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THE INTRODUCTION OF CAVALRY *THUREOPHOROI* INTO GREEK WARFARE*

The most distinctive feature of the armament of Celtic warriors of the late La Tène period was the large shield they carried. These shields were wooden, sometimes covered in hide or felt, oval in shape, with a single recessed horizontal handle on the inside, protected on the outside by a reinforcing 'barley-corn' *umbo* and a *spina* (reinforcing rib) at the front. The remains of three of these shields were found at La Tène in Switzerland, the type-site for the late Celtic 'La Tène Culture', and other examples have been found throughout northern Europe. The most spectacular finds of Celtic shields of this type in recent years have been made at the sanctuary site of Gournay-sur-Aronde.¹

The ancient Greeks applied the word *thureos*, literally 'door', to this type of shield. The *thureos* was a large shield, usually oval in shape, and usually reinforced around the rim, and given a central rib and an *umbo*. This type of shield was probably called a 'door' because of its large size, rather than for any reason to do with its shape. Nevertheless, this has not prevented many modern scholars from erroneously translating *thureos* into English as 'square shield' or 'oblong shield'. To be sure, some representations of a square type of *thureos/scutum* have survived (Fig. 1), but these are relatively rare before the Imperial period.

The relationship between the Celtic 'La Tène' shield and the *scutum*: a shield of identical shape used by the Romans and other Italians is extremely obscure.

*This article contains material previously discussed in the books; Nicholas Sekunda and Angus McBride, *Seleucid and Ptolemaic Reformed Armies 168-145 BC*, Vol. 1: *The Seleucid Army*, Stockport 1994, and Nicholas Sekunda and Angus McBride, *Seleucid and Ptolemaic Reformed Armies 168-145 BC*, Vol. 2: *The Ptolemaic Army under Ptolemy VI Philometor*, Stockport 1995; neither of which are currently available, and in my forthcoming contribution to the *Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare*.

The *thureos* was also used in Italy, where the Romans called it a *scutum*. The archaeological evidence for early examples of this type of shield in Italy has been gathered and discussed by Eichberg,² and by Stary,³ who present examples much earlier than the first contacts of the Celts with Italy. Consequently Maule & Smith, followed by Lévêque and Feugère,⁴ suggested it was used in Italy from Prehistoric times, and was perhaps later borrowed by the Celts. The precise sequence of events remains, however, uncertain.

Greek Infantry *thureophoroi*

In the early third century the *thureophoros* (a soldier carrying a *thureos* shield) also appears as a type of infantryman in the Greek battle-line. To many Greek armies, especially the smaller ones, the *thureophoros* was a troop type more suited to their tactical needs, rather than the heavier-armed and less fluid phalangite.⁵ In the Hellenistic period

¹ J.-L. Bruneaux, A. Rapiin, *Gournay II. Boucliers et Lance. Dépôts et Trophées*, Paris 1988; T. Léjars, *Gournay III. Les Fourreaux d'Épée. Le sanctuaire de Gournay-sur-Aronde et l'armement des Celtes de La Tène moyenne*, Paris 1994: for shields of this type in Eastern Europe see: M. Domaradzki, *Shields with Metal Fittings in the Eastern Celtic Region*, "Przegląd Archeologiczny", vol. 25, 1977, pp. 53-97.

² M. Eichberg, *Scutum. Die Entwicklung einer italisch-etruskischen Schildform von den Anfängen bis zur Zeit Caesars*, Frankfurt 1987.

³ P. F. Stary, *Zur eisenzeitlichen Bewaffnung und Kampfweise in Mittelitalien (ca. 9 bis 6. Jh. v. Chr.)*, "Marburger Studien zur Vor- und Frühgeschichte", Bd. 3, 1981, pl. 31, 1; 40.1; 50.1.

⁴ Q. F. Maule, H. R. W. Smith, *Votive Religion at Caere: Prolegomena*, "University of California Publications in Classical Archaeology", vol. 4, 1, Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1959, p. 6; M. Feugère, *Les armes des Romains, de la République à l'Antiquité tardive*, Paris 1993, p. 92.

