

By Mark Backhouse

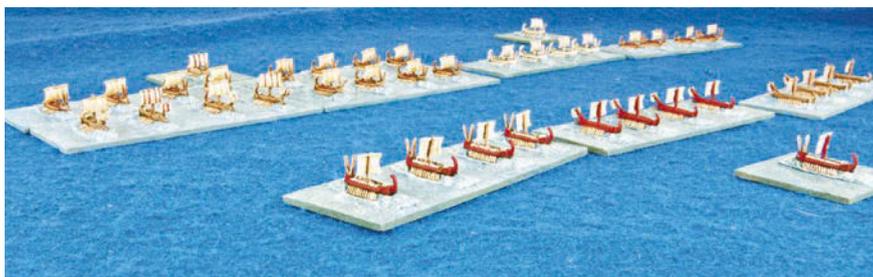
An ancients naval battle conversion

HAIL, AGRIPPA!

I was looking for a massed naval set of rules to recreate naval battles in the ancient world, but I couldn't find any set that met my needs. Most tend to focus on a bottom-up level of command, with emphasis on individual ships making tactical decisions. This can make for an entertaining game, but I was keen to recreate some of the larger battles of the period, and wanted to play the games from the perspective of an admiral commanding a large fleet of several hundred ships. In these sorts of battles, admirals would not have been concerned about the fate of individual ships, but would rather have focused on the bigger picture of whether his squadrons were breaking through, falling back, or disintegrating into a disordered mess.

David Manley wrote an interesting article, a decade or so back, that used the popular American Civil War set *Fire and Fury* as the basis for a large-scale tactical ancients naval game. I was inspired by this idea, but my budget constraints meant that, unless I used very small ship models (such as the excellent 1/3600 scale ships made by Outpost Wargames), I would need to have several bases of ships per unit. Instead, inspired by *Impetus*, a base of several models was used to represent a small squadron, and I kept this as the lowest-level unit that an admiral might conceivably send orders to. I chose 1/2400 scale as a good compromise between cost and visual appeal, using models from *Tumbling Dice*. Alternatively, ships at 1/1200 scale are available from *Langton and Navwar*, at 1/600 from *Xyston*, and at 1/300 from *Roman Seas* and *Steve Barber*.

The rules I ended up modifying were *Hail Caesar*. But my reckoning was that most Roman naval battles were just land battles at sea, and many of the



Ramming Speed!

special rules could be applied to the different types of ships to capture the feel of the period.

A NOTE ON SCALES

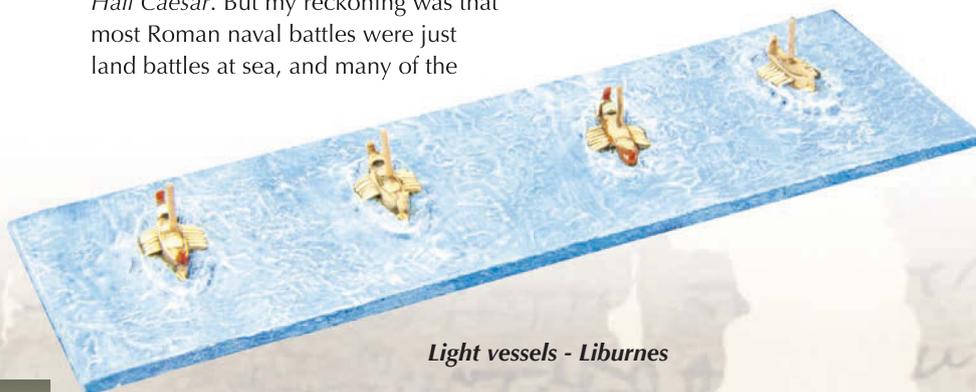
Distances are suggested for 1/2400 models. If you are using significantly larger ships (e.g. 1/600 or even 1/300), you will probably want to double these distances and base sizes. With 1/3600 models, you could halve all of the suggested sizes and distances. You might also want to place a few more ships on each base.

BASING

As long as both fleets are based in a similar way, don't worry too much about these suggestions. Ships should be organized into units. Ships can be based individually, or multiple ships can be stuck to a single base. A standard-size unit should have four ships and should fit into an area 12cm wide x 4cm deep. A small unit should have two or three ships, with a 9cm frontage and a 4cm depth. A large unit should have five or six ships, with a 15cm frontage and a 4cm depth. Commanders are placed singly on a base. Sizing is less important here, but I use a 4.5cm frontage and 4cm depth.

