

A Battle to Remember? Arrian's *Ectaxis contra Alanos*

Oliver L. Spaulding, Jr., a colonel in the U.S. army specializing in field artillery and a professor of military science at Harvard University, wrote in the early twentieth century about the utility of ancient military treatises in modern warfare. Napoleon, Spaulding claims, said “that the military art is to be learned from history, not from modern history alone....On unimpeachable authority [i.e., Napoleon's], then, we may say that there is something in ancient campaigns that is of value to the modern; that there is something immutable in the midst of the changes in the methods of war; that, in fact, *plus ça change, plus ça reste la même chose*.”¹ While it is debatable how useful ancient military treatises are for conducting modern warfare, the nature of these works suggests that the Romans, at least, believed that they had “something...of value.” For the Romans regarded both the historical *exempla* contained in these treatises as well as, to a certain degree, the technical descriptions of maneuvers and tactics as good models for military behavior and generalship. To what extent these treatises shaped the actual battle tactics of Roman generals is unclear;² nevertheless, to suggest that they were merely antiquarian fabrications full of outdated maneuvers and moralistic adages may be somewhat misleading.

In his overview of surviving works of ancient military writers, Spaulding passes over one piece of literature which other scholars have tended to group with military handbooks. While far from being a normal didactic technical treatise on tactics or generalship, the *Order of Battle against the Alani* (Ἔκταξις κατὰ Ἀλάνων), written by L. Flavius Arrianus in c.135 CE,

¹ Spaulding Jr. (1933): 657. Spaulding had an interesting career. His father was a colonel in the Union Army, a trustee of the University of Michigan, a Congressman, and an Assistant Secretary of the Treasury. See Patterson (2006). Spaulding, Jr., served with the Artillery Corps in multiple locations (including Alaska, China, the Philippines, Panama, and the AEF during World War I) and was an instructor at the Army War College intermittently until the beginning of World War II. See Stein (2008). He also wrote multiple treatises of his own on field artillery. For some of his lectures, see “Infantry and Cavalry School Lectures 1898-1910” <<http://cgsc.leavenworth.army.mil/carl/resources/archival/lectures.asp>>.

² Campbell (1987), cautiously suggests that, partly due to the lack of formal military schooling, these handbooks played a role, if merely a limited one, in the preparation and training of Roman military commanders.

nevertheless offers a unique insight on the Roman army.³ A brief piece, full of frustrating lacunae, the *Ectaxis* provides the marching order and disposition of Roman troops as they prepare to engage an oncoming assault of enemy cavalry. The work has generated a strong debate among scholars regarding its literary nature, its purpose, and its implication for the history of Roman military tactical development. It is the goal of this paper to consider these questions, to explore the historical background of the *Ectaxis*, and to investigate to what extent it can tell us about the Roman army in the second century CE. While no clear consensus has emerged regarding these difficult questions, nevertheless most scholars agree that Arrian's *Ectaxis*, the only surviving detailed account of the disposition of troops written by a Roman military commander, remains an essential source for an insider's look at Roman warfare.

The author and his work

The *Ectaxis contra Alanos* was written by Arrian in c.135 CE while he was serving as governor-legate of Cappadocia. Before obtaining this position in c.131 CE, Arrian led a remarkable career for a Greek provincial in the Roman administration.⁴ Born and raised in Nicomedia, the capital of the province of Bithynia in Asia Minor, Lucius Flavius Arrianus grew up in family of wealth and influence, probably associated with the municipal aristocracy.⁵ His family most likely had obtained Roman citizenship through the influence of L. Flavius, a suffect

³ The text can be found in Roos (1968): 177-85. Campbell (2004): no. 164-165, offers a useful translation, although I do not agree with it in its entirety. The translation provided by Tortzen in Saxtorph (2002) is wrought with errors, due in part because it is based on Jacoby's text (*FGrH* 156 Arrianos F 12). Testimonia to the life of Arrian are collected by Roos (1968): lviii-lxv. They are cited by T followed by the number. Fragments of lost works also are cited by the number in Roos (1968).

⁴ The standard work on Arrian's career is Stadter (1980), but see also Schwartz (1895), Pelham (1896), and Syme (1982).

