

BOEOTIAN EPAMINONDAS: AN UNEASY EXEMPLUM  
TO THE ATHENIAN XENOPHON

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*In this article I will discuss why Xenophon wanted the Athenian cavalry to adopt Boeotian tactics and how developments in Greek cavalry tactics required an improvement of Athenian horsemanship. I will suggest that Xenophon wrote his treatises *On Horsemanship* and *Cavalry Commander* (written after the Battle of Mantinea in 362 BC) to inform his fellow Athenians about his own experiences with horsemanship and wanted to convey the practices that he thought of as most useful to the Athenian cavalry. Thus examining the influence of Boeotian cavalry tactics and training in the works of Xenophon, this article will offer a new interpretation of tactics and horsemanship in the mentioned treatises.*

### **Introduction**

It is very probable, that Xenophon learned his horsemanship- and cavalry skills from Agesilaus II, King of Sparta, or vice versa, and, that he has been influenced by Persian weaponry and tactics because of his campaigns in Persia<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, there is also a Boeotian influence on the works of Xenophon, specifically his works on cavalry and horsemanship (Toalster 2011, 85). In this article, I will argue that Xenophon analysed Boeotian cavalry tactics and referred to these in works such as *Cavalry Commander* and *On Horsemanship* in order to convey these tactics to the Athenians in an attempt to improve and update the Athenian cavalry<sup>2</sup>. Xenophon seems to have been convinced that especially Boeotian tactics were the battle tactics of the future. As a result he has put his views on cavalry tactics and training forward in the *Cavalry Commander*

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\* I would like to thank L. de Blois, J.J. Brouwers, J.P. Crielaard, S. Ellebaut, R. Konijnen-dijk, D. Slootjes, and C. van Woerkum for their kindness to comment on earlier versions of this article. Responsibility for the views expressed and for any errors or omissions is entirely my own.

<sup>1</sup> Worley 1994, 136. See also Anderson 1970; 1974; Bugh 1988; Gaebel 2002; Spence 1993; Worley 1994; Blaineau 2010; Toalster 2011.

<sup>2</sup> The Athenian cavalry suffered a steady decline after the 5th century BC. See for example: Bugh 1988, 143-153.

(*de Equitum magistro [Eq.Mag.]*), while *On Horsemanship (de Equitandi ratione [Eq.]*) deals with training horses and riders individually according to his views on tactics. In these works he refers to ‘the enemy’ specifically, by whom he meant the Thebans<sup>3</sup>. Xenophon’s *On Horsemanship* is closely connected to *Cavalry Commander*, as Xenophon writes in the final chapter<sup>4</sup>.

Xenophon’s respect for Epaminondas is not a new idea. For instance, J.K. Anderson wrote that he did not immediately recognize the genius of the Theban commander, but did so at a later stage in his life (Anderson 1970, 199; see also Toalster 2011, 16). Xenophon accorded praise to Epaminondas in his *Hellenica*, before he starts his account of the Battle at Mantinea (362 BC) and he devoted the final chapter 7.5 of *Hellenica* to Epaminondas<sup>5</sup>. From this remark and others we may conclude that Xenophon surely respected Epaminondas on at least a military level<sup>6</sup>. An example that Xenophon really had a high opinion of the Theban general is found in the following quote:

“But when he [Epaminondas] had led them forth, thus made ready, it is worthwhile again to note what he did” (X. *HG* 7.5.21).

This might also put Epaminondas on the list of Xenophon’s *exempla* – such as Hiero and Agesilaus II – which function as a model for military strategy and tactics. Although he probably had much trouble admitting this, since he and his friend Agesilaus II of Sparta had been lifelong enemies of Thebes and Epaminondas<sup>7</sup>. In his works, Xenophon makes as little reference to Boeotians as

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<sup>3</sup> X. *Eq.Mag.* 7.1 (in footnote on page 273 in Loeb edition: “The Thebans are meant”); 7.2; 7.3; 9.7.

<sup>4</sup> X. *Eq.* 12.14: “What it belongs to a cavalry leader to know and to do has been set forth in another book”. With this book he meant ‘*Cavalry Commander*’.

