

Alexander's Seventh Phalanx Battalion

R. D. Milns

AT SOME TIME between the battle of Gaugamela and the battle of the Hydaspes the number of battalions in the Macedonian phalanx was raised from six to seven.¹ This much is clear; what is not certain is when the new formation came into being. Berve² believes that the introduction took place at Susa in 331 B.C. He bases his belief on two facts: (a) the arrival of 6,000 Macedonian infantry and 500 Macedonian cavalry under Amyntas, son of Andromenes, when the King was either near or at Susa;³ (b) the appearance of Philotas (not the son of Parmenion) as a battalion leader shortly afterwards at the Persian Gates.⁴

Tarn, in his discussion of the phalanx,⁵ believes that the seventh battalion was not created until 328/7, when Alexander was at Bactra, the new battalion being that of Cleitus "the White".⁶ Berve is rejected on the grounds: (a) that Arrian (3.16.11) says that Amyntas' reinforcements were "inserted into the existing (six) battalions *κατὰ ἔθνη*"; (b) that Philotas has in fact taken over the command of Perdiccas' battalion, Perdiccas having been "promoted to the Staff . . . doubtless after the battle" (*i.e.* Gaugamela).⁷ The seventh battalion was formed, he believes, from reinforcements from Macedonia who reached Alexander at Nautaca.⁸

Now all of Tarn's arguments are open to objection; and I shall treat them in the order they are presented above.

¹ Arrian 3.2.9 for Gaugamela, where all 6 battalions are named; 7 battalions are named by Arrian at the Hydaspes battle: those of Cleitus and Coenus, 5.12.2; of Polyperchon and Alcetas, 5.11.3; of Meleager, Attalus and Gorgias, 5.12.1. I am not here concerned with the question of whether Antigenes now commanded Coenus' battalion (Tarn II.190 and 146); the important thing is that 7 battalions are here named.

² *Das Alexanderreich auf prosopographischer Grundlage* I (München 1926) 115–116: henceforth cited as BERVE.

³ Reinforcements: Diod. 17.65.1; Curt. 5.1.41–42; Arrian 3.16.10.

⁴ Philotas: Arr. 3.18.6.

⁵ Tarn, *Alexander the Great* II (Cambridge 1948) 142–148; hereafter referred to as TARN II.

⁶ Cf. Arr. 4.22.7.

⁷ Tarn II.143.

⁸ Tarn II.147; cf. especially his n.3.

(a) Arrian does not say anything about “the existing (six) battalions.” Rather, he says *τοὺς πεζοὺς δὲ προσέθηκεν ταῖς τάξεσι ταῖς ἄλλαις, κατὰ ἔθνη ἐκάστους ξυντάξας*—literally, “he added the infantry to the *other* battalions, assigning each man according to nationality.” The emphatic position of the words *ταῖς ἄλλαις* strongly implies that there was a battalion or battalions over and above the ones to which additions were made.

(b) The earliest mention in Arrian of Perdiccas as a *σωματοφύλαξ* (which is what Tarn means by “the Staff”) is not until three-and-one-half years *after* the battle of Gaugamela, when the army was attacking the Rock of Choriene⁹ in the Spring of 327. The appointment may have been made at the time of the Philotas affair, since Curtius (6.8.17) speaks of Perdiccas here as an *armiger*. But one cannot have a great deal of faith in Curtius’ terminology; thus two sections later *armigeri* is used of a detachment of soldiers. However, such speculation need not detain us; for at the battle at the Persian Gates Arrian specifically mentions Perdiccas’ battalion as participating in the attack on the Persian Camp with Alexander; while Philotas is equally specifically mentioned in the same passage as being sent at this time to the Araxes with Amyntas and Coenus to bridge the river (Arrian 3.18.5–6). When this is recognized, Tarn’s argument for Philotas as being the successor to Perdiccas in the command of Perdiccas’ brigade falls straight to the ground.¹⁰

