modern-day Scribonia Attices of West Sussex (or the Roman ones of Ostia) will feel is harder to decide.

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THE BEGINNINGS OF CAVALRY

R. DREWS: *Early Riders. The Beginnings of Mounted Warfare in Asia and Europe*. Pp. xi + 218, maps, ills. New York and London: Routledge, 2004. Cased, £55. ISBN: 0-415-32624-9.

In this book Robert Drews takes four-square aim at the theories of Gimbutas and others that *c*. 4000 B.C. people on the Eurasian steppes began not only to ride on horses, but also to fight from horseback. D. opens his book with the statement that some will view his thesis (that mounted warriors did not become significant until the eighth century B.C.) as unlikely, whereas others will consider it self-evident and wonder why such a book as his should even have been necessary. I confess that I stand in the latter camp; but no matter: even self-evident truths bear occasional repeating.

That said, the earliest secure attestations of riders on the Eurasian steppes come from the late second millennium B.C.; such attestations, however, are legion in the first, as are references to mounted warriors. (D. dispatches [pp. 12–15] alleged earlier attestations, in particular the horse burial at Dereivka, now redated to the first millennium B.C.)

Extrapolating from known circumstances to unknown ones has its pitfalls. But positing that in unknown circumstances things develop *differently* from what one observes happening in known ones verges on lunacy. Point for point, the proponents of mounted warriors on the steppes in the fourth millennium B.C., however, do exactly that.

First, in the Near East and the Aegean region we find no attestation of anyone riding before the second millennium B.C.; and not until the first (or very late second) do we find anyone riding in a non-awkward fashion (e.g. not in a 'donkey-seat'—see e.g. Fig. 3.8 on p. 43). Secondly, in these regions cavalry does not appear until the opening centuries of the first millennium: i.e. mounted warriors were a late development which lagged far behind the advent of riding *per se*. Thirdly, comparable technological advances, such as the wheeled waggon, the spoked wheel, or the metal bit, on the basis of available evidence, seem to have appeared with rough contemporaneity both in the Near East and on the Eurasian steppes—i.e. wherever precisely such advances may have originated, they spread rapidly, and for the obvious reason that they conferred immediately apparent benefits on those who adopted them. Why, then, should we assume that in the case of riding and mounted warriors these technological advances appeared on the steppes two and three millennia respectively before we see them in the Near East—and not with rough contemporaneity in both regions as in the case of other comparable advances? Then, in the Near East, where we have abundant evidence, we see a long delay between the appearance of riding *per se* (however awkward) and the appearance of mounted warriors. Why, then, should we posit that riding and mounted warriors appeared simultaneously around 4000 B.C. on the steppes in a period for which we have no evidence?

In point of fact, what evidence we do have from the steppes (earliest attested rider from the late second millennium; and cavalry attested only in the first) actually

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suggests the expected roughly concurrent development with what we see in the Near East. It would require a truly compelling argument to overcome all this; and neither Gimbutas' wishful thinking about hordes of mounted Indo-Europeans thundering across the steppes and into Europe, Asia Minor, Iran, and India nor the ambiguous circumstantial argumentation which D. discusses and rightly dismisses (pp. 20–30) will ever compel anything.

That said, while I accept D.'s main thesis, I have reservations in detail. He advances (pp. 99–122) the argument that the development of the metal bit (specifically: the bit with a metal mouthpiece) first enabled riders to control their mounts sufficiently so that non-awkward riding became possible. While this appears to me chronologically and aprioristically plausible, I have no means of judging how much control a rider has using a bit with a cross-piece made of other material (say, wood or leather). Moreover, the Plains Indians skilfully rode horses and fought from them *without any bit at all*. D. knows this, of course, and advances a clever counter-argument: the Plains Indians, he notes, had observed Spanish colonists riding and thus knew 'good riding' by example. In other words, once people saw that it could be done, they could do it even by a different method: but, as in the story of Columbus' egg, first they had to see it done—and the real trick lay in figuring out how to do it the first time. For D., the real trick in this concrete case came with the development of the bit with a metal mouthpiece in the closing centuries of the second millennium. I am willing to believe, but, as the saying goes, I still need help with my unbelief.

Minor matters: Shalmaneser III's inscriptions show that cavalry was already significant in some quarters in the ninth century B.C. (so I would be less adamant than D. in insisting on the eighth); I persist in thinking that the Cimmerians did originate in the north Pontic region (D. misunderstands the situation in my view); in my opinion the development of hoplite warfare actually encouraged the eventual development of cavalry in most of Greece—hoplites out of formation were helpless, and cavalry was useful in breaking hoplite formations up by attacking from the sides or from the rear (once hoplite warfare was 'set', as it were, one worked at developing ways to crack the phalanx—cavalry and light troops were particularly useful in this).

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W.M.D.?

A. MAYOR: *Greek Fire, Poison Arrows and Scorpion Bombs. Biological and Chemical Warfare in the Ancient World*. Pp. 319, maps, ills. Woodstock, NY, New York, and London: Overlook Duckworth, 2003. Cased, US$27.95, Can$42, £20. ISBN: 1-58567-348-X (US), 0-7156-3257-4 (UK).

This is the kind of book that should confound those who question whether the study of the ancient world has any 'relevance' for the present day. At the same time it induces a certain awe in the conventional classicist, whose footsteps follow the trodden paths of scholarship, by reason of its impressive range of reference. Adrienne Mayor is described on the jacket flap as 'a classical folklorist who specializes in the early history of science'. Truly, there are not many of those about. Not the least of the book's virtues is its demonstration of the narrow demarcations, even in the

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