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# Centaurs and Cavalry: How the Sea Peoples Shaped Mediterranean Warfare

## *Kentaurlar ve Süvariler: Deniz Kavimleri Akdeniz'de Savaş Sanatını Nasıl Şekillendirdi*

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**Öne Çıkanlar:**

- Bu çalışma birden fazla faktörün etkisiyle gerçekleşen Geç Tunç Çağı (GTÇ) yıkımının sebep ve sonuçlarına yeni bir yaklaşım ve öneri getirmektedir.
- Süvarinin antik ve ortaçağ savaş düzenindeki yeri ve etkisi daha bilindik olsa da ortaya çıkışının yarattığı etkiye dikkat çekilmektedir.
- Mitolojik figürlerin gerçek yaşamdan ve burada karşılaşılan değiştirici, dönüştürücü etkilerden kaynaklanışına bir örnek daha sunulmaktadır.

**Öz:** Tunç Çağı Sonu Çöküşü ve Deniz Kavimlerinin İstilası, hem arkeoloji hem de antik tarih disiplinlerinin en çok tartışılan konularından biridir. Bu olguya dair pek çok hipotez ve görüş ileri sürülmüş; bunların çoğu, sözde barbarların, Akdeniz ve Yakın Doğu'nun güçlü ve iyi örgütlenmiş devletlerini nasıl mağlup edebildiğini sorgulamıştır. Başlangıçta bu başarının temel nedeni olarak demir teknolojisinin kullanımı öne sürülmüştür. Ancak açıkça görülmektedir ki, geç Tunç Çağı kültürleri, istila öncesinde demiri zaten kullanmaktaydı. Hatta bir Hitit kralının "Demir Tahtın Adamı" olarak anıldığı bilinmekte; ayrıca Hititler ile Mısır arasında gerçekleşen demir ticaretine dair mektuplar da günümüze ulaşmıştır. Bu tür bulgular olmasa dahi, söz konusu barbarların teknik açıdan Akdeniz medeniyetlerinden daha gelişmiş olduğunu varsaymak mantıksız olurdu. Drews (1993), birkaç on yıl önce, çöküşün tek bir nedene indirgenemeyeceğini savunan yeni bir hipotez ortaya koymuştur ve bu yaklaşımı büyük ölçüde haklı bulunmuştur. Drews'un açıklamaları arasında depremler, kitlesel göçler, demir işçiliği, kuraklık, sistemsel çöküş ve akıncı faaliyetleri gibi birden fazla etken yer almaktadır (Drews 1993). Onun istilacıların askerî başarısına dair getirdiği açıklama ise, bu grupların sayıca çokluğu karşısında, merkezi devletlerin son derece maliyetli savaş arabası birliklerinin etkisiz kalmış olmasıdır. Bu makalenin temel hipotezi, Deniz Kavimlerinin İstilası ile Akdeniz dünyasında kentaur (yarı insan yarı at) tasvirlerinin ortaya çıkışı arasında kurulabilecek yeni bir ilişkiye dayanmaktadır. Bu ilişkinin, bölgede orduların yapısında köklü bir dönüşüm yaratarak süvari birliğinin sahneye çıkmasına öncülük ettiği öne sürülmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Süvari, Kentaur, Deniz Kavimleri, GTÇ Yıkımı

**Highlights:**

- This study offers a new perspective and proposal regarding the causes and consequences of the LBA Collapse, which occurred as a result of multiple contributing factors.
- Although the role and impact of cavalry in ancient and medieval warfare is better known, this study draws attention to the significance of its disruptive emergence.
- This study provides yet another example of how mythological figures originate from real life and the transformative, altering effects encountered therein.

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**Abstract:** The LBA Collapse and the Invasion of Sea People is one of the most popular topics in both archaeology and ancient history. There have been numerous hypothesis and arguments on the subject, most of them questioning the reason for the success of so-called barbarians in defeating strong and well-organized states in the Mediterranean and the Near-East. It was at first believed that the main variable was the use of iron. But obviously the LBA cultures were using iron well before the invasion, the Hittite King was even referred to as the "Man on the Iron Throne" and letters discussing the trade in iron between Hittite and Egyptian kingdom are known. Even prior to this evidence, it was absurd to imagine the so-called barbarians were technically more advanced that the Mediterranean Cultures. A few decades ago Drews presented a new hypothesis, suggesting the collapse cannot be explained with a single reason; and he was obviously right. His various explanations were earthquakes, migrations, again iron working, drought, system collapse and raiders (Drews 1993). And his explanation for the military success of the invaders was the mass numbers of troops against the highly expensive chariot armies of the organized states. The hypothesis this paper presents provides a new correlation between appearance of centaur depictions in the Mediterranean and the Invasion of the Sea Peoples representing the introduction of a new unit in the armies of the region: *the cavalry*.