(c) Tarn’s argument for the seventh battalion being formed at Bactra is based on the belief that reinforcements of Macedonians were received soon before this time at Nautaca. For this the crucial passage is Arrian 4.18.3: *Σώπολιν δὲ καὶ Ἐπόκιλλον καὶ Μενίδα ἐκ Μακεδονίας ἐκπέμπει, τὴν στρατιὰν τὴν ἐκ Μακεδονίας αὐτῷ ἀνάξοντα*. Tarn believes that it was this *στρατιὰ ἐκ Μακεδονίας* from which the new battalion was formed at Bactra (together with supplements for the other six). To get rid of the overwhelming difficulty raised by the problem of the time factor—it would have been absolutely impossible for the three men to return to Macedonia, then come back to Bactra with the army in the time that it took for Alexander to move from Nautaca to

⁹ Arr. 4.21.4; Choriene is to be found in Berve under *Sisimithres*, no.708.

¹⁰ It may be noticed *en passant* that appointment as a *σωματοφύλαξ* need *not*, as Tarn seems to believe, disqualify a man from the command of a military unit. There is the example of Ptolemaeus, son of Seleucus, (Berve no.670) described at Arr. 1.24.1 as a *σωματοφύλαξ* and found as a battalion leader at Issus, where he met his death. (Cf. Arr. 2.8.4; 2.10.7.)

Bactra—Tarn resorts to the expedient of claiming that the three commanders met the army en route, “perhaps at no great distance” from Nautaca: that, therefore, “they were not of course sent *ἐς Μακεδονίαν*, as the text says—that has merely been put in from *ἐκ Μακεδονίας*.”¹¹ This highly suspicious line of argument has recently been followed and taken even further by P. A. Brunt in a recent article, in which he conjectures that there reached Alexander at Nautaca in the *στρατιὰ ἐκ Μακεδονίας* ca. 6,000 infantry and 500 cavalry.¹² Now there is no justification for Tarn’s excision of *ἐς Μακεδονίαν*. Repetitions of words and proper names in this fashion, though stylistically clumsy, are a regular part of Arrian’s method of writing, intended to give greater clarity.¹³ Further, apart from the fact that there is no record in our sources of any such army reaching Alexander at this time, it is interesting to note that of the three commanders only one is ever mentioned again in Alexander’s lifetime. This is Menidas,¹⁴ who reached Alexander at *Babylon* in 323, in the company of the finance officer, Philoxenus, and the Carian satrap, Menander, with a force of cavalry (Arrian 7.23.1).

In the light of these considerations I feel that Tarn’s arguments for 328/7 as the date of formation of the seventh battalion must now be treated with a great deal of caution.

It seems only reasonable that, unless Alexander was going to form the seventh battalion by drawing detachments from the original six (and thus decrease considerably the numerical strength of each battalion), the only time that this formation could be created is after the receipt of reinforcements of Macedonians.¹⁵ Now between 331 (Gaugamela) and 326 (Hydaspes), we know of six occasions when reinforcements reached Alexander.¹⁶ On only one of these occasions do we hear of *Macedonians* among the reinforcements; and this was in 331 at Susa. It must therefore follow logically from this that Berve

¹¹ Tarn II.147 n.3.

¹² P. A. Brunt, *JHS* 83 (1963) 27ff, “Alexander’s Macedonian Cavalry”; see especially the table of reinforcements on p.39.

¹³ See, for example, 2.14.1ff; 5.2.1.

¹⁴ For Epocillus, see Berve no.301; for Menidas, Berve no.508; for Sopolis, Berve no.736.

¹⁵ Berve’s hypothesis, I.116, of an “Angliederung von Nicht-Pezhetairen an die makedonische Phalanx” is untenable. The phalanx retained its purely national character right till the end of Alexander’s reign, when the King, after dismissing the 10,000 veterans at Opis, began to experiment with a new mixed phalanx (Arr. 7.23.3–4). The only Macedonian infantry who can be called “Nicht-Pezhetairen” (in the sense that Berve here uses the word, i.e. members of the phalanx-battalions) were, of course, the hypaspists.

¹⁶ See, most conveniently, Berve I.182, for a table of reinforcements and references.

(I.116) was correct in his conjecture of 331 for the formation of the seventh battalion.

