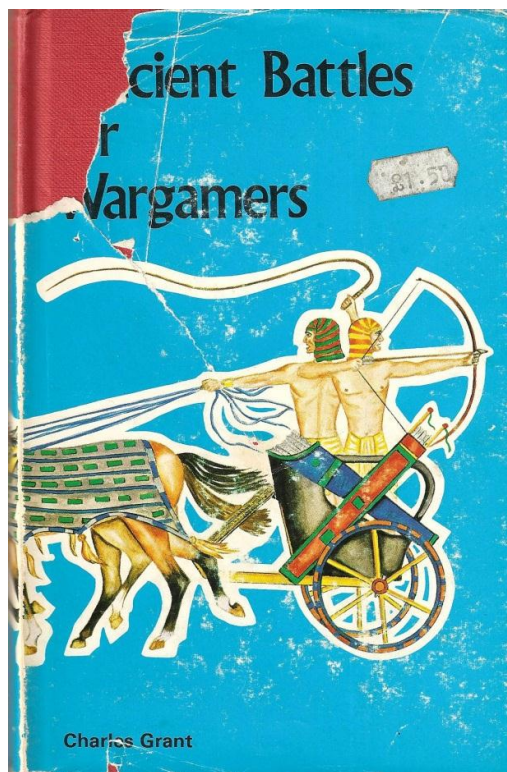


‘Ancient Battles for Wargamers’ by Charles Grant

Review by Jonathan Aird

Back in the distant past, the wargamer was but poorly supplied with information for his (and back then it pretty much was a 99.99% male pursuit) hobby. Access to detailed research material was beyond the pocket of most people -- true, there were interlibrary loans that could be used, but even then without access to illicit photocopying even this meant some hard reading and detailed note taking. It could be a slog. To meet the need of the average gamer who wanted the history represented in their wargames to be accurate and correct, a whole side industry of potted histories and battle descriptions sprang up to support the more rules-orientated wargaming books. This book by Charles Grant (senior of that name) falls into this category of support materials and consists of four battle histories and how to turn them into wargames. Much of the text was originally published in *Military Modelling* and *Battle* magazines, and when they eventually arrived on the scene the other wargaming glossy magazines would adopt this same approach for a long time as the standard historical wargaming article. However, “Ancient Battles for Wargamers” did have a bit more room than the typical 2,000-word article, and so the descriptions have a great deal more depth.



The author's approach to the book was spelt out in the introduction:

"It is my contention that the wargamers should make every effort to achieve historical accuracy in his wargames. While it is perfectly true that 'playability' -- an awkward word -- must be considered in any approach to wargaming, adherence to any such principle should in no way inhibit a desire for realism and accuracy."

So, in the wargames, the major events of the battles were, as far as was possible, to be introduced at suitable moments in an attempt to keep them “on track” with reality.

The four battles addressed are – Kadesh, Marathon, Granicus and Pydna – covering a time span of more than a thousand years. Each battle is described three times – the first is the actual history, the second is how to turn this into a manageable-sized wargame – and includes the reasoning for the terrain and the initial deployment of the troops where the original sources are somewhat vague. Thirdly, each battle is written up as an after-battle report of the complete game – with regular comments on the level of excitement of various phases (some of the games got so heated that players removed their ties and jackets, if you can credit it !).

engaged, 'Perdiccas' was bringing his battalions steadily forward and on the Persian side 'Rheomithres' was moving his Greek infantry diagonally forward to his left to fill the gap left by the 'Horsetails', and also, it may be said, to avoid if possible a direct frontal attack by the very formidable Phalanx. We have at this point reached Period Seven, and Fig. 5.4 shows the situation at this stage.

In spite of their success in routing two of the Persian left wing regiments, the Macedonians were feeling the strain and this was increased when the Second Companions were charged by the strong Cilician cavalry. This was the beginning of an epic struggle in which the Companions suffered no fewer than four consecutive 'push backs' (that is, they lost more casualties than their opponents in each of four successive periods but these were not sufficiently high to cause them to break). Thus, the next period was crucial—'A' Class troops, which the Companions were of course, break and run if pushed back five times in succession—and tension among the 'generals' was very high. However, a third force was about to throw its weight into the balance. This in fact was the Sarissophoroi, rallying back after their rout of the 'Horsetails', and they came pelting into the backs of the Cilicians. The ensuing encounter was a truly hectic one as, immediately prior to being smitten by the lancers, the Cilicians broke the Companions—having obtained the necessary fifth 'push back'—but, defenceless against this rude assault from the rear, the Cilicians were also broken, and they and the Companions went whirling off the table in one confused mass, leaving the Sarissophoroi to rally and cast about for a new opponent.

