

Medieval Scandinavian Armies (2) 1300-1500

Osprey Men-at-Arms Series No. 399 (2003)

Text by David Lindholm and David Nicolle; illustrated by Angus McBride

Review by Rob Morgan

Progressing neatly from the earlier volume that covers Scandinavian armies from 1100 to 1300, this Osprey opens with a note on the political background of a complex part of the medieval world, and a lengthy chronology. This was, in military and naval terms especially, a busy time for the Scandinavian world. What I wonder did happen to the population of the Western Settlement of Greenland in 1350?

The following notes on weapons and armour in the period are interesting, and suggest a quality to Scandinavian bowmen and crossbowmen which might not come to mind at first. The development of gunpowder weaponry is mentioned, but seems to have lagged far behind the south and west of Europe. While for information on armour, much weight is placed on the Visby grave-finds, not surprisingly.

In terms of military organisation and activity, one campaign, unknown to me, seems worthy of examination: Albrecht of Mecklenberg's forces using Gotland as a naval base for raiding in the late 1300s, harried the Baltic end to end. While on land, there's some useful war game information about the *bratar*, a form of medieval fortified roadblock, in frequent use. There certainly is potential for different wargames on the table top in this latter era in the frozen north! The authors continue with notes on fortifications, and indeed Scandinavia's castles are little reported in most of the fortifications journals I read, and make these notes valuable; the notes on siege warfare with which they conclude are again suggestive of a time-lapse with the southern parts of Europe in terms of implementation of 'best practise.' I liked the idea of a floating siege tower though, very Alexander the Great!

The reading list offered is not exhaustive, and in some cases obscure, as far as the English language reader's concerned. In this, as in the first volume of war in Scandinavia, it's Angus McBride's plates which make the text live. His double plate B and C on the last stand at Visby 1361, is superb and valuable for the wargamer. While Plate E, dealing with an attack on a *bratar* in the early 1400s provides splendid differential detail for painting Swedish forces. Plate G again is a very well-produced set of figures; the Danish man-at-arms shown at the Battle of Blankenburg 1471 is positively Yorkist in style and flair.

One point that could be made is that the key battles of the era are not well covered, and require much more investigation to become possible table top games. Visby and Blankenburg are examples. The line drawings and the illustrations in the text are again not well known subjects for the wargamer, and have some sound value.

I enjoyed both of these titles, and indeed have returned to them again and again, while thinking about Albrecht's fleet of raiders, and the concept of the Baltic *bratar* roadblock.

Men-at-Arms

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D. Lindholm and D. Nicolle - Illustrated by Angus McBride