

THE BATTLE OF MANTINEA, 418 BC

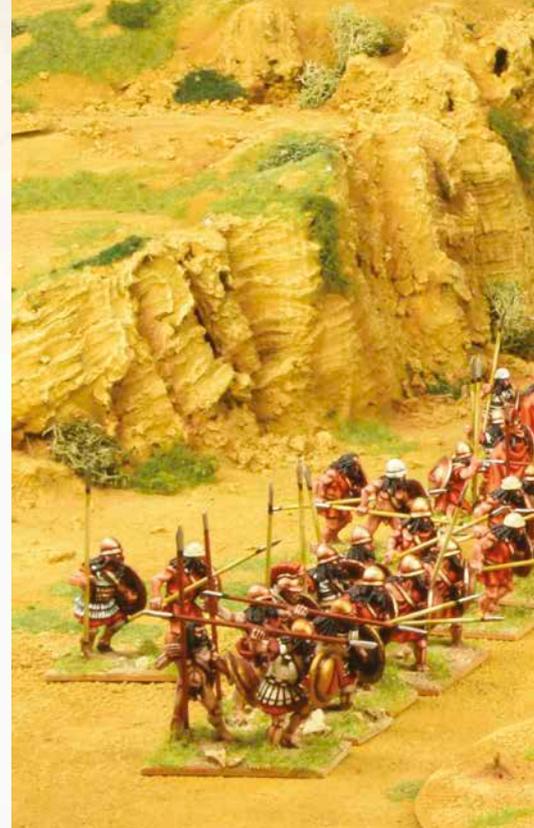
AGIS VERSUS THE ARGIVES

In 418 BC, Sparta found itself humiliated. After the Athenian successes at Pylos, Sphacteria, and Megara, the Spartan myth of invincibility had been severely challenged. Now Sparta's old enemy, the city state of Argos, had broken its truce with Sparta and formed an alliance with the Achaeans, Eleans, and Athenians. This new alliance was to challenge Sparta's hegemony over the Peloponnese.

By David Davies

Spartan officer and soldiers of the late fifth century - the description of the transverse crest comes straight from Thucydides' report of the Battle of Mantinea.