**Keywords:** Cavalry, Centaur, Sea Peoples, LBA Collapse

**Genişletilmiş Özet**: Geç Tunç Çağı'nın (GTÇ) çöküşü, arkeoloji ve antik tarih literatüründe sıklıkla tartışılan karmaşık bir olgudur. Bu süreçte Miken, Hitit, Ugarit, Kıbrıs ve Levant'taki pek çok gelişmiş devletin ani biçimde ortadan kalkması, araştırmacıları çok yönlü açıklamalara yönlendirmiştir. Başta ekonomik zayıf-lama, kuraklık, göç dalgaları, depremler ve iç sistem çöküşleri gibi çeşitli faktörlerin birlikte etkili olduğu kabul edilmiştir. Bu yıkıcı dönemle birlikte anılan en gizemli aktörlerden biri ise "Deniz Kavimleri"dir.

Başlangıçta bu istilacı grupların başarısı, demir silahlarının üstünlüğüne bağlanmıştır. Ancak Hitit Kralı III. Hattuşili dönemine ait mektuplar, demirin istilalardan önce de kullanıldığını, hatta Hititler ile Mısır arasında demir ticareti yapıldığını ortaya koymaktadır. Dolayısıyla bu grupların teknik üstünlükle başarıya ulaştığı fikri geçerliliğini yitirmiştir. Drews (1993), çöküşü tek bir nedene indirgememek gerektiğini savunarak depremler, kuraklık, göçler, sistem çöküşü ve istilacı baskınlar gibi çok sayıda etkenin bu yıkımı hazırladığını belirtmiştir.

Bu çalışmanın temel tezi, GTÇ çöküşüne katkıda bulunan unsurlar arasında genellikle göz ardı edilen kritik bir değişimi öne çıkarmaktadır: Süvari savaş birimlerinin ortaya çıkışı. Dönemin ordu yapılarında esas vurucu güç savaş arabalarıyken, bu birimler hem son derece maliyetli hem de coğrafi koşullara bağımlıydı. Hitit, Mısır ve Miken gibi devletlerin savaş arabası orduları düz arazilerde etkili olmakla birlikte, manevra kabiliyeti düşük ve beklenmedik saldırılara karşı savunmasızdı.

Süvari birlikleri ise çok daha ekonomik, hızlı ve çevikti. Hem menzilli silahlarda hem de yakın dövüşte at üzerinde olmak önemli bir avantaj sağlıyordu. Savaş arabalarının savaş alanında kapladığı alan, aynı kaynakla dört katı daha etkili süvari birlikleriyle doldurulabiliyordu. Bu durum, süvarilerin sadece stratejik değil, aynı zamanda lojistik olarak da üstün olduğunu göstermektedir.

Deniz Kavimleri'nin GTÇ'nin son evresinde bu taktiksel yeniliği beraberlerinde getirmiş olabileceği öne sürülmektedir. Bu birlikler, yalnızca istila eden gruplar değil, aynı zamanda savaş düzenini kökten değiştiren aktörlerdi. Bu dönüşüm, yalnızca askerî yapıda değil, mitolojik imgelerde de iz bırakmıştır.
Kentaur (yarı insan, yarı at) mitosu, bu bağlamda önemli bir kültürel belirteç olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Özellikle Euboia'daki Lefkandi'de bulunan MÖ IX. yüzyıla tarihlenen Kentaur heykelciği, bu dönüşümün doğrudan görsel ve mitolojik bir yansıması olabilir. Kentaur figürü, savaşçı atlıların, yani süvarilerin, medeniyet için taşıdığı tehdit ve hayranlık karışımı duyguların sembolü hâline gelmiştir. Tıpkı Azteklerin atlı İspanyol istilacılara duyduğu hayret gibi, GTÇ halkları da bu yeni askerî fenomeni insan-hayvan karışımı efsanevi yaratıklarla açıklamaya çalışmış olabilir.

Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma, Deniz Kavimleri'nin salt yağmacı ya da göçmen gruplar değil, aynı zamanda Doğu Akdeniz'de savaşın doğasını değiştiren bir askerî devrimin taşıyıcısı olabileceğini öne sürmektedir. Süvari birimlerinin ani ve etkili yükselişi, savaş arabası çağının sonunu getirmiş, yeni bir askerî dönemin başlangıcını işaret etmiştir. Bu yönüyle GTÇ çöküşü yalnızca bir yıkım değil, aynı zamanda askerî düşüncenin evriminde bir kırılma noktasıdır.

## 1. Introduction

The LBA Collapse and the Invasion of Sea People forms one of the most popular topics of both archaeology and ancient history. There have been numerous hypothesis and arguments concerning this subject, most of them questioning the reason for the success of so-called barbarians in defeating the strong and well-organized states of the Mediterranean and the Near-East.

It was at first believed that the main variable was the use of iron. But obviously the LBA cultures were using iron well before the invasion and there is even a letter, Hittite Iron Letter of Hattusili III (*KBo I 14*) which mentions the iron trade between Hittite and Egypt (Muhly *et al*. 1985, 71). Even prior to this evidence, it was absurd to imagine that so-called barbarians were technically more advanced than the high cultures of Mediterranean.

A few decades ago Drews (1993) came up with a more detailed hypothesis, to suggest that the collapse cannot be explained through only one reason; and he was obviously right. His various explanations were: earthquakes, migrations, again iron working, drought, system collapse and raiders (Drews 1993). And his explanation for the military success of the invaders was the mass number of troops against the highly expensive chariot armies of the organized states.

This paper focuses mainly on the military part of this phenomenon, in relation with archaeological and linguistic evidence pointing to a mostly disregarded revolution in the armies of the Mediterranean: the cavalry.

## 2. Sea People and the LBA Collapse

The term “Sea People” is actually a modern expression, introduced in 1896 (Maspero 1896). The most famous depiction of these invaders is recorded on the reliefs of Medinet Habu, in Egypt. But the attack on Egypt and Ramses III’s victory is of little concern regarding this paper. There are two reasons for that: First, the attack has come from the sea, as it was nearly impossible to pass through Sinai Desert to reach Egyptian mainland. So, the reliefs at Medinet Habu are one of the first depictions of a naval battle and are of little consequence in respect to the use of cavalry. Secondly, it is not entirely certain that the people that attacked Egypt were the same so-called Sea People that invaded Aegean, Anatolia, and Assyria. Because the invaders have moved local population and caused mass migration in the region and there is no certain evidence that they themselves even reached further south of Levant. Also, there are earlier inscriptions of Pharaoh Merenptah, in the Temple of Amun in Karnak, that mention a questionable victory over the Libyans and their islander allies, just before the invasion (Breasted 1962 (Vol. 3): 241-243). The names of the peoples mentioned in this inscription (Lukka, Meshwesh, Teresh, Ekwesh and Shekelesh) are not very different from the ones in the famous inscription of Ramses III’s victory over the Sea People:

> *As for the foreign countries, they made a conspiracy in their islands. All at once the lands were on the move, scattered in war; no country could stand before their arms. Hatti, Kizzuwatna, Carchemish, Arzawa and Alasiya were cut off. A camp was set up in one place in Amurru; they desolated its people, and its land was like that which has never come into being. They were advancing on Egypt while the flame was prepared before them. Their League was Peleset, Tjeker, Shekelesh, Denyen and Weshesh, united lands. They laid their hands upon the lands to the very circuit of the earth, their hearts confident and trusting: ‘Our plans will succeed!’* (Zangger 1995, 25).

The earliest source on so-called Sea People is however The Amarna Letters (Moran 1992). Woudhuizen (2006, 35) equates some names in these letters with the later mentions of Sea People. So, the tribes of so-called Sea People in Egyptian records are apparently the former bitter enemies of the Egyptian naval authority in the Eastern Mediterranean, rather than some mysterious foreign invaders. Also, Cline (2003, 137) claims the invaders to be immigrants seeking a suitable place to settle. They had nowhere else to go and intended to settle (Peczynski 2009, 24).

From this, it is safe to claim that the people mentioned, described, and depicted in Medinet Habu are the refugees and/or immigrants that fled from the original invaders. The four-wheel carts depicted in the reliefs also support the idea of immigrants rather than the invaders.

