς can mean "the cavalry are away" and so the expression can become a means of getting the cavalry off the plain of Marathon. Herodotus does use the expression χωρίς of Persian cavalry, but only to describe how they were drawn up in relation to the line of infantry at the battle of Plataea. They are close to it, but separate, χωρίς, i.e., not mixed in with the infantry (Hdt. 9.32.2). At Marathon, the relationship of the cavalry to the infantry line in the Persian battle array would have been known to Miltiades before the engagement. It would have been a matter of simple observation. So it is singularly pointless to have a group of Ionians signalling this relatively useless bit of information to the Athenians, who had been aware of it for about a week before the Ionians, in the absence of Datis, signified it to them.

Against *The Suda*'s garbled account, apparently implying that the cavalry was not present in the action at Marathon, we should set the clear assumption by Nepos that it was there (*Miltiades* 5). In his version, the Athenians do not charge far out into the plain, where 10,000 Persian cavalry might have ridden them down and pelted them with missiles. Instead they are attacked as they hide among trees or behind a small wooden breastwork, much as Roman legionaries might have done under these conditions.[5] The possible invention of the breastwork, and the clear

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of cavalry but of explaining how it was that the Persian fleet arrived off Phaleron after the annihilation of a major part of their army. It might also help to account for the fact that the Persians got away with the loss of only seven ships."

[5] In the MSS, the Athenian position is described in the following terms: *namque arbores multis locis erant rarae*. Hammond (38) follows Monginot's emendation of the awkward *rarae* to *stratae*. Hence the breastwork. It is worth wondering whence came Nepos' circumstantial comment about the trees (or breastwork), a significant feature of the Greeks' encamped position that is paralleled in *The Suda*. Trees are not mentioned by

implication that the Persians, not the Athenians, crossed the plain to attack, flatly contradicting or adding to Herodotus' story, show an embarrassment with the presence of the Persian cavalry. In view of this embarrassment, and in view of the fact that the earliest, most famous, and greatest authority that Nepos might have used, Herodotus, makes no obvious mention of the Persian cavalry in the fighting, his assumption that they were nevertheless there, and in force, is most striking. It would be a good idea to try and find out what may have influenced him to eliminate the well-attested charge of the Athenians (Hdt. 6.112; Justin 2.9) while maintaining the presence of the cavalry. There is no evidence for a literary tradition that emphasized the Persian cavalry apart from Nepos. However, there was a non-literary source that most upper-class Romans of Nepos' day would have seen in Athens: the famous painting of the battle in the Stoa Poikile. Was cavalry in evidence in that painting?

For some years now, art historians have identified the Roman Brescia sarcophagus as a copy of the right extremity of the depiction of Marathon in the Poikile.[6] The relief shows Greeks fighting against Persians, who have a row of beached ships at their backs. A Persian rider is shown being killed and unhorsed. He does not appear to be distinguished as a mounted officer, so we must conclude that, for the purposes of the relief, he represents the presence of a number of cavalry.

Recent articles by Elizabeth Pemberton and Evelyn Harrison on the friezes of the Nike temple have established the battle of Marathon as the best candidate for the subject of the South frieze.[7] Pemberton argues that the identification of the temple's South frieze with Marathon makes for a sensible and coherent identification of the other sides. Further, according to Harrison, no one has yet advanced a more compelling identification. Assuming that it is a historical event depicted, she observes that it is treated with a distinctly heroic touch. That suits admirably what we know of Athenian attitudes to Marathon; and in detail, the Athenians are depicted fighting without the support of archers or cavalry, against

Herodotus and are not otherwise known in the ancient literature. However, it is alto-gether likely that trees grew around the Herakleion where the Greeks were encamped. They are, therefore, a possible feature of the left extremity of the painting in the *Stoa Poikile*. In that position, they would balance the ships on the extreme right.

[6]E. Vanderpool, "A Monument to the Battle of Marathon," *Hesperia* 35 (1966) 105. Reference to Vanderpool's plate 35 reveals Greeks and Persians fighting near some beached ships. One Persian is being unhorsed. His body, all but the head, is completely concealed by the horse and a Greek shield. I take this as a deliberate choice by the artist to depict the general presence of horses with riders, and not a few officers mounted. It is the horse that is emphasized, not the rider.

[7]E. G. Pemberton, "The East and West Friezes of the Temple of Athena Nike," *AJA* 76 (1972) 303–310; E. B. Harrison, "The South Frieze of the Nike Temple and the Marathon Painting in the Painted Stoa," *AJA* 76 (1972) 353–378.

Persians, who have archers on foot, and cavalry. Harrison also shows some attractive reasons for identifying this frieze as possibly a copy of, or at least inspired by the central portion (that is the turning point of the battle) in the picture of Marathon in the Painted Stoa. When we add to these attractive identifications the famous comments of Pausanias, to the effect that the field at Marathon was haunted by battle sounds complete with ghostly neighings of horses,[8] we might find irresistible the conclusion that there were very strong local Athenian traditions going well back into the fifth century connecting Persian cavalry with the engagement at Marathon. However, the objections of historians to the presence of the cavalry (note 9, below) would still remain (not to mention the silence of Herodotus).

When the Athenian army arrived at Marathon, Herodotus says that Miltiades persuaded Callimachus and four generals that the Athenians should offer battle ($\sigma\upsilon\mu\beta\alpha\lambda\epsilon\hat{\iota}\nu$, 6.109). How was it that Miltiades was able to convince his fellow generals that they should fight, overriding their inevitable objections that the Persians were too strong and had a formidable cavalry?[9] The argument has been made that the Athenians did not attack for about six days because they were intimidated by the Persian cavalry.[10] Did Miltiades have the clairvoyance to know that after

[8]Pausanias 1.32.4. The locals could also point out the stone mangers of Artaphernes, and marks of his tent on the rocks (1.32.7).

