

“Strabo’s Vengeance”: The 2nd Battle of Asculum 89BC

Historical Background:

On the northern front of the Social War in 89BC everything turned on the siege of Asculum. After the death due to illness of the local Roman commander Pro-consul Sextus Caesar, the author of the critical “Lex Julia” law on Italian citizenship, the new consul for that year Pompey Strabo took command at the scene and tightened the siege of the city. The Italians, for their part concentrated a large relief army to try to attack and break the Roman blockade. In the final battle before Asculum it is possible that some 60,000 Italians and 75,000 Roman-led troops participated. The Italians were completely defeated and the city finally fell mainly due to both starvation and despair. One force of Marsi from the relieving Italian army survived the rout, but was later cut to pieces by Strabo in a mountain pass.

All the officers and leading men of Asculum were scourged and beheaded to avenge the original massacre of Roman citizens at that site when the Italian revolt was touched off in late 91BC. The rest of the ordinary free population was allowed to leave the city while their slaves and valuables were auctioned off. Consul Strabo kept the money garnered by the loot of Asculum to both pay his troops and to at least partly replace the sums he had originally expended to raise his private army at the start of the Social War. The Treasury of the Republic received none of the proceeds from the Consul of Rome. By the end of the year the war on the northern front had almost died out. Umbria/Picenum and the lands of the Marsi and Marrucini had largely returned to the fold of the Roman rule, and Silo, the Marsic Italian consul, had taken refuge with Samnites only to fall in another final doomed battle in the following year (88BC).

Expanded Map Setup:

The “Strabo’s Vengeance” scenario uses an extended two-section map to better allow for this two-front battle, and the resulting maneuvers of both the large Roman forces and the besieged and relieving Italian armies. Take a second C & C Ancients map and cut or fold it over lengthwise along the entire center of the “E” hex-row. The two maps are then abutted so that D1 on the now “half-map” is adjacent to A1 and A2 on the main full map; similarly D12 will end up adjacent to A12 and A13 on the main map. The play area is now 13 hexrows deep and 12 or 13 hexes wide depending on the hexrow. The main or full map is referred to as” Map 1” and the four row or half map is called:” Map 2” when charting the locations detailed below.

Terrain Set-up: (See Terrain Special Rules)

X23 *Roman Campworks*: (See Terrain Special rules on Campworks)---The facing of the Roman Campworks tiles is immaterial—Use Rampart Tiles to represent Roman Campworks: **Map 2:** A4, A6, B3, B6, C3, C6, D3, D4, D5, D8, C8 **Map 1:** B1, B8, C2, C9, D3, C4, D6, D7, F9, E9, E11, D10

X7 *Roman Camp Core*: Use Fortified Camp tiles to represent the Camp Core terrain.(see Terrain Special rules & Victory rules on Camp Core Hextiles) **Map 2:** B4, B5, C4, C5 **Map 1:** B6, B7, C7

x5 *Walls of Asculum* (Use Rampart tiles facing is immaterial see special terrain rules):

Map 2: A13, B12, C12, D12, **Map 1:** A13

x5 *Hill Tiles*:: **Map 1:** I11, I12, I13, H11, H12 (use normal Hill rules)

Initial Set-up:

Roman Army (use Roman blocks):

X4 Elite Heavy Infantry-5 Blocks (see special Legionary rules): **Map 1:** A3, A2, B6, B7

X8 Heavy Infantry (see special Legionary rules): **Map 1:** A9, F9, E9, D6, D7, D3, C2,
Map 2: D5

X10 Medium Infantry (see special Legionary rules): **Map 1:** F10, E11, C9, B8, C5, B4,
Map 2: C9, D8, A9, B6

X2 Warriors (Gauls see special rules): **Map 1:** B1, D10

X2 Auxillia: **Map 1:** C7, C10

X1 Light Archers: **Map 1:** D8

X1 Light Slings (see special rules): **Map 1:** C4

X3 Medium Cavalry: **Map 2:** D1, B4, B7

X1 Light Infantry: **Map 1:** D2

X4 Leaders (ALL **Map 1**) B7 (Pompey Strabo) E11 (Sulpicius) A3 (Sertorius) D6 (Roman Legate)

Italian Army: (use Carthaginian Blocks): The Italian Army is divided into two separate forces: Scato's Relief Force and the Asculum Garrison Force—see Special Rules---

