

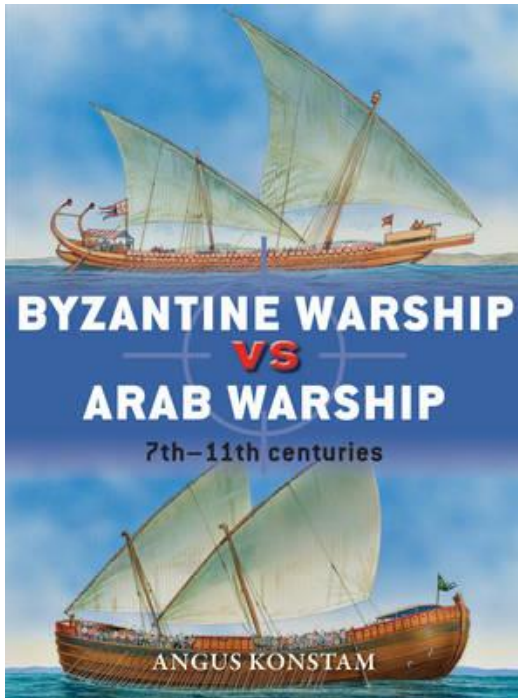
Byzantine Warship vs Arab Warship: 7th – 11th centuries

Osprey Duel series No. 64 (2015)

Text by Angus Konstam; illustrations by Peter Dennis

Review by Jonathan Aird

I am going to admit up front that the Duel series is not one of the Osprey strands that appeals to me very much to the extent that I have only two titles from it (it currently runs to some seventy books). There's something a bit 'bitty' about a lot of them. A bit of background on, say,



one tank, probably already covered by a New Vanguard, then a bit of background on a not very similar tank that's also covered by a New Vanguard. A little bit of combat assessment and all wrapped up with some pretty pictures. However, every now and again there is a title on a subject that hasn't really been covered before. And if it happens to be one of the areas of history that really interests me and I suspect that readers of *Lone Warrior* know by now that galley warfare in the Mediterranean is very much my thing then so very much the better.

There are very few easily available books that cover the Byzantine Dromons or the Arab Shalandiyyat in any detail at all, so this title by one of the better authors from Osprey's roster of regular writers is a very welcome addition. There is a good setting of the naval scene in the early

medieval period covered by the book, and a detailed chronology of engagements from small encounters to larger sea battles. This is followed by a detailed development of both classes of ships from typically monoremes to larger bireme craft, along with discussions of the construction of the ships and how they were crewed. This is all perfect for the wargamer looking to model these ships for sea battle games. The remainder of the book concentrates on the tactical doctrine, especially how it related to the crewing and the equipping of the ships with distance weapons such as catapults and close-in defences, such as Greek Fire projectors. If this section doesn't get you reaching for your galley rules-writing pencil then nothing will! The volume rounds out with a series of more detailed discussions of encounters.

There aren't the standard seven plates in the middle of the book and instead there is a profusion of illustrations throughout with black-and-white reproductions of ship representations in graffito, colour copies of painted works and a number of colour plates of the ships showing the development over the time span. Profuse is, in fact, hardly adequate to cover the level of good quality illustrations.

The excellent concluding analysis openly admits that the usual Duel approach of summing up the protagonists of the book through an analysis of statistics -- the 'this tank was 3mph faster than that tank, but its armour was 2mm thinner and so it's just isn't possible. What Angus Konstam does do though is produce a good overall assessment of these classes of ship, a

comparison of typical offensive capability through crewing and weaponry, which comes to the not surprising conclusion that they were fairly evenly matched and were both often subject to the capabilities of their commanders and the vagaries of the weather for their success or failure.

The great shame for the wargamer who has read this inspirational volume is the dearth of models to use in games. The time period falls uncomfortably between the naval periods of Ancients and Renaissance and the vessels available in relative profusion for both of these do not well represent a Dromon or a Shalandi. Navwar has some 1/1200th Dromons but that's about it. Outpost Wargames Services make a single 1/1200th Medieval Galley, which whilst very nice to my eye is neither one of the ships or the other. Some somewhat unsatisfactory Shalandiyyat could be created by converting a sailed merchant vessel, otherwise it's probably going to be a case of trying to carve hulls from balsa wood. It is to be hoped that the appearance of this book will encourage Navwar or Langton to expand their coverage into this period of history. If anyone knows of an existing manufacturer I'd really like to know!