

Ancient Cavalry: Limited by the Landscape

A LOOK AT THE FLAWS AND IMPRACTICALITIES OF CAVALRY IN ANCIENT
GREECE AND THE AEGEAN

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Climate

- Warm temperate Mediterranean climate
- Hot Summers
- Mild Winters
- Irregular annual rainfall



Image 1 – Ancient Greece

Terrain

- Mountainous
- Hard, Rocky land
- Only 20% was arable land



Image 2 – A Greek Landscape

Feeding and Watering

- For a 1000lb (450kg) modern horse, there should be 6.8lbs (3kg) of digestible food
 - Dried grass
 - Grain
- Ancient Horses were both smaller, and likely 'better doer' than large modern horses.
- Require clean, non-silted water



Image 3 – Piper (an older style breed of pony)

Prohibitive Costs

- 300-500 Drachma for a good horse
- “a single horse ate as much barley as six adult men” (van Wees, 2004, pp. 58)
- A cavalry man would have to provide all equipment themselves
- Most cavalry men came from the wealthier members of a state

Equipment

- 2 wooden javelins
- Curved slashing sword
- Boeotian Helmet
- Breastplate and neck piece
- Armoured left arm
- High boots
- No Stirrups or Saddle
- Quilted armour on the chest and stomach
(Worley, 1994, pp.139)

The Horse

- Well behaved
- Well fed
- Strong and healthy
- Properly hardened feet
- Good endurance

Image 4 – Pindos Pony



Image 5 – Piper again

Cavalry Tactics

- Thessaly used a diamond or Rhomboid formation, with officers at the four points (Worley, 1994, pp. 30)
- Pursuit of fleeing troops
- Rear and flank attacks to thin out phalanx ranks (Worley, 1994, pp. 38)
- Prevent foraging
- Reconnaissance and patrol
- Even Heavy Cavalry rarely engaged in full on attacks on a phalanx
- Would often dismount and fight on foot

Athenian Raids

- “the Athenians made an expedition into Corinthian territory with eighty ships and two thousand Athenian hoplites, together with two hundred cavalry on board horse-transports”
Thuc. 4.42.1
- Cavalry would charge across the sides and front of the opposing phalanx
- Cavalry move much faster than a phalanx, they are harder to attack.
- Horses are vulnerable to long range weapons, spears, and pikes

Boeotian Cavalry

- “the horsemen had already joined battle and those of the Lacedaemonians had speedily been worsted; then in their flight they had fallen foul of their own hoplites, and, besides, the companies of the Thebans were now charging upon them.” Xen, 6.4.13
- A long tradition of mounted Cavalry
- Military integration was key
- *Hamippoi* – light armed foot soldier, who mix with the cavalry, armed with shields and javelins

Spartan Honour

- “For the richest men kept the horses” Xen, 6.4.11
- “As for the men, on the other hand, it was those who were least strong of body and least ambitious who were mounted on the horses.” Xen, 6.4.11
- Cavalry viewed as an easy and safe option
- Men proved their bravery as a hoplite, joining the cavalry was seen as weakness (van Wees, 2004 pp. 67)

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Image 3 – Danielle Barlow, *Piper* [image] (2021) daniellebarlowart, Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/CLma6i-HE9a/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link (Accessed: 2nd June 2021)

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Image 5 – Danielle Barlow, *Day 10 – Me*, [image] (2019) daniellebarlowart, Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/Bu1oaw5H3CZ/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link (Accessed: 2nd June 2021)