⁵ J. Ma, *Fighting poleis of the Hellenistic world*, [in:] *War and Violence in Ancient Greece*, H. van Wees ed., 2000, pp. 337-376 at 357.

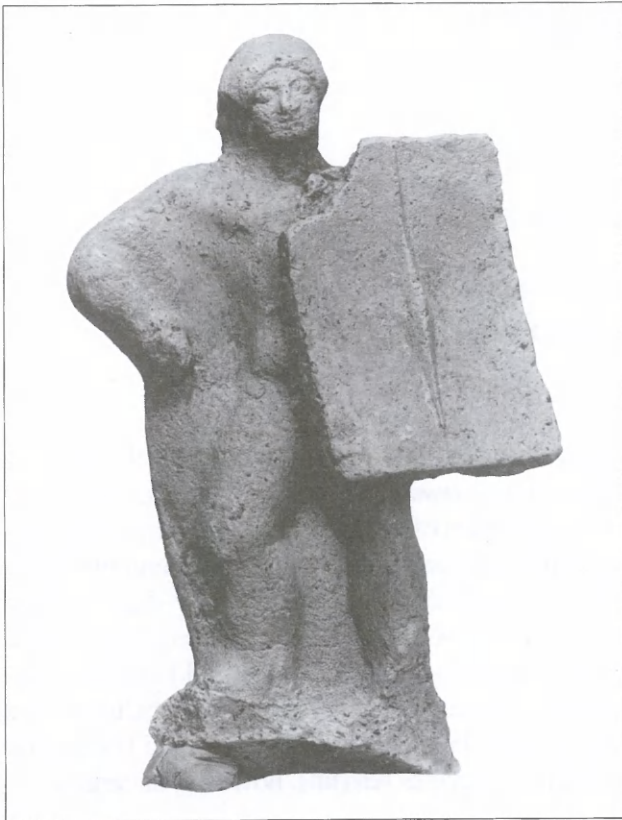


Fig. 1. Square scutum shown on a terracotta from Veii, dating to the beginning of the fifth century. Photo: Museo Nazionale di Villa Giulia, Rome.

the chief military concern of most of these smaller states was defence of their border areas from hostile incursion. The *thureophoros* could move more rapidly over more varied terrain than the phalangite. The *thureophoroi* could either fight at a distance, using their javelins, or at close quarters, relying on their *thureoi*, although it is true that in the latter case they would be at a disadvantage if facing more heavily armed troops (Plut., *Vit. Philop.* 9. 1). The *thureos* was adopted by the infantry of both the Achaean and Boeotian Leagues, perhaps as early as the 270s.

Consequently the ephebes of many Greek states would be trained as *thureophoroi*. In a number of Greek states the *thureomachia*, combat with swords and *thureoi*, is introduced into the range of athletic competitions. It is shown on a number of Hellenistic terracottas (Fig. 2). Many other terracottas show ephebes, clearly not Galatians, holding *thureoi* (Fig. 3). Therefore the appearance of a *thureos* or a *thureophoros* in the representational evidence has no ethnic significance unless the person carrying the *thureos* is clearly of Celtic physiognomy or wears elements of Celtic dress. The *thureos* is also attested at



Fig. 2. Terracotta in Berlin from North-West Asia Minor, showing two young Greek males engaged in *thureomachia*, after: U. H a u s m a n n, *Zur Erosen- und Gallier- Ikonographie in der Alexandrinischen Kunst* [in] *Alessandria e il Mondo Ellenistico-Romano, Studi in onore di Achille Adriani 2*, "Studi i Materiali" 5, Palermo 1983, pp. 283-295, tav. Iii, 7.

Carthage,⁶ where it may have been used by native Carthaginian troops, as well as by their Celtic and Iberian mercenaries.

The size of the *thureos* used by Greek armies is noticeably smaller than its Celtic or Roman counterparts. This might be explained by the need to increase mobility. The *thureoi* used by the infantry of the Achaean League were too narrow to fully protect the body (Plut., *Vit. Philop.* 9. 1).