At this point, it may be that the assault on Anatolia and Levant might be more informative. The main target of the invaders seems to be the Kingdom of Hatti and their allies. It is important to draw a picture of the whole situation. The Hittite troops might be somehow outnumbered and insufficient against the invaders, so the King demanded additional troops and food from his vassals in Ugarit (Zangger 1995, 26). This means the invasion from the west of the Hittite Mainland had just destroyed the already disloyal western allies of the kingdom and the only support to be hoped for was from the eastern and southern vassals. But the raiders seem to have moved quickly. Apparently, no state or site was able to help the other. There is a letter from the King of Ugarit, written to the King of Alasiya in Cyprus, seeking help; but this letter never left the kiln, in which was supposed to be fired (Zangger 1995, 26).

The letter of Ugarit, depictions, and inscriptions of Medinet Habu and a script describing a naval victory of the joined forces of Hatti and Alasiya against the “enemy” (Zangger 1995, 26) all indicate a naval invasion. But the interesting point is, most of these are about the “victories” of the defenders. Although we call these people “Sea People”, they don’t seem to be very successful regarding their naval activities. But, what about the armies?

The land invasion seems to be more effective. The raids targeting the unsettled Achaean Mainland caused the collapse of the citadels of the Wanaxes. Invading Anatolia should be equally easy and destructive, as the high culture of Troy was already destroyed, and the north-western gate of the peninsula was wide open for the invaders. The northern impact on the Achaean mainland and the north-western one on the Anatolian Peninsula caused migration. Following these main impacts, it is quite difficult to differentiate the original invaders from the populations in motion in the Aegean.

At this point, it is important to distinguish the multiple reasons for this sudden impact. Economic and social struggle that both centralised and decentralised political structures have been struggling with (Drews 1993, 8-29), the drought and production decline (ref. Drews 1993, 77-84), multiple threats on the borders -especially for the Hittites- (Drews 1993, 8-11) all of these clearly were of consequence in setting the stage for the final act. But, in considering the military side of this invasion, all of these factors do not seem to be sufficient to cause the well-equipped and experienced chariot armies of the Achaeans and the Hittites to be defeated by some “people”. If, as an inland kingdom, the Hittites accomplished even naval victories against the “enemy” during the process, it means the state should had enough resources to supply and maintain its land armies as its main defensive structure. So, there must be another factor that enabled the destruction of the strongest armies in the region.

## 3. Chariot Armies: A Technological Cul-de-Sac

Not only the wealthy centralized kingdoms of Near East, but also the Achaean Kings relied upon chariots, their main and most affective unit of their armies. There were different design choices depending on their use, like those Hittite chariots being able to carry three soldiers (a rider, an attacker and a defender) due to their centre positioned axles (Fig. 1), and, for example, Egyptian chariots carrying two soldiers (a rider and a warrior) with their rear positioned axles (Fig. 2); the former being used as heavy armoured vehicles to hit the enemy hard and the latter employing its advantages of speed and manoeuvrability on the battlefield (Litteauer & Crouwel 1983).

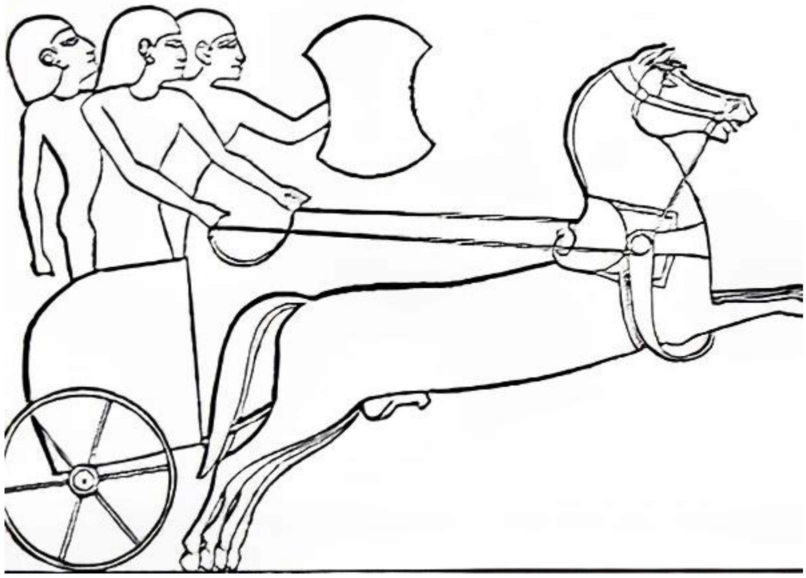

**Fig. 1**. Hittite chariot from the Great Kadesh Reliefs of Ramesses II, drawn by James Henry Breasted (1865–1935). Image source: Wikimedia Commons.

