



WRESTLING WITH RAPHIA

BEING THE ACCOUNT OF ONE WARGAMER'S ATTEMPT TO PIN DOWN POLYBIUS By Chris Hahn



I did not set out with the intention of refighting the Battle of Raphia in miniature, but that is what happened. My original goal was to set up a simple *Hail Caesar* game wherein light infantry and elephants would do battle. I even had what I thought was a pretty good title: *Peltasts versus Pachyderms: Hunting Elephants in the Tall Grass with Hail Caesar*. However, as is often the case with my wargaming ideas, I could not resist tinkering with the troop types and number of units involved in this now completely fictional contest.

To make a potentially long story short, while on the fifth version of an order of battle, I recalled seeing a map of a fairly large engagement in my old copy of *Warfare in the Classical World*. The book was secured from the basement stacks, and my attention, energy, and resources were soon focused on staging a Featherstone-correct production of the epic clash between Successor kings.

My first four attempts - using a variety of rule sets, scales, and reinforcing the "coffee table" reference with

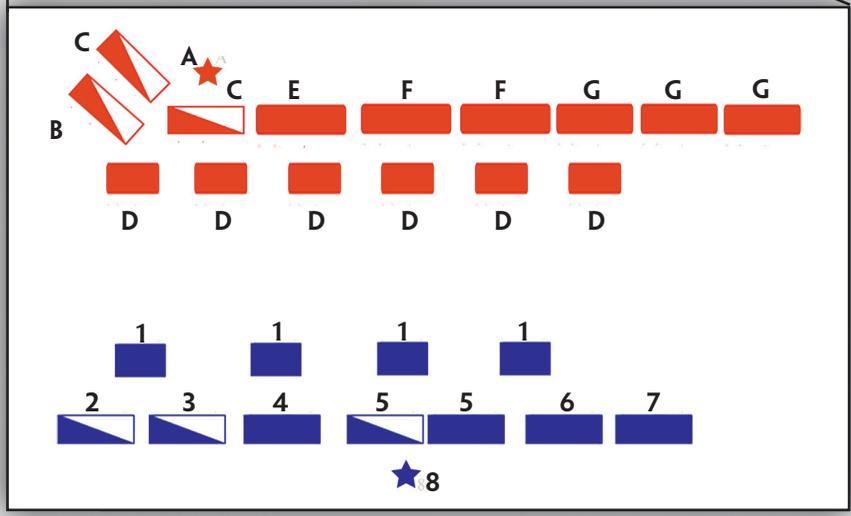
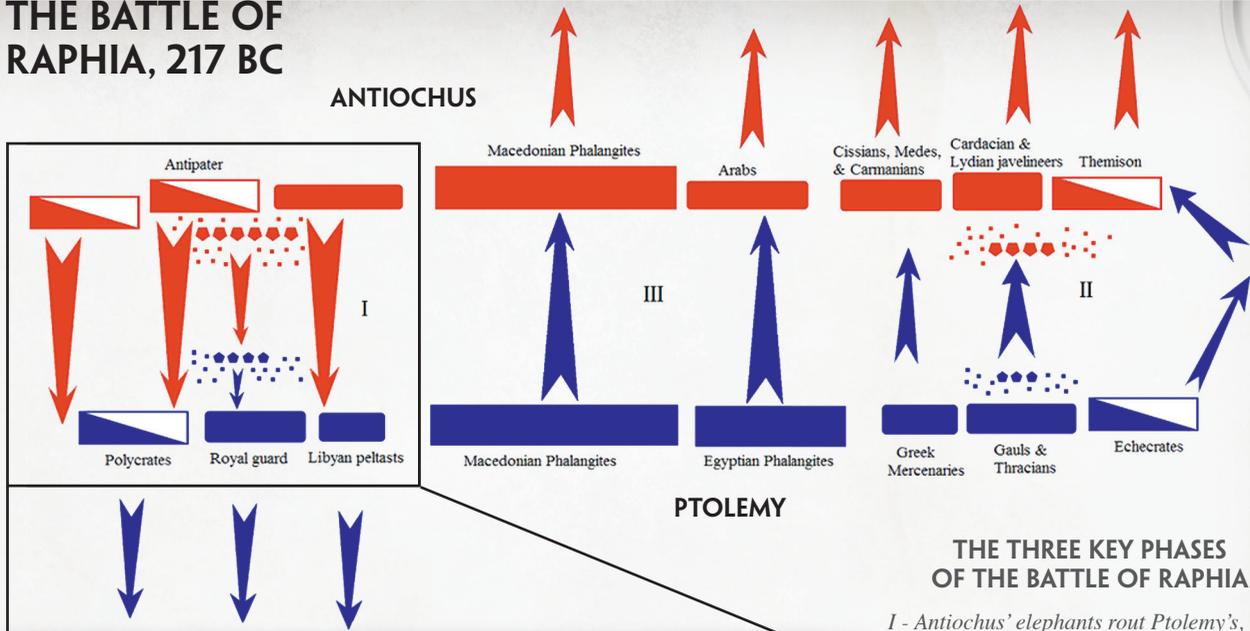
online translations of Polybius - were categorically panned by the critics (if I may continue the theater analogy), and resulted in an appropriate amount of disappointment as well as frustration. In my defense, try number four was rather impressive. I used *Hail Caesar*, but modified the dimensions of standard, large, and small units quite a bit. In addition, I replaced the inches in the rules with centimeters. These two adjustments allowed me to fit Raphia on my 6' x 4' table. Unfortunately, as just related, for