‘For they used *thureoi* which were easily carried because they were so light, and yet they were too narrow to protect the body, and spears which were much smaller than the Macedonian pike. For this reason they were effective in fighting at a long distance, because they were so lightly armed, but when they came to fighting at close quarters with the enemy they were at a disadvantage’.

The introduction of the *thureos*

There seem to be two possible ways in which the *thureos* may have been introduced into Greek warfare. First, it may have been brought in by the Galatian invaders who first invaded Greece from 281 BC onwards. This has most recently been ar-

⁶ Q. F. M a u l e, H. R. W. S m i t h, *op. cit.*, p. 52 n. 144.



Fig. 3. A terracotta from Nineveh now in the British Museum showing a Seleucid or Parthian *thureophoros*. Here it is quite clear that the warrior is not ethnically Celtic. Photo: author.

gued by Santosuosso and Ma.⁷ Second, it may have first been borrowed into the army of Pyrrhus from his Oscan allies or Roman enemies, who both used the *scutum*, during his Italian campaigns of 281-275 BC, and then subsequently brought over to the Greek mainland during his later campaigns in Greece. This route was seemingly first suggested by Couissin, by Maule and Smith, and then by Lévêque.⁸

It is certainly true that Pyrrhus made use of Italian infantry. Polybius (18. 28. 10) tells us that he placed maniples of Italian infantry between *speirai* of pikemen. This does not have to imply,

⁷ A. Santosuosso, *Soldiers, Citizens, and the Symbols of War From Classical Greece to Republican Rome, 500-167 B.C.*, Oxford 1997, p. 149; J. Ma, *op. cit.*, p. 354.

⁸ P. Couissin, *Les Institutions Militaires et Navales*, Paris 1932, p. 77; Q. F. Maule, H. R. W. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 6; P. Lévêque, *La guerre à l'époque hellénistique*, [in:] *Problèmes de la guerre en Grèce ancienne*, J.-P. Vernant dir., Paris 1968.

however, that Pyrrhus armed any of his Epirote or other Greek infantry with *thureoi* of Italian type. Rather the blocks of Italian troops in more open order were placed between the blocks of pikemen to make the line more flexible. Elsewhere I have called this type of arrangement of the battle-line an 'articulating phalanx'.⁹ Whether Pyrrhus took any of his native Italian allied troops (along with their *thureoi*) back to Epirus from Italy is unknown.

It had previously been impossible to decide which of these two suggestions had the most merit. In a recent communication at the Second International Hellenistic Warfare Conference in Valencia in October 2005, Pierre Juhel brought attention to a cavalry *thureos* listed in a Delphian temple inventory for 156/5 dedicated by King Ptolemy son of Lysimachos, who could not have used the royal title before 277-276. This confirms that the *thureos* came first to Greece at an earlier date than Pyrrhus' campaigns in Greece, which began in 274 with Pyrrhus' invasion of Macedon and ended with his death at Argos in 272. Therefore it seems to have been introduced into Greek warfare thanks to the Galatians, whom we first find present in the Greek world as invaders, and then serving as mercenaries in a number of Hellenistic armies. If there was any difference between the cavalry *thureos* and the infantry *thureos*, as is, indeed, implied by the Delphian temple inventory, then it would have presumably lain in the handle arrangement. A cavalryman using a *thureos* would have had to be able to hold his horse's reins as well as the horizontal handle of his shield.

The Greek Cavalry Shield

Before the third century Greek cavalry are never shown carrying shields. Mounted hoplites are shown in the representational evidence, and so, very occasionally, are Persian cavalry using shields. The representational evidence does not allow a close dating, but it seems that after the first quarter of the third century Greek heavy cavalry started to use large, round cavalry shields. One may presume that these too were borrowed from the Celtic invaders at the same time as the infantry *thureos*.

⁹ *Warfare in the Ancient World*, Gen. Sir John Hackett ed., London 1989, p. 132; N. Sekunda, *Hellenistic Infantry Reform in the 160's B.C.*, Łódź 2001, pp. 119-21.