**Fig. 2**. Relief depicting Ramesses II on a chariot during the Battle of Kadesh, Egyptian, 13th century BCE. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: *historycollection.com*.

From the evidence from Achaean culture, in the chariot race depictions the chariot itself is interpreted as an object of prestige displayed on LHIIIA2-IIIB amphoroid craters (Fig.3) and the wide acceptance of this type of pottery in the Eastern Mediterranean (as at Tell Atchana, on Cyprus and at Ugarit) among the elite, indicates chariots were used to promote the Achaean nobility across a wide spread of cultures (Leonard, 1994). Also, the tomb finds, especially a bit from Miletus in a LH IIIC tomb (Niemeier 1998) shows the horse to be a valuable asset for the Achaean nobility but the absence of the actual body of the horse itself also indicates that it is may have been too valuable to have been buried with its rider. Also, the date of this find should be considered by the reader in the following sections.

**Fig. 3.** Mycenaean pottery with chariot depictions. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Image source: Wikimedia Commons.

The Madduwatta Indictment mentions Attarasiya – a man from Ahhiyawa – being active with his chariots in western and south-western Asia Minor during the reign of King Arnuwandas of Hatti (Kan-Dündar, 2005). So, chariots were unsurprisingly used as war machines by Achaeans as was the case for other contemporary Mediterranean cultures of the period, so long as the topography rendered this possible.

Whatever the use and the design might be, chariots were the most expensive yet the most affective units in the Mediterranean armies of the LBA (Piggot 1992; Littauer & Crouwel 1983; Renfrew 1998). In addition to the advantages of speed, armour, and the ability to carry additional ammunition (such as javelins and arrows) there were certain disadvantages, not least cost and the topographical limitations. Chariots require large battlefields to effectively capitalise on their advantages of speed and manoeuvrability, and the Great Kingdoms of the Near East mostly preferred pitched battles to engage one another.

These well-organized and experienced field armies of the centralized kingdoms might be affective against each other in certain situations, but they also known to be less affective against raiders and unorganized invaders, such as Hittite armies being relatively successful against their Egyptian and Assyrian counterparts but were not able to affectively defend the homeland against the northern invaders of the Gaška Lands for centuries (Ünal 2003, 50-61). It seems that the order of warfare (like the order of diplomacy and the order of trade) was self-established between these East Mediterranean cultures, and just like these other pre-established orders it was quite vulnerable to disruptive interventions.

The internal factors such as social restlessness caused by drought and production decline seem to have been as disruptive as external factors like invaders, while internal ones affect mostly the order of diplomacy and trade, the external impacted on the order of warfare. The fall of the chariot armies has mostly been explained by the massed number of the hordes against the highly experienced and well-equipped but out-numbered troops (Drews 1993). But all the advantages of chariot armies prove highly effective especially against massed numbers of infantry. So, the collapse of the order of warfare at the end of LBA would have been caused by something else.

## 4. The Rise of Cavalry in the Mediterranean

According to Renfrew (1987 and 1998) and Piggot (1992) there is no reliable literary or archaeological evidence for "horse riding" before the end of the 2nd Millennium BC. However, Levine believes that riding would have preceded traction (Levine 2005, 7). Although horse breeding and cavalry units in general have been considered to be expensive (Piggot 1992; Littauer & Crouwel 1983; Renfrew 1998), the earlier (2nd Millennium BC) use of horses in the armies of Near East, Aegean, and Mediterranean seems to have been as a more expensive unit: chariots.

Comparing cavalry armies with chariots provides quite clear results. Chariots were not only more expensive but were also less effective than the cavalry. Although the speed factor is not very different, agility and manoeuvrability are much higher for cavalry units, as well as the height factor. Throwing projectiles from a distance is easier for the cavalry as it is easier to protect that distance. Also, in close combat, striking from above is a great advantage against both infantry and chariot units (Fig. 4).