There is, moreover, a piece of indirect evidence to be found in Arrian that lends strong support to this conclusion, and which, so far as I know, has not previously been noticed. This occurs in Arrian's account (3.19ff) of Alexander's campaign in pursuit of Darius, which began in Spring 330 from Ecbatana. First, however, we must make some attempt to assess the number of Macedonian infantry (exclusive of hypaspists) that Alexander had when he set out for Ecbatana.

It is almost certain that the battalions at Gaugamela were at full strength (*i.e.* 9,000+ altogether), since the numbers that Alexander had for the battle, as given by Arrian,¹⁷ are virtually the same as the numbers of the army at the beginning of the expedition.¹⁸ The only known reinforcement for the Macedonian infantry between 334 and 331 occurs at Gordium, where 3,000 infantry and 300 cavalry arrived at the army.¹⁹ Added to the original paper-strength of the phalanx, these would now give a total of 12,000 phalangites at the battle. From this, total losses must now be deducted (amongst whom can be included Macedonians detached from the main army on garrison duty). In this respect the sources are not always helpful because of the tendency to 'write down' the Macedonian losses and exaggerate the enemy's with a view to the glorification of the King; it is reasonable in such cases to assume that the highest figure given in the sources for the Macedonian losses will probably be nearest the truth. Also where garrison troops are left behind, it is not always made clear who comprised the force. The following tables will give the figures most conveniently for Macedonian infantry troops lost to the army from combat service either through death or garrison duty

¹⁷ Arr. 3.12.5; *ca.* 40,000 infantry and 7,000 cavalry.

¹⁸ That is, the 32,000 infantry and 5,100 cavalry as enumerated in the army list by Diodorus (17.17.3-4) + the *ca.* 10,000 advance guard (Diod. 16.91.2 and Polyæn. 5.44.4). These latter included a contingent of *ca.* 1,000 cavalry; see P. A. Brunt, *op.cit.* 33f and my own forthcoming article in *JHS* 1966.

¹⁹ Arr. 1.29.4, specifically named as Macedonians. The reference in Callisthenes fr.33 (Jacoby) to reinforcements reaching Alexander *μέλλοντι (δ') εἰς Κιλικίαν ἐμβάλλειν* must mean Gordium, which was the last important stopping place, apart from Ancyra (which merits merely a passing reference in Arrian), before the army invaded Cilicia. I feel that Callisthenes' totals of 5,000 infantry and 800 cavalry (of unspecified nationality) can be reconciled with Arrian's totals, if it be accepted that Callisthenes' totals include non-Macedonian units, such as the 200 Thessalians and 150 Elians mentioned by Arrian, and other units (*e.g.* mercenaries) not mentioned by Arrian.

from the crossing into Asia up to, and including, the battle of Gaugamela.²⁰

LOSSES IN BATTLE

The Granicus	ca. 30 (Arr. 1.16.4)
Halicarnassus	100 ²¹
Issus	ca. 300 (Diod. 17.36.6) ²²
Tyre	ca. 400 (Arr. 2.24.4) ²³
Gaugamela	ca. 500 (Diod. 17.61.3) ²⁴
<i>Total</i>	ca. 1,330

GARRISON TROOPS

Halicarnassus	ca. 300? ²⁵
Celaenae	ca. 150? ²⁶
Egypt	ca. 1,000 ²⁷
<i>Total</i>	ca. 1,450

Together these two totals add up to 2,780—say 2,800 for a round figure—Macedonians lost to active service between 334 and 331. The bat-

²⁰ Cf. Berve I.179–181. I assume that in battle losses, where our sources give merely a figure, this figure refers to *Macedonian* dead only. This assumption is not an arbitrary one; in the major battles and military operations the brunt of the fighting was borne—with the exception of one or two small specialised units, such as the Agrinians—by purely *Macedonian* troops. It is, of course, impossible to say what proportion of the infantry losses were from the phalanx and what from the hypaspists.

²¹ This is a very conservative estimate, since 40 men were killed in one sally alone by the defenders (Arr. 1.22.7).

²² Cf. Arr. 2.10.7, who says that 120 Macedonians—the context shows that they were phalangites—died in one stage of the battle alone.

²³ Again, the context shows that the ca. 400 were Macedonians: cf. τῶν μὲν Τυρίων . . . τῶν Μακεδόνων δὲ . . . ἐς τετρακοσίους.