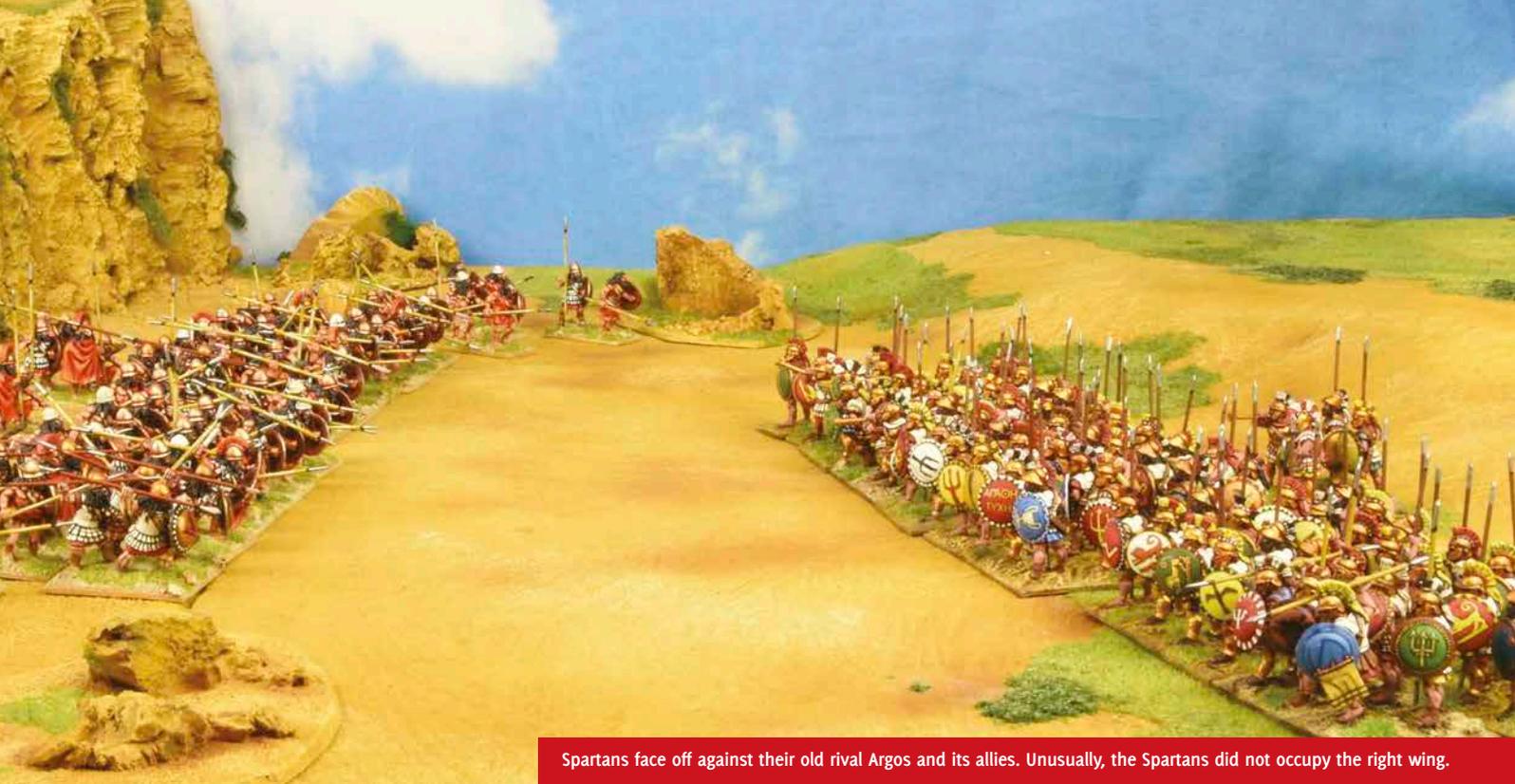
© Johnny Shumate



After the capture of Orchomenos in Arcadia, the Argive alliance marched to threaten the key town of Tegea. This town was of strategic importance as it controlled the Spartan exit from Laconia. Factions inside Tegea had contacted the allies and promised to join the Argive alliance. Meanwhile, the Eleans had attacked Lepreum, a further blow to Spartan power in the region.

Sparta was in turmoil and its king, Agis II, was facing the Spartans' anger for failing to control the situation. He faced severe sanctions if he failed to act. The Spartan army marched and secured Tegea, but Agis could not afford to wait inside the walls of the town and hope the Argives would go away. Instead, to bring them to battle, he would need to threaten allied or Argive territory and drive the allied army into the field.

At first, Agis moved against the city of Mantinea (one of the allied cities), but the allies refused to give battle, securing their place on a rocky outcrop. It is probable that the grain harvest had already been secured so there were no crops for the Spartans to threaten. Desperate for victory, Agis contemplated as-



Spartans face off against their old rival Argos and its allies. Unusually, the Spartans did not occupy the right wing.

saulting the Argive allied army, but elder Spartans advised against it. Attacking an army in unfavourable terrain of their choosing would have been costly. Instead, Agis ordered his men to divert the courses of rivers to flood Mantinean territory. The Argive alliance reacted and quickly took to the field, lining up ready for battle. The allies had been restless with their generals' lack of decisiveness and were eager to engage what they saw as retreating Spartans.

The Spartans had a surprise of their own, as part of their forces had been concealed in a nearby wood. It is possible this was a deliberate ploy to make their force seem smaller and encourage the Argive alliance to attack. When the enemy had lined up, the remaining Spartan forces emerged from the wood and lined up in good order, ready for the fight. It was too late for the Argives to retreat and so battle was joined.

PLAYING MANTINEA

We have a good account of the different sides for Mantinea, thanks to Thucydides. The Spartan army contained veterans of Brasidas' campaign including Neodamodes, Helots who had been freed for actively serving in the Spartan military. The Spartans placed the Tegeans in the place of

honour on the right wing, and the Argive allies did the same with the Mantineans, placing them on their right.