[9]If, indeed, the cavalry did seem so formidable to them. In Herodotus, 6.109, the reason put into the mouth of the reluctant generals for their uncertainty is simply the great numbers of the Persians. Every possible way of getting rid of the Persian cavalry has been imagined, introduced and re-introduced into the circus of speculation that characterizes Marathonian scholarship. The idea that the cavalry never even came to Marathon was refuted by Macan, 163, only to be re-introduced with an exquisite new argument by H. C. Avery, "Herodotus VI 112.2," *TAPA* 103 (1972) 15–22. J. B. Bury, "The Battle of Marathon," *CR* 10 (1896) 95–98, attacks Adolph Holm, *The Fifth Century B.C.* 2 (London and New York 1896) for accepting Herodotus' narrative uncritically. He then proceeds to offer a highly complex and speculative reconstruction that accepts little more of Herodotus' narrative than the fact of the shield signal—though Herodotus times it wrongly. So there begins a long period in which scholarship *rejects* Herodotus rather too uncritically. Major representative discussions include: J. A. R. Munro, "Some Observations on the Persian Wars," *JHS* 19 (1899) 185–197; F. Maurice, "The Campaign of Marathon," *JHS* 52 (1932) 13–24; G. B. Grundy, *The Great Persian War* (London 1901) 163–194; A. W. Gomme, "Herodotus and Marathon," *Phoenix* 6 (1952) 77–83. Detailed criticism of these and other essays that seek ways of removing the cavalry from the scene would fill a volume. Suffice it to observe that, in general, theories that oblige us to make such substantial alterations and additions to Herodotus' narrative are in some fundamental way at odds with it.

[10]As early as 1851, Sir Edward Creasy had written (*The Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World* [London and New York 1911, first published 1851] 11), "It is, therefore, little to be wondered at that five of the ten Athenian generals shrank from the prospect of fighting an enemy so superior in numbers, and so formidable in military renown. . . . They deemed it mere foolhardiness to descend into the plain to be trampled by the Asiatic

about six days, suddenly, just before the Spartans were due to arrive, the Persians would whisk their cavalry off the plain and so make it possible for the Athenians to venture out? If Miltiades could not have known that the cavalry would eventually depart, we must conclude that he had a plan that was designed to deal with the Persian cavalry, a plan based upon the assumption that the Persian cavalry would be there when the day came to fight. For even if Miltiades could foresee that the cavalry would withdraw, it is well-nigh unthinkable that he will have convinced his fellow generals of it.[11]

The possibility that the Athenians had a carefully prepared plan in mind when they committed themselves to battle becomes a virtual certainty if we consider the actions of the hoplites, when they had finally closed with the enemy.

It might be possible to believe that the idea of giving the Athenian hoplite line denser wings and a thinner centre could have occurred to Miltiades suddenly on the spur of the moment in the morning before the battle when the Athenians had unexpectedly discovered that their opportunity had arrived and the Persian cavalry had gone. But the other actions of the Athenian hoplites are not so easy to understand in this light. We are told by Herodotus that when the Greek and Persian lines had clashed, the Greeks were victorious on the wings, but the Persians broke through the centre. Exactly what takes place next is a little difficult to understand, for Herodotus does not make it sound like the normal "rolling up" of an enemy line by victorious wings, but what is clear is this: that the two victorious wings simultaneously, although they were quite possibly out of communication with each other and perhaps could not even see each other, because they were separated by a victorious enemy centre, halted their advance, though they were victorious, checked

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horse...." Munro writes [above, note 9] 189) "So long as the whole Persian army remained at Marathon the Athenians were not likely either to attack or make off." For the timing: A. R. Burn, *Persia and the Greeks* (London 1962) 257.

[11]It has been doubted that Miltiades' speech was given to Callimachus in the way Herodotus reports it by Gomme (above, note 9) 79–80. That Miltiades delivered a speech and sponsored a motion in the assembly that led to the advance of the Athenians to Marathon does not sound impossible. We may even accept that he presented on that occasion the arguments reported by Herodotus in 6.109. But why must we then believe that Miltiades cannot have repeated his argument to Callimachus on a later occasion? Surely we do not believe that the passing of Miltiades' decree committed the generals to fighting regardless of what they might find when they got to Marathon. Upon their arrival the generals would immediately debate the "hows," "whens," and "wheres" of a possible battle. And if in their judgment a battle would be too risky, theirs would be the option not to offer battle. That would be an obvious time for Miltiades to repeat and reinforce his arguments. Noteworthy is Miltiades' expression of fear that inaction will lead to *stasis* and ultimate medizing (6.109.5). See 27, and note 17 below.

their natural pursuit of the fleeing enemy and waited and with clock-work precision drew themselves together and then went on to victory.[12] To suggest that an Athenian hoplite line early in the fifth century could have done all this so successfully, without any preparation, indeed, in what is *ex hypothesi* a sudden, unexpected battle taking place as a result of a spur of the moment decision to take advantage of an unforeseen turn of events, is preposterous. These manoeuvres must have been planned in advance. They must, at the very least, have been explained very carefully to the Athenians before they undertook them. Now, it must be recognized that any plans of the Athenians before the engagement must have been laid in the anticipation that the Persian cavalry would be present. In other words, what we are witnessing at Marathon must be recognized as the execution of a plan that was designed to meet and to cope with Persian cavalry.

Now we might consider the alleged anachronism of the prytanies in Herodotus' narrative. According to Herodotus, the four generals who had been persuaded by Miltiades to join battle turned over their day of supreme command to Miltiades. Nevertheless, Miltiades waited until his day of command arrived before he undertook the attack. This has been taken to be Herodotus' explanation for the delay of the Athenians before they attacked. Quite probably at the time of the battle of Marathon the Athenians did not rotate the supreme command from general to general day by day. Instead, it may well be that the supreme commander was Callimachus, and the ten generals were simply tribal commanders.[13] If that is so, without entirely rejecting Herodotus' story we must rather conclude that what really happened was that the four generals who had sided with Miltiades co-operated with him most actively, and so seemed to the rank-and-file to have turned over their tribal commands to Miltiades (or, perhaps, to Callimachus, who was cooperating with Miltiades). We have already proposed that it was necessary for the success of Miltiades' plan that there be some considerable preparation before the

[12]Herodotus 6.113.2 νικῶντες δὲ τὸ μὲν τετραμμένον τῶν βαρβάρων φεύγειν ἔων, τοῖσι δὲ τὸ μέσον ῥήξασι αὐτῶν <u>συναγαγόντες</u> τὰ κέρεα ἐμάχοντο, καὶ ἐνίκων ᾿Αθηναῖοι I have never seen an explanation of the battle that successfully accommodates the aorist participle underlined. Most constructions treat it as though it were a present participle. A. R. Burn ([above, note 10] 250) comments on the action of the Athenian wings: "This was an amazing performance, by citizen soldiers in the heat of battle, and must have been premeditated." For a pursuit of Persians by victorious hoplites, the closest parallel is Herodotus' description of the Spartan victory at Plataea. The Persians flee in disorder (9.65.1), the Spartans press their advantage and pursue with slaughter (9.68), the Persians arrive at their stockade before the Spartans (9.70.1).