<sup>5</sup> X. *HG* 7.5.19-21: “Now the fact that Epaminondas himself entertained such thoughts, seems to me to be in no wise remarkable, — for such thoughts are natural to ambitious men; but that he had brought his army to such a point that the troops flinched from no toil, whether by night or by day, and shrank from no peril, and although the provisions they had were scanty, were nevertheless willing to be obedient, this seems to me to be more remarkable. (...) But when he had led them forth, thus made ready, it is worthwhile again to note what he did”.

<sup>6</sup> Anderson 1970, 222 quoting Xenophon: “I would not say that his generalship was fortunate. But of all things that are the work of forethought and of daring, this man seems to me to have omitted not one”.

<sup>7</sup> Many works of Xenophon can be regarded as manifests to pass on knowledge to future generations. It is likely that it was Xenophon’s intention to write the works on horsemanship and cavalry as political and military advice. Various pronouncements of his regarding the city of Athens, the need of the preparations for war and the training of the cavalry in particular, as stated earlier, are to be found not only in his specific manuals but also in *Ways and Means* and in *Economics* and *Memorabilia*. In works as *Agesilaus*, *Hiero* and the *Cyropaedia*, Xenophon uses kings as role models or *exempla*. Epaminondas is not explicitly mentioned in his works, except for a few places and chapter 7.5 in the *Hellenica* if he is forced by the circumstances to do so.

possible, preferring to ascribe actions to Agesilaus or the Spartans, though not with complete success<sup>8</sup>. In his *Hellenica*, for example, he completely ignores the Battle at Tegyra and makes every effort to cite Sparta as the precursor of cavalry attacks and the Boeotian Thebans as their imitators<sup>9</sup>. I would like to suggest that Boeotian tactics found their way into the manuscripts of Xenophon because Xenophon might have seen Epaminondas as a military role model, even though he does not mention him explicitly in his work on cavalry commandship. But why were Boeotian tactics that important to Xenophon? We have to take a look at the military situation in Greece at the time of Xenophon.

### **Greek cavalry on the battlefield**

The works of Xenophon on cavalry and horses should be regarded against the background of the developments in Greek cavalry warfare in especially the 4th century BC. Traditionally and generally speaking, there had been a different approach to battle tactics in Greece, where states without hoplite tradition favoured their cavalry contingents and states with hoplite traditions, such as Athens, favoured their hoplite tactics (Spence 1995, 178-179). Not only in Greece the approach to warfare differed from state to state, there was a large difference between warfare in Asia Minor and on the Greek mainland as well. The Persians possessed large contingents of lightly armed cavalry, whereas the Greeks had smaller units of cavalry<sup>10</sup>. Traditional cavalry states such as Thessaly and Boeotia were more capable of fighting cavalry battles, although even those riders preferred not to attack hoplite lines<sup>11</sup>.

The Athenian cavalry was very capable of raiding and fighting small skirmishes as a unit working on the field around their infantry, but they failed to train them-

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<sup>8</sup> X. *HG* 6.4.10: "In the second place, since the space between the armies was a plain, the Lacedaemonians posted their horsemen in front of their phalanx, and the Thebans in like manner posted theirs over against them. (...) the horsemen had already joined battle and those of the Lacedaemonians had speedily been worsted; then in their flight they had fallen foul of their own hoplites, and, besides, the companies of the Thebans were now charging upon them". Although Xenophon implies that the Thebans imitated the Spartans by doing so, in my PhD thesis (2012) I argue that Xenophon tried to ascribe certain Theban inventions to his Spartan friend Agesilaus. It might certainly be, that the Spartans copied Theban tactics here, since the Spartans were not very eager to change their opinions on the use of cavalry on the battlefield. In the Battle at Mantinea (418), Spartan cavalry seems to have played no role. And Agesilaus, for example, did not use cavalry at the Battle of Coronea in 394, but instead used infantry attacks against the Thebans (Worley 1994, 134).

<sup>9</sup> Xenophon does not mention this battle at all. Also, Plutarch gives a different account of many actions of Agesilaus against the Thebans, which many times goes against that of Xenophon. Also, he tries to defend Agesilaus almost to the bitter end in the work *Agesilaus* and he clearly tries to cover up some of the mistakes of his friend: see Koolen 2012, 101-112.

<sup>10</sup> Worley 1994, 152; whether or not light armed cavalry formed the core of the Persian army, see Tuplin 2010.