⁵ Arrian had served as a priest of the goddesses Demeter and Kore at Nicomedia (Photius, *Bibliotheca* cod. 93 = *Bithyniaca* F1 = T3).

consul in 33 BCE and a follower of Mark Antony in the east.⁶ Born between 85 and 90 CE, Arrian studied under the Stoic philosopher Epictetus at Nicopolis in Epirus, probably at age eighteen. During his time there, or perhaps a bit later, Arrian collected and published the talks of his master. Of this collection of eight books, only four survive today.⁷

Following his time in Epirus, the exact path of Arrian's career becomes unclear. He probably held some sort of military position as a young man, perhaps serving as an equestrian *praefectus cohortis* or legionary tribune during Trajan's Dacian Wars.⁸ He may also have served in Trajan's army in Armenia and Parthia; however, the source for this conjecture is less than perfect.⁹ Arrian seems to have been adlected into the Roman senate soon after Hadrian became emperor, perhaps due to an earlier meeting in Athens c.112/113 CE.¹⁰ It is also possible that his father had been a member of the senate and that Arrian simply followed the normal *cursus honorum*.¹¹ During Hadrian's reign, Arrian obtained the praetorship, and sometime after, perhaps c.125 CE, he held the propraeorship of the unarmed province of Baetica in Spain.¹² He then served as suffect consul in 129 or 130 CE.¹³ Due in part to his prior military service, as well as his connection to the emperor, Arrian became governor (*legatus Augusti pro praetore*) of Cappadocia and held office from c.131 to 137 CE.¹⁴

Cappadocia, located along the northeast frontier of the empire, bordered the Caucasus Mountains and the Black Sea in the north, the Euphrates in the east, and Syria in the south.¹⁵

⁶ Syme (1982): 184; Dio 49.44.3.

⁷ Stadter 1980: 5.

⁸ Devine (1993): 313; Bosworth (1993): 229.

⁹ It confuses Trajan and Hadrian (Joh. Lyd. *De mag.* 3.48, p. 142.6 = T14).

¹⁰ Bosworth (1993): 229.

¹¹ Stadter (1980): 6.

¹² Based on an inscription found in Cordoba (*AE* 1974.370). See Stadter (1980): 10 and n. 61.

¹³ His name was found as part of a consular date on brick stamps in Ostia and in Leptis Magna in Africa (*CIL* XV, 244 and 552 = T7).

¹⁴ For evidence for his legateship, see *IGRR* III, 111 (= T17), *AE* 1905.175 (= T11). See also Syme (1982): 200.

¹⁵ Stadter (1980) provides a very useful map of this region.

The province bordered on the client kingdoms of Armenia, Iberia, and Albania, as well as the Parthian Empire to the south and east. To the north, in the Caucasus Mountains, numerous mountain tribes dwelled, and beyond the mountains was the homeland of the Sarmatian tribe, the Alani. As legate of this frontier province, Arrian had the task of defending the borders from any incursions. To accomplish this, Arrian held two legions under his command, XV Apollinaris (stationed at Satala) and XII Fulminata (stationed at Melitene), as well as auxiliaries and natives troops.¹⁶

In addition to serving as general of the military forces of the province, another task of the governor was to inspect the troops and various outposts throughout the region. Hadrian himself had done this, and Arrian took up where the emperor had left off. As shown in his *Periplus Ponti Euxini* (*Circumnavigation of the Black Sea*), Arrian had sailed north and east from Trapezus along the coast of the Black Sea, going as far as Dioscurias Sebastopolis, during which time he stopped at various forts, inspected troops, talked to client tribes, and took note of interesting works of art. He returned to the heart of his province upon hearing of the death of the Bosporan king Cotys (131/32 CE). Arrian reported his findings to the emperor, in Latin;¹⁷ however, he also included the *Periplus*, a literary supplement written in Greek, which was “written in a more personal tone than one would expect in an official report, omitting details of the results of the inspection, but adding information on the rest of the circuit of the sea, and sent in the form of a letter.”¹⁸ It has been suggested that the *Ectaxis*, like the *Periplus*, was also a

¹⁶ For XV Apollinaris, see Wheeler (2000). For XII Fulminata, see Bertrand and Rémy (2000).

¹⁷ Arr. *Per.* 6.2, 10.1.