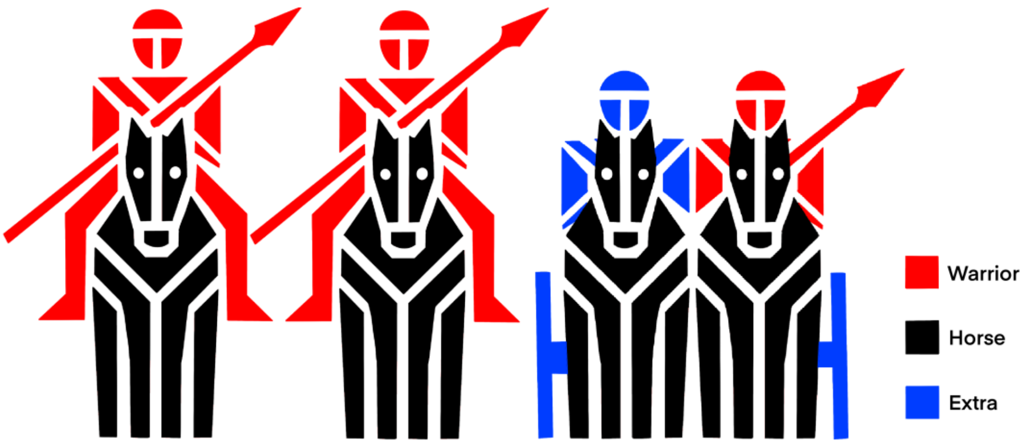


**Fig. 4**. Cavalry/Chariot comparison by height and quantitative measures (drawing by author)

Beside the advantages mentioned above on the battlefield, cavalry is relatively more cost effective when compared to the cost of chariots, and, cavalry is easier to deploy in mass numbers. Just one individual unit of cavalry is at least as affective as a chariot if not more, while both manpower and production costs are less than half that of a chariot (Fig. 4). No effort or resources are spent for the chariot and no man is spared to just steer the chariot.

Even if at first glance it appears less important than the other factors, the ground covered on the battlefield is also relevant. The firepower of one single chariot on a ground is multiplied by four by the cavalry on the same area (Fig. 5). So, with the same resources and manpower, just two times more troops for a cavalry army means four times more firepower than the chariots. As the inequality grows this advantage cumulatively grows.

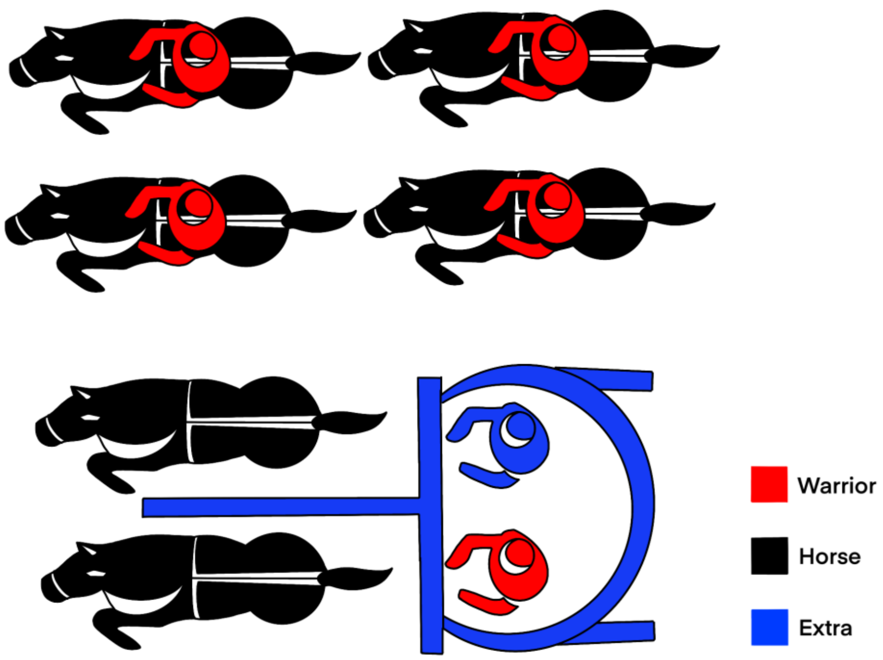


**Fig. 5.** Cavalry/Chariot comparison by "area covered times firepower" (drawing by author)

In addition to the advantage of cost effectiveness, height, agility and firepower, the chariot armies of the region were not used to such an enemy. Any adversary opposing a cavalry army should be prepared accordingly. Long spears and shield wall formation like the later phalanx would be crucial to resist and even overcome the cavalry, but this kind of well-trained and equipped armies would not be seen in the region for hundreds of years. The "Great Kingdoms" of LBA were not prepared for, nor had they ever seen such a type of warfare, and if neither experienced nor prepared sufficiently, it is quite impossible to resist the cavalry.