ORDERS

Orders are given in the same way as the normal game. These probably would have been communicated by waving flags or torches, playing instruments, or possibly using small, light ships to carry messages. If an admiral wishes to give



Light vessels - Liburnes



Single based command vessels.

an order to any units that are more than 6" away, they suffer from a -1 leadership modifier for every full 6" distance between them.

MOVEMENT

Ships in combat are assumed to use oars, rather than sails (if they have them), unless specifically mentioned by the player. Ships marked as 'sails' are reliant on their sails as their only form of propulsion.

- Light ships, 4.5" (Hemiolias, Penteconters, Biremes, Triremes)
- Heavy and Medium ships, 3" (Quadrirèmes, Quinqueremes, Hexeres)
- Super-heavy ships, 2.5" (Octeres, Deceres, and anything bigger!)
- Ships may row backwards at half normal speed, while continuing to face in the same direction.
- Sailing ship with the wind behind them, 4.5"
- Ships with the wind to their side, 3"
- Ships cannot sail heading into the wind. No movement into wind is possible with sail.

Units do not get a free move when in column formation. However, ships with their sails up may be allowed a free move if the wind is behind them, provided that it has been agreed beforehand by both players that the wind is of a sufficient strength.

Commanders can move either 12" (for lighter ship types) or 9" (for heavier ship types) per turn.

MANOEUVRES

Units may manoeuvre by use of wheeling: simply measure and move as you would do in the normal rules. Units may also turn 180 degrees on the spot. This is a free action for skirmishing small rowed craft. For light ships such as triremes and biremes, it takes one action; for heavy and super-heavy ships, it takes an entire turn. Note that this can be sped up with the 'Drilled Oarsmen' special rule.

Ships are assumed to be in an open order, with wide enough gaps between each ship so that other friendly ships may pass through them. Enemy ships, however, may not pass through your ships, except after a combat with a sweeping advance.

TERRAIN

Most sea is regarded as ordinary open terrain. Shallows reduce movement to a maximum of one move for all medium or larger ships (i.e. Quadrirème and above). Impassable shallows can only be moved through by units of small rowed craft. Land is obviously impassable for ships! Sandbanks can count as shallows or land, depending on the tide.

Sea battles tended to be fought in calm conditions. However, if you want to fight in choppy seas, roll 1D6 for each unit not at anchor in shallows. On a roll of 6, the unit suffers a hit. Ships equipped with a *corvus* are especially vulnerable, so roll two dice per unit.

SHOOTING

Anti-personnel shooting, such as javelins, slings and bows, all count as:

- Close-range shooting: 3"

Catapults, ballistas and other forms of artillery count as:

- Long-range shooting: 6"

This is an exaggeration of the ground scale at 1/2400 scale, but seems to work well for game-play.

"Beak met beak with a crunch, and no sooner met than they backed off. Volleys of missiles darkened the sky and fell into the empty sea."

Lucan's Civil War.

RAMMING, BOARDING AND CLOSE COMBAT

Ramming and boarding is covered by the normal *mêlée* rules in *Hail Caesar*. Ships specifically equipped for ramming gain the 'Rams' special rule. Faster, lighter ships also tend to have high clash scores and lower sustained combat scores, representing their vulnerability once they are locked in combat and boarding occurs.

Units of ships can support each other in the same way as in the normal rules, and it is assumed that this comprises some side rams and missile fire, as well as the psychological advantage of having allied troops nearby. Heavier ships are less manoeuvrable and therefore suffer from lower close-range support scores, as they would find it tricky to avoid ramming their friends!

Abstracted ancient naval tactics can be easily represented using the normal rules for supports. A *diekplous* ("break-through" manoeuvre) can be represented by placing a supporting unit behind the first. A *periplous* ("sailing around" manoeuvre) can be represented by adding additional supporting units on either flank.

When you check for break tests, the column you use is determined by the style of fighting of the ships involved. Very light ships act as skirmishers. Lighter ships reliant on ram-and-run tactics to disable their opponents count as cavalry. Medium and heavier ships, relying on rams to hold their opponent fast before boarding, count as infantry. This gives the heavier ships greater staying power in boarding and ramming.

Heavy vessels (Quinqueremes).





Examples of casualty markers.

