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Army of Hellenistic Egypt: organizational and historical-philosophical aspect

This article is devoted to the analysis of the formation and transformation of the organization of the army of the Ptolemaic power. The authors consider the mechanisms of the evolution of the army of Hellenistic Egypt and show the main directions of this process, its ideological justification – philosophical concepts that developed in the era of Hellenism. Rejecting the excessively strict classical assessments given to the military art of Hellenistic Egypt, the authors turn not only to historical but also to historical and philosophical argumentation. The conclusion is made about the sufficient effect of the army organization throughout the greater length of the history of the Ptolemaic state when the army acted as one of the main pillars of the Ptolemaic rule and a universal foreign policy tool. The decline of military affairs in Egypt, which occurred in the second half of the II – first half of the I century BC, was mainly caused by the changes that occurred in the system of international relations in the Mediterranean region and in the general crisis of the Ptolemaic dynasty and state. Despite all the shortcomings of the army of Egypt during the Hellenistic period, the army was one of the most stable institutions that slowed down the process of state collapse. The article is prepared based on materials announced during the round table “The Ancient World in the history of mankind”, dedicated to the memory of Candidate of Historical Sciences, Associate Professor Vyacheslav Gorovoy (1954–2020).

Keywords: ancient world, antiquity, Hellenism, Ptolemies, Ptolemaic Egypt, military organization, army, Hellenistic monarchy, Hellenistic philosophy, stoicism, cynicism, epicureanism.

Introduction

The formation of the army of Hellenistic Egypt took place at the turn of the 4th–3rd centuries BC, mainly during the reign of the first kings of the Lagid dynasty. The foundations of an independent military organization were laid by the ancestor of the dynasty Ptolemy I Soter, who at first used the Macedonian troops and the Macedonian military organization as Egypt’s satrap. In the wars of the Diadochus, the structure, armament, and tactics of the opposing armies did not yet have noticeable differences and generally conformed to the principles laid down by Alexander the Great.

To speak about the army of Hellenistic Egypt as a unique military organism, formed in specific conditions of monarchy of Ptolemy and reflected in itself both strengths and weaknesses, it is appropriate since III century BC.

“There is no doubt that the army in Ptolemaic Egypt, as in other Hellenistic states, has always played a significant role as the main pillar of the dynasty. Moreover, the Hellenistic monarch was above all a military leader... The military character of the Hellenistic tsarist authority can be seen in the duties of the tsar, the education of the tsars, the organization of the court, the signs of power, the self-expression of the rulers and their attitude to the army” [1; 186]. The Macedonian royal tradition of leading the army on the battlefield, personally fighting in combat, continued to persist in the Ptolemaic dynasty. For example, Ptolemy VI Philometor was mortally wounded in the battle on the River Enopore against the ruler of the Seleucid state Alexander Balas in 145 AD [2; 190].

Egypt remained one of the most stable states of the Hellenistic world and its inhabitants for almost 300 years were spared from foreign invasions (the exception can be only the campaign of Antiochus IV in 170–168 BC year). In addition to the good geographical location and proper bureaucratic organization laid down by the first Ptolemies, there was undoubted merit of the army, which stood up to the opponents, who had considerable resources and glorious military traditions.

These achievements were consistent with the foreign policy aspirations of the Ptolemies, who sought to play an important role in the Hellenistic world of the eastern Mediterranean, but did not aspire to create a vast polyethnic empire as their immediate neighbors and adversaries, the Seleucids. Compared to the Kingdom of Syria, Hellenistic Egypt was always a less ethnically diverse political entity, although in its territory,

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in addition to the Egyptians, who constituted an absolute majority, there were representatives of other peoples – Macedonians and Greeks, and Jews, Libyans and Nubians [Read more: 3]. This, on the one hand, contributed to the formation of a relatively homogeneous (by the standards of the Hellenistic world) army organization, which was, therefore, better placed to govern on the battlefield. On the other hand, the Ptolemies, especially during the reign of the first representatives of the dynasty, needed a constant influx of warriors from Macedonia and other Greek states, because, before the reforms made in the reign of Ptolemy IV Philopator, they formed the basis of the military organization, while the Egyptians, ten times superior to the ruling foreigners, provided the economic foundation of the state. Thus, at the beginning of the III century BC two main directions of foreign policy activity of Ptolemy were formed: northern “Greco-Macedonian” and north-eastern “Syrian”.