<sup>11</sup> For more on this subject, see also Spence 1995, 123-132; 153-155; Worley 1994, 123-152; Koolen 2012, 75; Koolen 2013.

selves to fight in formations or to fight as a unit against lines of infantry. This usually appeared not to occur in the battle until a decision was made and then the cavalry went for the remaining infantry units or fleeing infantry to cut them down one by one. One of the reasons that cavalry did not earn a high standard in the hoplite army was that cavalymen usually waited for the infantry to decide a battle and came into action only afterwards<sup>12</sup>. This does not mean that Greek cavalry did not have an important role in warfare at all or that it was not able to render decisive actions on the battlefield. Athenian cavalry, for instance, played a decisive role on the battlegrounds of Solygeia in 425 BC (Th. 4.43-44). So, although the approach to tactics differed, cavalry was certainly not an obsolete type of defence. This conclusion is fortified by the new coordination between Greek cavalry and infantry that began to appear in the 4th century – a development that had started during the Peloponnesian War. Cavalry units were more often used on the battlefield itself to drive off enemy cavalry and their close combat deployment increased. Traditionally, the safest and easiest way of deploying cavalry was on the wings. This provided not only flank protection but also made sure that the cavalry could not get in the way of the infantry in case of a forced retreat (which would put them against their own infantry). The traditional tactics of deploying cavalry on the wings was easier, probably safer, and required less thought from the commander. Deploying cavalry in front of the hoplite lines asked for an intelligent general that had a well-trained cavalry capable of maneuvering easily as it could then be used either against other infantry or cavalry (Spence 1995, 154; Koolen 2012, 113-136).

### **Boeotian tactics in *Cavalry Commander***

Many tactical advice given in the *Cavalry Commander* appears to be very similar to the tactics used by Epaminondas in the Battle at Mantinea. According to the *Hellenica*, which was written after Mantinea (362 BC), Epaminondas used *hamippoi* and cavalry in a dense square formation with the infantry units forming an oblique phalanx in order to cut through the enemy infantry lines<sup>13</sup>. The

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<sup>12</sup> Athenian cavalymen even seem to have had a reputation for staying mounted or riding off the battlefield with their infantry in a troubled situation (Lys. 14.7). In *Hippias*, Aristophanes seems to be referring to such a situation, when a slave called Nicias offers a solution to a difficult situation: “let us bolt at top speed” (Ar. *Eq.* 25).

<sup>13</sup> Although the battle at Mantinea (362) is renowned for what seems to have been the first deployment of a wedge formation, this formation is not described by Xenophon in his *Hellenica* nor his *Cavalry Commander*. Nor is it described by Diodorus Siculus in his account of this battle or by any other author, D.S. 15.85.4; Xenophon does say that Epaminondas led his army ‘prow on like a trireme’, using the adjective ‘ἀντίπρῳρον’ (X. *HG* 7.5.23). This can be translated as ‘head on’ or ‘frontally’. Xenophon applies this term to wheeling of the Spartan *lochoi* in parallel columns to the right to meet an attack on the line of march. Epaminondas led his cavalry and infantry force in a deepened and dense phalanx forward, which is described by the word ‘ἔμβολον’. Anderson 1970, 326 and 327 on these tactics; Arr. *Tact.* 11.2; see also: Devine 1983.

improvement that Epaminondas made is the use of a dense cavalry column with intermingled hoplites serving as *hamippoi* to push their way through enemy infantry or cavalry. In this particular battle he believed that when he could cut through the Athenian cavalry fielded in a formation like a hoplite phalanx six lines deep, he would have defeated the entire opposing army<sup>14</sup>. The Athenians had merely fielded their cavalry in phalanx formation, without intermingled foot soldiers, on which Xenophon commented: ἔρημον πεζῶν ἀμίπτων (“without intermingled foot soldiers”). This will lead us to conclude that Xenophon ascribed the defeat of the Athenian cavalry to the absence of *hamippoi* (X. *HG* 7.5.23-24).

Apparently, Xenophon was convinced that *hamippoi* or cavalry combined with infantry was the key to dominating the Greek battlefields in the future and this led him to discuss (*hamippoi*) *pezoi* in *Cavalry Commander*, referring to infantry intermingled with cavalry and the benefit of such tactics<sup>15</sup>.

“Another duty of a cavalry commander is to demonstrate to the city the weakness of cavalry destitute of infantry as compared with cavalry that has infantry attached to it. Further, having got his infantry, a cavalry commander should make use of it. A mounted man being much higher than a man on foot, infantry may be hidden away not only among the cavalry but in the rear as well” (X. *Eq.Mag.* 5.13).