²⁴ These would be mainly on the left wing of the phalanx, which received a severe mauling from Mazaeus. Note that even on the victorious right wing ca. 100 cavalry—Companions seem to be meant by Arr. 3.15.6—were killed.

²⁵ Arr. 1.23.6 says 3,000 mercenary foot and ca. 200 cavalry were left at Halicarnassus as the garrison for the city and the rest of Caria. It seems highly probable that they contained at least a stiffening of Macedonians; I have assumed ten per cent.

²⁶ Arr. 1.29.3 merely says ca. 1,500 soldiers. Again I have assumed a mercenary force with a stiffening of Macedonians.

²⁷ Curt. 4.8.4 gives this figure. In view of the great strategic importance of Egypt—and perhaps also warned by the recent experiences of Amyntas, son of Antiochus, of the attractions of Egyptian wealth to mercenary soldiers under an unscrupulous leader—the proportion of Macedonians left in the country is likely to have been much higher. This seems to be borne out by Alexander's administrative arrangements for the country as given by 3.4.3ff, where the Aetolian, Lycidas, is put in command of the mercenary forces, but two distinguished Macedonians, Peucestas and Balacrus, were appointed as στρατηγοί of the whole army of Egypt, perhaps of Upper and Lower Egypt respectively, and independent of the civilian administration.

talions of the phalanx were thus each somewhat more than 100 men overstrength before Gaugamela, and still each about 30 men overstrength after the battle.²⁸

Between the end of the battle and the army's departure from Persis early in 330, the following losses of manpower to the army are known:

LOSSES IN BATTLE	
Persian Gates	<i>ca.</i> 100? ²⁹
GARRISON TROOPS	
Babylon	700 (Curt. 5.1.43; Diod. 17.64.5)
Susa	1,000 (Curt. 5.2.16)
Persepolis	3,000 (Curt. 5.6.11) ³⁰
<i>Total</i>	<i>ca.</i> 4,800

Thus the phalanx, between Gaugamela and Ecbatana, received 6,000 reinforcements at Susa and lost from active service *ca.* 4,800. As has already been shown (see n.28), the probable strength of the phalanx after Gaugamela was 9,200 men. Between Gaugamela and Susa, where the 6,000 reached the army, a total of about 1,800 men were taken off active service, and a further 3,000 soon after at Persepolis. This gives a total of *ca.* 10,400 phalangites left on active service when the army left Persepolis, and this figure, I would suggest, must represent seven phalanx battalions of *ca.* 1,500 each. Whether the introduction of the new battalion was actually at Susa on the arrival of the 6,000 (as with Berve), cannot be stated with certainty. The descriptions of military reforms at this time, as given by Arrian, Curtius and Diodorus,³¹ seem to make this highly likely. The battalions would certainly be overstrength for a time,³² but Alexander must have had a very good idea of the opposition he was

²⁸ That is, if we take the reinforcements and losses (both deaths and garrison troops) as far as Gaugamela, we get a battle strength of 9,700 for the phalanx; after the battle this drops to 9,200.

²⁹ No figures are given in the sources, but both Diod. 17.68.2–3 and Curt. 5.3.18ff emphasise (what Arrian glosses over) that the Macedonians suffered heavy casualties in the first attack on the wall.

³⁰ Berve, II.278 *s.v.* NICARCHIDES, no.563, believes that this number is exaggerated. I cannot see why; the difficult entry into Persis and the unsettled condition of the very heart of the Persian empire must surely have demanded a much stronger garrison—and a much more reliable one—than elsewhere.

³¹ Arr. 3.16.10–11; Curt. 5.2; Diod. 17.65.2–4.

³² Nearly 1,930 men per battalion.

going to meet in Persis, with the need for a large detachment of Macedonians to garrison the country and a consequent reduction of battalion strength to normal. No doubt many of the 3,000 left in Persepolis were, as at Susa, “*aetate gravibus*” (Curtius 5.2.16).

