

SCENARIOS & VARIANTS

ALEXANDER'S WEAPONRY

Recent Research and Its Relevance to Wargaming

by Ben Miller

See, just when you think you know me, just when you think you'll never see scenarios or rules variants ever published in *MOVES*, I do a 180 to keep you off balance. Actually, the manner in which Mr. Miller supports and explains his variants (even though rendered for a not-wildly-popular game) is the real reason this article is seeing print. If some more of you develop thoughtful bases for variant rules, documented by serious readings, I'll be happy to seriously consider them for publication as well. —RAS

It is a commonly-held belief that the Macedonian infantry of Alexander the Great and his father, Philip II, regularly employed the sarissa, or long lance, in combat. A sarissa consisted of a wooden shaft with a metal point and butt spike, and varied in length from fifteen to eighteen feet. From the Battle of Chaeronea in 338 B.C. until Guagamela, in 331 B.C., the Macedonian infantry are depicted as using the sarissa, and this has been reflected in wargame designs concerning the period. Examples of this are SPI's *Spartan* and *Conquerors*. This article attempts to show that it was the Macedonian cavalry which carried a sarissa at Chaeronea and that the Macedonian infantry did not use a sarissa in a pitched battle until Guagamela. These changes will be discussed in relation to game rules changes and alteration of unit capabilities.

Game designers, influenced by the histories they have read, have for some time believed that the Macedonian infantry always used the sarissa. New archeological finds have been partially responsible for a major change in views. Lance points unearthed from the Macedonian funeral mound at Chaeronea have shown that only the cavalry sarissa were present, as distinguished by the differing sizes of the cavalry and infantry sarissas. Now realizing that only the cavalry carried a sarissa, it is possible to retranslate and reinterpret the original Greek sources. This knowledge, plus reexamination of the battlefield terrain, as well as other supporting work, has enabled a new view of Macedonian sarissa use to be formulated.

According to the best estimate, the Macedonian cavalry carried a fifteen foot sarissa, dating from Chaeronea. In game terms, half the cavalry in any given scenario involving Philip or Alexander should be set aside and marked as sarissa-armed. Only the Macedonian cavalry, such as the Companions, and perhaps a very few others, were sarissa-armed. It should be noted, though, that the sarissa-armed cavalry could also employ the standard javelin instead of the sarissa. Using the *Spartan* rules as a framework, rules for sarissa-armed cavalry would be:

[8.0] SARISSA-ARMED CAVALRY

CASES:

[8.1] MOVEMENT

[8.11] Sarissa-armed cavalry pay normal movement costs.

[8.2] MELEE COMBAT

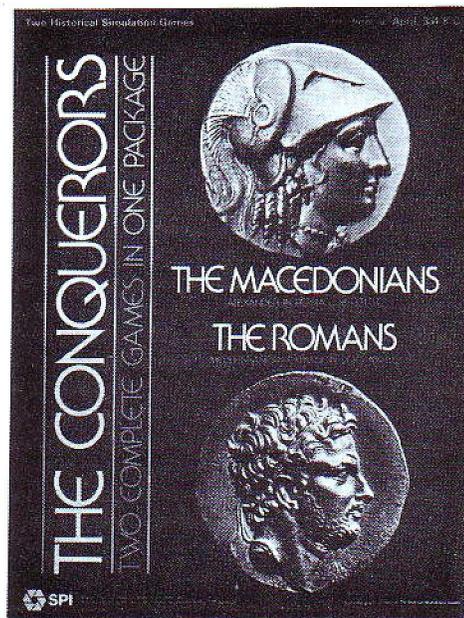
[8.21] In the first offensive melee combat, and only the first, double the melee strength of the units.

[8.22] After the first offensive melee, the units are treated as normal cavalry.

[8.23] After determining the combat results of the first offensive melee, roll the die again. If a "6" is rolled, the unit is disrupted.