He strongly recommends a heavily armed infantry to work in close cooperation with the cavalry on the battlefield. This would mean that cavalry attacking a line of battle in an attempt to break the lines is followed by the *hamippoi*, who either charge simultaneously with the cavalry or follow close behind<sup>16</sup>. In addition to the *hamippoi* he mentions a ‘cutting through steel’ ability of the square formation if it is rightly put in line with the best men who are “bent on winning fame by some brilliant deed” (X. *Eq.Mag.* 2.2-4). Xenophon’s friend Agesilaus II of Sparta used a square infantry formation for marching<sup>17</sup>, with cavalry in front and at the rear, but Xenophon takes this idea further and recommends a square for-

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<sup>14</sup> He was not mistaken, according to X. *HG* 7.5.24: “Thus, then, he made his attack, and he was not disappointed of his hope; for by gaining the mastery at the point where he struck, he caused the entire army of his adversaries to flee”.

<sup>15</sup> E.g.: X. *Eq.Mag.* 5.13; 8.19; 9.7: “infantry attached to cavalry will be most effective if it consists of persons who are very bitter against the enemy”. As explained above ‘the enemy’ seems to refer specifically to Thebes.

<sup>16</sup> X. *Ages.* 1.31. Note that Xenophon speaks of the Spartan *hamippoi* being *heavy infantry* of 10 years with the cavalry.

<sup>17</sup> X. *HG* 3.4.20 in the battle at Sardis in 395 BC and also at Coronea in 394 BC against Thessaly. See for example: X. *Ages.* 2.2.

mation when marching or fielding the cavalry<sup>18</sup>. The square formation was used in the Battle of Mantinea by Epaminondas.

In *Cavalry Commander* Xenophon also explains that the cavalry should be capable of ‘attack and flight’ tactics. Such ‘attack and flight’ tactics seem to have been deployed by Boeotians specifically, if we are to believe Plutarch:

“for they were not pitched battles, nor was the fighting in open and regular array, but it was by making well-timed sallies, and by either retreating before the enemy or by pursuing and coming to close quarters with them that the Thebans won their successes” (Plu. *Pel.* 15.5).

Xenophon suggests that cavalry should line itself up in the no-man’s-land between infantry battle lines with an as large as possible front. In this no-man’s-land, the cavalry should take strategic positions and harass the opposing side while wheeling, pursuing, and retreating. This harassing tactic is more effective if the commander keeps four or five of his best horses and riders hidden behind the infantry, so that the enemy will be surprised at his next attack: infantry appears from behind the cavalry to surprise the enemy<sup>19</sup>.

We now need to consider that *hamippoi* had already been used by the Thebans in 419 BC in the Peloponnesian War, being dispatched against Athens<sup>20</sup>. So we

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<sup>18</sup> X. *Eq.Mag.* 2: “When your men are well trained in all these points, they must, of course, understand some plan of formation, that in which they will show to greatest advantage in the sacred processions and at manoeuvres, fight, if need be, with the greatest courage, and move along roads and cross rivers with perfect ease in unbroken order. (...) To use an illustration, steel has most power to cut through steel when its edge is keen and its back reliable. (...) You must be very careful to appoint a competent man as leader in the rear. For if he is a good man, his cheers will always hearten the ranks in front of him in case it becomes necessary to charge; or, should the moment come to retreat, his prudent leadership will, in all probability, do much for the safety of his regiment. An even number of file-leaders has this advantage over an odd, that it is possible to divide the regiment into a larger number of equal parts”.

<sup>19</sup> X. *Eq.Mag.* 8.23-25: “Suppose now that the cavalry are busy in the no-man’s-land that separates two battle lines drawn up face to face or two strategic positions, wheeling, pursuing, and retreating. After such manoeuvres both sides usually start off at a slow pace, but gallop at full speed in the unoccupied ground. But if a commander first feints in this manner, and then after wheeling, pursues and retreats at the gallop he will be able to inflict the greatest loss on the enemy, and will probably come through with the least harm, by pursuing at the gallop so long as he is near his own defence, and retreating at the gallop from the enemy’s defences. If, moreover, he can secretly leave behind him four or five of the best horses and men in each division, they will be at a great advantage in falling on the enemy as he is turning to renew the charge”.