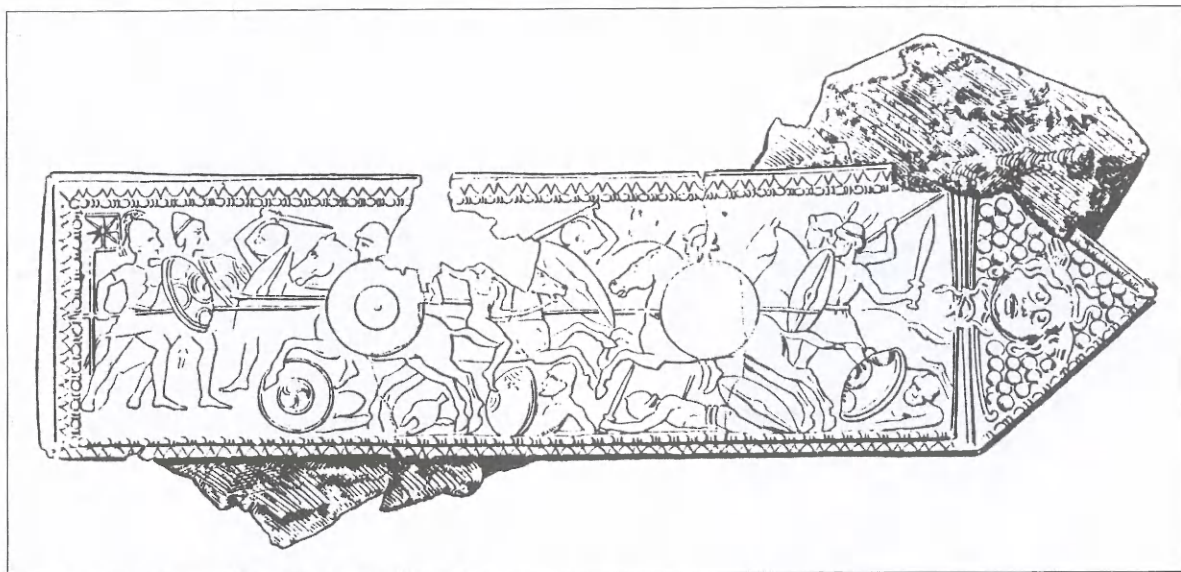


Fig. 4. Bronze band from Pergamon showing combat between Greek cavalry and an infantry phalanx carrying Macedonian shields, and enemy infantry, possibly Galatian, carrying *thureoi* and cavalry with shields with large umbos, after: *Altertümer von Pergamon* I p. 251.

Aelian (2.11-13) and Arrian (4.1-6) divide the cavalry arm into cataphracts and unarmoured cavalry (*aphraktoi*). The unarmoured cavalry are further divided into two groups, 'lancers' (*doratophoroi*) and *akrobolistai*, or missile-troops. Asclepiodotus (1.3) divides the cavalry into three branches. The cavalry which fights at close quarters uses very heavy equipment, fully protecting both horses and men with defensive armour, and employing, like the hoplites, long spears, for which reason this arm of service is also called the *doratophoroi* 'spear-bearing' or *xystophori* 'lance-bearing' cavalry. He does not divide these into *kataphraktoi* and *aphraktoi*, which presumably reflects the earlier date of Asclepiodotus, and the fact that he is closer to his original Hellenistic source. Horse armour was only patchily used before the cataphract was introduced into Greek warfare, probably by Antiochus III, and cataphracts did not use shields.

A number of authorities have sought to make a distinction between the equipment used by the *doratophoroi* and the *xystophoroi*, for example that the *doratophoroi* used shields while the *xystophoroi* did not. Such arguments are not convincing. Asclepiodotus conceives of the cavalry which fights at close quarters as one troop type, called either *doratophoroi* or *xystophoroi*. If there is any difference at all between these two types of troops it would have been in the type of cavalry lance they used. The *xyston* was the 'whittled' cavalry spear fitted with both head and butt as used by

Alexander's Companions and their Hellenistic successors.¹⁰ *Doratophoroi* may have used a more generic type of cavalry spear, but there would have been no essential difference between *doratophoroi* and *xystophoroi*, and both, presumably, used cavalry shields.