In addition, Ptolemies had extensive possessions beyond Egypt in the Mediterranean basin – Cyprus, Crete, Asia Minor, which had to be constantly defended against the claims of other powers, primarily Macedonia and the Syrian Empire.

Thus, in Hellenistic Egypt, foreign and domestic policies were deeply intertwined: the army was one of the main instruments that provided tax revenue and, ultimately, the rule of the dynasty, but it required foreign-policy activism, involving participation in numerous military conflicts in the eastern Mediterranean.

Experimental

The basic methods of historical research were used, suggesting logical analysis and synthesis of historical information based on general scientific methods, as well as methods of historical and philosophical analysis.

During the study, analysis of the army of Hellenistic Egypt and its system, including structural and functional aspects, were made. The general and specific characteristics of the historical phenomenon under study are shown, including the ideological foundations of the Hellenistic world, which had a direct impact on the political and power institutions of the Ptolemaic Empire. The genesis of the army of Hellenistic Egypt is considered in the categories of causal analysis. Accordingly, the results of this study are based on a set of the following methods: historical-genetic, historical-comparative, historical-typological, historical-dynamic, historical-systemic, and historical-philosophical. Their use in the research process allowed a multifaceted consideration of the phenomenon under study, involving not only historical but also philosophical literature.

The conclusions are based on a synthetic analysis of the data contained in the works of contemporaries of the studied historical phenomenon, as well as modern authors, based on the data, including archeological science and some auxiliary historical disciplines. The historical material itself is supplemented by philosophical analysis of the Hellenistic worldview, which had the most direct influence on the formation and transformation of Hellenistic Egypt's army.

Discussion

Alexander the Great's campaigns led to a significant upheaval in the Greek spiritual world. He strikes at the ancient polis wanting to realize the project of a universal divine monarchy that would unite different peoples, races, countries, and cities. Alexander's great campaigns resulted in the emergence of new kingdoms in Macedonia, Syria, and Egypt. The historical influence of the city-states began to fade away. The spirit of the new age was dissonant with the spirit of classical Greece; the polis as the ideal form of state was losing its vitality.

The crisis and further decline of the polis led to the collapse of the old ideals. The new realities rarely resorted to the former moral virtues, for the new life demanded a new type of man, a subject rather than a citizen. Hellenistic monarchies gave rise to a new type of man, with certain technical skills, performing the functions necessary for the state. Subjects understood how little depended on them and, often, took an indifferent position, which could not but affect the evolution of social life in general and its military component in particular.

Greek thinkers, finding no alternative to the policy, began to develop the idea of cosmopolitanism, declaring both the world of men and the world of the gods united and the fatherland boundless. The identity of a person and a citizen was violated, and the need for a new identity arose. Such identification was found – the individual.

In the Hellenistic monarchies, the bonds between the state and man gradually weakened. The economic basis of Hellenism became a large slave-holding, a huge market with developed monetary circulation, military-monarchical organizations, which were intended to provide effective management. The spread of mate-

rial culture – technology, construction, military art, etc. was of great importance. A special Hellenistic culture was formed; the ideological basis was a demonstration of the power of the state on the one hand and the importance of the individual on another.

The separation of the concepts of “man”-“citizen” led to the understanding of the person as such, in its autonomy and uniqueness. Man, with the attainment of his own personality, becomes free. In the field of military organization, the development of these ideas led to an increase in the number of mercenaries with no civil ties to a certain State and an increase in the influence of mercenary activities, which gradually became one of the main instruments of the military organization of the Hellenistic states [4; 84].

