

SPQR BATTLE PLAN

The Battle of Cynoscephalae, 197 B.C.

BY SALVATORE VASTA

The Meeting Engagement

Macedon: The infantry arm is the bulk of your army and consists mainly of phalanxes with supporting Light Infantry and a few Hoplites. Your mounted arm is relatively weak and small compared to a typical army from Macedonia. Overall leadership is good, but line commands will be hard to get if you stay outside Philip's range.

You have several options with your screening force. Since you have a numeric advantage you can attempt to overwhelm the opposing enemy screen, then regroup and move to engage Roman group 1 reinforcements. Note the latter will be difficult to pull off since your command ability will be stretched — not easy to get line commands. Alternately, you can remain defensive and use your strength to simply keep the Romans at bay. Since Roman group 1 doesn't enter until turn 3, your force should not have trouble until turn 5 or so. At that point, you must stay between him and your arriving army.

Despite the early jump, the rest of your army enters very slowly due to the 5 unit/turn limit. Just moving them onto the map will take the same time as the Romans who start arriving later than you do. Units should move in column to areas where you wish to form them into a line. However, make sure there are no Romans within striking distance. Your units will crumple if attacked while in column. Use column formation as far as possible up the hill. It will save many cohesion hits and some deployment time.

To double or not double; that is the question. As you're getting your line together, you'll need to decide if you're going to stack the phalanxes to double depth. A DD phalanx can be quite potent both offensively and defensively. The main disadvantage being that only Philip may command them and that could limit your options as the battle develops.

From this point, it is difficult to offer advice as much depends on how quickly and effectively both sides deployed. As is standard when taking on the Romans, harass his flanks and get him to issue individual orders rather than line commands. Try and stay on higher ground, but be careful not to suffer too many cohesion hits just moving up or down the hill. Finally, use your leaders to rally and regroup to keep the battle going.

Rome: Your screening force is at a significant disadvantage. It is best to set up as far away as possible to avoid getting nailed on the first turn. After that, leadership limitations will slow up the enemy screen's actions. You get a boost on turn 3 when an additional leader and more units arrive. If your staging force has survived, then you want to become more aggressive. The Praefect Sociorum can roll for line commands while the

Praefect Equituum can issue individual orders to the cavalry. Attempt to drive back the Macedonian screen by threatening his entry hexes. It is unlikely that you'll get there to do any real damage, but your presence will force him out of column and slow him down.

Your army enters the map last, but at a much faster rate than your opponent. Unless threatened by nearby enemy units, enter in column and stay in it until your legions are deployed. Remember that it is after 200 B.C., so there is no Triarii Doctrine to slow you up. The Aetolian League should either enter first or last. They are slower and you have to decide whether to place them on the map and use them as a separate force, or to wait and attach them to previously deployed legions. If the Macedonian screening force has been successful and is nearby, the Aetolian troops make a great second covering force for your legions.

Again, it is tough to offer advice now. Further movement will be dictated by the location and layout of the armies. Use your cavalry and elephants together to negate the Macedonian mounted arm. Except for his phalanxes, the bulk of the Macedonian army is poor light infantry. Cut through them with your big boys and you should be able to avoid taking on the phalanxes head on. Finally, this scenario may provide you with something you don't usually have. That is time. Be patient and let the terrain assist you. His phalanxes take cohesion hits moving up and down elevations, while your legionaries only suffer going up multiple levels in one turn.

The Set Piece

Macedon: Your first decision is to place subordinate leaders. Athenagoras or Nicanor should be placed with the cavalry since either can command them all without a line command. The remaining leaders should be split between the deployed and deploying infantry formations. Who goes where depends on what you do with Philip's Elite phase. If Philip is going to finish deploying the phalanx column, then place Nicanor with the deployed infantry. If not, reverse them.

Philip starts the battle with an Elite phase (the only one in the scenario) that he must take himself. The most prudent thing to do is hurry over to those phalanxes in column and get them into a line. If you don't, a Roman player may be able to hit them with the elephants before you get a chance to. If so, you're in trouble right from the get go.

If you feel those chances are small, you can swing to the right and grab your cavalry to attack the Roman left. If done right, you can surround the opposing cavalry and may be able to eliminate both units. This will immediately threaten the

Vth legion's flank and force his hand. He will have to either turn to face it, or risk losing cohorts to your marauding cavalry.

It is on the right where you will win. Your forces are already deployed and poised to outflank the Vth. That doesn't necessarily mean you should charge everyone on turn 1. You have to make sure that your left is stable. Engaging too quickly will leave a gap which a good Roman player will exploit. Despite the defensive nature of phalanxes, do not be afraid to strike first with them, especially if using the Long Sarissa rule. If you can coordinate it with a powerful flank attack, you may be able to inflict more hits than the Roman can deal with.

It is on the left where you are weakest. The Romans have a numeric and quantitative advantage. The key here is a quick deployment and possible tactical withdrawal of the Illyrians to refuse the flank. The phalanxes should simply get to the hilltop and form up in a line. Forget trying to stack into double depth. You probably won't have the time. It will shorten your frontage, and then only Philip can command them. Considering the mass of Roman infantry on this flank, it will be useful to maintain several units in reserve some hexes back. They can be called upon to counterattack, plug up holes, and to protect a flank as needed.

Rome: A quick check of the battlefield will show the bulk of the army deployed on your right. The Vth legion is within striking distance and unfortunately ripe for outflanking. It is for the latter reason that it's suggested to put Flaminius with them as well as 1 Tribune and 2 Praefect Sociorum (latin plural form?). You will need them to help hold off the inevitable enemy turning of your left.

On the other hand, almost everything else is in your favor. You outnumber your opponent in quality units and 1 / 3 of his army isn't even set up yet. You even have the added bonus of having a very good Roman Overall Commander with the same initiative rating as his counterpart. The only occurrence in the original SPQR scenarios. You'll find it has a big impact in terms of going for momentum.

Your right is fairly straight forward except for the elephants. You must get up the ridge quickly. Depending on how the other flank is fairing, you may consider leaving the Greek Allies behind. Their HI only have a movement of 4 and your 2 cavalry units and legions should be sufficient to win this flank. Your superior movement capabilities should allow you to outflank the Macedonian line and roll him up.

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You get the privilege (or burden, if you're a pessimist) of having war elephants. The question is what to do with them. If Philip doesn't use his Elite phase to finish deploying the phalanxes in column, you can attempt a quick kill. Using two leaders will assure that they make it, but may leave your legions without a commander. The other and more conservative option is to move those elephants to aid the Vth legion. They can be commanded by any leader in this battle and their arrival could just be enough to drive off the Macedonian cavalry and save the flank.

The last thing to cover is the Roman left. If you've got the stomach for it, you can try and throw off the Macedonians by charging them head on. What you are banking on is the routing of the weaker infantry on the sides of the double depth phalanx thus exposing their flanks. This may result in his needing to pull back leaders to rally units and therefore slow up his outflanking attack. It's a gamble, but war is not for the weak.

However, in this scenario the Roman player isn't that hurried. With just your initial line commands, you can form a hollow square with the legion. This action will blunt his cavalry flank attack and buy you some time. The disadvantage is the difficulty in commanding it. As units rout, it will be tougher and tougher to find enough individual orders to fill the gaps and rally units. Hopefully, they can survive long enough for the right flank to do their thing and win the game.

Finally, should the situation develop as it did historically do not hesitate to perform the same maneuver as that nameless Roman Tribune did. Taking a page from Scipio Africanus' book, he didn't just think of the Princepes and Triarii lines as reserves for the Hastati. But rather as separate combat formations to move and attack independently at weak points of the enemy line.