

## The Dogs of War?: Reevaluating Dogs in Greek Warfare

Scholarly interest in the interaction of humans and animals in antiquity and how the ancients viewed animals has accelerated in the past decade (e.g. Calder 2011, Campbell 2014, Fögen et al. 2017, Lewis and Llewellyn-Jones 2018). Dogs are naturally featured prominently, and most often in the context of the hunt and their role as the proverbial “man’s best friend.” The use of Xenophon’s, and later Arrian’s, *Cynegeticus* has allowed scholars to comment on the way ancient Greeks employed dogs, and numerous funerary stelae and epigrams reveal the high esteem in which beloved pet dogs were held by their owners. However, I argue that dogs and humans interacted in another critical venue in antiquity: war.

In 1941, Forster provided a brief survey of the ways in which dogs participated in the military sphere, but literary sources are rather few. Dogs appear in military camps as early as in Homer (e.g. *Il.* 1.50; 23.173; 24.409), and in historical times served as camp sentries and patrolmen’s assistants (e.g. Plut. *Aratus* 24; Polyæn. *Strat.* 2.24) and traveled with armies (e.g. Strabo 15.1.31; Plut. *Alex.* 61). However, Forster could not take into account the archaeological evidence which has since emerged. Since Cook’s work (1950), scholarly debate regarding dogs in a military context has centered specifically on the question of whether they participated in battle alongside soldiers. Cook dismisses the idea as improbable, claiming Pliny’s (*NH* 8.40, 8.142.2-3) and Aelian’s (*DA* 7.38;) accounts were misinformed, and more recent scholarship supports this (e.g. Douglass et al., 2001; Calder, 2011) or contends that Pliny and Aelian seem sincere in the particular cases they mention, although they are unique (Kitchell 2017). Other works provide no details of dogs in a military context (e.g. Sabin et al. 2007; Lewis and Llewellyn-Jones 2018).

But is the all-or-nothing belief about dogs in battle correct? I argue not in this paper but propose a middle ground that the evidence, especially archaeological, better allows. A considerable number of Greek pots depict military scenes in which dogs appear alongside hoplites and cavalrymen, revealing that dogs were part of the military paraphernalia that a well-to-do soldier took with him on campaign. Dogs walk and run beside armed warriors or their horses, lead armed men and chariots, nudge the feet of their masters, point at their masters with one paw, and especially wear a variety of collars and leashes. By analyzing a sample set of 130 pieces of such pottery from the Beazley Archive and by drawing on literary evidence, I argue that dogs were present on the march and in military camps, used guards, hunters, and likely status symbols for their masters, and that some particularly ferocious dogs, such as the Molossian breed, might even have been used in combat.

But why the relative lack of literary references to dogs on campaign? The answer, I argue, is that, like similarly sparse references to slave or helot attendants who accompanied soldiers, ancient writers took for granted that dogs were commonplace attendants, who thus did not need to be recognized. Where the literary sources are lacking, the archaeological reveals an established custom of bringing dogs along on the march. The presence of dogs in military camps, and on the battlefield, should not be readily dismissed as an unsolvable historical question. Rather, it needs to be reconsidered for the dynamic it provides on human-animal interaction and the nature of Greek warfare.

## Bibliography

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