

# **Maritime Warfare in Northern Europe 500BC-1500AD**

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## **Review by Rob Morgan**

This volume, I came upon it by chance the other afternoon, edited by a committee of historians, is a collection of 25 papers presented to a seminar held in Copenhagen in 2000, and it's not easy to find, though copies exist in many academic libraries, and I presume at Greenwich. Fortunately, all but one of the papers in the collection are in English, and most of them have significant value to the naval wargamer in the medieval and renaissance periods. Others are of interest to those with a combined-ops outlook, and those with an interest in fortifications and the logistics of naval warfare.

The book, which is very well illustrated throughout, opens with a description and commentary on the ancient Hjortspring boat, which it asserts is the oldest known northern plank-built warship. I don't know anyone who actually ventures as far back as that in wargames terms, though conversion and model making are no problem at all. But there follows an interesting and well written chapter on the attacks on Denmark from the sea in the Late Roman period. This provides a great deal of material on raiding in particular, and information which will carry over to later eras. Jan Bill provides a paper entitled 'castles at sea' on the subject of ships used in war in the High Middle Ages, and it's a short, well-detailed account with a sound bibliography. Very useful!

The paper which follows deals with the amphibious capacity of the medieval Danish armies, an unusual topic, but one well worth some consideration by naval as well as land warfare enthusiasts, as is the paper by Michael Mortensen on 'Early Danish artillery' at sea from 1500 to 1523. His consideration of the Danish king's ship *Maria* of 1512-25 provides a good readable foil for the better known *Mary Rose* material. While I found the paper entitled 'Bastard Navies' - offensive armies with its wealth of information an incredible read, the idea of a 'fighting dog' as part of an oared warship's complement is a new one on me!

That this volume is 'Baltic-oriented' comes as no surprise, and the papers on naval bases in Scandinavia from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the

structures of naval warfare, military boathouses, shore defences and fortifications are all valuable to the naval wargamer. Not merely to those of us with a mass of longships! One intriguing aside in the work is a paper by Berengere le Cain, on the defensive port of Harfleur, reading which will be of interest to those with an inclination towards the 100 Year War for instance, and I certainly didn't know most of the author's quoted sources!

Strategy at sea, the Viking ship-levies, and the history and archaeology of 11<sup>th</sup> century warships provide further useful chapters, and I particularly enjoyed the run of chapters on Danish and Norwegian maritime warfare in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and on naval war between 1000-1300AD. Both providing valuable additions to what we commonly refer to as expert (sic) knowledge! Some chapters, naturally, will be of less interest, those which deal with the references to naval conflict in poetry, and naval laws, though the concluding papers include a short and very interesting piece by Richard Unger on the origins of navies in the late Middle Ages, which stands up magnificently for war at sea in the cold waters of the north, in comparison with the early might of Mediterranean 'super-states'. A few of Unger's references surprised me, and from my own point of view, the sooner I can obtain a copy of Macdougall's much quoted Edinburgh volume 'Scotland and War from AD79-1918' the better! If I can find it, I'll review it.

This is a superb collection of papers, and far from being the record of a dry archaeologists symposium, it is a beautiful volume which, though access to a copy is not going to be easy, provides a solid base line for the Medieval, the Renaissance and the Dark Ages naval and combined ops wargamer.

Worth knowing about.