DAMAGE

When a unit suffers hits, we can assume that they represent a combination of crew casualties, oars and rudders being sheared off, small fires, holes, running aground, or ships becoming water-logged or captured, and even reduced morale. The actual details do not particularly matter. Rather it is the overall picture for the group of ships and their effectiveness that is important. In the game, we represent this with a counter showing a partially sunk ship with a dial around the outside (we used the excellent ones from Warbases). For units that are 'disordered', we placed a small fire on one of the ships, represented by cotton wool, but the *Flames of War* fire markers for destroyed tanks would look really good, too!

SPECIAL RULES

Many of the special rules in *Hail Caesar* can be used straight out of the rule book, as is. These include: 'Brave', 'Drilled', 'Eager', 'Elite', 'Freshly Raised', 'Levy', 'Militia', 'Steady', 'Stubborn', 'Tough fighter', 'Valiant' and 'Wavering'. These can be used to differentiate between the crews and the marines from unit to unit. 'Feigned flight' can be particularly useful for depicting lightly-equipped pirate Hemiolas. 'Marauder' is a useful ability to give to light ships, where individual commanders have a high degree of autonomy and rely on speed and opportunism to ram their opponent's flanks.

TYPES OF SHIP

| Type of ship | Move | Clash | Sustained | Short ranged | Long ranged | Morale | Stamina | Notes/morale type |
|------------------------------|------|-------|-----------|--------------|-------------|--------|---------|-------------------|
| Small rowed e.g. Hemiolas | 4.5" | 3 | 2 | 3 | - | - | 4 | Skirmishers |
| Biremes | 4.5" | 5 | 3 | 3 | - | 6 | 6 | Rams/ Cavalry |
| Triremes | 4.5" | 6 | 4 | 3 | - | 5 | 6 | Rams/ Cavalry |
| Quadrirèmes | 3" | 6 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 6 | Rams/ Infantry |
| Quinqueremes | 3" | 7 | 7 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 6 | Rams/ Infantry |
| Hexeres | 3" | 7 | 8 | 4,2 | 3 | 4 | 7 | Rams/ Infantry |
| Octeres | 2.5" | 7 | 9 | 4,2 | 4 | 4 | 8 | Rams/ Infantry |
| Deceres | 2.5" | 8 | 9 | 4,2 | 4 | 4 | 9 | Rams/Infantry |
| Merchant | 3" | 3 | 3 | 3 | - | 5 | 6 | Oars or Sails |

Rams

Units with rams may counter-ram, just as cavalry can counter-charge if charged in their front arc.

Rams reduce their opponent's morale by one in the first turn of every new combat, if they are 'ramming' or 'counter-ramming'.

If a unit charging or counter-ramming with rams wins a combat, and their opponent is forced to retreat in good order or retreat disordered by a break test, the winning unit can opt instead to carry out a sweeping advance. The losing unit stays stationary and still suffers from the effects of disorder, if this was the result. This represents the ramming ships smashing their way through the opposing formation, and shearing oars as they go on to attack the formations on the other side.

"Two ships met head-on, and a sailor who chanced to be swimming in between was transfixd by their prows. This shattering impact totally smashed his chest. His bones

were ground to powder. Blood and guts smashed out in a ghastly stream from his mouth – still, nothing prevented the brazen beaks from closing together."
Lucan's Civil War.

Expert rammers

The Rhodians developed a reputation for their skill at ramming. By quickly moving their crews to the front of the ship just before impact, they could lower their ram so that it hit below the waterline, while their opponent's ram penetrated above the waterline. In game terms, when a unit of expert rammers declares a 'ram', their targets may not opt to 'counter-ram' as a ram reaction. This ability might also be used sparingly with other nationalities to represent particularly experienced units.

"The Rhodians withstood them and deployed shrewdly and skilfully, to such effect that, in spite of the inequality of numbers, none had their oars swept off; they met the enemy's onset head-on every time."
Caesar, The Civil War.



A fleet of Quinqueremes close on the enemy.



Will the Pompeian fleet hold?

Drilled oarsmen

Some seafaring nations developed particularly experienced and well trained groups of oarsmen, capable of carrying out much faster manoeuvres than their opponents. This might be used to represent the Athenian crews in the fifth century BC or the Carthaginian crews at the start of the First Punic War. Allow them to do a '180 degree turn' move, as if they were one class lighter than their normal ship manoeuvre speed. This would therefore mean that a unit of Athenian triremes with this ability could do a '180 degree turn' move for free and move 4.5", all in one action! Note that this ability can also be used in conjunction with the standard 'Drilled' ability from the rule book; however, this is a powerful ability and should be used with care when balancing out sides in a scenario. Using this ability will require orders.