Philosophical concepts reflected the thoughts and sentiments of people, who had fled their homelands, were involved in events during which States collapsed and new political organisms were created. Social life was formed spontaneously, the individual was at the same time involved in the events that took place, and subordinated to them. The concept of chance and destiny – “quiet” began to play an important role in Hellenistic philosophy. The image of a free person, a sage, capable of resisting fate and external circumstances were formed.

Different philosophical schools give their idea of the new ideal of the free man – the sage.

A way of life outside of civilized comfort is the ideal of Cynicism. The categories of “ascetic”, “labor”, and “effort” became the basis of the method and the path leading to freedom and virtue. Contempt for pleasure, exercise of body and soul, lack of attachment are the fundamental values of the Cynics, following which should lead man to freedom. Diogenes saw it as his task to show that man has everything at his disposal to be happy if he understands his nature. Happiness comes from within and never from outside. Cynic is also outside a particular state; his country is the whole world.

Cynicism proved less viable than other Hellenistic philosophies because of its anarchism, extremism, and spiritual poverty. Nevertheless, the ideas of apathy, autarky, search for new ideals and values become a common place for other philosophical schools of Hellenism, such as “Stoja” Zeno of Elea, “Garden” Epicurus, skepticism, etc.

The main ideas of epicurism can be characterized as follows: there is a place for happiness in the life of man; happiness is the absence of suffering; man needs nothing but himself to achieve happiness. Man is autarchic; he needs neither gods, nor state, nor wealth. Everyone has the same right to peace and quiet, so the doors of the “Garden” were open to everyone.

The values of Stoicism, also a calm, even “insensitive” sage, free from passions, were largely consonant with the principles of the military community. The Stoics paid much attention in their teachings to the phenomenon of will. The teachings of the Stoics were therefore strongly influenced by Socrates. According to Chrysippus, the whole universe is composed of a single soul-tender matter-ether. Marcus Aurelius, the Roman Emperor, is one of the great representatives of Stoicism. He believed that everything in the world was interconnected, evolving by some law, guided by divine providence. There is a single world soul that controls all things. This thought is especially pronounced in the writings of Seneca, for whom freedom is the supreme ideal.

In Stoicism, much attention is paid to the ideal of service, including military service, to developing a sense of duty, to overcoming the fear of death. For example, Zenon, claiming that death is not to be feared, resorted to the following statement: “Evil cannot be glorious, death can be glorious, so death is not evil” [5; LXXXII, 9].

Marcus Aurelius, on the other hand, believed in the equality of all human beings from birth, thus recognizing the legitimacy of various forms of government, including those where the political process involved the entire population. In this connection, a direct analogy is drawn with the political organization of the Ptolemaic Power, where the centralized monarchy was coexisting in the political field with some autonomous civil communities.

In Hellenistic public discourse, human behavior in complex life situations was perceived in terms of manifesting the most significant traits of character. The behavior of a man in war revealed these qualities most clearly. In this regard, war was not perceived as an absolute evil, or part of foreign policy, which should be avoided as much as possible. The war was conceived as an ideal field for realization of heroic characteristics of personality – valor, courage, intellect [6; 251–252]. Moreover, the Tsar’s political legitimacy depended directly on his success on the battlefield, on his willingness and ability not only to protect, but also to expand his state. Over time, in the context of the general degradation of the Hellenistic states, the rulers were forced to substitute real military achievements with a demonstration of military power (the number and splendour of parades increases), as well as an appeal to the “glorious past”. The Hellenistic world was domi-

nated by a charismatic (according to M. Weber) type of political power, and a ruler whose luck was in doubt risked losing the support of his subjects. As mentioned above, according to the Macedonian tradition, the Hellenistic sovereign is not only a political leader, but also a military leader. In contrast to the classical period, the Hellenistic version of the military chiefdom was not associated with the idea of citizenship. The military leader of the Hellenistic era is either a warrior on the throne, guided by the gods and fate (the ideal type, Alexander the Great), or a warlord responsible to his monarch, but not to society and the polis. This paradigm shift, on the one hand, contributed to the professionalization of the army and military art, on the other hand - increased the likelihood of the military institution being cut off from society, making the army an instrument of the foreign and internal policy of the ruling dynasties.