a variety of reasons, this fourth attempt failed (in rather spectacular fashion) before the curtain went up on the third act.

In mid April of 2012, after taking about a week to think things over, I started back to work on my "accidental" Raphia project. Instead of playing around with newer rules, I went back to Arty Conliffe's familiar and comfortable *Armati* and *Advanced Armati*. Instead of trying to cram 132,000 infantry, 11,000 cavalry, and all 175 elephants on my tabletop, I decided to break up the historical engagement. A close reading of Polybius revealed that I could refight the left, right, and then center of the flat field as separate engagements. After rereading the relevant chapters of *Book V*, I decided to model the action on the *Kings' Flank*. The following orders of battle are my interpretation of the information provided by Polybius in Chapters 65, 79, and 82.

The Battle of Raphia - illustration by Peter Dennis from *War Elephants* (NV 160) © Osprey Publishing. www.ospreypublishing.com

THE BATTLE OF RAPHIA, 217 BC



SELUCID FORMATIONS

- A. King Antiochus
- B. Light Cavalry
- C. Heavy Cavalry
- D. Indian Elephants
- E. Cretans
- F. Greek Mercenaries
- G. Daae, Cilicians, etc

PTOLEMAIC FORMATIONS

- 1. African Elephants
- 2. Libyan Cavalry
- 3. Egyptian Cavalry
- 4. Cretans
- 5. Royal Guard (cavalry on left)
- 6. Peltasts
- 7. Libyan Infantry
- 8. King Ptolemy

THE THREE KEY PHASES OF THE BATTLE OF RAPHIA

I - Antiochus' elephants rout Ptolemy's, who then cause mayhem in the Royal Guard. Then Antiochus' right wing attacks Ptolemy's left, driving them back.

II - Echebrates, on Ptolemy's right, orders an attack, outflanks the enemy cavalry and drives back Antiochus' entire left wing.

III - Ptolemy takes command of his phalanx and orders an assault on the enemy. The Ptolemaic phalanx routs Antiochus' men.

The accompanying diagram shows how each wing was deployed for the miniature refight. Making use of the scenario rule found on page 38 of *Armata*, I determined that King Antiochus would command 10 Heavy Divisions and 5 Light Divisions. His right wing would be "destroyed" when 8 Key units were broken. On the other side of the field, King Ptolemy would command 7 Heavy Divisions and 3 Light Divisions. His left wing would be "wrecked" with the loss of 5 Key units.