¹⁸ Stadter (1980): 12. For a detailed analysis of the literary quality and peculiarity of the *Periplus*, see Bosworth (1993): 242-53.

literary accompaniment to an official report.¹⁹ This and other possibilities for the nature of the *Ectaxis* will be analyzed below. First, let us turn to Arrian's encounter (if any) with the Alani.

The “invasion” of the Alani

Our main source for the Alani assault on Roman territory is provided by Cassius Dio:

The war of the Jews ended at this time [summer 135 CE], but another war, this one of the Alani (they are Massagetai), was incited by Pharasmanes [II, king of Iberia]. The war greatly harassed Albania and Media [Atropatene], touching upon Armenia and Cappadocia. Then, since the Alani were persuaded by the bribes of Vologaeses [II of Parthia], and since they were also afraid of Flavius Arrianus, the governor of Cappadocia, the war ended.²⁰

There is no hint here that the Alani made any major incursion into Cappadocia. Rather, it seems as if Arrian scared them away before they could cause major damage. Arrian's “battle” might have merely been a show of force rather than a major encounter.²¹ The Alani were not a major threat to Rome; in fact, it seems as though the Alani only caused trouble when bribed by others.²² Rome had been in contact with the kingdoms of the Caucasus region, including Armenia, Albania, and Iberia, since at the least the time of Pompey. By the reign of Trajan, Rome controlled the Caucasus kingdoms with puppet kings. However, with the death of Trajan and the withdrawal of the empire in the East, Pharasmanes II, king of Iberia, became more independent, refusing to meet with Hadrian when the emperor was touring Cappadocia in 131 CE.²³ The king's boldness induced him to seek the help of the Alani in raiding his neighbors, perhaps as a way to test the extent of Rome's influence in the region. However, neither Parthia nor Rome

¹⁹ Bosworth (1977): 247.

²⁰ ὁ μὲν οὖν τῶν Βουδαίων πόλεμος ἐς τοῦτο τελευτήσεν, ἕτερος δὲ ἔξ Ἀλανῶν (ἐστὶ δὲ Μασσαγῆται) ἐκινήθη ὑπὸ Φαρασμάνου, καὶ τὴν μὲν Ἀλβανίδα καὶ τὴν Μηδίαν ἔσχυρῶς ἐλύπησε, τὰς δ' Ἑρμενίας τὰς τε Καππαδοκίας ἐψάμενος, ἔπειτα τὴν Ἀλανῶν τὴν μὲν δώροις ὑπὸ τοῦ Οὐλογαίου πεισθέντων, τὴν δὲ καὶ Φλάβιου Ἀρριανῶν τὴν τῆς Καππαδοκίας ἔρχοντα φοβηθέντων, ἐπαύσατο (Cass. Dio 69.15.1 = T12). I base my analysis on Bosworth (1977): 218-220.

²¹ Bosworth (1977): 220. Wheeler (1978): 352, asserts that whether the battle between Arrian and the Alani actually occurred cannot be proven, based on Dio's account as well as the fact that there is no evidence of any official recognition or public praise for Arrian's actions.

²² Bosworth (1977): 220-224.

²³ HA *Hadr.* 13.9; Bosworth (1977): 224-228.

would allow this incursion to continue, and the Alani threat was quelled by a simple bribe and a show of force.

Arrian describes what this “show of force” may have looked like in the *Ectaxis*. The work is divided into three main parts. The first part outlines the marching order of the army (1-11). The second part describes the disposition of the forces as they ready for battle (11-24). The third part shows what should happen in battle during the expected cavalry frontal assault (24-6). The plan calls for this assault to be routed, leading to a pursuit of the enemy (26-29), but, if the enemy should try to outflank the troops, the plan outlines how the reserve troops, particularly the auxiliary cavalry, should respond (30-1). Unfortunately the text breaks off here. It is difficult to determine how much of the text is missing, and it is also recognized that the text is quite lacunose.²⁴

The army described by Arrian consisted of the legion XV Apollinaris, a *vexillatio* of the legion XII Fulminata, various groups of auxiliary, as well as local militia from Lesser Armenia, Trapezus, Colchis, and Rhizus. The military force totaled anywhere between 11,000 to 28,000 men.²⁵ Nearly all of the legions and auxiliary forces can be identified with some certainty.²⁶ Where the battle was to take place is unclear; the text only suggests that the forces were arranged in a wide, flat area, with higher ground on either flank of the main force.²⁷ Since the Alani were coming from Albania and Media, it seems prudent to suggest that Arrian had his forces aligned

²⁴ The archetype manuscript is “a sadly mutilated torso,” Bosworth (1977): 232.