[13]For the delay: Macan, 157-161; Hammond 35, note 99; Burn (above, note 10). On the question of supreme and tribal command: N. G. L. Hammond, "Strategia and Hegemonia in Fifth-Century Athens," *CQ* n.s. 19 (1969) 111-123.

battle. It is now perfectly natural to suggest that Miltiades took advantage of what amounted to the command of four tribes, plus his own, plus the willingness of the Plataean contingent, to gain the command of the equivalent of six tribes, and these he was able to take aside and explain to them his strategy. In this way Miltiades could have had the opportunity he needed to prepare enough of the Athenian army for the disciplined manoeuvres that they were to execute when their opportunity for battle should come. This proposal might provide partial explanation for the Athenian delay before fighting. It would seem now that what is needed is some motive for the Athenian decision to strike on the day that they chose, before the arrival of their Spartan reinforcements.

Once Miltiades was satisfied that the Athenians were prepared for what it was they were to do, he had a choice: either wait for the Spartans, or try to catch the Persians off-guard, or slightly unprepared. Basically, what he needs is just enough time to get across the plain before the Persian cavalry can intercept his advance. The distance between the two armies, Herodotus says, was approximately a short mile or about 1500 m.[14] In order to cross this distance, Miltiades' army would need something like fifteen or twenty minutes. In other words, what Miltiades needed was a morning in which he could draw up his army and find himself prepared approximately fifteen or twenty minutes ahead of the Persians. Let us listen now to Herodotus' description of how the Athenians crossed the distance between the two armies:

The Persians therefore, when they saw the Greeks coming on at speed, made ready to receive them, although it seemed to them that the Athenians were bereft of their senses and bent upon their own destruction, for they saw a mere handful of men coming on at a run without either horsemen or archers.[15]

Following the simple procedure of regarding the information that Herodotus sets down as ultimately derived from the Athenian participants in the actual battle, and from their observations of circumstantial events, let us try and interpret the information that we have been given. The first thing that the Athenians observed as they set out was that the Persians saw them coming and made ready to receive them. Herodotus

[14]"Eight stades, no less," Herodotus 6.112.1. My estimate of 15–20 minutes to cover such a distance is intended to err more toward the generous than the meagre. The plain was probably not without obstacles, and keeping formation was more important than maintaining speed.

[15]Herodotus 6.112.2; translation by George Rawlinson, *Herodotus; the Persian Wars* (New York 1942). See also Creasy (above, note 10) 31–32. It is unfortunate that Creasy's narrative was so uncritical and rhetorical; his idea did not deserve the peremptory burial served it by Macan, 162. Herodotus says that the Persians παρεσκευάζοντο ὡς δεξόμενοι. This construction with παρασκευάζω occurs 14 times in Herodotus (see J. E. Powell, *A Lexicon to Herodotus* [Hildesheim 1960] 291–292). It nearly always means to make physical preparations, and often means to prepare "from scratch."

uses the word παρασκευάζω in the imperfect middle, "they were preparing themselves" or "they began to prepare" to receive them. Apparently, the Persians were not fully prepared when the Athenians set out; whether or not this gives the Athenians their required time, may still remain uncertain, but it does give them an opportunity to cover some of the distance before the cavalry could intercept them. That the Athenians crossed the entire distance at a run, as Herodotus suggests, seems doubtful.[16] It seems best to look upon Herodotus' story as an exaggeration of the truth, which must have been that the Greek army crossed the plain with greater than usual speed. The next thing that the Athenians observed as they approached the enemy would appear to have been expressions of some alarm, or perhaps even dismay, on the Persians' faces. These expressions are given an Athenian-oriented interpretation; the Athenians, when they set out to attack the Persians, will all have had fears: they were endangering their lives by moving against Persians who had archers and cavalry, while they themselves had none; they were moving out into an exposed plain where they could be rounded up and pelted with arrows by the highly manoeuverable, missile-throwing Persian cavalry. Naturally, they were concerned and, naturally, into the expressions of surprise that they saw on the Persian faces they read their own fears. But could it not be more truthful to say that the expressions of surprise they saw really were honest expressions of alarm? The Persians had *not* expected the Athenians to attack, for three reasons: first, they had been convinced by Hippias that the Athenian army was a somewhat demoralized and uncommitted group of men, many of whom were in fact in sympathy with the Pisistratids;[17] second, the Persians had become accustomed to

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[16]Herodotus 6.112.1–2; Macan, 155; W. Donlan and J. Thompson, "The Charge at Marathon: Herodotus 6.112," *CJ* 71 (1976) 339–343. "The Charge at Marathon Again," *CW* 72 (1979) 419–420. From this last article (420) the estimate for the time elapsed while covering 1500 m. would be: 220 yds. at 5 mph (double time) take 1.5 min., the remaining 1420 yds. (approx.) at a slow march of about 2.5 mph would take about 19 min. Herodotus' term, δρόμῳ, can be used to describe the movement of soldiers wading in water (Hdt. 9.59.1; Thuc. 1.63.1); so it need not necessarily mean at a full run. If it simply means at the double, then, following Herodotus, the entire distance would have been covered at approximately 5 mph, and the time elapsed would be less than 12 min.