Scato's Relief Force ALL Scato Force units set-up Initially on **Map 1**

X2 Elite Heavy Infantry-5 Blocks (see special Legionary rules): G6, H5

X8 Heavy Infantry (see special Legionary rules): F1, G3, H3, G4, I5, I8, I10, H7

X9 Medium Infantry (see special Legionary rules): G2, H2, I3, I4, H4, I6, I7, I11, I12

X2 Auxillia: I9, G5

X1 Light Archers: G7

X2 Medium Cavalry: H12, G1

X1 Light Cavalry: I1

X3 Leaders H5 (Scato) G3 (Italian Legate) I10 (Italian Tribune)

Asculum Garrison Force (see Special Retreat/Evasion Rules for this force)

X1 Heavy Infantry see special Legionary rules): **Map 1:** A12

X3 Medium Infantry (see special Legionary rules) **Map 1:** A13 **Map 2:** D11, B11

X1 Auxillia: **Map 2:** C12

X1 Light Infantry: **Map 1:** A11

X1 Leader: **Map 1:** A12 (Garrison Legate)

War Council:

Roman Army

Leader: Pompey Strabo

6 Cards

Italian Army

Leader: Scato

5 Cards

Move First

Victory: x13 Banners for Roman Player & x15 Banners for Italian Player—the Italian receives 2 Banners for eliminating Strabo, and 1 Banner for each Roman Camp Core hextile that is removed in the course of play, and 1 Banner for every three Roman Campworks tiles removed. The Roman Player scores normally.

Special Scenario Rules:

Command Rules:

The “Marian” Command Card Deck

Historical Note: *Combat in the 1st Century BC between Roman/Italian Legions was somewhat different than the wars between civilized states in the 3rd Century BC. There was less room for combined arms tactics and maneuver, and battles probably tended to be more of the nature of hand to hand full bore slugfests.*

This particular scenario utilizes a different Command Card Deck than the original C & C Ancients Deck. Eight (8) Cards are removed from the original deck leaving 52 Cards for scenario play. This new deck is called the “Marian Deck” and it is named after Caesar’s uncle Gaius Marius, a general in the Social War, and a reorganizer of the Roman Legions in circa 105-103BC (several years before Caesar was born) to meet the challenges of the Germanic Tribal invasions that threatened the Roman Republic of the time.

The following eight cards are removed before play and put aside to create the Marian Deck:

X4 “Order Light troops”, x1 “I Am Spartacus”, x2 “Move-Fire-Move”, x1 “Mounted Charge”---note that one Mounted Charge” card is still retained in the deck.

Leader Command & Rally Special Rules:

All Leaders may cancel a retreat or a sword hit if present with the unit.

Strabo may cancel both a retreat and a sword hit if present with the unit.

Units on both sides involved in close combat with the support of a Leader may only count one helmet hit amongst those rolled to inflict a hit on an opposing unit. Exception:

Roman units supported by Strabo, and Italian units supported by Scato, may count up to two helmet rolls as hits in a single close-combat or battle-back. *Units and the Rally Card:*

No unit can be rallied to beyond its strength at the start of the scenario. If a Player rolls “swords” when attempting to rally he may freely chose which unit gets a block back.

Reduced Missile Range & Auxillia Skirmish Special Rules:

a) Light Archers & Light Slingers only have a range of 2 hexes in this scenario—and may missile fire at adjacent enemy units.

b) Auxillia, Light Cavalry, & Light Infantry only have a range of one hex in this scenario—and may missile fire at adjacent enemy units.

c) An ordered unit may either missile fire or conduct close-combat in a player-turn—never BOTH.

d) Auxillia from BOTH sides may evade if attacked by enemy Medium or Heavy Infantry. Use normal evasion rules otherwise.

Line Command Special Rules: Due to the vast size of this battle neither side may order more than eight units per player-turn with a Line Command Card.

Roman/Italian Legionary Infantry Rules:

The following types of infantry units in the game on BOTH sides are assumed to be Roman/Italian Legionaries: Heavy Infantry, and Medium Infantry. ALL of these units are considered to be Roman/Italian Legionary Infantry.

Roman Pilum:

Each Roman/Italian Legionary Infantry unit starts with a Pilum Marker. The Pilum is a one-time use weapon that is generally fired right before a Roman/Italian Legionary unit attacks in close-combat or is itself attacked by the enemy in close-combat. Once the pilum is fired (or lost see below) –the Pilum marker is removed from the Roman unit to indicate that the pilum has been expended and the unit may not throw Pilum for the rest of the battle.