²⁵ Wheeler (2004a): 310. *Ec.* 15 seems to suggest that XV Apollinaris had far more troops than XII Fulminata. Also, *Ec.* 5 shows that only the first legion had its legate present; the other legion only had military tribunes. This, combined with archaeological evidence, suggests that the legate of XII Fulminata was away with a detachment in Judaea, or perhaps still in Melitene as a reserve force. See Bosworth (1977): 233-234; Bertrand and Rémy (2000).

²⁶ Ritterling (1902). Roos (1968) includes these identifications in his *app. crit.* Bosworth (1977): 233, persuasively amends the military units “Aplanoi” to “Apulanoi” (*Ec.* 7, 14).

²⁷ *Ec.* 11-12, 14, 25, 30.

somewhere near the border, perhaps on a road in a mountain pass near Satala in Lesser Armenia, where the legion XV Apollinaris was stationed.²⁸

While it is correct to keep in mind that an army's marching disposition tended to reflect the climate, terrain, and tactical needs of the time,²⁹ the marching order outlined by Arrian seems generally to correspond with other accounts of Roman marches.³⁰ Nevertheless, there are some differences. Arrian has the main column of infantry surrounded by parallel lines of cavalry in order to protect the flanks.³¹ He also has archers placed at the head of each group. This disposition of cavalry and archers, combined with the infantry marching at four men abreast,³² suggests that Arrian was concerned with being outflanked or ambushed.³³ Arrian also arranged the infantry in this way to facilitate the shift from a marching column to a battle line. The first half of the marching order for each legion and auxiliary unit were long-range fighters, either archers or spearmen, while the second half were short-range fighters, such as heavy infantry.³⁴ In case of an attack, or when the army finally reached its destination, the first half of each respective group could easily halt and get into position, while the second half, the short-range fighters, would then line up parallel in front of them, with the result being four ranks of short-range fighters, followed by four ranks of long-range fighters.³⁵ This could easily be accomplished in short order by using signals and/or words of command.³⁶

²⁸ Bosworth (1977): 234. This could not have been a narrow pass, as having nearly two legions (plus auxiliaries) lined up in ranks eight-men-deep (*Ec.* 15) would require the formation to be about 1200-men-wide, which, at intervals of about three feet, would spread nearly 600 yards wide.

²⁹ Lee (2007): 141.

³⁰ Such as Vespasian's march into Galilee, Jos. *BJ* 3.115-126. Bosworth (1977): 236.

³¹ *Ec.* 4, 9.

³² *Ec.* 4, 5, 6.

³³ Bosworth (1977): 236.

³⁴ *Ec.* 3-6.

³⁵ *Ec.* 15-18.

³⁶ Arr. *Tact.* 27, 32 = Campbell (2004), no. 28-29.

Once in position, Arrian's army was ready to withstand a frontal assault of heavy cavalry.³⁷ The Sarmatian Alani tended to attack on horseback, wear heavy armor, and use lances or broadswords.³⁸ Arrian planned to arrange his troops with such an attack in mind, with the two legions of heavy infantry positioned in the center and acting as a defensive base (*probole*), backed by foot and cavalry archers, as well as artillery.³⁹ The auxiliary units were positioned similarly on the wings, with infantry in the front, archers/spearman in the back.⁴⁰ These units were ordered to maintain the high ground on each wing and to shower the enemy with arrows and spears, thereby forcing the oncoming enemy straight into the wall of legionaries.⁴¹ Cavalry also guarded the wings, in case the oncoming enemy attempted to circle around the front line; if they did, the cavalry were to attack with melee weapons, striking at the unprotected thighs and bellies of the Alani riders and their horses.⁴² Arrian's expectation was for the long-range missile attacks of spears, stones, catapults, and arrows to deter the cavalry from even making it to the line, as the heavily concentrated rain of projectiles would "throw the horses into confusion and bring destruction to the enemy cavalry."⁴³ Once the enemy was repelled and began to retreat, the infantry lines would open up, allowing half of the cavalry to pursue the fleeing Alani at full speed, the other half to follow in good order. At the same time, archers and spearmen would advance at a run, with the infantry following at a quick walk, in order to provide a defensive base in case the enemy doubled-back.⁴⁴

³⁷ For a helpful diagram of Arrian's battle formation, see Campbell (2002): 55, fig. 3.2.