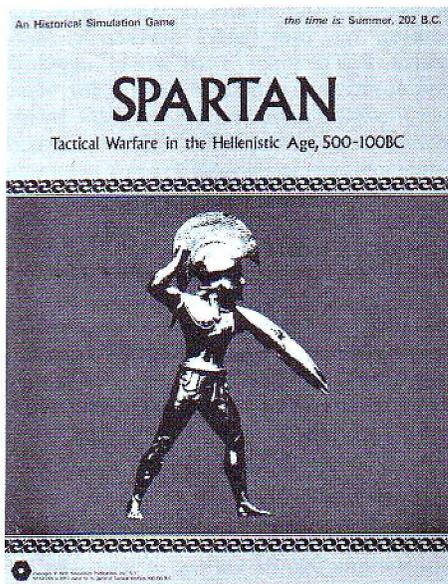
[8.24] If the defending unit(s) are eliminated, the cavalry must advance into the vacated hex.

[8.25] If the sarissa-armed cavalry are attacked prior to their own first attack, double their melee strength. Continue this until the sarissa-armed cavalry makes their own first attack.



[8.26] Spear-armed infantry (Class A) receive no defensive benefits when attacked by sarissa-armed cavalry (Class C).

The effectiveness of the sarissa-armed cavalry was a combination of their armament, formation, and shock. Cavalry armed in this manner carried a fifteen foot sarissa along with a saber. The sarissa was gripped close to the middle and carried either underhand, or overhand above the shoulder. A regular Greek hoplite spear of 7 to 8 feet would project only about three and one half feet in front of the bearer. A sarissa-armed cavalryman would have about four to five feet of the sarissa in front of the horse's head, which would outreach a spear-armed hoplite. A Macedonian cavalry squadron of one hundred and twenty men used a wedge-shaped formation, with a point facing the enemy line. Greek hoplites usually formed in a line eight deep. The point rider would, in a charge, kill a hoplite with his sarissa and continue on with his saber. With a fifteen foot sarissa, combined with the lack of stirrups, it would be necessary to release the sarissa or be unhorsed. Behind and to the side of the point rider were two more horsemen who would kill their opponents and continue on with their sabers. Even if none of the riders killed a second man with their sabers, there were seven other men directly behind them, in every other rank. All this, plus the shock of a massed cavalry charge would enable the squadron to pierce a hoplite line.



The inability of the sarissa-armed cavalryman to retain his sarissa after charging explains the one turn advantage in melee strength. Since there is also a chance the attack could unsettle the squadron due to its violence, a roll for possible disruption is called for. Defensively, the reach of the sarissa would put any attacker at a disadvantage. The reach of the sarissa would void any defensive advantage spear-armed infantry receive. A successful attack would demolish that section of the hoplite line and carry the attacking cavalry into the space the hoplites had held.

The Macedonian infantry carried an eighteen foot sarissa as opposed to the cavalry's fifteen foot one. The Macedonians may have been using the infantry sarissa as early as 335 B.C., but there is no evidence that it was used in a pitched battle until Guagamela in 331 B.C. The Macedonian infantry were trained in the use of both the hoplite spear and the sarissa. At the players' discretion, the Macedonian infantry units listed in the order of battle may be considered either spear-armed or sarissa-armed. Again using the *Spartan* rules as the framework, the player could deploy his Macedonian infantry as Professional Spearmen for the spear-armed troops, and Professional Pikemen for the sarissa-armed troops. Rules changes for Macedonian infantry would be:

[9.0] MACEDONIAN INFANTRY

CASES:

[9.1] MOVEMENT

[9.11] Prior to the first Fire or Melee Combat, all units are moved normally.

[9.12] Subsequent to the first Fire or Melee Combat, for each hex that a unit moves into, roll one die and consult Table 10.0, the Infantry Movement Table.

[9.13] Sarissa-armed infantry expend two movement points in order to change facing.

[9.2] FIRE COMBAT

[9.21] Sarissa-armed infantry subtract one from any roll when they are defending against a Fire attack.

[9.3] MELEE COMBAT

[9.31] Sarissa-armed infantry defend at one-third their printed strength (retaining fractions) when attacked through a flank hexside.

