

Bematists

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Bematists (*bematistai*) were individuals who “measured distances by paces” (LSJ); they are often mentioned together with *hemerodromoi* (runners of a day’s distance), *dromokerykes* (running heralds), and perhaps chorographers.

A bematist is first attested in two dedications to Zeus in Olympia (*IvO* 276 and *IvO* 277; ca. 323–300 BCE), made by Philonides, the son of Zoitos, from Cretan Chersonesos, described as king Alexander’s *hemerodromos* and bematist of Asia (cf. *FGrH* 121; Plin. *HN* 2.73, 7.20; Paus. 6.16.5). As bematists of Alexander the Great’s march, Pliny (*HN* 6.61) recorded Diognetos (*FGrH* 120) and Baiton (*FGrH* 119). Athenaeus (10.442b) utilized the work of the historian Ktesias (*FGrH* 688), against which he checked the information he found in the works of the bematists: Baiton, who wrote *Stations* (sc. *military*) of *Alexander’s march*, and Amyntas (*FGrH* 122), who composed *Stations* (of *Asia*). Finally, Diogenes Laertius (2.17) names an Archelaos (*FGrH* 123) as “chorographer of Alexander’s conquered land.” That a chorographer was also primarily involved with distance-measuring and mapping is indicated by Strabo (2.4.1; 5.2.7, 8; 6.1.11; 6.2.11; 6.3.10), who, although he does not use the word “bematist,” knows of this activity – as demonstrated for example when he notes that the Via Egnatia was “measured in paces by miles” (*bebematismene kata milion*, 7.7.4).

From these scattered bits of information we can infer that, together with the *hemerodromoi*

and the chorographers, the bematists formed a special military unit, in charge of topographical surveying and mapping by pace-measuring distances mainly for military purposes – activities instrumental for the achievement of efficient speed in military communications, transportation, and maneuvering. Even though two bematists bear Macedonian names (Amyntas, Archelaos) and Hesychius (s.v. *bematizei*) remarks that the word is somehow Macedonian, it is rather unlikely that members of this unit had a specific ethnic origin.

The bematists appear as a distinct military body especially from Alexander the Great onwards (Berve 1926, vol. 1: 43–4, 51–2; Hammond 1994, 24–34, 67–8, 174–80) – a period when the term acquired a specific, technical meaning, which related and identified it with activities instituted by Macedonians.

SEE ALSO: Alexander III, the Great; Army, Hellenistic.

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