³⁸ Arr. *Tact.* 4.3; cf. 4.7; 11.2; 44.1; see also Tacitus' description of Sarmatians, Tac. *Hist.* 1.79.2-3; cf. *Ann.* 6.35.1-2 describing Alani in 35 CE. Bosworth (1977): 234.

³⁹ *Ec.* 15-18.

⁴⁰ *Ec.* 12-14.

⁴¹ It is unclear how steep the high ground was (or was expected to be). In order for this arrangement to be truly effective, the terrain must have been sufficiently steep enough to prevent, or at least hinder, a direct cavalry assault against the wings of Arrian's army.

⁴² *Ec.* 20-21, 30-31; Bosworth (1977): 236.

⁴³ *Ec.* 25-6 (trans. Campbell (2004)).

⁴⁴ *Ec.* 27-29.

Whether or not this battle order actually went into action, of course, cannot be proven. However, as suggested by Dio, it seems that Alani were repulsed in some way, most likely through a show of force on Arrian's part. It has been suggested that Arrian may have used this opportunity to settle affairs with the Iberian kingdom, in order to make the region more "receptive" to Roman hegemony.⁴⁵ Pharasmanes, the king of Iberia, appears to be more subservient after this incident; in return for his obeisance, he gets the "privilege" of supporting a *quingenaria cohors* in his kingdom.⁴⁶ A bilingual inscription (Greek and Aramaic) found at Mcheta (Harmozica), in ancient Iberia, points to a man with a Roman name serving as a high official in the court of the Pharasmanes, suggesting an even greater Roman influence during or after Arrian's tenure.⁴⁷ It was the expansion of influence in the Caucasus kingdoms, rather than the defeat of the Alani, that seems to be Arrian's main achievement as governor.⁴⁸

Arrian's tactics?

A few scholars argue, some more vehemently than others, that Arrian's infantry tactics are evidence of the Roman army's occasional use of a phalangical formation, similar to, but not necessarily based on, that of the Macedonian army of Alexander the Great.⁴⁹ The use of this formation can be traced back to Republican times, similar, in essence, to the *testudo* "turtleshell" formation used by Crassus at Carrhae and Antony in his Parthian campaign.⁵⁰ Arrian, in an

⁴⁵ Bosworth (1977): 229-232. Themistius, *Orat.* 34.8 = T13 (late 4th c. CE) says that after the Alani were defeated, Arrian crossed the Caspian Gates and also regulated the boundaries between the Iberian and Armenian kingdoms.

⁴⁶ Perhaps a garrison in disguise? Dio 69.15.3; HA *Hadr.* 17.11-12.

⁴⁷ SEG XVI 781 (Greek only). See also Bosworth (1977): 230 n. 56. Bosworth suggests that Arrian himself installed this man, acting, in a way, like Alexander the Great installing Macedonians alongside native satraps. This is an appealing, yet still unproved, suggestion.

⁴⁸ Bosworth (1977): 232.

⁴⁹ Wheeler (1979), (2004a), (2004b).

⁵⁰ Crassus: Plut. *Crass.* 24.3, Dio 40.22.2; Antony: Plut. *Ant.* 45.2-3, Dio 49.29.2-30.

unusual fashion, calls his legion a phalanx,⁵¹ and his “closely packed” (πυκνῶ) formation of eight ranks deep⁵² is highly suggestive of the *puknosis* of the Hellenistic phalanx, while his “most concentrated” (πυκνοτάτη) formation, with the men standing shoulder to shoulder, with shields locked together,⁵³ is suggestive of the *synaspimos* of the Hellenistic phalanx.⁵⁴ Unlike the Hellenistic phalanx, however, it appears that Arrian’s “most concentrated” formation is primarily a defensive maneuver, used particularly against cavalry charges. Also, the infantry are not uniformly equipped, with the front four ranks using pikes (κοντοί) and the back four ranks using spears or javelins (λογχοί).⁵⁵ Nevertheless, this close formation did not prevent flexibility, for if the enemy were to flee, the infantry could easily shift out of this close formation, ready to reform it at a moment’s notice.⁵⁶