These 'lancers' could also be called *sariso-phoroi*, *kontophoroi*, *xystophoroi* or *lonchophoroi*, according to what type of spear they carried. It has been suggested that *xystophoroi* and *sariso-phoroi* are to be distinguished, the former being heavy cavalry and the latter light,¹¹ but there is, in fact, no evidence for any such differentiation. We definitely get the impression that in the Hellenistic Period the heaviest branch of Greek cavalry which fought at close quarters was heavily equipped. The representational evidence is unanimous in demonstrating that they used shields.

In fact the representational evidence from the Hellenistic period shows two principal types of cavalry shield in use. Though round, both types of shield are quite different from the bronze-faced shields

¹⁰ Plut., *Vit. Alex.* 16. 11; Arr., *Anab.* 1. 15. 5-8, 16. 1; *Anth. Pal.* 6. 131; cf. N. Sekunda, *The Sarissa*, "Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Archaeologica", 23, 2001, p. 13-41, 37-40.

¹¹ E. Rawson, *The Literary Sources for the Pre-Marian Army*, "Papers of the British School at Rome", 39, 1971, p. 13-31, 24 n. 41.

used by hoplites, and are obviously made from a quite different material. They are also in general a little larger than the hoplite shield, and cover from neck or chin to thigh. In one type the shield has an *umbo* and *spina* (i.e. a central rib), and possibly a rim too, although this is rarely shown (Fig. 4). The other type of Hellenistic cavalry shield does not have a *spina*, but has an extremely large *umbo* (Fig. 5). It is possible that either or both of these types of shield could have been termed a cavalry *thureos*, as in the inscription discussed by Pierre Juhel. Nevertheless there is a significant difference in shape between both these round cavalry shields and the oval infantry *thureos*. Consequently I will argue that the cavalry *thureos* is a third type of shield used by Hellenistic cavalry, identical in shape with the infantry *thureos*.

Thureophoros Cavalry

Asclepiodotus (*Tact.* 1. 3) and Arrian (4.4) both mention another branch of cavalry which fights with the enemy at close quarters as being termed *thureophoroi* ‘*thureos*-bearers’:

‘when it, sometimes, carries unusually long shields for the purpose of protecting the mount as well as the rider’.

I assume that this taxonomy goes back originally to the lost work of Poseidonius, but this cannot be proved, and it should be noted that *thureophoros* cavalry does not appear in Aelian. It seems obvious that the passage is referring, not to round cavalry shields of the normal Hellenistic type, but to the elongated oval *thureos* as used by the infantry. These literary references to mounted *thureophoroi* are supported by a number of representations of cavalry of this type. Without exception these cavalrymen are unarmoured, and it seems probable that they should be considered as belonging to what we would term the medium cavalry branch.

Probably the most interesting piece of evidence is a cameo in Florence showing a Greek *thureophoros* cavalryman (Fig. 7). He holds a relatively large *thureos* horizontally at his side, the front end slightly lower than the rear. The shield has an *umbo* and a *spina*, wide near the *umbo* but tapering and disappearing before it reaches the edge of the shield, which is not protected by a rim. He holds a spear a little over two metres long with a ‘broadhead’ spear-point. He also wears spurs strapped to the ankles: this is a very rare example

of the spur depicted in Greek art. His cloak has a small lead weight on the corner. We have no certainty whether the cameo was manufactured in a Greek or Roman cultural circle, so the ethnicity of the horseman cannot be established. Nor can the date be established with certainty. Nevertheless we perhaps have evidence here that during the later Hellenistic period the smaller Mediterranean states supported forces of *theophoroi* cavalry, just as they did forces of *thureophoroi* infantry.