The tempo of events in the centre was also accelerating. The Prodromoi javelins were unwise enough to close with the 2nd battalion of the Phalanx and were driven off and, following up, the battalion collided with the Corinthian mercenaries and routed them (despite this the latter rallied a couple of periods later). However, 'Rheomithres' now brought up his Boeotians to cover the Corinthians and with them charged the advancing Hypaspists and, simultaneously putting in a skilful attack on them with the Messenian javelins, first pushed them back, then routed them.

It was now Period Twelve and the excitement was very high—perspiration flying about in every direction. (It was a very warm evening and ties, jackets and sweaters were successively discarded as the wargame temperature rose.)

The climax, however, was close at hand. On the Persian right, after a brief lull with units rallying and regrouping, the heavy cavalry went into action, the Medes and Bactrians of 'Arsites' charging 'Parmenio's' Thessalians, now supported by the newly rallied Thracians. The fighting was prolonged, first one side then the other being pushed

back or held, the Persians cleverly avoiding the 4th Phalanx battalion which had been swung in their direction. The remaining Paphlagonian regiment also added its weight to the fray and the pressure finally proved too much for the Macedonians, who broke and fled.

The end was at hand. The Second Companions had been attacked by the combined Hyrkanian and Crescent cavalry and overwhelmed by weight of numbers. In the centre the Hypaspists had already been broken by the Boeotians and at nightfall (this being in fact the end of Period Fourteen the situation is as shown in Fig. 5.5, with the battalions of the Phalanx clubbed together and beginning to retreat towards the Granicus fords, covered by the Sarissophoroi. It seemed that, as far as we were concerned, Alexander's invasion of Persia had for the time being been brought to a halt. The wargame was over.

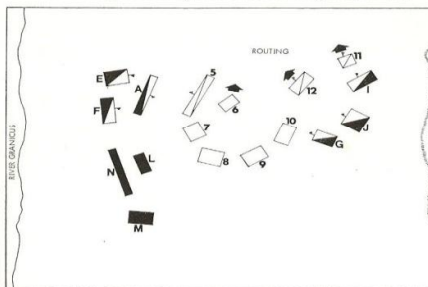


Fig. 5.5 Situation at the end of Period Fourteen

In retrospect it was enormously exciting and satisfying, despite its reversal of history and, of course, as on all such occasions the post-mortem was long and searching, being productive of far-ranging discussion. One point requiring immediate comment is that we allowed 14 periods for the day's fighting, rather longer than the ordinary quota but anything less seemed to be cutting the time rather unnaturally.

As well as the battle descriptions there are three chapters on the troops of the time -- the Greek Hoplite, the Immortals, and the Thracians -- and a series of colour plates to illustrate the troop types needed for the battles (some of these were also reproduced on the dust jacket). These are succinct but useful overviews of the troops and their equipment and ways of fighting, as well as their successes and failures. There's plenty of useful detail for the figure painter -- such as examples of shield designs for the hoplites. A full page is dedicated to the rhomphaia -- a subject of much heated debate amongst wargamers at the time (and especially within the Society of Ancients). The mechanics of a phalanx -- how more ranks could actually be put into use to decisive effect -- are also debated. These are chapters which are both thoughtful and thought provoking. Finally, there are two appendices -- the first is a bibliography which directs the reader to a dozen or so books after assessing their various merits, and the second a list of wargame figure manufacturers -- running to seven in 25mm and two in 15mm (such were the times).

There is, as with any other books of the same age, the knotty problem of accuracy -- and certainly some of the material has dated but the generality of it is still pretty much valid. Charles Grant was both widely read on military history and a wargamer of long experience -- both of which he was able to put together with a prose style that is both informative, somewhat authoritarian and also sociable. It makes for entertaining reading, allowing the author's personality to shine through.

Sadly, this book has yet to be given the John Curry history of wargaming makeover and republication so the only source is the second-hand market. A testament to its worth is given by the above scan of the cover -- the book is somewhat battered, the dust jacket creased and ripped in places through many re-readings. What more can I add as a recommendation? Copies of a paperback edition are

available from Amazon UK from around £25, reflecting the author's continuing stature in the wargaming world.

Model and Allied Publications, Argus Books, 1977

ISBN : 0 85242 553 8