<sup>20</sup> First mention of ἵπποδρόμοι ψιλοὶ by Hdt. 7.158.4, referring to the offer of Gelon to help the Greek against the Persians. Also see: “The Tegeans and the other Arcadian allies of Lacedaemon joined in the expedition. The allies from the rest of Peloponnese and from outside mustered at Phlius; the Boeotians with five thousand heavy infantry and as many light troops, and five hundred horse and the same number of *hamippoi*”: Th. 5.57.2. It may well be that the heavy infantry which came to the aid of the Boeotian cavalry and so defeated the Athenian and Thessalian cavalry were also *hamippoi* (Th. 2.22). But Thucydides is not clear

would be wrong to assume that the phenomenon of *hamippoi* was new. Why did Xenophon put so much emphasis on the need to implement such intermingled foot soldiers? In my view there is only one explanation: Epaminondas improved the use of the Boeotian *hamippoi*. At Mantinea the Athenian cavalry could not keep up with this improved deployment of cavalry and *hamippoi*. Apparently, Epaminondas was not only fielding merely *hamippoi* like he presumably did at Leuctra and other battles, but put to field a new and improved version. The Athenian cavalry did initially not succumb necessarily to Boeotian tactics but to Epaminondean tactics. From the comment in *Hellenica* chapter 7.5 on Mantinea, Xenophon says it was noteworthy what Epaminondas did. Did Xenophon immediately recognize the benefits of the improved type of warfare and tried to convince the Athenians of it in *Cavalry Commander*? Or did he write his works before Mantinea?

### Dating *Cavalry Commander*

*Cavalry Commander* is traditionally dated at 365 BC<sup>21</sup>. So, if we follow the original dating, the question is: why would the Athenians not have listened to a man who was an authority on the subject of cavalry and go into battle without *hamippoi*, but did so years after the Battle of Mantinea? There are clues in the *Cavalry Commander* and other works of Xenophon that may force us to leave the traditional date<sup>22</sup>. Some passages from *Ways and Means* (*de Vectigalibus*) are exactly the same as in *Cavalry Commander* and Xenophon states that *Ways and Means* was written in the period after Hegesileos, a commander who fought at Mantinea in 362 BC (*Ways and Means* 3.7) and after ‘the late war’ (*Ways and Means* 4.40)<sup>23</sup>.

Xenophon speaks especially anxious about the Thebans and a state of confusion in Greece. Several passages in *Cavalry Commander*, *Ways and Means*, and *On Horsemanship*, refer to a power vacuum which really only had first arisen after

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on this. This is the first time that *hamippoi* are mentioned. It is possible that the Boeotians devised this type of cavalry in order to be capable of fighting the Thessalian cavalry which, according to Simon. Ath. (*Eq.* 1) was the most powerful cavalry in Greece, though unwilling to fight hoplites in battle formation, (*X. HG* 4.3.5-9). In the above passages from Xenophon, this would seem to be the first time that the *hamippoi* are mentioned.

<sup>21</sup> E.g. Marchant, Loeb: *Xenophon Scripta Minora*: Introduction on Xenophon p. xxviii.

<sup>22</sup> I am not the only one to advocate a different, later, date: Christesen 2006. On the dates of these treatises, see also Delebecque 1957, 425-460; Delebecque 1973) 19-29, and (1978) 8-12. Delebecque believed that *On Horsemanship* was written in two phases, one dating to the 380s and another dating to the 350s (after the *Cavalry Commander*, to which Xenophon refers at the end of *On Horsemanship* (12.4).

<sup>23</sup> Ἡγησίλεος; Hēgēsīleōs. Relative of Eubulus of Probalinthus (Dem. 19.290), *strategos* of the Athenian troops in the battle of Mantinea in 362 BC (*X. Vect.* 3,7; Ephoros *FGrH* 70 F 85; D.S. 15.84.2) and probably in 349/348 again *strategos* of the Athenian reinforcements for the tyrant Plutarchus of Eretria. In agreement with the latter he was convicted of deceiving the people in an *eisangelia* law-suit (Schol. Dem. Or. 19.290). (see: Brill Online Reference Works).