[17]Hippias must have been able to convince the Persians that Athenian resistance would be slight. By now he was an old man; most probably he was close to 80. According to Herodotus, he was old enough to be able to sneeze out one of his teeth when he disembarked on the shores of Marathon, however old that may be. It is, therefore, well worthwhile to wonder how it was that he had successfully convinced the Persians that it would be worth their time and effort to establish him as tyrant in Athens. What guarantees could Hippias give that, if he were placed in Athens, he could control the city and maintain it as an ally of Persia for any length of time? He must have been able to convince them that there was a broad basis of support for him in Athens and that when he passed off the scene, he would be replaced by one of his sons or else an equally

Athenian inactivity (possibly the Athenians had drawn up and offered
battle, or seemed to offer battle before, but, of course, on ground that
would have been somewhat favourable to themselves, and had not ever
attacked); and third, the Persians, if they had heard of the imminent
arrival of the Spartans, would no doubt have expected that there would
certainly be no engagement before that time. For these reasons, we may
fairly confidently assume that the Persians were not in a full state of
preparation on the morning of the battle. Herodotus certainly seems to
imply that in his description of the Persians making ready to receive the
Greeks when they saw them coming. We need no motive for the Athenian
attack other than the bold opportunism of Miltiades.

As a result of the victory, the Athenians rose to considerable promi-
nence in the ensuing struggle with Persia. At Plataea, we are told, they
claimed and won the privilege of holding the left wing in the Greek line,
second only to the Spartans on the right. Before the description of the
final struggle at Plataea, Herodotus includes a curious story that reflects
back upon, and must influence our understanding of, Marathon. Ac-
cording to this story, the Spartans, believing a battle to be imminent,
changed positions with the Athenians, placing them opposite the Persians
(below, note 29), and themselves opposite the Boeotians and Thessalians.
The reason the Spartans give for this bizarre move is that the Athenians
had learnt how to deal with the Persians at Marathon, while they them-
selves knew better how to deal with the Boeotians (Hdt. 9.46.2). By this
time it was clear to the Spartans that one of their greatest uncertainties in
the battle would be how well the right wing would survive the charge of
the Persian cavalry. So what they needed on the right was a unit that
would withstand the cavalry with the coolness that comes from exper-
ience. Now the Spartans had visited Marathon after that victory, and, if
some modern historians are right, they knew very well that the Athenians
had been able to handle the Persians only after the disappearance of the
cavalry. Herodotus, however, is making the Spartans act as if they knew
that the Athenians had solved the problem of the Persian cavalry at
Marathon. Even if Herodotus' anecdote is false, it remains to be explained
how it could have been invented if everyone knew that the Persian

pro-Persian nominee and that this succession would go relatively uncontested. Of
course, he would anticipate that the victorious Persians would remove most of his
ardent political enemies, but still it would have been necessary for him to demonstrate
that many Athenians would be eager to take him back. In the light of these considera-
tions, it becomes possible to understand most of the Persian strategy after the capture
of Eretria. If the Persians were convinced that the Athenians, or at least many of them,
would be anxious to receive Hippias back, then their apparent lack of military haste in
not attacking Athens directly, and not forcing an engagement until the Spartans were
nearly due to reinforce the Athenians, becomes easily understandable.

cavalry, so formidable at Plataea up till that moment, had been absent from Marathon.

One last possible clue to the presence of the Persian cavalry on the plains of Marathon remains to be considered. Herodotus says that the barbarians who broke through the Greek line at Marathon were Persians and Sacae, apparently stationed side-by-side, or possibly even inter-mingled (6.113.1). Is this combination of Persians and Sacae likely to have been a combination of infantry or of cavalry? At the battle of Plataea, Persians and Sacae fought side-by-side as cavalry, but certainly not as infantry. As cavalry, the Sacae were superior to anything that the Persians could put into the field, including themselves (Hdt. 9.71.1). The Sacan infantry, on the other hand, was not nearly so impressive; at Plataea, where emphasis was on the wings, it was placed in the much weaker Persian centre and was obviously not at all so significant a detachment either for size or for prestige.[18] Herodotus describes the weaponry of the Sacae in the following terms:

The Sacae, or Scyths, were clad in trousers and had on their heads tall, stiff caps rising to a point. They bore the bow of their country and the dagger, beside which they carried the battle-axe, or sagaris. They were, in truth, Amyrgian Scythians but the Persians called them "Sacae" since that is the name they give to all Scythians.[19]

The weaponry of these Sacae is suitable for cavalry—mounted archers—but not particularly suitable for heavy infantry. They carry no shield, they do not apparently have heavy protective head-gear, nor any protective body weaponry, such as a breast-plate. The Scythians, of

[18]In his line of battle, Mardonius ordered his infantry nation by nation (9.31). We have no numbers for each unit, but Herodotus does indicate which parts of the Greek line each nation opposed. Because Herodotus does give numbers for the various Greek contingents (9.28), it is possible to gain an impression (albeit rather vague) of the relative size of each Persian contingent by comparing it with the numbers of Greeks opposite. Roughly speaking, the Persians (apparently in deeper ranks) and some others opposed slightly less than 12,000 hoplites, the Medes, somewhat more than 8,000, the Bactrians, a little less than 4,000, the Indians, a little less than 1,000, the Sacae, about 2,000, and lastly the Boeotians, Locrians, Malians and Thessalians opposed a trifle less than 12,000 hoplites. Apparently, the Sacae were relatively few. Furthermore, they, with the Bactrians and Indians, are placed over against the weakest and least homo-genous part of the Greek line. On the subject of the cavalry, while Herodotus speaks of the Persian infantry as existing in separate national divisions, the cavalry is only referred to as "the cavalry." In 9.32.2, we are told that it was drawn up separately from the infantry, and in 9.40 it attacks and skirmishes with the Greek line as a unit con-sisting at least of Thebans, Persians, and Medes. On the day of the final battle, Pausanias is attacked by the entire Persian cavalry (9.57.3); so he sends to the Athenians for help. If they themselves cannot come, he askes that they send their archers, apparently assuming that the Athenians will not have to deal with any cavalry. From 9.68 we might conclude that the Boeotian horse was with the rest of the cavalry, but it would be possible to give other interpretations.