ORDERS OF BATTLE FOR ARMATI

SELEUCIDS - King Antiochus					
• Antipater's Cavalry	2 units of LC	2 [0] 0	+1	Various	2BP
	4 units of HC [K]	4 [0] 0	+1	Various	3BP
• Cretans	3 units of SI	2 [1] 1	+2	Bows	1BP
• Greek Mercenaries	7 units of PH [K]	7 [1] 1	+1	Spears	4BP
• Daae, Cilicians, Etc.	7 units of LI	4 [1] 2	+1	Various/Javelins	2BP
• Elephants	6 units of EL	5 [3] 2	+1	Various	3BP
PTOLEMAIC - King Ptolemy					
• Libyan Cavalry	2 units of LC	2 [0] 0	+1	Various	2BP
• Egyptian Cavalry	2 units of HC [K]	4 [0] 0	+1	Various	3BP
• Cretans	4 units of SI	2 [1] 1	+2	Bows	1BP
• Cavalry of the Royal Guard	1 unit of HC [K]	5 [1] 1	+1	Spears	3BP
• Infantry of the Royal Guard	4 units of PH [K]	7 [1] 1	+1	Spears	4BP
• Peltasts	3 units of LI	4 [1] 2	+1	Javelins	2BP
• Libyan Infantry	4 units of PH [K]	6 [0] 0	+1	Pikes	4BP
• Elephants	4 units of EL	4 [3] 1	+1	Various	3BP



Above: *Elephants!* Photo taken at Partizan 2013 of a game presented by Simon Miller and Craig Davey, using Simon's own ruleset "To The Strongest!". Apparently the Seleucid and Ptolemaic elephants were all on loan from Aventine (and painted by Adam Smith).

In Chapter 84, Polybius offers a graphic description of the contest between African and Indian elephants. In Chapter 85, the military inexperience of young King Antiochus is examined. While *Armati* does have specific rules governing elephants in combat, and breakthrough movement, it does not contain rules specific to the historic engagement of Raphia. The following amendments were drafted in order to better reflect the narrative of Polybius.

African versus Indian

1. When a stand of African elephants comes within 9" of a stand of Indian elephants, the African elephants must take an immediate panic test. Roll 1D6.
2. If a 1-2 is rolled, then the African animals panic. They immediately stop all movement, are given a panic status marker, and cannot rally out of their panicked state.
3. If a panicked stand of African elephants is contacted by Indian elephants, they will break on a roll of 1-3 on 1D6. If they do not break, they will fight with their special fighting value against the larger and apparently smellier Indian pachyderms.

Extra Elephant Rules*

1. Indian elephants suffering a BP (Break Point) loss in melee, roll 1D6. On a roll of 1, the elephants rout.
2. African elephants suffering a BP loss in melee, roll 1D6. On a roll of 1-2, the elephants rout.
3. Routing elephants turn 180° and make a full move (9") to the rear.
4. If friendly or enemy heavy infantry units are contacted, a new melee is fought immediately. The infantry unit rolls with a -1 modifier to represent the disorder associated with fighting elephants. This modifier remains in effect until one side breaks, or the elephants rout again.
5. If friendly or enemy light or skirmisher infantry units are contacted, roll 1D6. On a roll of 1, the light infantry or skirmishers are dispersed.
6. If friendly or enemy cavalry units are contacted, roll 1D6. On a roll of 6, the cavalry manages to evade the onrushing pachyderms. The horse are moved back one full move, earn a fatigue marker as well as a "disordered" marker. On any other result, the cavalry must fight as panicked troops. If the cavalry lose a BP, then they are broken.

7. Stampeded elephants may be targeted by missile units, if they are in range during the missile fire phase of the game turn.
8. During the movement phase of the game turn, routing elephants are moved before any other units.
9. Elephants are removed from the tabletop when their unit BP is reached.

[*These rules were adapted from *The LA Group*. See Post #30877 on the *Armati Forum*.]

The Folly of Youth Rule

1. Seleucid units will roll 1D6 to determine if they make a breakthrough move after a melee victory. On a roll of 3-6, the unit will make a breakthrough move as per the rules.
2. If the Seleucids manage to break the left wing of King Ptolemy's army, then each Seleucid unit has to roll a "pursuit" die to determine if it will chase the defeated enemy off the field.
3. Victorious Seleucid units will pursue the enemy on rolls of 1-3.
4. King Antiochus (if still alive), will pursue the defeated enemy on a roll of 1-5.

ON THE RIGHT WITH KING ANTIOCHUS

On the afternoon of 21 April 2012, the two Successor kings met again on a comparatively small tabletop. The following is offered not as a blow-by-blow account, but rather as a summary of the eight turns that witnessed history repeating itself, if not exactly in the way it reportedly happened some 2,229 years ago.

