Case 4-Asia-Iran-Parthia-Horse and Rider-100 BCE

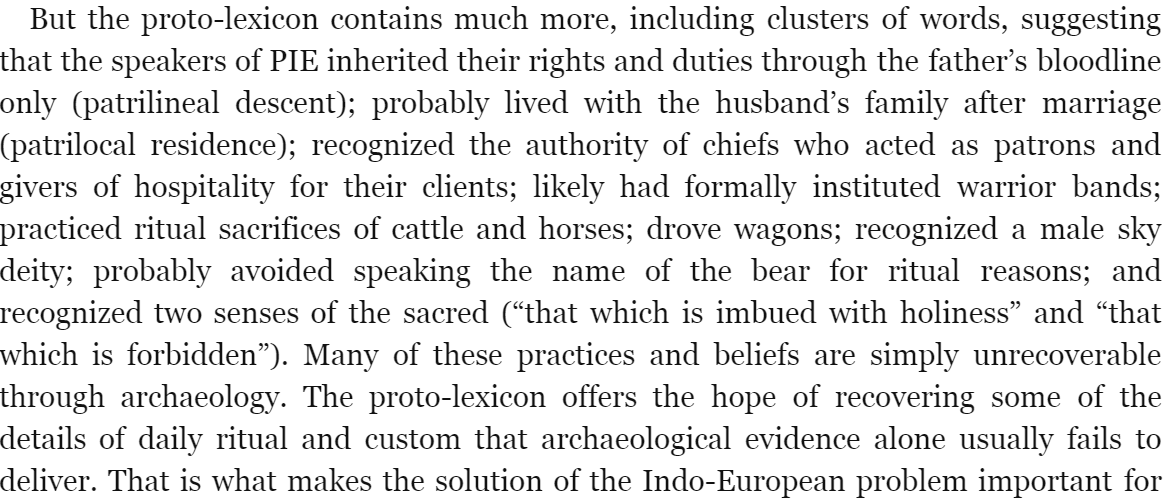


**Case no.: 4**

**Accession Number:**

**Formal Label:** Asia-Iran-Parthia-Horse and Rider-100 BCE

**Display Description:**



the expansion of the Indo-European languages (Anthony 2010). In this expansion, the horse played an important rôle by expediting travel across the steppes from the area between the Black and Caspian Seas. For instance,Parthia in north-eastern Iran was invaded by horse riding Scythian exiles in the 10th -9th centuries who were called Parthi" (Smith n.d.).” In the 7th c the Scytians were conquered by the Medes and later incorporated into the Achaemenid Empire under Cyrus the Great in the 6th century BCE. All of these overlays of Indo-European-speaking peoples provided the matrix which was established by about 400 BCE.

After the 4th-century-BCE conquests of Alexander the Great they formed part of the Hellenistic Seleucid Empire. By the 3rd c BCE the Eastern-Iranian [Parni](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parni" \o "Parni) people and Arsacid dynasty, rulers of the Parthian Empire (247 BC – 224 CE) overtook them. Finally, in the 2nd c the seven Parthian clans were controlled as a feudal aristocracy under the last pre-Islamic Persian state, the Sasanian Empire. 

This map shows the Major Indo-European languages at about 400 BCE, just before Alexander’s push through the Anatolian- and Iranian-speaking zones. From Anthony, 2010**.**

**LC Classification:**

**Date or Time Horizon:**

**Geographical Area:**

**Map:**



The region of Parthia within the empire of Medes, c. 600 BCE; from  Shepherd 1926.

**GPS coordinates: 60E, 35 N**

**Cultural Affiliation:** Parthia

**Media:** terracotta, black slip.

**Dimensions:**

**Weight:**

**Condition: original**

**Provenance:**

**Discussion:**

When Arsaces I overthrew the Seleucid governor of Parthia and made himself king in 247 B.C., he set into motion a number of events that would literally change the world, providing he could keep Antiochus III from reclaiming his lost territories, territories conquered in the days of Alexander the Great. The Seleucids as a whole were not a pleasant people and antagonized many of their conquered subjects in the few hundred years that they ruled the Middle East. More interested in breeding war elephants than horses, they influenced the likes of Pyrrhus of Macedonia and Hannibal, who both overestimated the effectiveness of battle elephants in Europe.

Alexander the Great's cavalry was the decisive factor in many of his battles against the Persians and their allies. And the Scythians, the great horsemen of the Steppes, were responsible for more than their fair share of Persian casualties. Mounted archers on swift horses originally stolen from the Medes, the Scythians and their related tribes were responsible for the deaths and defeats of Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Persian Empire, and King Darius, who learned the hard way what a frog, arrow and bird represented to King Idymanthrus of Scythia.

[](http://www.parthia.com/coins/pdc_1128.jpg)

[Single curve bow on silver tetradrachm of Artaxerxes III Ochus, ca. 333 B.C., 21.7 mm, 15.1 gm. Photo by permission [Calgary Coin Gallery](http://www.calgarycoin.com/)]

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Parthian Light Horse Cavalryman** | **Parthian Heavy Horse Cavalryman** |
| [Click image to enlarge](http://www.parthia.com/images/lighthorse.gif) | [Click image to enlarge](http://www.parthia.com/images/heavyhorse.gif) |
| [Graffiti from private houses, Dura Europos. Earlier third century A.D. (After M. Rostovzeff, *Caravan Cities*, figs. 2-3)] | |

The Parthians also adopted the Scythian bow, a double curve weapon ideal for horseback. The original Persian bow was a single curved weapon that was used by footmen. The Persians themselves seemed to prefer using spears when mounted since it did not require as much skill to kill a lion.

One thing the Parthians did not adopt from the Scythians was their horse. The Scythians used several breeds of horse with the golden Akhal-Teke being their preferred mount. Their obsession with golden colored horses resulted in a large number of golden chestnuts and golden bays being found among the tribes and in the Scythian ice tombs. The Russian Don, now inhabiting the region once ruled by the Scythians, comes predominantly in golden chestnut and bay.

[](http://www.parthia.com/coins/pdc_3634.jpg)

[Bronze tetrachalkous of Mithradates II (c. 123 - 88 B.C.), 21 mm, 6.6 gm. Photo by permission Doug Smith's [Ancient Greek & Roman Coins](http://mywebpages.comcast.net/dougsmit/)]

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