[19]Herodotus 7.64.2; Rawlinson's translation.

course, were well known as redoubtable cavalrymen. In fact, in Herodo-
tus' account of the Persian invasion of Scythia in book 4(128.3), we have
several stories of Scythians actually defeating Persian cavalry, but un-
willing to close with Persian infantry. At the battle of Gaugamela,
according to Arrian, Sacae were present but as mounted archers (Arrian
Anab 3.8.3, 11.4). Is it reasonable to assume that the Persians would have
brought Sacan light infantry all the way from their home near Bactria,
when such infantry could be easily obtained from other much nearer
parts? The Persians had gone to the trouble of building special horse-
transports, obviously intending to use cavalry. Why then are we to
believe that these Sacae whom they took pains to bring from so great a
distance, who were after all, the best, or amongst the very best cavalry in
the whole empire, were, in fact, infantrymen in this battle? It has been
observed that it was the Persian custom to put their best troops in the
centre of their line.[20] On this view, Sacan infantry is definitely out of place
here, but cavalry is right at home.

The painting in the Stoa Poikile depicted in its centre a struggle
between Athenian infantry and Persian cavalry and infantry. Harrison
argued (above, note 7) that this scene depicted the turning point in the
battle of Marathon. It is interesting, then, that this suggestion about the
Persians and Sacae would give a similar picture. Furthermore, if the Sacae
could have been cavalry, then we cannot state with confidence that
Herodotus is entirely silent about the Persian cavalry in the fighting.

On the above reconstruction either the cavalry was trapped between
two lines of infantry, as may have happened at Leuctra (Xen. *Hell*
6.4.13); or it was charging in to support its victorious infantry in the
centre and take advantage of the break-up of the enemy line there; or it
was attempting to cover the retreat of the fleeing wings.[21] It might be
useful to suggest how such a position could have been reached from what
we know and can reasonably deduce about Persian military practice. The
assumption is that an army does (or tries to do) what it is trained to do,
especially in an emergency.

The Athenians move suddenly from the Herakleion toward the Persian
camp. On the assumption that it is not in a state of readiness, its position
would be as follows: the infantry is bivouacked in a line nearest the enemy
with its centre near the Soros;[22] the cavalry is immediately behind it,

[20]Ed. Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums*[4] 4.1 (Stuttgart 1944) 311.

[21]Herodotus 9.68 (Plataea). Both barbarian and Boeotian horse proved helpful
during the flight of the infantry: αὕτη δὲ (i.e., the cavalry) τοσαῦτα προσωφέλεε τοὺς
φεύγοντας, αἰεί τε πρὸς τῶν πολεμίων ἄγχιστα ἐοῦσα ἀπέργουσά τε τοὺς φιλίους
φεύγοντας ἀπὸ τῶν Ἑλλήνων.

[22]Hammond (17, 29) argues that the many Persian arrowheads found in the soil
atop the Soros prove: a) that the Persians laid down a heavy barrage of arrows at the
advancing Greeks, and b) that the centre of the Persian line was within about a 150 m.
radius of the Soros, as that would be the effective range of the Persian bows. But an

where it can be protected from night attacks, and supplied with fodder and water from the sea;[23] the ships stretch along the Cynosoura behind

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old arrowhead is not necessarily from an arrow that has been fired. Other possibilities are: spillage from the quivers of the slain and wounded, or from quivers discarded as encumbrances in the hand-to-hand fighting. As a general rule, the Persians will not discharge all their arrows before the enemy closes with them. Therefore, a concentration of arrows is a likely clue to the position of their initial battle-line (Xen. *An.* 2.1.6). If the Soros marks the place of the heaviest concentration of Greek casualties it must be closer than 150 m. to the centre of the Persian line. Most of the Greeks must have fallen at, or near the place where the Persians fought their way through the centre. See also Macan 155.

Sp. Marinatos, "From the Silent Earth," *AAA* 3 (1970) 63–68, "Further news of Marathon," 153–166, "Further Discoveries at Marathon," 349–366, tried to establish the length and orientation of the Athenian line by identifying an alleged Plataean burial some 2.5 km from the Soros. The main lines of my argument are scarcely altered whether or not Marinatos is right. His argument is not without its difficulties, however. See Karl-Wilhelm Welwei, "Das sog. Grab der Plataier im Vranatal bei Marathon," *Historia* 28 (1979) 101–106.

[23]According to Xenophon, the Persians made a practice of hobbling their horses at night, which makes them extremely vulnerable to night raids. For protection, therefore, they would bivouack behind the infantry but at no great distance from it (Xen. *An.* 4.3.35). The suggestion that the Persians would have been attracted to the area by the adjacent good pasture for their horses should be rejected (Munro [above, note 9] 187; Hammond 39). These horses have spent some months in ship transports, in camps, and on Aegean islands of which only the last, Euboea, might have had any good pasturage, and then there was apparently too much fighting to allow time for turning the horses out to pasture. The horses must have been maintained on hay or grain (or both) until they arrived at Marathon. Changing a horse's regimen from fodder to pasturage should never be done abruptly. Flatulent colic can debilitate the animal for weeks, and cause irreparable damage to the health of older horses, and it probably frequently proved fatal in ancient times. Transporting these animals involved numerous threats to their health: infections from wounds, the rapid spread of parasites in the close quarters of the ships (for most of which the ancients can have had no cures), and the probability of distemper. To run the additional risk of colic would be foolish and unnecessary. We do not know how many animals were brought to Marathon, but 1,000 is one of the more recent suggestions (Hammond 44). For that number of horses about ten tons of hay, a few tons of grain, and about 8,000 gallons of water must be provided each day. The fodder will come by ship, probably from Euboea, and will be dumped on the beach behind the infantry. There the horses must be to get their meals. Before he eats, however, a horse should drink. So water will be brought in too. Later waterings will be obtained in various ways from nearby springs. On horses and their care in antiquity one begins with Xenophon's *Cavalry Commander* and *The Art of Horsemanship*. Among modern studies there are J. K. Anderson, *Ancient Greek Horsemanship* (Berkeley 1961), and P. Vigneron, *Le cheval dans l'antiquité Gréco-Romaine* (Nancy 1968). In general, on the subject of caring for and maintaining horses I have had to rely on the experience of friends and acquaintances and manuals, for example, R. Hapgood, *First Horse, Basic Horse Care Illustrated* (San Francisco 1972) 13–30, 101–116; and P. Jacobson and M. Hayes, *A Horse around the House* (New York 1972) 52–102 and 155–174. There is a very detailed description of flatulent colic and its treatment in the last century in William Youatt's *The Horse* (London 1885) 324–325. The ancients may not have understood the disease so well, and are not likely to have had such sophisticated treatments.