Harpax

At the Battle of Naulochus in 36 BC, Marcus Agrippa pioneered an innovative new weapon – the *harpax*. It was a large metal grapple that could be fired at enemy ships and then used to haul them closer, ready for boarding. Units equipped with a *harpax* shoot up to long-range using their standard shooting dice. They can only be used to target enemy units with ships of equal size or smaller. For every 6 rolled, the target unit is moved 3" closer to the shooting unit, as it is dragged closer to it. The targeted unit is also disordered. This rule is used as an alternative to the standard break test caused by shooting, if natural 6s are rolled. If a target unit is dragged into contact, they may be engaged in mêlée, with the *harpax*-armed unit counted as ramming. Their opponents may not counter-ram.

"The grab was particularly highly valued. It fell on the ships from long range, it was light, and it became firmly fixed because it was hauled back by its ropes. It could

not easily be cut by its victims because of the iron sheathings, and its length made it extremely difficult for anyone cutting the ropes to reach them."

Appian, The Civil Wars.

Corvus

The *corvus* ('raven') was a boarding device first used by the Roman navy during the First Punic War, at the Battle of Mylae in 260 BC. It consisted of a gangway that could be dropped onto enemy ships in any direction and would be held firm with a large spike that penetrated the opponent's deck. Units of marines could then be manoeuvred onto the opposing ship to capture it. Units equipped with a *corvus* reduce their opponent's morale by one in any sustained mêlée.

The *corvus* was abandoned after the First Punic War, because ships that used them were regarded as too top-heavy and unstable in storms, following several disasters off the south coast of Sicily. Units equipped with the *corvus* are therefore more vulnerable in choppy seas.

"But when the ships that came into collision were in every case held fast by the machines, and the Roman crews boarded by means of the 'ravens' and attacked them hand-to-hand on deck, some of the Carthaginians were cut down and others surrendered from dismay at what was happening, the battle having become just like a fight on land."

Polybius, World History.

Unseasoned or waterlogged timbers

Often fleets were constructed in a hurry to meet an immediate need, and were made out of unseasoned timbers. Ships also became waterlogged if they were left out at sea for too long. This encouraged crews during the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars to beach their ships overnight, which in turn made them vulnerable to enemy attacks! Units with

unseasoned or waterlogged timbers would have been less capable of quick manoeuvre. They may only make a maximum of two moves, regardless of how low the leadership roll of the commander issuing orders is.

Sails

Most warships did not go into battle with their sails up, because it made them more vulnerable when rammed. A lot of gamers, however, will model sails on their ships for visual impact. On odd occasions, sails were kept onboard ships and used to make a quick getaway. It takes one full turn and a successful order to raise the sails of a unit. During this turn, they must remain stationary. Afterwards, they move using the sailing movement rates.

Overloaded

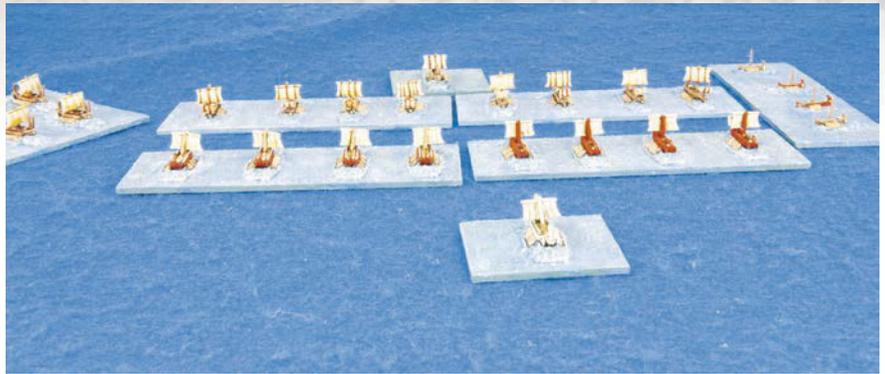
Often, ships were overloaded with a much larger complement than they were originally intended to carry. Overloaded ships may only carry out a maximum of one action per turn, regardless of the order given. If ships are overloaded with additional marines and soldiers, an optional +1 (or, in extreme cases, +2) may be added to the ship's sustained mêlée score.