the Battle at Mantinea in 362. The first being his reference to the confused state Greece was in, which he clearly stated as a consequence of the Battle at Mantinea in 362 BC: “neither was found to be any better off, as regards either additional territory, or city, or sway, than before the battle took place; but there was even more confusion and disorder in Greece after the battle than before” (X. *HG* 7.5.27). The same he states in *Ways and Means* 5.8: “and now owing to the confusion prevalent in Greece, an opportunity, I think, has fallen to the state to win back the Greeks”. Indeed, after Mantinea Greece was left in confusion, as Sparta had been thoroughly defeated, Athens could not really coin its victory, and Thebes lost its leader. But, at this point in history, Athens did not yet have lost its allies. Only in 357 its allies started to revolt from Athens. So the last comment was definitely referring to the Social War and not to the recent battle against Thebes. Marchant, in Xenophon’s *Scripta Minora*, states that this will probably be an allusion to the ‘War of the Allies’ lasting from 357 to 355 BC<sup>24</sup>. Xenophon died around 355 BC and probably never saw the end of the ‘War of the Allies’. If so, he will never have spoken about a ‘reigning peace’. This could mean that the *Cavalry Commander* was also authored after the Battle at Mantinea, since after that battle an uneasy peace was made between Sparta, Athens, and Thebes. Xenophon sensed his opportunity with the confusion that reigned in Greece shortly after the battle at Mantinea. He urges the Athenians to seize power in the Aegean once more and in *Ways and Means*, for example, he set out a plan on how this might be achieved and he called on the Athenians to take action to regain control over Greece (X. *Vect.* 5.8 - 6.3). Xenophon put forward Boeotian tactics in the *Cavalry Commander* in order to prepare the Athenians for an upcoming (decisive?) battle, which he foresaw or probably even wanted. He anticipated Thebes would not long stay content with the current peace treaty and under a new leader, after the demise of Epaminondas, would try to fight Athens and Sparta again. In his works he mingled his own best practises from his own large experience of cavalry warfare in Persia and the Peloponnese with the aforementioned ‘modern’ Boeotian tactics. Thus Xenophon wrote that the city would absolutely be destitute without *hamippoi*, concluding this from the Battle of Mantinea.

After meticulously analysing Boeotian tactics in his account of the battle at Mantinea in 362 BC (X. *Hellenica* 7.5.19 - 27), he put forward his recommendations in the *Cavalry Commander*. Presumably, the death of his son Gryllus while serving in the Athenian cavalry at Mantinea made Xenophon even more determined to offer his expertise to the Athenians. He hoped it would give them the means to avenge their defeat – not to mention the death of Gryllus – in the future.

Taking into account other sources, such as Aristotle, we find that tactical recommendations made by Xenophon were implemented by the Athenian army

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<sup>24</sup> See footnote on page 219 of the Loeb edition.



around 355 BC<sup>25</sup>. A relief showing an Athenian *hamippos* has been dated around 350 BC (Sekunda 2005, 54). In the *Memorabilia* and *Cavalry Commander* Xenophon for example writes that the cavalry commander should reject horses that are incapable of keeping up with the exercises or that kick and behave viciously. Aristotle writes that the Council did indeed mark and reject such horses using exactly the phrases Xenophon used in his treatises. Aristotle also mentions infantry attached to cavalry or *hamippoi* to have become a regular unit in the Athenian army (Arist. *Ath.* 49). When infantry needs to keep up with the horses in battle formation, the riders will need to get more control of their horses, this control called ‘collection’ which can only be achieved by frequent specific training and specific horsebits<sup>26</sup>. And being a horseman he recognized that new style *hamippoi* and infantry units would require the Athenian horsemen to improve or at least alter their training. This remark brings me to an issue that needs careful consideration, which Xenophon himself was very aware of: horsemanship.

### **Linking *Hellenica*, *Cavalry Commander* and *On Horsemanship***

Since the Athenians were at war with the Boeotians who were experts in cavalry warfare, Xenophon advised Athens to put more emphasis on the use (and therefore training) of cavalry. He needed to alert Athens to the importance of taking the cavalry seriously and acquiring or at least altering their horsemanship<sup>27</sup>. All aspects of horsemanship are important to the functioning of cavalry, especially if it is to fulfil its task as a battle cavalry fighting in formation<sup>28</sup>.