The mounted *thureophoros* would have been inferior to the heavily-armed cavalryman in pitched battle, just as the *thureophoros* infantryman would have been to the phalangite, but he would have had certain tactical advantages, apart from being cheaper to equip, as was the case with the *thureophoros* infantryman. They would have been faster moving than heavy cavalry, and so better suited for policing and for internal peace-keeping duties. It is possible that the mounted *thureophoroi*, in fact mounted troops with infantry shields, may have sometimes fought dismounted, like dragoons in the Early Modern period. These may all have been reasons why the smaller Greek city-states who preserved at least some quasi-independent status during the middle and late Hellenistic period, may have preferred to support units of *thureophoros* cavalry. There is some support for this in Livy 43.6.6, where it is recorded that in 170 BC, during the Third Macedonian War, the citizens of Alabanda in Caria donated three hundred cavalry shields (*scuta equestria*) to the Roman cause. One presumes that Livy is using a Greek source here, almost certainly Polybius, and that the original Greek of the passage would be *thureoi hippikoi*.

Mounted *thureophoroi* would also have been well suited to garrison the rebellious provinces of the Seleucid Empire. This concept may find some support in two Late Hellenistic terracottas.

The first is a terracotta (Fig. 8), in the Musée Historique in Berne, found in a Hellenistic deposit of votives left in a grotto on Mount Carmel near El-Bi’ne, two hours on the road south of Acre. He wears a tunic reaching to the knee and low ankle-boots. It is uncertain whether he wears trousers, or whether the lower leg is bare. His hooded cloak indicates that he is a Galatian, though it is possible that Thracians wore hooded cloaks of this type too. He sits on a square-shaped saddle-cloth of three or more layers. The *thureos* he carries is relatively small, and has a rim, an *umbo* and a *spina*.



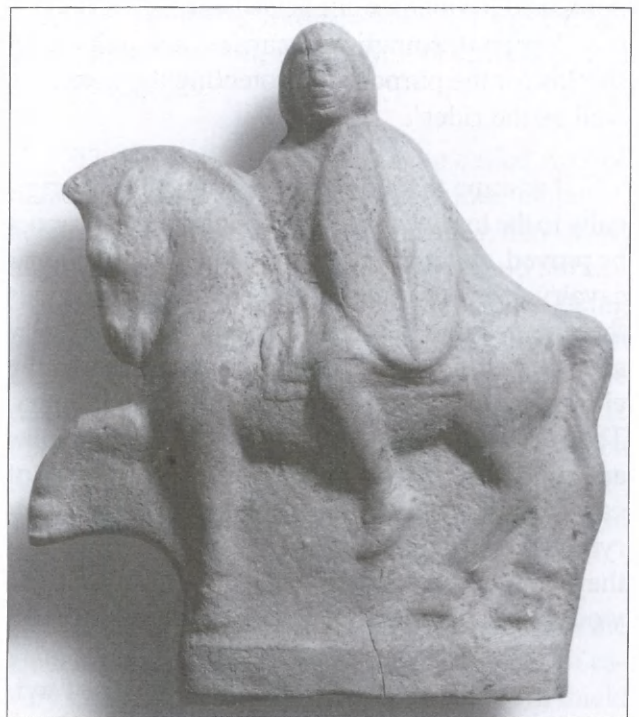
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Fig. 5 – Round cavalry shield with spina shown on the Aemilius Paulus Monument from Delphi. The horseman is presumably a Macedonian, after: H. K ä h l e r, *Der Fries vom Reiterdenkmal des Aemilivs Pavllvs in Delphi*, “Monvmenta Artis Romanae V”, Berlin 1965, taf. 18; 6 – A large cavalry shield with a large umbo but without a spina is also shown on this gem in the Kestner-Museum Hannover (Inv. Nr. K 1714). The cavalryman either wears a petasos hat, or more probably a Boeotian helmet, and seems to hold a sabre (*kopis*), which would be held in his right hand in the impression. Photo: Kestner Museum; 7 – Drawing of a cavalryman shown on a cameo in Florence, after: A. Giuliano, *I Cammei della Collezione Medicea nel Museo Archeologico di Firenze*, Rome 1989, p. 287 no. 260; 8 – Terracotta in the Musée Historique in Berne (26491) from El Bine in Palestine showing *thureophoros* cavalryman, dimensions 14.8x16.8 cm. Photo: Berne Neg. Nr. 48,33.