Just before a Roman/Italian unit with pilum is attacked or is itself attacked by the enemy for the very first time in the battle in close-combat it throws its pilum—roll one die and apply normal hits for swords, color, or a Flag/retreat hit Afterwards remove the Pilum marker. The act of throwing the pilum **is not** considered to be part of the Close-Combat—so any result of the pilum throw is resolved before the Close-combat. If two Roman Legionary Infantry units that have not thrown pilum yet engage the attacker resolves his pilum throw first. An attached Leader may use his special ability to cancel a “swords” hit that was inflicted via a pilum hit (see special Command rules) on the unit he is stacked with.

Roman/Italian Legionary units, adjacent to the enemy, that have not expended their Pilum may also be ordered to throw Pilum if the card “Darken the Sky” is played by their commanding player. The Player picks one adjacent enemy unit and throws two dice – apply the results just as one would before close combat—and remove the Pilum Marker.

Roman/Italian Relief Moves & Cohort Maneuvers:

Adjacent and on the same side Roman or Italian Legionary Infantry, instead of moving, may switch places in a “Relief/Cohort Maneuver”. Relief/Cohort Maneuvers may only be conducted through the play of Section cards ONLY. Instead of ordering one unit via a section card, the controlling Player may order a pair of adjacent Legionary Infantry units to switch hexes—at least one of the units switching places must not be adjacent to an enemy unit. A unit that switched places via the Relief/Cohort Maneuver into a hex adjacent to the enemy may close combat in the same player-turn.

Outflanking---*This is an easy way of introducing facing and flanks to the game with little fuss—it can be retrofitted to other scenarios where appropriate:*

A unit is said to be “Outflanked” if it is surrounded **in all** six adjacent hexes by either enemy units, or hexes adjacent to an enemy unit. The presence of friendly units or impassable terrain does not negate an “Outflanked” situation **in any way**. Units on the board edges (and not surrounded by six adjacent hexes) **cannot** be “Outflanked”. Effects of being Outflanked: “Outflanked” units when battling back roll only half the normal number of dice they would be normally entitled to rounded up—to a

maximum of only two dice—“Outflanked” units when battling back **never** hit on helmet rolls even if supported by a leader. A unit’s “Outflanked” situation is judged at the instant it battles back.

Special Terrain Rules:

. Campworks: Roman foot Units occupying their own Campworks hextiles that are not in an outflanked condition Battle-back with one extra dice and may ignore the first Flag result inflicted upon them. Campworks tiles are removed (and the hex reverts to clear terrain) when an opposing Italian unit enters the hex for any reason. Campworks block line of sight.

Camp Core Hextiles: Camp Core Hextiles confer no combat benefit to Roman units occupying them, **but do** block line of sight. Camp Core tiles are removed (and the hex reverts to hill terrain) when an Italian unit of any type unit enters the hex for any reason.

Walls of Asculum: There are five hextiles representing the “Walls of Asculum”, the major Northern Italian city that the Romans were besieging: Roman units may not enter or missile fire into such Wall hextiles and may never be ordered to enter **hexes** adjacent to the “Walls of Asculum”. The Romans may attack into such adjacent hexes to the Walls however with missile or close-combat attacks—Movement into such hexes adjacent to the Walls of Asculum via an advance after close combat is not allowed either.

Asculum Garrison Force Retreat/Evade Special Rules:

. Asculum Garrison force units and the Asculum Garrison Legate retreat/evade on Flag & other results **only towards** the **side edge** of the extended two maps where the Walls of Asculum are located per the three-hex retreat compass directions laid out in the two examples below. Scato relief force Italian units/leaders retreat/evade normally towards their edge of the map per the normal rules.

Examples: #1 The Asculum Garrison Legate leader was with a Medium Infantry unit that was eliminated in B11 Map 1 and survived his Leader evasion roll. He may evade initially into hexes A12, B12, and C12 on Map 1 per the three hex retreat compass and continue on in the same directions as the Italian player wishes

#2 An Asculum Garrison force Heavy infantry unit is forced to retreat one hex from hex C9 Map 1 after coming under close-combat attack from C8—it may retreat into hexes D9, C10, B9 per the three hex retreat compass if those hexes contain no friendly or enemy units.

Roman Army Special Rules:

Roman Elite Slingers:

The sole Roman Slinger unit hits on swords when executing missile fire against Italian light foot units & also hits on swords when battling-back in close combat against any Italian unit.