As we have seen above, at Mantinea the Athenian cavalry was lined up in formation and they were not able to withstand an attack by the dense cavalry and *hamippoi* formation of Epaminondas. If a cavalry unit should be able to attack another cavalry unit frontally, combined with an infantry unit, the horses should be trained to stay in line and in pace with the foot soldiers. This requires a higher standard of control of the horse than a loose formation of cavalymen waiting

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<sup>25</sup> Marchant 2000, Introduction, xxvi: Euboulus seems to have implemented some of Xenophon’s advice after 355 BC.

<sup>26</sup> Exercises and bits to improve control or ‘collection’ are described by Xenophon in ‘On Horsemanship’, i.e. 7.12-8.10; 10.1-11.13.

<sup>27</sup> Horsemanship means that the horses must be trained to work closely with their riders, forming one unit. The riders need to train their horses to such an extent that they will be able to withstand hardship and trust their riders, who in turn require a good understanding of speed, formation, and tactics. Horses must be prepared for all eventualities, such as unexpected situations (sudden enemy attack which necessitates a galloping retreat, jumping over dead bodies, leaping over trenches, making quick turns, and executing assault manoeuvres). This requires daily hard work and cannot be learned in a few months. Since Greeks did not use standing armies, the quality of their cavalry units was usually very poor. Another important factor is the Greek landscape which is usually not very suitable for horseriding or keeping horses.

<sup>28</sup> Horsemanship is a skill that encompasses not only the riding of a horse, but also thorough knowledge of horses, horse breeds, their character, build, training requirements, use of bridles, and so on. For the cavalryman, this demands a thorough knowledge of weaponry, exercises, formations, and cavalry tactics. This is also expressed by Beamish 2010, 23-36; 56.

for an attack on infantry that had lost its formation. Xenophon wanted the Athenian cavalry to adapt to the changing battlefield conditions and adopt, amongst other tactics, especially Boeotian tactics combining cavalry and infantry as these were the successful military tactics of the day. Xenophon understood how important the cavalry fighting in formation would become on the battlefield and how necessary it would be for the cavalry and the infantry to be deployed as a tactical unit together<sup>29</sup>.

The performance of the cavalry as a combat unit will succeed or fail depending on the level of training received by horses and riders alike. When lacking a high standard of horsemanship, a cavalry may be successful in minor skirmishes but if facing a cavalry on the battlefield that is being deployed as a tactical and strategic weapon, a poorly trained cavalry will prove unsuccessful, especially against an expert force like that of the Boeotian Thebans. Of course, being masters in horsemanship will not guarantee victory on the battlefield, but poorly trained horsemen will not be able to perform manoeuvres that require more control of their horses. Xenophon explains that the cavalry should be capable of ‘attack and flight’ tactics. Referring to the above ‘attack and flight’ tactics, Xenophon writes on manoeuvres to be held during annual cavalcades in Athens: “I think that these manoeuvres would look more like war and would have the charm of novelty” (X. *Eq.Mag.* 3.13). He also admits that “our cavalrymen are not accustomed to these movements” (X. *Eq.Mag.* 3.5). This comment means that the Athenian cavalry at that time did not perform these exercises during parades or daily drills. Although he is now speaking of cavalcades instead of battle, the exercises performed by the cavalry in the intervals of peace between wars, should reflect real battle situations in order to prepare the cavalry for war. If they did not perform these exercises during training or cavalcades, they will absolutely not have been able to perform such during battle.

In *Horsemanship* and *Cavalry Commander* Xenophon discusses the horsemanship and thus training necessary to rise to a higher level of cavalry warfare in which cavalry and infantry had to be able to work more closely together. Xenophon recommends to practise exercises that will prepare horses and riders for close encounter battles and keeping up battle formations or performing manoeuvres on the battle field. Xenophon also writes about the importance of discipline and authority within the army, always a salient point in Athenian armies that consisted of citizens who were used to democracy and speaking their minds<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> X. *Eq.Mag.* 8.1: “It is clear, however, that no troops will be able to inflict loss on a much stronger army with impunity, unless they are so superior in the practical application of horsemanship to war that they show like experts contending with amateurs”.

<sup>30</sup> The Athenian cavalrymen were not used to being ‘bossed around’ by their peers nor would they easily accept a cavalry commander that came from non-equestrian stock. Also the many changes in the leadership of cavalry made it impossible to create a ‘standing army’ or to create an ‘equestrian type of mentality’. On peer leadership and how democracy can fail in a military environment, see Koolen 2012, 151-165.