[10.0] INFANTRY MOVEMENT TABLE

DIE	Spear-armed		
	Clear	Hill/Slope	Stream
1	-	-	-
2	-	-	-
3	-	-	-
4	-	-	D
5	-	-	D
6	D	D	D

Sarissa-armed

DIE	Clear	Hill/Slope	Stream
1	-	-	-
2	-	-	-
3	-	-	-
4	-	-	D
5	-	D	D
6	D	D	D

[10.1] EXPLANATION OF RESULTS

"-" = no effect; "D" = disruption. The affected units are tagged by the placement of a disruption marker.

[10.2] EFFECTS OF DISRUPTION

Units which are disrupted in this manner are treated as units that were disrupted by combat, i.e., they may not initiate combat or be moved for the duration of their disruption. Disruption never affects leader units. All normal disruption rules apply.

[10.21] When the units are stacked with a Leader, subtract one from the roll.

[10.22] If the Defender elects to use defensive fire on the unit, add one to the roll. Consult the Infantry Movement Table first, adding one to the die roll, and resolve the Defensive Fire Combat second.

The great strength of the Macedonian phalanx lay in its bristling wall of sarissa points which outreached their opponents' spears, their unbroken line, and the weight of their attack. The phalanx's weakness was its limited lateral maneuverability and vulnerability once their line was broken. The phalanx was usually deployed sixteen ranks deep. The first five ranks held their sarissas levelled, and the ranks behind held their sarissas upright at a slant over their shoulders. A sarissa-armed soldier needed both hands to wield the heavy weapon. The only other protection besides the sarissa was a two foot shield slung over the neck protecting the left shoulder, very light armor, and a dagger.

On a parade ground, the soldiers in the phalanx would march and keep order according to the plan. Once battle was joined, all the uncertainties inherent in these situations come into play. Certain units would fall out of step, and gaps would open in the line. The harder the terrain, the harder it was to keep the line in order. The Infantry Movement Table is a reflection of this fact. Hoplite phalanxes were more maneuverable and affected to a lesser degree. At Issus, the spear-armed phalanx broke formation on level ground, with a gap opened between two units. Serious trouble was averted because of a prepositioned reserve and because Alexander had already won the battle on another part of the field. A leader present with the phalanx could mean very much. At Chaeronea, with Philip commanding the spear-armed phalanx, the phalanx retreated backward across a stream and up the slope of a hill while being pursued by the Athenians. The Macedonians then attacked down the slope, using their momentum to smash the Athenians. Additionally, a unit undergoing missile fire would have added trouble maintaining order.

When receiving missile fire, the sarissas of the rear ranks would give added protec-

tion to the men under them. The addition to the fire combat roll portrays this advantage.

The four ranks of men behind the first rank were able to maintain an even wall of spear points by holding the sarissa further toward the butt and using the shoulders of the men in front for support. The butts and shafts of the first rank's sarissas would project backward, interlocking the men between them. This, plus the weight of the rear ranks pressing forward, jamming the front ranks still closer together, made flanking maneuvers very difficult. The increased costs to change facing is a depiction of this. The phalanx's non-maneuverability also made it much more vulnerable to a flank attack as it would be very hard to turn to meet it. If a soldier was forced to drop his sarissa, he had only a dagger and very light armor to fight with.

When implemented, these aforementioned rules changes will lessen the role of the phalanx to a certain extent, but it maintains an important position. In reality, the cavalry assumed a crucial function. The cavalry should be used to punch holes in the enemy's flanks and dislocate their ability to fight. Thus, when the phalanx makes its weight felt, the enemy will be shattered. The cavalry had already decided the issue at the Battles of Granicus and Issus before the phalanx had effectively entered the battle. At the Battles of Guagamela and the Hydaspes the cavalry had somewhat lesser importance. The cavalry alone does not have the weight at times to defeat an enemy, and the flanks of a phalanx without cavalry support are vulnerable. Used correctly, it is possible to recreate on the playing board Alexander's achievements and also to see the limitations that could have cut his success short. ■ ■

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