While I tend to agree with Campbell that Wheeler goes “too far” to find phalangical tactics in the Republican and Imperial periods,⁵⁷ I also find Wheeler’s basic argument quite appealing. Wheeler rightfully stresses that, as shown in the *Ectaxis*, the Roman army most likely had various tactical arrangements to draw on other the traditional Caesarian, *pilum*-hurling, sword-slashing legionary maneuvers. The choice of tactics depended on the enemy, the terrain, and (to a smaller degree) the commander’s preference. This is not to say that Arrian is a tactical

⁵¹ *Ec.* 6. Wheeler (2004a): 311 n. 8 maintains that Arrian’s use of phalanx for legion is not unprecedented. Cf. *Jos. BJ* 3.95.

⁵² *Ec.* 15.

⁵³ *Ec.* 26.

⁵⁴ *Arr. Tact.* 11.3-4 (= Campbell (2004), no. 167). In this passage, Arrian compares the *synaspimos* formation to the *testudo* formation of the Roman army. Whether or not he equates them is unclear.

⁵⁵ Wheeler (2004b): 151-159 argues at length about the nature of the *kontos*. He concludes that it was *hasta* used only for thrusting. Bosworth (1993): 270, esp. n. 224, claims that the *kontos* is “a specialised, prosaic word” and should not be equated with the *hasta*. He also retracts his earlier argument ((1977): 240-1) about the third and the fourth rank. Rather than “jabbing and wounding” (παίειν ἢ ῥυκοντίζειν) the horses with their *kontoi* (as Campbell translates), they instead act as some kind of reserve with their *kontoi* in crouched position ready for throwing (ῥυκοντίζειν) at any convenient target. He argues that the *kontos* could be used for throwing (for short distances) or for impaling. This confusion is due, in part, to lacunae in the text.

⁵⁶ *Ec.* 29.

⁵⁷ Campbell (1987): 26 n. 83

genius or even that he was “experimenting” with the phalanx.⁵⁸ Rather, these tactics were developed slowly overtime and were perpetuated mostly by word-of-mouth rather than written treatises. This does not conflict with Campbell’s argument that military treatises were used (to a certain extent) by military commanders, particularly in training. Tradition, experience, and written manuals all had a role in the tactical education of military leadership. Nevertheless, Bosworth rightfully points out that Arrian’s decision to use such a close, phalangial formation most likely was due, in the short term, to the fact that the legion XV Apollinaris had served in the Dacian and Parthian Wars under Trajan.⁵⁹ It was with Trajan that the legion perfected, but did not necessarily invent, this particular formation, either in battles against the Parthian cavalry or by incorporating the tactics of indigenous tribes on the frontiers. It was only by chance that these tactics resembled a Macedonian phalanx.

The nature and purpose of the *Ectaxis*

How accurately Arrian’s depiction of his battle formation reflects normal Roman tactics of the second century is debatable. A conclusive answer to this question is further complicated by the literary style of the work, which is very unusual. The *Ectaxis* is written as a series of commands that alternate between third-person imperatives and accusatives + infinitives. This is a style that is rarely seen in Greek literature. Therefore, the *Ectaxis* is not a hastily written report from a general stationed on the frontier. If he were writing to the emperor to simply explain his actions against the Alani, Arrian most likely would have written in normal, indicative Latin sentences, using accurate military terms.⁶⁰ Instead, he wrote a highly polished essay of some

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Bosworth (1977): 244-245. Arrian, too, may have served on the Daccian frontier at one point.

⁶⁰ Arrian wrote an “official report”, the *Romaika grammata*, soon after his inspection of troops and forts during his trip along the Black Sea coast (*Peri.* 6.2, 10.1).

literary quality in Greek. His vocabulary is literary, almost archaic: he calls a legion a phalanx instead of other normal Greek equivalents, and he prepares for an encounter against the “Scythians” instead of the Alani. Arrian does not use technical terms for groups in the army. He also includes unnecessary explanatory phrases in his battle orders, such as his description of the *kontoï* as having long, thin points.⁶¹