Starting from the 1st millennium BC, one can see that these advantages caused the chariots to fall from favour, to be mostly replaced by cavalry and various infantry units.

Dalley (1985, 37) claims cavalry first developed in Assyria in early 9th century BC, in the reign of Ashurnasirpal (883-859 BC). It is mostly believed that the concept of cavalry was imported to Assyria from Asian Nomadic Cultures but checking the major sites and early spread of that Eurasian steppe culture leads to a far northern location compared to Assyrian borders: north of Aral, Caspian and Black Seas (Olsen 2006, 253, fig. 17.1). Also, the well-established dating of confirmed Early Iron Age nomadic cavalry finds from the Early Scythian Era are no earlier than 8$^{th}$ century BC (Grach 1980; Savinov 1993). From this it is evident that the emergence of cavalry in the Mediterranean and Mesopotamia was rooted elsewhere, both chronologically and geographically. Nonetheless, this kind of an impact should be caused by a sudden effect, rather than through distant relations. One should check earlier clues concerning cavalry to determine the effective and original cause.

Although Kelder (2012) claims that horse-back riding (and cavalry according to him) can be seen in very few and speculative examples in both Aegean and Near Eastern examples, none of these indicate that cavalry was been adopted by LBA armies as a standard and accepted unit. Most of these examples (both from the Aegean and the Near East) either depicted in non-military ceremonies, by some deities, or even controversial as to if they depict cavalry at all (Kelder 2012).

At this point, it is necessary to distinguish between horse-back riding and cavalry. Riding horses for sports or in prestigious activities, or even for hunting is not an indication of the adoption cavalry warfare. This would be like comparing fishing practices with naval fleets. Cavalry warfare requires trained riders as well as equally trained horses to enable them to engage in both close combat and projectile skirmishes. The riders should be able to control their horses while using their weapons at the same time, and the horses should not be afraid of the chaotic atmosphere of a battlefield and should be easily controllable. Also, any unit of an army should be trained and organized to manoeuvre and react in mass numbers. Besides, cavalry warfare requires specific equipment for both riders and horses. So, very few and mostly controversial examples depicting some kind of horse-back riding are known which do not constitute solid indicators of cavalry being used in LBA armies.

As a result, the Mediterranean armies should have met the cavalry in a period after LBA and before 9$^{th}$ century BC; and this contact most probably was a sudden impact.

## 5. Mythology and Representation: Early Centaurs

First of all, it is essential for this paper to put a limit on the subject of Centaurs. This paper does not aim to investigate or interpret the mythological hybrid creature called a Centaur, nor the evolution of the myth itself in classical mythology. What is important for this work, is the 'first' appearance of this mythological hybrid and its timing.

The mythological interpretations of the Centaurs are mostly related to war and chaos; as these creatures are mainly regarded as outsider, stranger, foreigner invaders of the civilization itself. Even there are suggestions to claim that the very design of a centaur is the depiction of the struggle between the civilized and uncivilized (man and horse respectively) (Fidan 2024, 59), a broader perspective might suggest that not only the tangible design, but the concept itself should be related with and even rooted in such a struggle.

Scobie (1978, 142) suggests the name Kentauros (Κένταυρος) should combine "κεντεῖν" (to prick, to sting, mostly conveys the idea of piercing or driving something sharp into something else) and "ταῦρος" (bull) and should mean something like "bull-slayer". Even though this etymological approach is not entirely accepted, there is a connection between the boar-hunt and the cavalry; while the hunting campaigns for strong wild animals like lions or boars mostly relied upon cavalry as can be seen in famous ancient depictions of such scenes (Barringer 1996, fig. 5, 11a, 17b)

Putting aside the design and etymology, the idea of such a creature should have been triggered by an encounter for the first time with an unfamiliar concept (like most mythological ideas). A similar affect can be observed in Aztec culture after their encounter with Spanish Knights in early 16th century AD (Pittaro & Green 1933, 249). So, it seems reasonable, not absurd to suggest that the idea of a Centaur should originate from some kind of encounter with a cavalry dominated culture.

