

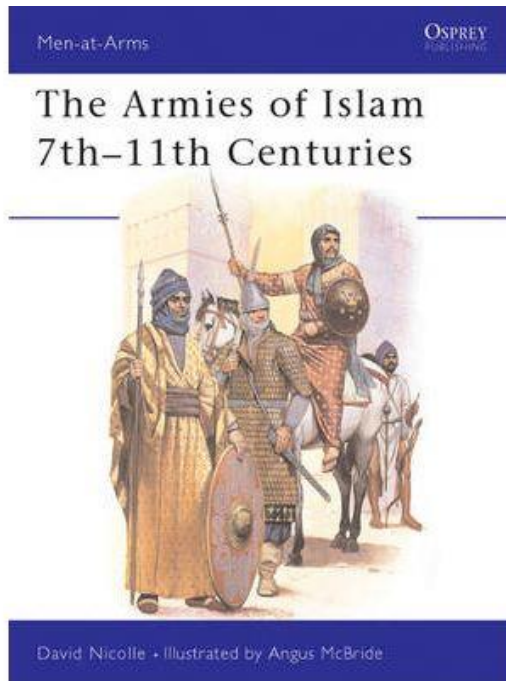
The Armies of Islam 7th-11th Centuries
Osprey Men-at-Arms series No. 125 (1982)
Text by David Nicolle; colour plates by Angus McBride

Review by Rob Morgan

This early Osprey is one I didn't buy when it was first published. I came to it by way of another Early Medieval volume, which is rather neglected now, but given the way that the modern world unfolds in a military sense, is ripe for rediscovery. That work is by John Bagot Glubb (known as 'Glubb Pasha') and titled 'The Great Arab Conquests', my copy is old and was published in 1963; there are more modern editions. The book, written by the commander of the vaunted Arab Legion, deals with just 50 years of history, from 630AD to 680AD, in which the Bedouin of Arabia established an empire as substantial as Rome's and by far the greatest of that era. This 370-page title ranges from Tangier to Samarkand, and is filled with battle and campaign maps and provides material for a wargames scenario of immense depth and variety. More of that later.

Glubb Pasha's competent text lacks the illustrations and artwork of the Osprey title, and the two together are supportive reads, though Nicolle's work travels a few centuries further along a fascinating road. The Chronology of Nicolle is detailed and needs careful examination, as this is a military world of depth and complexity, displaying immense strength and versatility. Interestingly, on page 5 he provides examples of the known orders of battle of Turks, Persians, Yemenis and Indians, and also provides examples of the elaborate flags and banners flown at one of the key battles examined by Glubb's seminal work, which took place at Siffin 675AD. Nicolle considers the first Arab armies, and provides notes on the rise of heavy cavalry, of horse archers, and their development as states rose and fell and gave way to other empires and loyalties. Though never given the prominence deserved on the table top, the role of infantry in the wars of the Arabs is well covered here. Horse archery continued to be a prominent feature of these forces as the centuries progressed of course, but Nicolle moves on to give thought to the European influence on the Arabs, gained through their Iberian territories, Andalus especially.

I liked the pages which deal with 'Tactics & Styles of Combat', as here the writer provides useful wargames notes on the role of champions in single and group combat, of raiding forces, on land and at sea; also of defensive actions, sieges (at which the Arabs excelled) and the complexities of combat between different Arab forces in the field (very useful this!). He touches too upon Western Islamic tactics in Spain, and with this the book ends. It's written for the wargamer, and well written. Illustrations are excellent too.



The plates are, as always from the late Angus, exceptionally well drawn, from the earliest troops of the 7th and 8th centuries through to the semi-cataphract cavalry and horse archers of Persia and Transoxiana a century later. The African troops in plate D are particularly interesting, and in many ways the figures illustrated are generic. The Andalus troops at plate F clearly display the immense European influence in armour and weaponry. The Fatamids, at plate G,

however, are what most wargamers would know as Arab medieval soldiers. The plates end with a group of 10th century frontier troops, enemies of the Byzantines, and these attractive drawings show figures which would not be out of place in much of Europe. Superb art work colourful and informative.

As for wargames figures, well, I am not even going to begin to suggest ranges. Its true that there are decent Islamic and Arab models, cavalry, infantry and camelry as well as a few heavy weapons in so many manufacturersølists. In 15mm on 25mm or if you want the larger battles 6mm scale. Irregular make a decent range in this smaller scale, by the way, but weøve come a long way since I first opposed a few Crusaders from the Airfix -Robin Hoodøset with converted Airfix Arabs.