The original publication of the *Ectaxis* is also difficult to determine. Was it a separate piece? Or perhaps part of a larger work? Scholars have argued for both, “equally dogmatically and equally inconclusively.”⁶² It is obvious that the work derives, in part, from Arrian’s encounter (in whatever sense) with the Alani. Arrian most likely wrote a simple report for the emperor, in Latin, describing his military maneuvers. The *Ectaxis* is a later revision of this report, polished for publication, and it would have performed a similar role as the *Periplus* did for Arrian’s expedition around the Black Sea.⁶³ This literary essay could then have also served as a private memoir or even a military handbook.⁶⁴ Others have suggested that the *Ectaxis* was part of the *Alanike*, a lost work only referenced by later authors.⁶⁵ This is unlikely, as no other historical work has had a section written in such a style or length as the *Ectaxis*.⁶⁶

A possible answer can be found by considering which authors had a literary influence on Arrian. Bosworth rightfully points out Arrian’s use of Alexander historians for his technical

⁶¹ Stadter (1980): 46.

⁶² Bosworth (1977): 247. His note 124 lists the following: E. Schwartz, *RE* II 1233: a sidepiece to a Latin report to Hadrian; K. Hartmann, “Flavius Arrianus und Kaiser Hadrian,” *Progr. Augsburg*, 1907, 24: a separate monograph; F. Jacoby, *FGrH* II B 563: a portion of the *Alanike*; Roos (1968) xxi: a manual for the use of the Cappadocian army.

⁶³ Bosworth (1993): 243, 266; (1977): 247-8; Schwartz (1895).

⁶⁴ Campbell (1987): 27 n. 88.

⁶⁵ Wheeler (1979): 301 n. 1; Saxtorph (2002). The *Alanike* is mentioned by John Lydus in the 6th c. (*De mag.* 3.53 = Arr. *Parth.* F6) and Photius in the 9th c. (*Bibl.* 58 = Arr. *Parth.* F1). See Roos (1968) xxx-xxxi. Stadter (1980): 163 believes that the *Alanike* “implies a geographical and ethnographical work like the *Indike*...[it] possibly contained an account of Arrian’s confrontation with the tribe when it attacked Cappadocia in 135...[and it] undoubtedly [was] composed as a result of the Alan attack.”

⁶⁶ Stadter (1980): 45; Bosworth (1993): 266; (1977): 247.

language, as well as his heavy reliance on Xenophon.⁶⁷ Arrian's minor works can all be seen as directly related to the work of Xenophon: Arrian's *Diatribes* of Epictetus is similar to Xenophon's *Apology* of Socrates; Xenophon's description of the march of the Ten Thousand serves as a foil for Arrian's *Periplus*; and Arrian's *Cynegeticus* is a commentary on Xenophon's piece of the same name.⁶⁸ In addition, in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, we find a detailed order of march, very similar to Arrian's in the *Ectaxis*.⁶⁹ Cyrus, speaking to his troops, addresses them in the third person imperative, just as Arrian does. He lists troops by their national origins and explains the reasons for their various dispositions, such as why heavy infantry should march in the front of the column. Arrian, too, uses nationalities to describe troops, addressing them in an abbreviated form (e.g., "the Italians") instead of using the official form (*cohors I Italica*).⁷⁰ He also offers explanatory statements, such as the fact that the *kontos* will bend upon hitting the enemy cavalrymen.⁷¹ Both generals list various commanders and officers, addressing them individually by name. Also, both generals are portrayed as great leaders; they inspect their troops, make sure men stay in formation, and praise those who marched in good order.⁷²

By drawing on the style and themes of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, while also expanding their application from marching orders to battle arrangement, Arrian constructs himself as the ideal commander. Denied the chance to depict a glorious victory over the Alani, Arrian nevertheless uses their "incursion" to describe his abilities and leadership, even though he

⁶⁷ For Alexander historians, see Bosworth (1977): 248-243. Also, "Xenophon had become more than a simple literary inspiration. He was now a model for action, a constant point of reference for the presentation and propagating of Arrian's own image" (1993): 275. Arrian calls himself "Xenophon" in some of his works (e.g., *Ec.* 10), although Bosworth doubts this was part of his real name (1993): 273 n. 230, *contra* Stadter (1980): 2-3.

⁶⁸ Bosworth (1993): 272-275.

⁶⁹ Xen. *Cyrop.* 5.3.34-45. See Bosworth (1993): 264-267.

⁷⁰ *Ec.* 3.