It is essential to identify the first depictions of Centaurs to understand when and where this encounter may have taken place. Although there are some earlier artefacts identified as centaurs, which are mentioned in the following paragraph, the earliest certain depiction of a centaur is the well-known Centaur of Lefkandi in Euboia (Desborough *et al*. 1970). The statuette was found in two pieces in two different tombs (Desborough *et al*. Popham, 1970, 21) and both burials are dated between 900-875 BC (Desborough *et al*. 1970, 24). Regarding the production technique, the Lefkandi Centaur is considered to be the follower of the wheel-made votive animals of LBA, more significantly of LHIIIC (Desborough *et al*. 1970, 27).

The identifications of earlier examples have mostly been questioned. One was carved on a seal in the Berlin Museum (Evans 1894, 343, fig, 69) and the second, from Prosymna was also on a seal (Blegen 1937, 277-278, fig, 589). Although it is difficult to clearly identify hybrid creatures on such small artefacts, Demargne (1929, 123) and Boardman (1963, 54-55) questioned if these examples represented centaurs. Also, a figure on a Sub-Mycenaean pyxis has been identified as a centaur by Bohen (1988, 12-15, fig: 2.1, 3.1, Pl: 1.1). But this identification is also questionable (Shear 2002, 149). Shear (2002, 147-148, Pl: 3 a-c, e-f) describes two terracotta figurines of Mycenaean origin from Ugarit as centaurs and dates them to the LHIIIA-B periods. But these figures are also questionable as no head has been uncovered and the arm-hand extensions are also not very distinctive (Shear 2002, Pl: 3 a-c, e-f).

For these examples to be identified correctly as centaurs, these LH IIIB and Sub-Mycenaean dates are late enough to have been inspired due to the so-called Sea People invasion. Moreover, these dates close the gap between the LBA collapse and the Centaur of Lefkandi. Obviously, the centaurs, the mythological reflection of brutal, fierce and crude warrior horsemen, have been created in the imagination of the LBA people of the Achaean mainland inspired by the invaders and raiders of the era.

## 6. Conclusion

The Late Bronze Age collapse, a period of profound upheaval in the Mediterranean, has long been attributed to a confluence of factors, including economic instability, environmental pressures, and the enigmatic "Sea Peoples." While previous hypotheses have emphasized the role of mass migrations and technological shifts, this paper proposes a critical, yet often overlooked catalyst: the introduction of cavalry warfare.

The traditional reliance on expensive and logistically demanding chariot armies, prevalent in both the Near Eastern empires and the Mycenaean kingdoms, proved a strategic vulnerability. These chariot-centric forces, while formidable in pitched battle on open terrain, were ill-equipped to counter swift and agile cavalry tactics employed by the invading forces. The advantages of cavalry (increased maneuverability, heightened vantage point, and cost-effectiveness) allowed for rapid deployment and devastating strikes, effectively bypassing the strengths of the established military orders.

The emergence of the centaur myth, serves as a compelling cultural marker of this military revolution. These hybrid creatures, symbolizing the fusion of man and horse, likely reflect the shock and awe experienced by LBA populations first encountering these novel equestrian warriors. The timing of the earliest definitive centaur depictions aligns with this period of upheaval, suggesting a direct correlation between the rise of cavalry and the cultural representation of this new and formidable force.

The evidence presented suggests that the "Sea Peoples," beyond being mere raiders or refugees, may have introduced a paradigm shift in Mediterranean warfare. Their adoption of cavalry tactics, a departure from the established chariot-based strategies, prove a decisive advantage in the chaotic environment of the LBA collapse. This military innovation, coupled with the existing socio-economic vulnerabilities of the region, contributed significantly to the downfall of the powerful Bronze Age kingdoms.

In essence, the "Centaurs" (the invading cavalry) played a pivotal role in reshaping the military landscape of the Mediterranean, marking the end of the chariot era and ushering in a new age of warfare. The LBA collapse, therefore, represents not just a period of destruction, but also a transformative moment in military history, driven by the strategic advantage of the horse and rider.

**Author's Note**: This study was very briefly presented as an oral presentation with the title "The Sea People and the End of the Era of Chariots: Rise of the Cavalry," at the "International Symposium on Cultural Continuity, Change and Interaction in the Aegean World from the Second to First Millenium B.C." held on 18th November 2022 via online digital platform.

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