Xenophon describes how putting an incompetent cavalry commander in charge could negatively affect the overall performance of the force and that only those who were proven competent horsemen should be allowed to command<sup>31</sup>. The cavalry commander should be better than his riders, otherwise he cannot substantiate his superior position. He must therefore be a superior horseman, better in combat tactics and be capable of training his men well. In addition, he needs to have a good tactical insight in order to be successful in war and on the battlefield. A lack of which, of course, might be fatal on the battlefield and during a march. Xenophon warns that the Athenians will need to put a good commander in charge of their cavalry, otherwise they will not be capable of fighting a superior force<sup>32</sup>.

I believe that Boeotian tactics found their way into the writings of Xenophon, precisely because in the fourth century the Athenians started to fall short in cavalry tactics on the battlefield. Xenophon seems to refer to this, when he observes: “if one took the same pains with our cavalry, they too would greatly excel others in arms and horses and discipline and readiness to face the enemy, if they thought that they would win glory and honour by it?” (X. *Oec.* 9.3.14). The Athenians had to recognise this and to discontinue with their usual *ad hoc* training of both these units<sup>33</sup>.

Unfortunately, a few years after Mantinea, Greece again lost itself in the aforementioned War of the Allies, being the battle perhaps that Xenophon foresaw. Macedonian Philip II, who had learned tactical lessons from Epaminondas while being in custody at Thebes, eventually put an end to all strife. The Macedonian phalanxes relied heavily on their cooperation with the cavalry, thus proving Xenophon right in his observations he had made (Devine 1983, 213; Strootman 2010-2011, 51-68).

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<sup>31</sup> In 4th century Athens, the command of the cavalry had become a stepping stone to a high position in a political career. Those men were not capable of leading a military force that needed strict orders and sometimes severe measures of punishment, because they would only think of canvassing the soldiers in order to secure their votes later on, according to Polybius 10.22.8-10. Also in the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon criticizes the Athenians for choosing generals that are inexperienced and not interested in the art of warfare itself, but only in career- and moneymaking (X. *Mem.* 3.4.1.).

<sup>32</sup> That especially cavalry needs an excellent and brave commander is expressed in many military works. Not only in Xenophon: “but if the city falls back on her navy, and is content to keep her walls intact, as in the days when the Lacedaemonians invaded us with all the Greeks to help them, and if she expects her cavalry to protect all that lies outside the walls, and to take its chance unaided against her foes – why then, I suppose, we need first the strong arm of the gods to aid us, and in the second place it is essential that our cavalry commander should be masterly. For much sagacity is called for in coping with a greatly superior force, and abundance of courage when the call comes” (X. *Eq.Mag.* 7.5); But also for example in Beamish (2010, 23-36), the author states that cavalry can only succeed on the battlefield if it is led by excellent and capable commanders.

<sup>33</sup> Greek armies were not professional armies, except for the Spartan infantry. Greek armies received training on the job, which might work for infantry, but cavalry just does not work like that.

## Conclusions

It is clear that from the 5th century BC onwards Greek cavalry had slowly developed from a mainly supporting unit into a combat unit, with Epaminondas taking the role of the cavalry even further between 371 BC and 362 BC. Especially the Boeotian cavalry became able to work closely with the infantry in the centre of the battlefield instead of a wing unit waiting for the infantry lines to break. Xenophon clearly saw this new role for cavalry as an important development in cavalry warfare since Athens was at constant threat from Thebes and tried to convey his thoughts on this subject to the Athenians. After the successive defeats of Sparta at Tegyra in 375 BC and at Leuctra in 371 BC, and especially, after the defeat of Athens at Mantinea in 362 BC, Xenophon had seen the effectiveness of the *hamippoi* and cavalry in formation in the way Epaminondas fielded them. From Xenophon's account of the Battle at Mantinea in 362 BC we can conclude that the Athenians went to battle without *hamippoi*. Xenophon decided it was best to fight fire with fire, so he wanted the Athenians to adopt Boeotian tactics in order to defeat them and try to regain hegemony in the Aegean. Around 350 BC, *hamippoi* seem to have found their way into the Athenian cavalry, but Athens was utterly defenceless against a new foe on the battlefield: Epaminondas with his tactics of dense infantry and cavalry formations had prepared a solid basis for the genius cavalry and infantry stratagems of his student Philip II of Macedon, who would eventually conquer large parts of the Greek world.

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