Roman-allied Gauls:

Both of the Roman Warrior units are allied Gauls. When reduced to two blocks they no longer are granted an automatic Momentum attack option when clearing a hex of enemy unless they are stacked with a Roman Leader.

The Social War: 91 BC to 88BC

The Social War in Italy began in late 91BC when, after a long period of unrest over the issue of Roman citizenship, the Italian peoples, who had linked up as allies in the last two centuries to the Roman state, revolted and formed the makings of their own republic. They called their new polity Italia and inaugurated their nation and their capital in the city of Corfinium that was itself renamed Italica. They created their own coinage to both pay their troops and as gilded popular propaganda against Rome. Their coins displayed the Italian bull gorging and raping the Roman wolf. The Italian armies of the new state were trained and led by the battle-hardened veterans of Rome's many wars, and were generally organized at the lower levels on the Roman pattern in Legions & cohorts. The peoples of Italia initially were able to field over a 100,000 men divided up into individual armies according to their positions within Italy.

The organization of the infant state of Italia mimicked the style of the Roman republic. Like the Romans the Italians selected two consuls to lead their armies and their new government. Lesser posts in the Italian republic were parceled out to prominent Italian nobles to head the forces newly raised from the various peoples of Central and South-Central Italy. The Italian consuls were Quintus Poppaedi Silo of the Marsi, and Gaius Papius Mutilus of the Samnites. The Italians also formed their own Senate of about 500 members.

The Roman Senate and people were caught by surprise at the sudden onset of the war and the genesis of Italia. They had to hastily cobble together Legions, recruit volunteers, levy taxes on the wealthy classes, and call for the help from their outer Imperial provinces as well as the Roman client kingdoms. Italia's very existence posed a dire threat to the integrity of what remained of the Roman confederation. Non-Roman or partly Roman/Latin areas of Italy, particularly in Umbria, northern Campania, and Etruria, as well as scattered & initially besieged cities like Alba Fucens, Acerrae, and Asernia remained precariously loyal to Rome, but almost all of Lucania, Apulia, and parts of southern Campania quickly moved into the Italian column via both Italian invasions and diplomacy. It was necessary for the Romans and their remaining loyal allies to survive the first onslaughts, and quickly recover from their early defeats as this would discourage further defections and allow time for Rome's ultimately superior resources and greater cohesion to be brought to bear.

The initial trigger for the start of the Social War in late 91BC was the assassination of the Roman Tribune Livius Drusus, who had proposed laws for the enfranchisement of the Italians and the purchase & distribution of land in Italy to settle lower-class Romans. He was struck down on the poorly lit portico of his house while conducting business with his clients one evening. A knife was discovered driven into his hip.

The Course of the Social War in 89BC: The Final Battles

For the year of 89BC the Romans elected as consuls Pompey Strabo (the father of Pompey the Great) and Lucius Cato, a scion of the famous patrician Cato family. Strabo was dispatched from Rome to his old stomping grounds in the north with several legions to reinforce the siege of Asculum that was being conducted by Sextus Caesar acting as pro-consul, while Cato, remaining near Rome, commanded the central front opposite the Marsi. This left Sulla, by default, in almost sole defacto command for Rome as legate in Campania where he soon laid blockade to the Italian-held town of Pompeii.

Sextus Caesar, for his part, was busily tightening the siege of Asculum to the point where one of the Italian generals, Vidacilius, lost all hope and committed an elaborate pre-planned suicide on a funeral pyre in the center of the town. He had broken into the siege with a handful of troops leaving the others outside to be defeated by Sextus Caesar when they were caught while switching camps. Reputedly up to 20,000 Italians were killed or captured in that action alone. Caesar, however, was unable to rest on his laurels dying soon after from some illness before Strabo had even arrived to take command.

Strabo, possibly while on the march from Rome, managed to intercept a force of 15,000 Picentes who were trying to make common cause with the Etruscans against the Romans without the knowledge that the domestic situation in Etruria had calmed down following the passage of the “Lex Julia” laws on Roman communal citizenship. The hapless Picentes were caught in the mountains—Strabo killed half of them and drove the other half toward the wintry peaks of the Apennine range where most of the remainder starved and froze.

On the central Marsic front the Romans sustained a major defeat and the loss of the second consul in the war to the fierce Marsi. Lucius Cato first faced insubordination from his own officers, as well as raw recruits, but managed to penetrate as far as Fucine Lake where his army was over-run and he fell in the fight.