The estimated numbers are as follows:

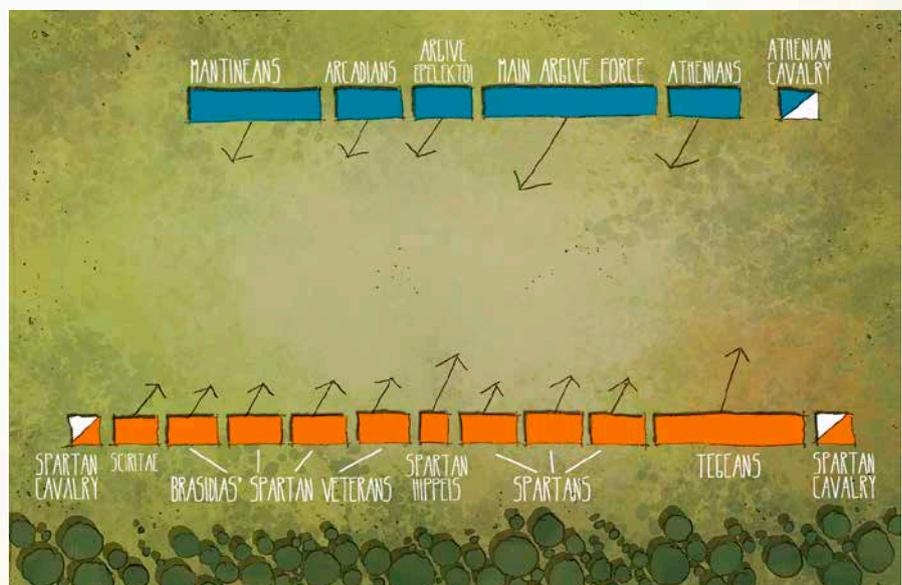
Spartan army (from left to right)

- 300 Spartan and allied cavalry (medium and light cavalry)
- 600 Sciritae allies (levy hoplites)
- 2000 Brasidian veterans (Neodamodes, unarmoured but veteran hoplites)
- 500 Spartan Brasidian veterans (elite hoplites)
- General Agis II and 500 *hippeis* royal bodyguard (elite hoplites)
- 2500 Spartan infantry (regular hoplites)

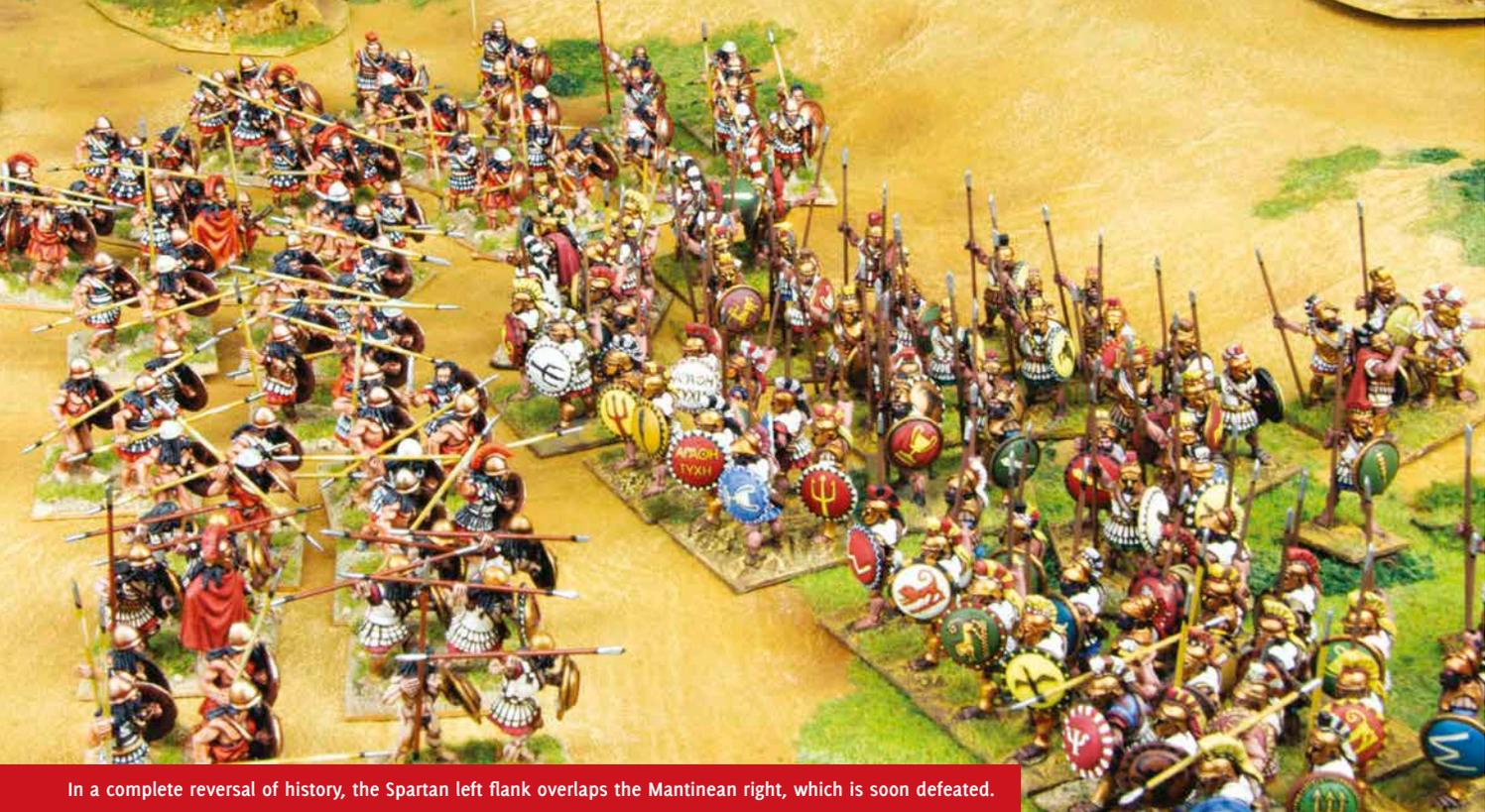
- 2500 Tegean infantry (regular and levy hoplites)
- 300 Tegean cavalry

