

Religion and Spirituality in AVGVSTVS to AVRELIAN

by Phil Hendry



Ancient peoples were very religious, and superstitious. They had spiritual explanations for many natural phenomena - thunder and lightning, earthquakes, storms, etc., and in the sphere of human experience, such things as illness and disease, childbirth, etc.

In AVGVSTVS to AVRELIAN, as in most historical miniature wargames, we have ignored the influence of religion, belief, magic, etc - what we might term, loosely, spirituality. This is probably due, in no small part, to a desire to show ourselves to be 'rational', and to distance ourselves from 'mere' fantasy gamers, the results of many of whose games seem to us to hinge on the result of a single spell or invocation. But I would suggest that we may have been 'missing a trick'.

We ourselves may be far too sophisticated to go in for all that spirituality stuff, but the little men we play with, (who, we mustn't forget, represent real, ancient, people) probably do believe in gods, magic, religion, omens, augurs, etc., and in most cases, pretty whole-heartedly. And in this case it is, I contend, the belief that matters, not whether or not the gods, magic and omens are actually real. If the people our little men represent believed they were real, then that belief is going to have influenced their attitudes and actions. Therefore, in our 'modelling' of a small slice of 'reality' on our tabletops, our little men should display something of the effects of those beliefs too.

The guidelines, or optional rules which we present here are an attempt at modelling the effect spirituality might have on the actions of our armies.

Pre-Battle Ritual

Ancient generals were often either priests themselves, or had priests accompanying them, who would perform many duties, not least among which would be performing sacrifices and interpreting signs and omens before battle. Often these ceremonies would be performed before the army left camp to deploy for battle. The 'results' of these ceremonies would very rapidly percolate through the whole army, and could have a strong influence on morale. If the omens were good, men might well believe that the gods were on their side, and go out to fight full of confidence that they were going to win. If on the other hand, the omens were bad, men might not fight so well - or even refuse to leave camp and fight at all, terrified that they had lost favour with the gods, and were bound to lose.

The simplest way to decide whether an army is confident or not is simply to roll an ordinary die. On a roll of 1, the omens are bad, whilst on a roll of 6, the omens are good. Of course, you might decide it would be more 'atmospheric' to 'draw lots' or something... Coloured pebbles in a bag, drawing straws - or whatever means your imagination suggests!

Once battle is joined...

The effect of the omens are strictly limited, and temporary. A bad omen causes a -1 penalty on Reaction Tests, whilst a good omen causes a +1 bonus.

The effects last until an 'opposing' result occurs - so, for instance, if an army has suffered a bad omen, it will continue to suffer the -1 penalty until or unless a unit passes a Reaction Test, at which point the army begins to believe that something has happened to negate the effect of the omen (perhaps an eagle has flown west over the army, or something). After that, they won't be subject to the penalty any longer.