them for the most part;[24] the Persians face Vanderpool's Herakleion,[25] which the Greeks have occupied because they need to have their un-shielded right protected by the beach, in much the same way as Pausanias probably used the Moloeis at Plataea,[26] and the mercenaries used the Euphrates at Cunaxa (Xen. *An.* 1.8.4).

The Persian cavalry never closes with heavy infantry that is in good order,[27] for it is a missile-throwing unit. Insofar as it comes in on a wing it attacks only the enemy right,[28] deploying from its left, like the cavalry at Plataea—all on the Persian left—,[29] and like Tissaphernes' cavalry at Cunaxa, which rode past and through the Greek extreme right, which was protected by peltasts (Xen. *An.* 1.10.7–8). Its movement, which may be in squadrons, is from left to right in a clock-wise rotating motion across the enemy's front.[30] This is because right-handed archers and javelineers,

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[24]Vanderpool (above, note 6) 93–106.

[25]S. Marinatos, *Praktika ArchHet* 1972 (Athens 1974) 6.

[26]Herodotus 9.57.2, cf. note 32 (below).

[27]Xen. *An.* 2 and 3 *passim* and especially 3.2.18 ὑπὸ μὲν γὰρ ἵππου ἐν μάχῃ οὐδεὶς πώποτε οὔτε δηχθεὶς οὔτε λακτισθεὶς ἀπέθανεν. This statement is possible only if cavalry did not customarily close with infantry. For a unique exception, there is the specially trained horse of the Persian general Artybius (Hdt. 5.111). The whole tenor of the story shows how unusual this horse was. There is no indication that other Persian cavalry fought this way. The weapons of the Persian cavalryman were the bow and the javelin (Herodotus 9.49.2). See also Herodotus 4.128.3, where the Scythian horse shuns the Persian foot.

[28]It is sometimes assumed that Persian cavalry would harrass enemy wings, e.g., Gomme (above, note 9) 80. This sounds more like Roman tactics. The Persian horse was simply a highly mobile firing platform. It needed a large target along which it would move. This would be the front of the enemy line, not the rear. There is no evidence from antiquity that Persian horse ever tried to take an enemy in the rear. Xenophon imagines it happening in his *Cyropaedeia* (7.1.36–37), where the rear rank meets it by facing about, the cavalry gets too close, and the results are nearly disastrous for Cyrus. At Cunaxa, Tissaphernes quickly found himself in the rear of the Greek line. Far from seeing this as an opportunity to harm the mercenaries from behind, he rode off to plunder the Greek camp (Xen. *An.* 1.10.7–8). Against heavy attack by cavalry, Macedonian infantry could form a square (Arrian *Anab.* 4.5.6) and Brasidas did the same in his retreat from Lyncestis (Thuc 4.125.2). He placed his light–armed inside the square where they would be obliged to fire over the heads of their own hoplites, or perhaps they darted through the files to participate in the ἐκδρομαί described in 4.127.

[29]Mardonius and his Persians hold the extreme left wing of their line (Herodotus 9.31.1). The cavalry is brigaded separately, χωρίς (9.32.2), but it comes in its entirety against the Greek right on the day of the final battle (9.47.3). See also Thuc. 5.67.2, where the line of Athenian and Argive allies is described before Mantinea. Their cavalry is all on their left, unlike the Spartans, who have cavalry on both wings (5.67.1).

[30]All the time trying to provoke the enemy to break discipline and charge. Insults help as well as missiles: ἐνθαῦτα ὡς προσήλασαν οἱ ἱππόται πρὸς τοὺς Ἕλληνας (*scil.* particularly the Megarian contingent, somewhat exposed in the Greek battle line at Plataea) προσέβαλον, κατὰ τέλεα (i.e., squadron by squadron, cf. ἅμα πάντες of 9.23) προσβάλλοντες δὲ κακὰ μεγάλα ἐργάζοντο καὶ γυναῖκάς σφεας ἀπεκάλεον, Herodotus 9.20. See also Herodotus 4.128.3: ἡ μὲν δὴ ἵππος τὴν ἵππον αἴει τρέπεσκε ἡ

who are mounted, and who do not wish to fire over the bobbing heads of
their horses, must discharge their missiles sideways across their bodies
from right to left, if they wish to keep a seat without stirrups.[31] This
means that the enemy must be on the left as they sweep across his front.

The Persian system was developed over years of fighting against
armies the like of which are described throughout Xenophon's *Anabasis*
and *Cyropaedeia*. They are units whose discipline and defensive armour
could not compare with that of the Greek hoplite phalanx. We have an
extremely scant description of one battle (Malene) fought by Persians
against Greeks before Marathon.[32] Here the cavalry seems to come in
after the two lines had been engaged for some time. No other information
is available, apart from Herodotus' assertion that the Persians won,
presumably thanks to the decisive charge of the cavalry. We may
conclude that the Persians would use their traditional system of fighting
at Marathon, as unsuited to dealing with hoplites as it may have been,

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τῶν Σκυθέων, οἱ δὲ τῶν Περσέων ἱππόται φεύγοντες ἐσέπιπτον ἐς τὸν πεζόν, ὁ δὲ πεζὸς
ἂν ἐπεκούρεε. οἱ δὲ Σκύθαι ἐσαράξαντες τὴν ἵππον ὑπέστρεφον, τὸν πεζὸν φοβεόμενοι.
It should be admitted that the "defeats" inflicted on the Persian cavalry by the Scy-
thian may be more illusory than real. The "flight" of the Persians toward their infantry
was no doubt intended as a ploy to draw the Scythians into all-out battle, something
the Persians desperately wanted, but the Scythians were carefully avoiding. This ploy
will only be effective if the Persian horse can actually ride right into its infantry
(ἐσέπιπτον ἐς τὸν πεζόν). If it rides for the wings the battle will simply continue as a
cavalry fight on the wings. I should like to thank Mr. A. J. O'Connor for pointing out to
me the fact that the Persian horse would have to move in this clock-wise, rotating
manner (Arrian *Anab.* 4.4.7, 4.5.4). In Xen. *Cyr.* 3.1.7–9 the Persians are made to use
Armenian light infantry in the same way as they used cavalry against the Scythians in
Herodotus 4.