Meanwhile to the north everything continued to focus on the siege of Asculum. After the defeat of Cato the Italians soon gathered about 60,000+ men to break the Roman blockade, while Strabo had up to 75,000 men under his command to combat their attempts. The Italian rebels were defeated in the major decisive northern battle of the war and Pompey Strabo hunted their remnants through the mountains of Picenum and back southwards into the Marsic and adjoining lands.

In Campania and surroundings equally dramatic and decisive military events unfolded with fortune’s favor strongly on the scales on behalf of Rome. Sulla’s threat to Pompeii and the other Italian-held coastal towns was disturbed by the arrival of large army of Samnites leavened with turncoat Gauls under the command of Cluentius. In a surprise move the Samnites took station close to Sulla’s hilltop camp provoking him to sally out before the return of his foragers from the nearby countryside. Sulla at first was defeated and had to draw back into his fortifications, but the arrival of his foragers on the field allowed another more successful attack. Cluentius was then himself also forced back

towards his camp and rallied back to the attack when he received reinforcement from the Gallic deserters. The Italian army advanced again, but was thrown into dis-order when the Gauls suddenly bolted supposedly over the loss of one of their number in a single combat with a Moor in Sulla's army. Cluentius' army was chased back some miles to the walls of Nola and cut to pieces with their commander right at the gate to that city.

The Italian-held cities of Campania were now at the mercy of Sulla's forces. Stabiae, Pompeii and Herculaneum soon fell to the Romans and Nola was left isolated. Sulla then embarked on his victorious campaign into Samnium, which with the Apulian debacles destroyed many of the remaining embers of the rebellion per the Cambridge Ancient History:

“This brilliant maneuver dealt telling blows against the Samnites and must have aided operations in Apulia and Lucania. Sulla first marched against the Hirpini and captured two of their cities, Aeclanum and Compsa. At Aeclanum, he forestalled the arrival of help from Lucania by giving the inhabitants one hour's notice of battle; he then set fire to the wooden walls and captured the city. Bursting into central Samnium by an unexpected route he surprised the Samnite commander, Papius Mutilus, and drove him in rout to Asernia. This success enabled him to strike at Bovianum Vetus, a principal city of the Samnites and a rebel headquarters, which fell after a short engagement. Leaving an army to blockade Nola, he went to Rome to stand for the consulship. In Apulia a competent (Roman) legate...Cosconius, recovered practically all the ground which had been lost to Vidacilius in the previous year. He burned Salapia and crushed a Samnite army on the northern bank of the Aufidus near Cannae. Winning freedom of movement by these victories he ravaged the territories of Larinum, Ausculum, and Venusia and secured the undulating moorlands which lie north of the Via Appia between Venusia and Tarentum...”

At the end of the year Cosconius was replaced in the field by Q. Caecilius Metellus who proceeded to attack the Iapygae defeating and killing the Italian general Poppaedi and incorporating the survivors of the rebel army into his force. Metellus also advanced further into northern Apulia stamping on the last sparks of the rebellion in those parts.

By the close of the year 89 BC the Italian rebellion that represented the issue of the Social War had been reduced, with the Marsic defections from the cause, mainly to the Samnite heartland. Silo the Italian consul of the Marsi took refuge among the Samnites and led them in the final campaign of the war. The Samnites tried to convert their national struggle into a confrontation between classes, freeing and arming some 20,000 slaves to beef up their forces. Initially that approach offered some success with the recapture of Bovianum Vetus and in skirmishes with Roman detachments. The desperate Samnites even sent embassies to King Mithridates in Asia seeking help and alliance against Rome. It was all for naught, the Samnites and their exiled Marsic consul were beaten down in a great battle later that year (88 BC) closing the book on the Social War, but as the famous Roman historian Appian notes (below) the war itself added greatly to the threats facing the creaky Roman Republic and the instability, factions, and conflicts

generated and brought to their fatal fruition by the war give rise to future civil disorder and internal wars in the decades to come:

'This was the state of affairs when the so-called 'Social War' broke out, involving the many peoples of Italy. It began unexpectedly, rapidly became serious, and caused enough apprehension to extinguish factional strife in Rome for some time. When it died down it too gave birth to other internal conflicts, and to faction leaders who were more powerful and employed against each other not legislative programmes, not demagoguery, but whole armies. And for these reasons I have included it in this history, because it originated in the civil dissensions in Rome and it resulted in much worse conflict of that type.' (From Appian's "Civil Wars" Book 1 Chapter 34 originally written in the early to mid-2nd century AD)