QUICK MINI-CAMPAIGN – MASSILIA 49 BC

The Siege of Massilia was one of the first big battles in the civil war between Caesar and Pompey. The city of Massilia (modern day Marseilles) was a Greek colony with close ties to Rome. The city at first declared neutrality, but later supported Pompey. Two naval battles were fought in the bay at Marseilles, which make for a fun and fast mini campaign that can easily be played in an evening, with each game lasting between 30 minutes and an hour. They are also small scale, which means that the forces are easy to put together, and still represent the fleets at a 1:1 ratio of models to real ships.

Scenario 1 – First encounter

The Massiliotes led by Lucius Domitius rowed out of Massilia to break the siege. They brought with them seven-teen warships, eleven of which were decked, and a number of smaller ships. Facing them was a Caesarian fleet led by Decimus Brutus with twelve ships.



The Octavian and Ptolemaic fleets engage.

Terrain: The game can be played on a small table; 4' x 4' will be big enough, and 3' x 4' will be fine, at a push. A small island should be placed three-quarters of the way down the table; the Caesarian fleet starts the game moored here. The Massiliotes start the game deployed within 6" of the opposite edge. If larger scaled ships are used, these will obviously need to be adjusted!

The Massiliote Fleet

Led by Lucius Domitius; he has a Leadership rating of 8.

The Caesarian Fleet

Led by Decimus Brutus; he has a Leadership rating of 8.

The first unit of Quinqueremes was manned by a special corps of selected men, who were chosen for their courage; hence, their 'Valiant' status. The fleet had been built quickly at Arelate and the ships are known to have been particularly handicapped by the unseasoned timbers used in their construction.

Victory conditions and consequences

The Caesarians win if they destroy three or more Massilian units. The Massilians

win if they destroy two or more Caesarian units. Note that, for this scenario only, shattered units do not count towards army breaks.

If the Caesarians win, play scenario 2 as described below. If the Caesarians lose, remove the unit of captured Quadriremes from their list and replace it with an ordinary-sized standard bireme unit, taken from the generic lists.

Historically, the Caesarians won and captured six Massilian ships.

Scenario 2 -The Pompeian relief force

Pompey sent a relief fleet of sixteen Roman ships to reinforce Massilia, led by Lucius Nasidus. The ensuing battle was fought in the same location in the bay of Marseilles, so the terrain can stay the same. Again, a small table should be able to accommodate this scenario. The deployment is the same as in the first scenario. However, Lucius Nasidus must deploy his command at least 12" away from the Massilians on the same table edge.

The Pompeian Fleet

Lucius Domitius has a Leadership rating of 8 and controls the four Massilian units. Lucius Nasidus has a Leadership rating of 7 and controls the four Roman units.

The Romans withdrew from the battle early on, leaving the Massilians to be defeated – hence, the 'Wavering' classification and low Leadership score of Nasidus.

The Caesarian Fleet

Led by Decimus Brutus; he has a Leadership rating of 8. A second sub-commander with a Leadership rating of 8 can also be used to command the Quadriremes as a separate division.

Victory conditions

The Pompeians win if they break three of the four Caesarian units. The Caesarians win if five of the eight Pompeian units break.

Historically, the second battle was won fairly convincingly by the Caesarians,

THE MASSILIOTE FLEET

| Unit | Move | Clash | Sustained | Short ranged | Long ranged | Morale | Stamina | Notes/ morale type |
|-----------------------|------|-------|-----------|--------------|-------------|--------|---------|------------------------|
| 2 x Small rowed Units | 4.5" | 3 | 2 | 3 | - | - | 4 | Skirmishers, marauders |
| 3 x Quadrireme units | 3" | 6 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 6 | Rams/ Infantry |

THE CAESARIAN FLEET

| Unit | Move | Clash | Sustained | Short ranged | Long ranged | Morale | Stamina | Notes/ morale type |
|------------------|------|-------|-----------|--------------|-------------|--------|---------|---|
| Quinqueremes | 3" | 7 | 7 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 6 | Rams, Unseasoned timbers, Valiant. Infantry |
| 2 x Quinqueremes | 3" | 7 | 7 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 6 | Rams, Unseasoned timbers. Infantry |

POMPEIAN FLEET

| Unit | Move | Clash | Sustained | Short ranged | Long ranged | Morale | Stamina | Notes/ morale type |
|------------------------------|------|-------|-----------|--------------|-------------|--------|---------|--------------------------|
| 2 x Small rowed Ships | 4.5" | 3 | 2 | 3 | - | - | 4 | Skirmishers, marauders |
| 2 x Quadriremes 4 x Roman | 3" | 6 | 5 | 3 | 3* | 5 | 6 | Rams, Infantry |
| Quinqueremes | 3" | 7 | 7 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 6 | Rams, Wavering, Infantry |