King Ptolemy held the initiative for almost the first half of the battle, and he lost no time in sending his smaller elephant force against the Seleucid line. This initial advance was swiftly countered by King Antiochus. About half of the African elephants - those on the right of the advance - balked and then panicked after a short fight. Ten were brought down by javelin volleys of the peltasts under Socrates. Another ten stampeded toward the solid line of King Ptolemy's Royal Guard. On the left of the contest, the Ptolemaic pachyderms were giving as good as they got. Size and strength eventually favored the Seleucid beasts and, though hurt in the chaotic melee, these formations were able to send the smaller animals running for the rear. In one sector, arrow volleys from Cretan archers brought down the friendly elephants. Their volleys were then trained on the advancing enemy animals. In the far left sector, the Libyan and Egyptian cavalry maneuvered to get out of the way of the maddened creatures.

While this was transpiring, the Libyan phalanx on King Ptolemy's right advanced straight ahead, supported on its left by a large group of peltasts. To meet this threat, King Antiochus moved up his Daae and Cilicians, and ordered his Greek mercenary infantry to advance. The Seleucid light troops were no match for the heavier Libyans in the open field, so they kept the enemy at a safe distance - but not so far away as they could not throw javelins into the serried ranks of the Libyans. Casualties began to mount on the Ptolemaic side of the field, and the frustration level did too, as the enemy light infantry maintained a steady harassing fire. The light infantry under Socrates worked its way forward, subjecting the Greek mercenary formations to the same treatment. In fact, a unit of hoplites had to split off from the main phalanx to protect a vulnerable flank. The light infantry of both armies got a little careless unfortunately, and in subsequent turns, found themselves on the sharp end, as first the Libyans caught up with and dispersed a large number of the Seleucid allied troops, and then the Greeks and a single unit of Daae javelins were able to catch the peltasts from behind. While his left was being scattered, King Antiochus focused his attention on Ptolemy's Guard and cavalry. The remaining elephants were driven deeper into the enemy position and Antipater's large cavalry contingent was ordered forward, finally.

Twenty more Indian elephants would perish in attacking the Cretan archers and the phalanx of the Royal Guard. The last twenty would add to the disorder beginning to take a severe toll on King Ptolemy's line. His Libyan cavalry had withdrawn in order to avoid a stampede of panicked elephants. Now they were being hunted by fresh squadrons under Antipater's command. A unit of Egyptian horse had become disordered trying to move out the way of the same friendly herd, but got caught in a bit of a traffic jam. While trying to sort things out, they were attacked from behind by a unit of Indian elephants. Sufficed to say, these cavalry did not last long. The cavalry of the Royal Guard had been charged by elephants too, and fared just as poorly. Fortunately, they were able to break off from the confused melee, and retreat in the same direction as the surviving unit of Egyptian horse.

With their successful advance, the Libyans had taken themselves out of the larger battle on the flank. King Ptolemy sent couriers to retrieve the heavy infantry, but apparently none arrived. The infantry of his Royal Guard was still intact, although they faced greater numbers of Greeks to their front as well as elephants and a large number of Seleucid heavy horse to their left. With his elephants and cavalry gone, with his peltasts dispersed and three-fourths of his archers dead or wounded, King Ptolemy left his Guard to fend for itself. With a



Above: Photo taken at Partizan 2013 of a game presented by Simon Miller and Craig Davey, using Simon's own ruleset "To The Strongest!". Models are from Aventine, Foundry, Polemarch, and Gripping Beast.

small bodyguard and his sister Arsinoe trailing behind, the young king galloped for his life in the direction of his main phalanx.

ASSESSMENT

On page ten of *Battle Notes for Wargamers*, Donald Featherstone explains: "To refight any historical battle realistically, the terrain must closely resemble both in scale and appearance that over which the original conflict raged, and the troops accurately represent the original forces." The diagram on page 93 of *Warfare in the Classical World*, and the lack of any reference to specific terrain features in other source material lead me to believe that my simple representation of the battlefield of Raphia was sufficient. With regard to representing the troops and troop types present, I think I did a decent job of it. Differences of opinion will exist and occur, I expect. This is only natural, and indeed, welcomed. I fully admit that splitting Antipater's horse into two units of light and four units of heavy was