Fig. 9. Terracotta from Tarsus (Tarse 36) now in the Louvre showing *thureophoros* cavalryman. Photo: Louvre.

The second is a very similar fragmentary late Hellenistic terracotta in the Louvre originally coming from Tarsus (Fig. 9).¹² The terracotta is broken: the head is missing and likewise the left foot, so we do not know if the rider wore a hooded cloak and was booted or not. It may be that he is not a Galatian but Greek, for he does not seem to wear a hooded cloak, but rather a tunic with an overfold over the belt. Traces of the colour mauve are preserved on the tunic. It is uncertain whether he is bare-legged or wears trousers. There does, however, seem to be some faint indication of folds just below the kness, which would make trousers more probable. There are traces of pink paint on the lower leg or trousers.

As well as Galatians, we have some evidence that Thracians may have served as *thureophoros* cavalry in the Seleucid army, as well as with other armies. In 166 BC a Seleucid officer named Seron launched an attack against the Jewish rebels (1 Macc. 3.13). Bar-Kochva has suggested that



Fig. 10. Late Hellenistic Thracian cavalryman with *thureos* in the National Archaeological Museum Sofia. Photo: NAM No. 8409.

Seron may have been a Thracian and his troops may have been Thracians.¹³ In 163 BC the Jewish rebels attacked Gorgias, general of Idumaea, who had command of 3,000 infantry and 400 cavalry. On the Jewish side, a cavalry regiment called the '*Toubiēnoi*' participated in the battle of Marissa which ensued. These were descendants of military settlers, stationed near Amman east of the Jordan in Ptolemaic times, under the command of one Tobias. One of these cavalrymen, named Dositheus, tried to capture Gorgias by grabbing hold of his cloak. His arm was, however, chopped off by a Thracian cavalryman (2 Macc. 12.35), and Gorgias escaped. We are not told with what weapon: perhaps with a *sica*. In 130 BC a unit of Thracian cavalry fought with Aristonikos, who claimed to be the rightful successor of the last king of Pergamon, against the army of the Roman consul Crassus. One of the Thracians cut off the head of the Roman consul with a single blow

¹² S. Mollard-Besques, *Musée National du Louvre. Catalogue raisonné des Figurines et Reliefs en terre cuite grecs, étrusques et romains I-IV*, Paris 1954-1986, III pl. 374 g, p. 301.

¹³ B. Bar-Kochva, *Judas Maccabaeus. The Jewish Struggle against the Seleucids*, Cambridge 1989, p. 119, 133.



Fig. 11. Carnelian gem now in the Kestner-Museum in Hannover showing *thureos* and horse's head, inv. K 1646. Photo: Kestner Museum.

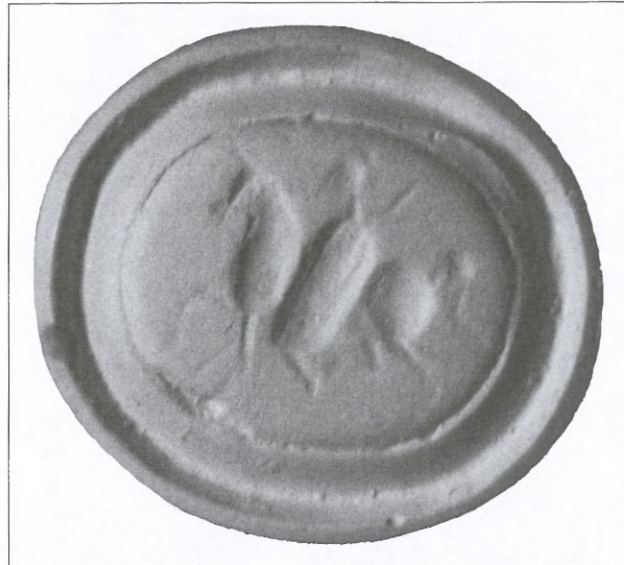


Fig. 12. Impression of a gem in Munich showing a horseman with a *thureos* and armed with a spear. Photo: after cast from Staatliche Münzsammlung, München.