⁷¹ *Ec.* 17.

⁷² *Ec.* 10; Xen. *Cyrop.* 5.3.55.

seemingly never had the opportunity to put them into use.⁷³ The *Ectaxis* is more than a mere literary accompaniment to an official report sent to please the emperor; in fact, it is an “emphatic self-advertisement conveyed in a very sophisticated literary form.”⁷⁴ It should also be seen as a work united in theme and conception with Arrian’s other military writings, that is, his *Tactica* and also his lost work on Roman infantry maneuvers.⁷⁵ All three works were written not only to praise the emperor and his recent military reforms, but also to demonstrate Arrian’s literary talent and military abilities, particularly in his defense of Cappadocia from the Alani threat. What Arrian’s exact goals were in writing these works is difficult to determine,⁷⁶ but it is clear that Arrian had more in mind than merely pleasing the fancy of some antiquarian, armchair military historian. Arrian’s military writings, while highly literary, are carefully crafted works shaped by politics and designed as an attempt to gain favor with the biggest military buff of them all: Hadrian.

Arrian and ancient warfare

In a recent colloquium held at the University of Michigan, Prof. Eugenia Kiesling of the History Department at the U.S. Military Academy reflected on how the military approaches history as a series of “lessons learned”.⁷⁷ Similar to Spaulding’s view seventy-five years ago, the U.S. military continues to see history as a practical means of learning about military leadership

⁷³ Granted, the text of the *Ectaxis* breaks off abruptly. Could there have been a description of the rout of the Alani? No later author seems to mention it. We can only assume that Arrian never actually fought with Alani, or at least never described it.

⁷⁴ Bosworth (1993): 267.

⁷⁵ Stadter (1980): 46. Wheeler (1978): 356 denies that any such ‘lost’ work actually existed, as the passage (*Tact.* 32.3) is highly problematic. He claims that the *Tactica* was most likely written in celebration of Hadrian’s *vicennalia* in 136 CE.

⁷⁶ I’m not as confident as Wheeler (1978) to suggest that any of these works was Arrian’s attempt to prolong his military career. If it was, it obviously failed, as we have no record of Arrian receiving any further military command. Perhaps he preferred to retire to Athens instead, where he was elected *archon* in 145/6 CE. See Stadter (1980): 13-18.

⁷⁷ Kiesling (2008).

and strategy. While it is unlikely that the Marines will adopt the Hellenistic phalanx anytime soon, it is clear that many people today still believe that history has some value in determining proper actions in the contemporary world.

Arrian, too, appreciated the value of military history. A writer of a military handbook himself, Arrian believed in the practical (if limited) application of such works for a general. He himself may have utilized such treatises in his plan of defense against the Alani in 135 CE. However, he also had read literature that offered the great model generals of history, such as Alexander the Great and Cyrus. The experience troops of his legions may also have aided Arrian in his preparations for his encounter with the Alani. It was a combination of all three, plus his own innate abilities, which allowed Arrian to devise such tactics.

Arrian's *Ectaxis* shows an author who inhabited a multi-cultural world, one in which a Greek provincial, learned in literature and philosophy, could rise up to be a powerful general and administrator in the Roman Empire. Through an application of experience, literature, and tactical theory, Arrian created a fresh *exemplum* for future generals.⁷⁸ Whether later soldiers of the Roman army utilized his work in their training is unclear, yet it is certain that another emperor may have felt that the *Ectaxis* deserved to be published with other great works of military theory.⁷⁹ Arrian's *Ectaxis* remains an important work for both understanding the Roman army as well as the cultural fusion that was the Empire. Through a close investigation of its literary and historical context, one may better appreciate this fragmentary, 'minor' work of one of the most interesting characters of Roman history.

⁷⁸ Campbell (1987): 27.

⁷⁹ Cod. Laurentianus gr. 55.4 is the archetype manuscript for the work. Dated from time of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (r. 912-959), an emperor with tastes similar to Hadrian, the manuscript contains three separate collections of almost exclusively tactical works. The first and third collections are Byzantine, but the second collections contain Hellenistic and Roman military treatises by Asclepiodotus, Aelian, Aeneas Tacticus, Arrian (*Tactica* and *Ectaxis*), and Onasander, as well as the "rhetorica militaris" and Sextus Julius Africanus. See Devine (1993).

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