based more on wargaming convention and experience than on any line found in the narrative. I can also accept that I might have made a mistake or three with my depiction of the Daae, Cilicians, Libyans, and Greek mercenaries. Readers more familiar with Polybius or the online translations of his Histories, will perhaps agree that he can be confusing at times. For example, in Chapter 79, the Daae and Cilicians under Bytaccus the Macedonian are described as light-armed troops. Then in Chapter 82, this same contingent is described as being "armed in the Macedonian fashion." To my mind, this means as pikemen, complete with sarissa, small shield, greaves, etc. But how can pikemen be considered light troops? On the other side of the field, the three thousand Libyans are "armed in the Macedonian fashion" (65). This description is repeated in Chapter 82, so I thought it acceptable to make these troops heavy infantry (phalanx types), though not as good as the Greek or Macedonian units listed in *Armata*.

An additional question that bothered me was the specific deployment of Antipater's cavalry. The online translations of Polybius make mention of half of the four thousand horsemen being arranged behind the elephant screen, and then "two thousand more at an angle with them" (82). What is the angle? And, are the two thousand cavalry facing in toward the Seleucid battle line or are they facing to the right? In the end, the interested wargamer has to make - can only make - a best guess based on the available material and sources consulted.

Given that I did not start out with the intention of refighting Raphia, and given that I "suffered" through several failed attempts, I think this completed third of the historic engagement went fairly well. The additional elephant rules, though some may view them as cumbersome, helped to recreate at least part of what happened on that June day in 217 BCE. (At one point during the miniature battle, a unit of Indian elephants stampeded and ran into a Greek phalanx. The Greeks



Above: A clash of Man and Beast! another photo taken at Partizan 2013 of a game presented by Simon Miller and Craig Davey. Will the pikes and fierce determination of the phalanx be enough to stop several tonnes of rampaging muscle?

Right: A Successor-period Armoured War Elephant from Sergeant Major Miniatures. Painted by Steve Dake, photo by Don Nelson.



were able to handle the panicked animals without too much trouble, however.) The additional rules governing Seleucid unit behavior also contributed to the overall enjoyment of the wargame. As one turn ran into another, it was noted that history kind of repeated itself - albeit in a smaller version - on this one flank of the larger battlefield. The African elephants did not cause as much damage and disorder as they did in the actual engagement, but they did effectively take the Ptolemaic cavalry out of the equation. The peltasts under Socrates were not affected by panicking animals, but they were dispersed by the steady advance of Greek mercenaries. On this isolated flank of the general engagement, the Seleucid king was successful on his right and to a large extent, in his center. It was only on the left side of his right flank that he was defeated. It was also noted that a decision was reached without either side reaching its determined breaking point. King Ptolemy lost just a single unit of Egyptian heavy cavalry. King Antiochus did not lose a single key unit during the eight turns played. Had the elephants of

both sides been labeled key units, well, the score and story would have been very different.

The positive experience with the right flank at Raphia leaves me eager to prepare and play the action on the left as well as the fight between the phalanxes in the center. Common sense would dictate that I stay with *Armati* (and its various rule amendments), but I find myself tempted by the variety of Ancients rule books available. I wonder if I might have a go with *War & Conquest* or even *Might of Arms*? As long as I'm considering these options, I wonder if I might consider another try at refighting the entire battle with *Hail Caesar*. Ah . . . decisions, decisions.

COMMENTS ON SOURCES

Though dismissed as a coffee table book, the diagram and caption on page 93 of *Warfare in the Classical World* seems to mesh with the account given by Polybius. I am certainly no expert in the field (never have claimed to be one), but it was nice to have a map of the field so that I

could better visualize the frontages of formations and the stages of the battle.

I found a few translations of *Book V* online. The following is the web address of the translation I used most often: http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Polybius/5*.html.

The Paton translation, mentioned in the brief discussion thread on the *Armati* forum, is available at: http://www.archive.org/stream/historiesswitheng03polyuoft/historiesswitheng03polyuoft_djvu.txt.

Additional information regarding the differences between Indian and African elephants at Raphia was found in the following academic article written by Michael B. Charles: *Elephants at Raphia: Reinterpreting Polybius 5.84-5. Classical Quarterly* 57: pp. 306-311.

I am very grateful for the expertise and knowledge shared by members of the *Armati* forum. In particular, I want to thank Steve, Mark, and Vincent for their constructive comments and counsel.