Argive-allied army (from left to right)

- 300 Athenian & allied cavalry (medium cavalry)
- 1000 Athenian infantry (regular hoplites)
- 2500 Argive infantry (regular and levy hoplites)
- 500 Argive Epilektoi Hoplitai (elite hoplites)
- 2000 Arcadians, Cleonaeans, Orneans, and Aeginetans (regular and levy hoplites)
- 2000 Mantineans (Regular and levy hoplites)



© Rocio Espin



In a complete reversal of history, the Spartan left flank overlaps the Mantinean right, which is soon defeated.

Each individual force probably included its own light infantry and skirmishers. We can assume that regular and elite hoplites are armoured while levy hoplites are unarmoured.

Rule sets

There are several excellent rule sets out there for this period. Page 37 of the *Biblical & Classical* lists for *Hail Caesar* provides lists for the Peloponnesian War. *Swordpoint* has lists in its *Classical Armies* supplement.

The size at which you play Mantinea will depend upon the forces you have available. You could break down into game units of 300 to 500 men to the unit, or 1000 men to the unit with 500 men being a small unit.

Smaller-scale games, such as *Men of Bronze* or *Mortal Gods*, could be used for Mantinea by splitting the gameplay between several players, each controlling their own faction and playing the several 'mini' battles on one large table. Effectively, each pair of gamers would be playing their section of the battle.

Playing the battle

Setup is the key to this battle. Each side sets up with their right flank overlapping the enemy's left flank. Historically, both sides tried to wheel to prevent their weak side from being

overlapped (not the easiest thing in phalanx formations, as most rulesets attest in their movement rules). Effectively, it'll be the battle of the flanks that determines the outcome.

Victory conditions

This is a standard battle, so use standard victory conditions for your rule set. Whichever side breaks first loses. While the Spartans have a slight numerical advantage, but this should not sway the battle too heavily.

CONCLUSION

Initially, the right side of each army overlapped the other, so both sides

tried to manoeuvre to redress this balance. However, the Spartans had the numbers and the drill to take full advantage and press their attack on the allied left flank. With their left flank folding, and despite having a similar advantage against the Spartan left flank, the allied troops began to break formation, and soon the allied army routed.

The Argives were forced to cede the territory they captured and ally against the Athenians to force them out of the Peloponnesian peninsula. Agis had been successful in winning a great victory and restoring both his and Spartan prestige. **WS&S**



The Mantinean alliance attacks the Spartan flanks with cavalry and various light skirmishers.