The formation and transformation of the army of Hellenistic Egypt corresponded to these philosophical shifts, as well as to the vagaries of Ptolemaic politics, the economic condition and the internal unity of the state. During the reign of the first three kings of this dynasty, its organizational structure broadly followed the Macedonian system introduced by Philip II and improved by Alexander the Great.

The main line of troops of the Egyptian army during this period was the heavy infantry - the Phalangites, which continued to use the Macedonian battle order. The phalanx was the basis of the Egyptian army's formation on the battlefield and its strike was intended to decide the outcome of the battle. In the future, a number of changes aimed at increasing the number of phalanxes, armament and equipment of soldiers inevitably affected the tactics, and not for the better.

Over time, the number of soldiers in this battle formation increases – from the end of the III century BC there are diphalangias and tetraphalangias, reaching up to 8 and 16 thousand. Men [7; 38], the main armament of the phalangites – sarisses from 4.8 m in the beginning of the 3rd century BC to 6.7 m in the II century BC, weighted protective equipment: linothorax (linen armor) over time supplemented with bronze plates or were replaced by metal hippocrates, as well as simpler types of breastplates [8; 54]. Only such defensive weapons as helmets, mainly of the Thracian type, and round shields remained relatively unchanged. Bent copied swords were used for close combat [8; 55].

These changes over time increased the phalanx's impact strength, but reduced its mobility and tactical flexibility. The general decline of military affairs in the Hellenistic states, manifested from the middle II century BC did not spare Egypt, whose generals increasingly began to rely in combat on the numerical superiority of heavy infantry [9; 423]. Tactics such as the false retreat of Philip II at the Battle of Heronay, or the slash-strike favored by Alexander the Great, which won the Battles of Issus and Havgamel, are gradually being abandoned.

The battles were reduced to frontal confrontation, as was evident at the Battle of Rafiah in 217 BC - one of the largest battles of the Hellenistic era. The outcome of the battle was eventually resolved by a confrontation between the Egyptian and Syrian Phalanx, in which the first, encouraged by the appearance of its king, eventually managed to take over.

In this battle, for the first time in the military practice of Hellenistic Egypt, 20 thousand ethnic Egyptian phalangites – Mahims, trained and armed according to the Macedonian model, who were members of the military class, formed during the last five dynasties of Egyptian pharaohs, fought on the battlefield in the army of Ptolemy IV. Subsequently, the role of the Mahims in the manning of the Egyptian army steadily increased [10; 16].

The phalanx's vulnerability to flank strikes required a cover of lighter and more mobile infantry and cavalry. For this purpose, the Ptolemaic army used rifle infantry units, as well as a special kind of infantry, finally formed by the II century BC and later became popular - Tureophors (from the word tureos - a shield of the Celtic type) and the Torakytes, which were a much more universal kind of troops. They could successfully act against enemy light infantry as well as in rough terrain, but were able to fight as phalangites if necessary [11; 38].

Starting from the second half of the III century in the army of Hellenistic Egypt more and more frequent mercenaries can be conventionally divided into two main types. The former served for a limited period of time; the latter were mostly of non-Greek origin. Thus, in the mentioned Battle of Rafiah in the Egyptian army, Galatian and Thracian troops totaling 6 thousand people [12; 77]. Others, mostly Hellenic, served in the royal army on a permanent basis [Haniotis 2, pp. 132]. The innovation of the Ptolemaic, however, dating back to the epoch of the pharaohs, was the consolidation of mercenaries through the distribution to them of plots of land and settlement in separate settlements - cleruccias [13; 90].