from his *sica* (Val. Max. 3.2 int. 12). In 147 BC, following the accession of Demetrius II, Apollonios the governor of Koile-Syria commanded 3,000 cavalry, including 1,000 horse-archers, against Jonathan the high priest of the Jews (*I Macc.* 10.77, 79-80). Some of these cavalry may have been *thureophoroi*.

One would not expect a unit of the Seleucid Army proper to be found in this kind of provincial garrison duty, and so it would probably be reasonable to assume that the Thracians were mercenaries. If so, it is difficult to see how they could have been recruited into Seleucid service, unless they, like the Mysians, were a unit which had originally been raised for service in the Pergamene Army, but which had been transferred to the command of Antiochus IV. in 175 BC.¹⁴ It is remarkable how many Thracian mercenary cavalry regiments were raised for service in late Hellenistic armies. Herod and Cleopatra both maintained Thracian cavalry regiments in their service. The method of recruitment and terms of service of these regiments are quite unknown. Their armament as *thureophoros* cavalry is, however, shown, on Thracian tombstones.

As an example (Fig. 10) I illustrate a tombstone of a Thracian cavalryman from Abdera, dating to the second or first century BC, and now in the National Museum in Sofia. His equipment is typical of Thracian and other mercenary cavalry regiments of the late Hellenistic period. He carries a *thureos*, a long sword and a spear, and wears trousers, tunic and cloak.¹⁵

The *thureos* continued in use as a cavalry shield into the Roman period, and this may have taken place through the agency of Gallic and Thracian cavalry contracted into Roman service. For example Plutarch (*Vit. Lucull.* 28) mentions Thracian and Gallic cavalry serving in the army of the Roman general Lucullus at the battle of Artaxata in 69 BC. The cavalry *thureos* is shown in a number of gems, two of which I illustrate here, which are generally classed as Roman Republican, but which might much more probably be termed Late Hellenistic.

The first example (Fig. 11) is a 'Roman' carnelian gem dated to the first century BC, now in the Kestner-Museum in Hannover, on which a horse's head and a *thureos* are shown together. The seal may well have been carried by an officer serving, or having served, in a regiment of *thureophoroi* cavalry in Roman service.¹⁶ The second (Fig. 12) is a gem in Munich dated to the

¹⁴ Cf. N. Sekunda, *OGIS 248 und die Söldnerregimente des Heeres Antiochos IV. Epiphanes*, "Studia Graeco-Latina Universitatis Nicolai Copernici. Collectanea Classica Thorunensia", XIV, 2003, p. 145-49.

¹⁵ Inv. 8409, published by B. Bar-Kochva, *op. cit.*, pl. IV.

¹⁶ Inv. K 1646, published in *Antike Gemmen in Deutschen Sammlungen* IV nr. 668.

Augustan period.¹⁷ If this dating is correct, then some regiments of Roman cavalry went on using the *thureos* shield well into the reign of Augustus and beyond.

Some final points in conclusion. The Galatan *thureos* was not adopted solely by Greek infantry, but by Greek Cavalry too. Although the cavalry *thureos* is mentioned from the very first years it

was witnessed by the Greeks, the heyday of *thureophoros* cavalry seems to have been in the later Hellenistic period, during the second and first centuries BC. Therefore the *thureophoros* does not appear in the taxonomy of cavalry forces given by Asclepiodotus and then Arrian as a whim of fancy, but rather as a reflection of the actual state of affairs in the later Hellenistic period. Finally, it is possible that the *thureophoros* cavalrymen passed on into Roman usage, and influenced the way in which some auxiliary cavalry units came to be equipped and fought.

¹⁷ Published in *Antike Gemmen in Deutschen Sammlungen* I, 3 nr. 2378.

