DE BELLIS ANTIQUITATIS

SIMPLE FAST PLAY ANCIENT WARGAME AND CAMPAIGN RULES
WITH ARMY LISTS

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INTRODUCTION

These rules derive from an experimental set for battles between Romans and Celts demonstrated by Phil Barker at the 1988 Society of Ancients conference. Its favourable reception led to a more general two page rule set called "De Bellis Societatis Antiquorum" produced for a very successful and popular competition at the 1989 conference. This commercial version extends the combat system, differentiates a few extra troop types, includes fuller explanation of procedures and philosophy than proved possible in two pages and incorporates set-up information, a campaign system by Richard Bodley Scott and suggested compositions for all important armies between 3000 BC and 1485 AD. We hope that it will prove acceptable both as an introduction for new players and as a tonic for the jaded.

Our intent is to provide the simplest possible set of wargames rules that retain the feel and generalship requirements of ancient or medieval battle. The rule mechanisms used are entirely new. They start from the assumptions that the results of command decisions can be shown rather than the minutia of how orders were comunicated and interpreted, that the proportions of different troops fielded were decided by availability within their culture and not cost-effectiveness against a current opponent, that differences between troops of the same class and era were relatively unimportant, and that most shooting regardless of theoretical weapon range was at very short distances. The resulting system is more subtle than may be immediately apparent, and is the fruit of much detailed development work.

The average player has memorised the battle rules part way through his first game, but tactical skill, especially in the use of light troops, takes longer to develop. A game lasts less than an hour, so that a five round convention competition could be completed in one day and still leave plenty of time for visiting the trade stands. Since all battles end in outright victory, the organiser's work is minimised. Campaigns for up to six historically opposed armies can also be completed in a single day if desired.

Figure manufacturers may be comforted to learn that the small number of figures required for a DBA army is not as likely as it may at first seem to reduce their business. Many testers have not been content to merely provide a pair of historically opposed armies, or even the armies for a complete historical campaign, and have taken the opportunity to buy all those armies that have tempted them in the past but been ruled out by expense, painting time or storage considerations. 15mm scale figures have been most popular, followed by 6mm.

We see this style of game as an alternative to, rather than replacement for, conventional wargames rules. Each style has its own advantages and disadvantages. It may be that some future synthesis will emerge, and we welcome any suggestions.

CONTENTS

PLAYING EQUIPMENT AND REPRESENTATIONAL SCALES

CHOICE OF FIGURE AND MODEL SCALE

These rules can be used with any scale of figure or model. 25mm is good for public demonstration games at conventions, where its easier visibility for spectators is an advantage. 15mm combines cheapness and convenience, the number of figures based as an element serving as a useful reminder of combat factors. 5mm and 2mm increase visual realism at some cost in convenience.

ARMY SIZE AND TROOP REPRESENTATION

An army consists of 12 troop elements, one of which includes its only general. Unless sallying after standing siege in a campaign or including more than one war wagon, it must also have an on-table camp which is garrisoned either by one of the 12, or by an extra element of camp followers that cannot leave it.

An element consists of a rectangular base to which is fixed figures, or the equivalent 5mm or 2mm blocks, representing 6 to 8 ranks of close-formed foot, 4 or 5 ranks of mounted troops or skirmishers, or a single rank of elephants, scythed chariots, artillery or wagons. WRG 7th edition elements are ideal.

PLAYING AREA AND GROUND SCALE

The optimum playing area is 24 inches or 600mm square for 15mm or smaller figures or twice that for 25mm. We recommend the use of either single integral terrain blocks or grouped 12 inch or 300mm square blocks.

The ground scale varies with the size of army represented, but for convenience 1 inch or 25mm on the table can be taken as equivalent to 100 paces in real life if using 15mm or smaller figures, or 50 paces if using 25mm. Measure distances on the table with a 600p template marked at 100p intervals.

TIME SCALE

Play is in alternate bounds, which simulate approximately 15 minutes in real life.

DICE

All dicing uses a single ordinary 1 to 6 die.

DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

The function of the command and communications system in a wargame is exactly opposite from that in real life battle in that it is used, not to enable the general to manoeuvre his troops at all, but to prevent him doing so too freely. That of these rules is arbitrary, but its results are very similar to those from more elaborate systems incorporating written orders, transmission by a limited number of messengers or signals, and then testing interpretation on receipt. It also substitutes for elaborate testing of troops' reaction to events, and effectively simulates the reduction in armies' cohesion under stress of battle.

Wargamers usually pay much more attention to often theoretical differences between weapons than did ancient commanders and troops. Surviving Hellenistic and Roman manuals lump all foot skirmishers as psiloi regardless of whether armed with javelin, sling or bow, in effect defining them by their function rather than armament. We have done the same in these rules, and were surprised to find overall realism did not seem appreciably reduced. Morale and training distinctions have also been discarded as linked with function. Thus, all knights are rash, all warbands fierce but brittle, all skirmishers timid.

Similarly, a real general does not know that a unit has just lost a certain number of men. He will not know even its total losses until next day, if then. Some nations during this era even thought it unlucky to count the troops at all! Wargames rules that tell players losses suffered and inflicted during play are therefore inherently unrealistic. However, the general will usually be in a position to see if a body is moving forward cheering, standing its ground, edging back looking over its collective shoulders, or has disintegrated. These rules provide players with that information and that only.