The recruitment of mercenaries, like the recruitment of ethnic Egyptians, was an attempt to overcome the relative limitations of mobilization resources and to broaden the social base of the Ptolemaic army, and, as a result, this activity is by no means unsuccessful.

The cavalry of Egypt in the Hellenistic period continued to retain continuity with the Macedonian military organization. It was divided into high and low status hipparchys, with the number of the former decreasing over time.

High-status hipparchys were numbered (five of them are known to exist in the III century BC whereas only two of them, the fourth and fifth, survived in the next century). The low-status hipparchians appeared to be mercenaries and their names reflected their origins. Known Thracian, Persian, Thessaly, and others Hypoarchies are known. All tactics of the cavalry of Alexander the Great were kept [11; 43].

A peculiar, native of the army of Hellenistic Egypt was elephantheria - battle elephants, the most famous of the battle of Rafiah. "Elephant Corps" Lagidov began to form even under Ptolemy Soter, and the greatest development of elephantheria got in III century BC. However, the costs of creation and development of this kind of troops clearly exceeded its combat value [6; 79]. Against an organized and persistent adversary with the appropriate experience, the elephants of war demonstrated questionable effectiveness. This was amply demonstrated by the Battle of Magnesia in 190 BC where the elephants of Antiochus III were unable to achieve any meaningful results against the Roman veterans of Scipio of Asia. The victory of the Syrian elephants over the Egyptian in the earlier Battle of Rafiah ultimately did not affect the overall outcome of the battle.

Because of the general progress of science in Hellenistic Egypt in the III century BC [Read more: 14; 266-293] there was a process of professionalization of the military business, accompanied by the development of siege and fortification technologies, as well as the appearance of various projectiles, which were rarely used in field battles, but proved to be effective in siege and defense of cities and fortresses [14; 164].

Since the 2nd century BC Roman influence on the Ptolemaic army is observed. This influence was reflected in the presence of syntagms using manipulative construction, some of which had their own standards. The "Tactics" of Asclepiodota, referring to I. BC, describes the phalangarchy approaching numerically to the Roman legions [15; 60]. A distinctive feature of the Egyptian army from the middle III century BC is the presence in its ranks of persons from Rome, which is unusual for the armed forces of other Hellenistic states [8; 61]. However, these attempts to copy elements of the Roman military organization and transfer them to a completely different socio-cultural soil cannot be considered successful, although they have contributed to a certain flexibility of the army organism of the Ptolemaic Empire.

Conclusions

The classical assessments given to the army and military art of Hellenistic Egypt [16; 137] should be recognized as being too strict. The army of the Ptolemaic state has, for most of its history, been sufficiently effective to meet the political challenges of the Lagidean dynasty.

The evolution of the army's institution during this period was also influenced by the Hellenistic period. An active cult of tsarist power demanded its military heroes, embodied in successful warriors on the throne. The legitimacy of the tsarist power, continuing the Macedonian tradition, was reinforced by military victory.

The army of Hellenistic Egypt combined universal, received from the Greco-Macedonian system, and unique, formed on its own soil, organizational and structural elements. Much attention was paid to the formation of professional command and the development of the fortification and siege business.

For almost three centuries, the army effectively defended the borders of the Ptolemaic state, periodically conducting successful offensives far beyond its borders (especially at Ptolemy I Soter and Ptolemy III Euerest) and Egyptian military commanders made a significant contribution to the development of military art of the 4th and 3rd centuries. In the second half of the 1st century BC the decline of the military business was mainly due to the change of the foreign and domestic political situation of the Ptolemaic State, expressed in the general crisis of this political party.