[31]Anderson (above, note 23) 82 and note 8, also page 204.

[32]Herodotus 6.29; A. R. Burn, "Hammond on Marathon: A Few Notes," *JHS* 89
(1969) 118. I wonder if it is as certain as Burn thinks that the Persian cavalry must
have come in on a wing. If, after fighting "for a long time" the infantry of neither side
was gaining ground on the other, penetrating or breaking up the other's line, then it
would indeed have been difficult for the Persian horse to infiltrate the infantry line and
engage, but if the line was breaking up, the story would be quite different. Burn makes
the further assumption that the Persian cavalry would have attacked Pausanias' flanks
at Plataea, except for the fact that his "... right flank was covered by the Moloeis
torrent, and his left by the Corinthians and others." (Herodotus 9.57, 69.) Reference to
Herodotus leaves one in some considerable doubt as to whether both Pausanias' flanks
were so protected. Pausanias advanced to the Moloeis and stopped to wait for Amom-
phoretus, straggling behind. The Corinthians are beyond the Moloeis, and are further
depicted by Herodotus as being *hors de combat* until the conclusion of the struggle.
Amomphoretus, therefore, seems to be furthest from both the Moloeis and the Corin-
thians. One flank, accordingly, may have enjoyed the protection of the Moloeis (if it
was a "torrent bed," Pausanias would surely have waited *before crossing it* for Amom-
phoretus to catch up to avoid isolating him). It is hard to see any alternative but that
Pausanias survived the attacks of the cavalry and infantry with at least one of his wings
somewhat exposed, probably his shielded left.

since it was the only way they knew, and their victory at Malene would give them no reason to doubt its effectiveness.

The purpose of the initial harrassment by the cavalry is to induce the enemy to flee or charge forward, or to break up an existing charge once it has begun by inflicting casualties on the front ranks and forcing the rear ranks to stumble over the fallen as they advance, or step around them, thus interfering with their rank-mates.[33] As a disciplined, relatively heavy-armed force (for eastern armies, at any rate) the Persians had the problem of drawing the enemy onto their infantry.[34] Once the cavalry had accomplished this, the infantry's task was to make a barrier of shields, fire over it,[35] and charge into the gaps created thereby to demoralize and defeat the enemy. It follows that there is a critical moment when the cavalry must disappear from the scene in order to avoid catching arrows from friendly infantry, or being trapped between the two lines. Once the enemy is irreversibly committed to its charge the cavalry must take a position behind its infantry. Here it will fire over the heads of its own infantry on the advancing enemy,[36] be in a position to give decisive support to its infantry once the enemy's line begins to break at any point (as at Malene?), or cover the retreat of its infantry should it be defeated as at Plataea.[37] The position behind the infantry might be reached by riding around its right wing, but it is not impossible that the Persian infantry was trained to allow its cavalry to pass right through its files. The idea may sound odd, but it is well-documented even for heavy infantry undrilled in the procedure. It happened spontaneously in the ranks of the French heavy infantry at Agincourt,[38] Greek peltasts did it again spontaneously at Cunaxa, ushering Tissaphernes and his cavalry

[33]Thinner formation have a better chance of maintaining order during an advance than denser ones. This may be a clue to Miltiades' strategy. If his centre can engage the enemy in good order it stands a chance of holding the Persian centre, typically its strongest part (above, note 20 and Xen. *An.* 1.8.5–6, 21), until his wings can put the enemy wings to flight. In other words, Miltiades might have been hoping that the victory of his wings would draw the sting of any possible enemy penetration of his centre. His victorious wings, threatening the ships, would force a general retreat by the enemy.

[34]Herodotus 7.61–80; Xenophon, though he may be unreliable in detail in the *Cyropaideia*, seems to regard the Persian heavy infantry as something roughly comparable to a hoplite force for drill, weaponry, and tactics (2.1.21).

[35]Herodotus 7.218.3, 9.61.3 (They put down their bows when the Greeks charge [9.62.1]), and by implication 9.99.3 Naturally, this volleying begins as soon as the cavalry is clear. The number of arrows that go beyond the target makes it impossible for the horse to make an effective attack from behind the enemy.

[36]For the principle of using -height to intensify fire-power, Xen. *Cyr.* 6. 1.52–55, 6.4.18, 7.1.39

[37]Note 21, above.

[38]For this and many useful insights I owe a great debt to the book by John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (London 1967), the chapter on Waterloo (117–203), and particularly the study of Agincourt (79–116); see also note 30 (above).

through their line (Xen. *An.* 1.10.7), and the hoplites themselves at Cunaxa did the same for the scythed chariots with no loss of discipline or men (Xen. *An.* 1.8.19–20). It would have been difficult for the Persians to have predicted how ineffective their typical line of attack would be against Greek hoplites. It is instructive to compare Plataea with Cunaxa. In both battles Greek hoplite losses were negligible;[39] at Plataea the Persian infantry was still making the mistake of standing its ground against the charge of the hoplites (above, note 35), by the time of Cunaxa they knew enough to run away (Xen. *An.* 1.10.11).

