

The Barbary Pirates 15th-17th Centuries
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By Angus Konstam; illustrations by Gerry Embleton
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Review by Jonathan Aird

Contents:

Introduction
Historical Background
The First Corsairs
Chronology 1450-1660
The Barbary Coast
The Barbary States
The Ships
The Pirates
Techniques & Tactics

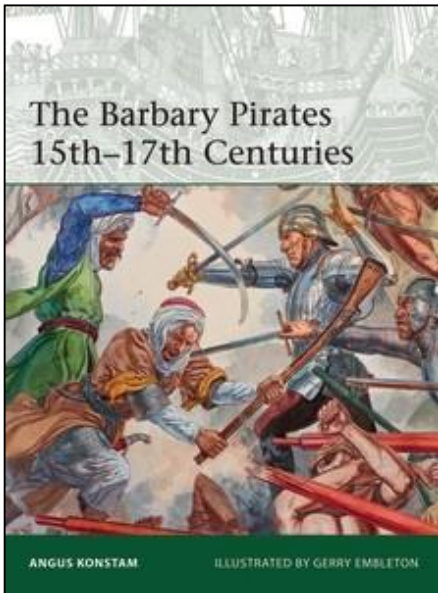
Plates:

A: Raid on Corsica c.1480
B: Galley Armament & Barbary Galiot
C: Action against a Venitian Galley c.1540
D: Polacca & Tartans (ship types)
E: Barbary Kebec, early 17th century
F: Turgut Reis at battle of Preveza, 1538
G: European Renegads, c. 1620
H: Barca Longas, early 17th century

Comments:

I was particularly pleased to see *The Barbary Pirates 15th-17th Centuries* listed as a release for this year as it covers one of my favourite periods of wargaming, and additionally an area of military conflict that I find fascinating ó galley warfare in the age of gunpowder. This book offers an excellent primer to the period from the non-European perspective. The Barbary Coast stretched along the northern shores of Africa ó from the Empire of Morocco in the east, through Algiers to Tunis and Tripoli in the west ó a constant threat to Christian shipping in the Mediterranean. They were particularly feared because their main plunder was people ó slaves to be traded in the markets of Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli. The Barbary Pirates is something of a misnomer, as Angus Konstam quickly acknowledges. For the most part, they were licensed operatives ó what the European seafaring nations liked to call Privateers. It's a tricky point in general as one nation's semi-heroic Privateers are, of course, Pirates to all those that they prey on. Konstam actually prefers the term Barbary Corsairs ó although he also sees similarities to the Buccaneers of the Caribbean as the Barbary Corsair also undertook assaults on towns and villages to supplement their exploits at sea. The main thing that Angus Konstam does in his discussion of nomenclature is to defuse the demonization of the Barbary Pirates. Were they nice people? Well, not really. Were they any worse than contemporaries like Drake -- who traded in slaves - or the buccaneer Henry Morgan, who raided and pillaged? Again, not really.

The origins of the Barbary Pirates is traced back to the Arab conquests of North Africa in the 7th century, leading to the formation of several kingdoms that vied with each other for power and would in time come under Ottoman influence. Following the fall of Constantinople, the



Ottoman Empire extended its influence into the Barbary states by having Turkish captains establish privateering bases in them. The careers and exploits in this period of some of the most notable captains of Kemal Reis and Oruc and Khizr oBarbarossaö -- are briefly recounted, giving plenty of fodder for wargame scenarios and as does the four-page chronology of the period covered by the book with useful details of the most notable battles and raids, including ones as far from their bases as Cornwall.

However, good as the history section is, the best is yet to come of the chapter covering the ships tracing the changes over the period from a purely galley-based force and embodied by the fast and agile *galiots* (ships with 16 to 20 oars per side) and through the use of small sail craft such as the *xebec*, to the use of European-looking *carracks*, often brought into the fleets by renegade European crews. This later, a feature of the early 17th century Barbary

Pirates, offers the potential for a wonderfully varied crew for a ship of the period with men in European, Ottoman and North African garb mixing on the same vessel. If one were to consider a game in larger scales utilising just a couple of ships per side and or a couple of ships raiding a small village and then a very attractive setup could be achieved and plate G in this book illustrates the possible diversity very well. In fact, all the plates in this book and whether of crewmen or the vessels they used and are beautifully done. Gerry Embleton's drawings offer very evocative scenes, and ones such as the boarding of a Venetian vessel well illustrate the variation in weaponry and armour used by the two sides. Alongside these are a good number of colour reproductions of, predominantly, the ships and there were several that were new to me -- including in the captions where the originals are would have been useful though. Some are full-blown artworks by professional artists and others are watercolour sketches by sailors recording actions they had witnessed or been involved in; both offer useful details as modelling and painting guides.

The sections on life on board and crew to soldiery ratios is interesting, with Konstam noting that one advantage the Barbary Pirates often had over their victims was that the smaller ships would be crewed with free men and so even the oarsmen could join in the fighting to capture a ship if required. This chapter leads neatly into a discussion of techniques and tactics with a typical raiding o'cruiseö being described, along with other details that can be used to inform the development of gaming rules and believable scenarios. When a vessel's main treasure was itself, and the crew as soon-to-be slaves, a different approach was required to capturing it and destruction of the vessel and destruction of the crew were both bad for business.

It's no secret that I greatly enjoy books on galley warfare and particularly Renaissance galley warfare and but even taking that inbuilt bias into account I can heartily recommend this book to anyone looking for an introduction to this fascinating topic. And, if you already share that interest, then you probably already know that one can never really have too many books on galleys!