CAESARIAN FLEET

| Unit | Move | Clash | Sustained | Short ranged | Long ranged | Morale | Stamina | Notes/ Morale type |
|--|------|-------|-----------|--------------|-------------|--------|---------|-------------------------|
| 1 x Quinqueremes | 3" | 7 | 7 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 6 | Rams, Valiant, Infantry |
| 2 x Quinqueremes | 3" | 7 | 7 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 6 | Rams, Infantry |
| 1 x Large unit of captured Quadriremes | 3" | 8 | 7 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 8 | Rams, Infantry |

after a bitter struggle. The Pompeian relief force proved useless and abandoned the struggle early on. Demoralized by their naval defeats and after a long siege, Massilia eventually capitulated.

THE BIG BATTLE - ACTIUM 31 BC

Following the breakdown of the Second Triumvirate, Octavian and Mark Antony clashed to decide the fate of the Roman Republic. The battle was fought off the coast of Actium in western Greece. Mark Antony's fleet was attempting to break out of the Ambracian Gulf, where they had been bottled up by the aggressive naval strategy of Agrippa, Octavian's general.

Suffering from malaria, desertion, and a shortage of rowers, Antony had been forced to destroy some of his own ships. In the ensuing battle, Antony's fleet was drawn out into open waters away from the coast, where it was enveloped by Agrippa's squadrons and defeated. Cleopatra's squadron escaped once the sides were engaged, taking with her the Ptolemaic war-chests, which were essential for supporting the war effort. Antony abandoned his fleet and escaped with her, only to commit suicide later on in Egypt.

This is a considerably larger battle than the one at Massilia, but can be played out happily in an evening. Exact figures for the battle are hazy, but each base roughly translates into fifteen ships. Octavian's 24 bases, therefore, equate to about 360 actual ships, versus Antony's 16 bases, representing about 240 ships. The larger ships in Antony's fleet are probably over-represented using this

system. However, it does seem to capture the emphasis that Roman writers placed upon these behemoths.

The game will need to be played on a 6' x 4' table or larger. While the coastline looks aesthetically pleasing, it is not a requisite for a good game. The two fleets deploy up to 9" in from either of the long edges. You could use the historical deployment of the squadrons' positions, or take it in turns to alternately deploy squadrons. Mark Antony's fleet count as escaping, if they can leave anywhere along Octavian's side of the table.

Octavian and Agrippa's fleet

Agrippa (Left Flank and C in C). Leadership rating 9.

While technically subordinate to Octavian, Agrippa made the tactical decisions during this battle.

- 5 x Quinqueremes, 3 x Biremes (Drilled, Marauders).

Arruntius (Centre). Leadership rating 8.

- 4 x Quinqueremes, 2 x Quadriremes, 2 x Hexeres.

Octavian (Right Flank). Leadership rating 8.

- 5 x Quinqueremes, 3 x Biremes (Marauders).

Mark Antony and Cleopatra's fleet

Antony (Centre and C in C). Leadership rating 8.

- 1 x Deceres, 1 x Octeres, 2 x Quinqueremes.

Publicola (Right flank). Leadership rating 8.

- 4 x Quinqueremes.

Sosius (Left flank). Leadership rating 8.

- 4 x Quinqueremes.

Cleopatra (Reserve). Leadership rating 8.

- 2 x Hexeres, 1 x Quadriremes, 1 x Merchants. (All have sails. The merchant ships have the Ptolemaic war-chests on board.)

Victory conditions

Mark Antony wins a minor victory if he can escape with Cleopatra, along with the war-chests on the merchant ships in Cleopatra's squadron. He wins a major victory if he can escape with Cleopatra and the war-chests, along with at least four other unspent units.

Octavian wins a minor victory if at least half of Mark Antony's fleet is destroyed.

He wins a major victory if both Mark Antony and Cleopatra are killed and the Ptolemaic war-chests are captured.

When Mark told the purveyor of the ships of Hail, Agrippa! the latter produced a suitably shocked face. However, when shown the pictures of Mark's article, he admitted that's how naval warfare should look. Hail, Agrippa! is due to be expanded further. Mark has plans to create more coastal scenery and even a walled town, all in the correct scale.

All ships from Tumbling dice.
Casualty markers from Warbases.