The following picture of Marathon, then, would appear to be the most sensible. Any initial charge by the Greek line would be met by a counter-charge (or an attempted counter-charge) by Persian cavalry. The cavalry, bivouacked behind the line of infantry, would have to respond by doing some or perhaps all of the following, depending on the degree of surprise: waking up and donning armour, unhobbling and throwing heavy protective blankets over the horses,[40] mounting, forming up, and riding around or through the line of scurrying infantrymen. How long this will take is impossible to estimate. We might observe, however, that forming up will take longer, the greater the number of cavalry. Assuming, then, that the Greeks are able to get a good start on the Persians, actually getting out into the plain by a few minutes (perhaps under cover of the semi-darkness of early dawn, and using as cover those mysterious trees mentioned by *The Suda* and Nepos) then the initial effectiveness of the cavalry becomes a variable. The greater the number we assign to it, the more we diminish its early effectiveness, because it will take too long to deploy, but the more we diminish its size in order to speed up deployment, the more we decrease its potential effectiveness by depriving it of number.

It is a peculiar irony of the scholarship of the battle of Marathon that the silence about the cavalry has attracted so much attention that another silence in Herodotus, in fact in all the ancient sources, has gone completely unnoticed. Herodotus is usually careful to mention the volleying of Persian archers. At Thermopylae (against the Phocians), Plataea, and Mycale the initial volleying of the archers is mentioned or implied (above, note 35), but not at Marathon. When the Persians saw the Greeks coming it is not quite clear what they did. Herodotus simply says that they prepared to receive them. It is significant that they apparently did not do what they normally did: make a stockade of their

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[39]The Spartans and Tegeans had to deal with the cream of the barbarian force as well as the enemy cavalry. Herodotus (9.70.5) sets their losses (presumably hoplites) at 108, including the intense, hand-to-hand fighting (9.62–63), where many (πολλοί) of the Spartans were killed. Xenophon claims that the mercenaries at Cunaxa lost nobody except one man, on the left wing, hit by an arrow (*An.* 1.8.20).

[40]Anderson (above, note 23) 79–81.

shields and fire arrows at the advancing enemy, or if they did, no one
mentions it. Are we now going to embark the archers and send them to
Athens before the battle? If we do, who will be left for the Athenians to
attack, and on whom to inflict 6,400 casualties (Hdt. 6.117.1)? The irony
becomes exquisite when we recall that a reason commonly adduced for the
charge of the Athenians "at the run" was to reduce the effectiveness of the
Persian arrows.[41]

We have argued that the main reason for the Athenian success was
their ability to get an effective head-start on the Persians, to close the gap
between the two forces too quickly for the Persians to respond effectively
with their usual preliminaries. It now remains to suggest in some detail
how that could have taken place.

We must assume that the Greeks have found a way to draw up and
"move out" before the Persians either saw it, or, at least, became alarmed.
Their infantry will get prepared quickly, but first the cavalry must arm
itself and deploy. Most cavalrymen could be mounted and ready in a
matter of a very few minutes, but none will advance until the officers are
ready. They have heavy coats of mail to put on that will provide an
almost impenetrable protection to their entire bodies, if we may be guided
by Herodotus' description of Masistius.[42] Arming them, and getting them
mounted in their heavy gear, will take some considerable time. Even-
tually the horsemen will advance to intercept and harrass the oncoming
Greeks. As for the Greeks, if they are still some distance away, they
might experience a sally or two and the discharge of a few missiles by the
enemy cavalry, but if they are close, they will probably choose this
moment to break into a run. Under these circumstances the Persian
infantry will be unable to shoot at the Greeks, because their own cavalry
will be in the way. As for the cavalry, it will have little choice but to fall
back behind its infantry and receive the charge of the enemy. In other
words, Herodotus' description of Marathon is intelligible if we make only
one major assumption: that Miltiades was able to get the Athenians
across the plain just a little too quickly for the Persians to launch a
properly timed counter-attack.

Ever since Macan's monumental study of the Herodotean narrative,
the problem of how the Persians would have loaded their horses while
trying to fight off the pursuing Greeks has troubled scholars.[43] And why

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[41]F. Schachermeyr, "Marathon und die persische Politik," *HZ* 172 (1951) 28.

[42]Herodotus 9.22.2. It was the horse that was vulnerable (9.22.1).

[43]Macan 163. False dilemmas that seem to convict Herodotus or the believers in the
presence of the cavalry are common in Marathonian scholarship: e.g., M. O. B. Caspari,
"Stray Notes on the Persian Wars," *JHS* 31 (1911) 104, n. 16, "Those who assume the
presence of the cavalry at the scene of action are quite at a loss to explain why it failed
to assist the hard-pressed Persian infantry or how it managed to re-embark in the face

did the cavalry not protect its worsted infantry as at Plataea? The cavalrymen must have known that loading up the horses would be a somewhat time-consuming business. So they are not likely to have stayed for too long to protect their fleeing friends, when a glance backward or sideways by the "winners" in the centre would have revealed Greek wings, victorious and in good order, threatening the ships, their only line of retreat. Therefore, Herodotus' failure to mention their presence at the end of the battle covering the retreat need be of no great concern.

Now, perhaps, we might return to *The Suda*. According to this source there was a saying χωρὶς ἱππεῖς which was associated with Marathon and *was also used against any who broke formation in the ranks*. This, I believe, is the "grain of gold" that should have been mined from this source. As it stands now, *The Suda* is garbled partly because its account of the χωρισμός has nothing to do with breaking formation in the ranks. Therefore, if the story has any basis in fact, it must have originated in a different form, one in which the ἀποχώρησις of the cavalry amounted to a desertion of position in the line of battle. A story such as that, alleging that unsupported infantry charged and defeated a force of infantry and professional cavalry, and it was the cavalry that first broke and fled, will have sounded impossible to a Byzantine ear, as we demonstrated at the outset. Therefore, someone has made a very simple adjustment to the story. Some Ionians have been introduced and through them the timing of the departure has been altered to make it the cause of the charge of the Athenians rather than the result of it. To put it simply, χωρὶς ἱππεῖς, if it is reliable, means that the cavalry broke formation and fled. So began the rout that made Marathon one of Athens' greatest victories.[44]

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