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И.Д. Хлебников, Н.А. Донецкая

Эллиндік Египет армиясы: ұйымдастырушылық және тарихи-философиялық аспект

«Эллиндік Египет армиясы: ұйымдастырушылық және тарихи-философиялық аспект» мақаласы Птолемей державасы армиясының құрылуы мен қайта құрылуын талдауға арналған. Авторлар эллиндік Египет армиясының эволюция тетіктерін қарастырған, осы процестің негізгі бағыттарын, оның идеологиялық негіздемесін — эллинизм дәуірінде қалыптасқан философиялық тұжырымдамаларды көрсетеді. Эллиндік Египеттің әскери өнеріне берілген тым қатаң классикалық бағалауды қабылдамай, авторлар тек тарихи ғана емес, сонымен бірге тарихи-философиялық дәлелдерге де жүгінеді. Птолемей мемлекетінің тарихының көп бөлігінде армия Птолемей билігінің негізгі тіректерінің бірі және сыртқы саясаттың әмбебап құралы болған кезде армияны ұйымдастырудың жеткілікті тиімділігі туралы қорытынды жасалады. Біздің дәуірімізге дейінгі II ғасырдың екінші жартысы мен I ғасырдың бірінші жартысында болған Мысырдағы әскери істің құлдырауы әскери — ұйымдастырушылық тәртіптің проблемаларынан туындаған жоқ және әскери өнер саласында болған жоқ. Бұл негізінен Жерорта теңізі аймағындағы халықаралық қатынастар жүйесіндегі өзгерістерге және Птолемей әулеті мен мемлекетінің жалпы дағдарысына байланысты болды. Эллиндік кезеңдегі Египеттің армия денесіне тән барлық кемшіліктерге қарамастан, армия мемлекеттің ыдырау процесін баяулатқан ең тұрақты институттардың бірі болды. Мақала тарих ғылымдарының кандидаты, доцент Вячеслав Владимирович Горовойды (1954–2020) еске алуға арналған «Адамзат тарихындағы ежелгі әлем» атты дөңгелек үстелін өткізу аясында жарияланған материалдар негізінде дайындалды.

Кілт сөздер: ежелгі әлем, ежелгі, эллинизм, Птолемейлер, Птолемей Египеті, әскери ұйым, әскер, эллиндік монархия, эллиндік философия, стоицизм, кинизм, эпикуреизм.

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Армия эллинистического Египта: организационный и историко-философский аспект

Статья посвящена анализу становления и трансформации организации армии державы Птолемея. Авторами рассмотрены механизмы эволюции армии эллинистического Египта, показаны основные направления данного процесса, его идейного обоснования — философских концепций, сложившихся в эпоху эллинизма. Отказываясь от излишне строгих классических оценок, данных военному искусству эллинистического Египта, авторы обращаются не только к исторической, но и к историко-философской аргументации. Сделан вывод о достаточной эффективности армейской организации на большей протяженности истории государства Птолемея, когда армия выступала в качестве одной из

главные опоры владычества Птолемеев и универсального внешнеполитического инструмента. Упадок военного дела в Египте, произошедший во второй половине II–первой половине I в. до н.э., был вызван не проблемами собственно военно-организационного порядка и лежал не в области военного искусства. Он был обусловлен, главным образом, изменениями, произошедшими в системе международных отношений в регионе Средиземного моря и в общем кризисе династии и государства Птолемеев. Несмотря на все недостатки, присущие армейскому организму Египта эллинистического периода, армия являлась одним из наиболее устойчивых институтов, замедливших процесс крушения государства. Статья подготовлена на основе материалов, озвученных в рамках проведения круглого стола «Древний мир в истории человечества», посвященного памяти кандидата исторических наук, доцента Вячеслава Владимировича Горюхова (1954–2020).

Ключевые слова: древний мир, античность, эллинизм, Птолеми, птолемеевский Египет, военная организация, армия, эллинистическая монархия, эллинистическая философия, стоицизм, кинизм, эпикуреизм.

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