We may now return to the piece of evidence which, in my opinion, affords conclusive proof that the seventh battalion had been introduced at least before Ecbatana, in the Spring of 330. When the army advanced to Ecbatana, the monies that had been taken since Gaugamela were transported there to be handed over to Harpalus. Parmenion, with a strong force of mercenaries, was appointed to guard the treasury. However, it was first necessary to clear up the tribes in the mountainous area along the southern shore of the Caspian. Accordingly, Parmenion was ordered to take his mercenaries and make an expedition which would reduce the tribes along the western part of the southern shore, while Alexander himself set out in pursuit of Darius (Arrian 3.19.7–8). When Darius had been either captured or killed, Alexander himself would turn back into the mountains and reduce the eastern part of the southern shore.³³ Whilst Parmenion and his troops were away, the task of guarding the treasury was entrusted to *ca.* 6,000 Macedonians, with some cavalry and a few light infantry. On Parmenion’s return these 6,000 were to be relieved of their task and make their way eastwards (to Parthyaea) to join up again with Alexander. They were to be led by Cleitus “the Black,” at that time ill in Susa, but expected to have recovered by the time of Parmenion’s return.³⁴ Unless evidence can be produced to show that an increase in the manpower of a phalanx battalion was made about this time, the 6,000 Macedonians can only represent four battalions that were left at Ecbatana.

Now the troops that Alexander took with him on his pursuit of Darius and subsequent operations in Hyrcania are named by Arrian (3.20.1) as follows: the Companion Cavalry; the Prodrumi; the mercenary cavalry of Erigyus; the Macedonian phalanx, “*apart from those assigned to the treasury*”; the archers; and the Agrianians. The “Macedonian phalanx” must include the hypaspists who, in fact, are mentioned along with their commander several times during the

³³ This follows from the course of military events after Darius’ death.

³⁴ Arr. 3.19.7–8. The 6,000 did rejoin Alexander, as their instructions stated, at Susa, on the Parthyaean-Arian border; cf. Arr. 3.25.4: *ὁμοῦ ἤδη ἔχων τὴν πᾶσαν δύναμιν*. They have no connection with the 7,000 foot-soldiers who reached Alexander in 326 at the Hydaspes (Curt. 9.3.21).

pursuit.³⁵ The rest of the phalanx, after deducting the hypaspists, amounted to three battalions, as can be seen from the battalions which are named with their commanders during the pursuit and operations in Hyrcania. These are those of Craterus, Amyntas, and Coenus; no other battalions or battalion commanders are mentioned by Arrian either during the pursuit of Darius or in the subsequent operations.³⁶ There were thus certainly seven battalions in the Macedonian phalanx with Alexander by Spring 330.³⁷

That the introduction of the seventh battalion is not mentioned in our sources (especially Arrian) need not cause surprise when it is remembered that other, much more important military reforms receive no mention (*cf.* the reorganization of the cavalry into five hipparchies at some time before the Indian campaign). Again, to the best of my knowledge, it is nowhere specifically *stated* in our sources that *six* battalions of the phalanx crossed into Asia with Alexander. This is a deduction based on the known numbers of the Foot Companions and the known names of battalion commanders as given in battle lists. Likewise we are left to deduce, from our available evidence, the introduction of the *seventh battalion*.

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND,
NEW SOUTH WALES
March, 1966

³⁵ *Cf.* Arr. 3.23.3, 3.21.8.

³⁶ For Craterus and Amyntas, see Arr. 3.23.2; for Coenus and Amyntas, see Arr. 3.24.1. That there were only the battalions of Craterus, Amyntas and Coenus with Alexander is based not only on Arrian's silence; with the number of Macedonian troops available to Alexander, as I have demonstrated, there *could* not have been more than these.

³⁷ The above arguments might well be used to show that in fact Perdiccas *was* appointed "to the Staff" as early as Ecbatana (but after the Persian Gates—see pp.159f), since so senior a battalion leader as Perdiccas would probably not be subordinate to a squadron leader of the cavalry. However, it is perhaps possible to underestimate the importance of both Cleitus himself and of his position as leader of the Royal Squadron. It was, after all, Cleitus and not one of the senior battalion leaders who was appointed, along with Hephaestion, as hipparch after the Philotas affair (Arr. 3.27.4). Perdiccas, Craterus and Coenus had to wait till considerably later before receiving a hipparchy.