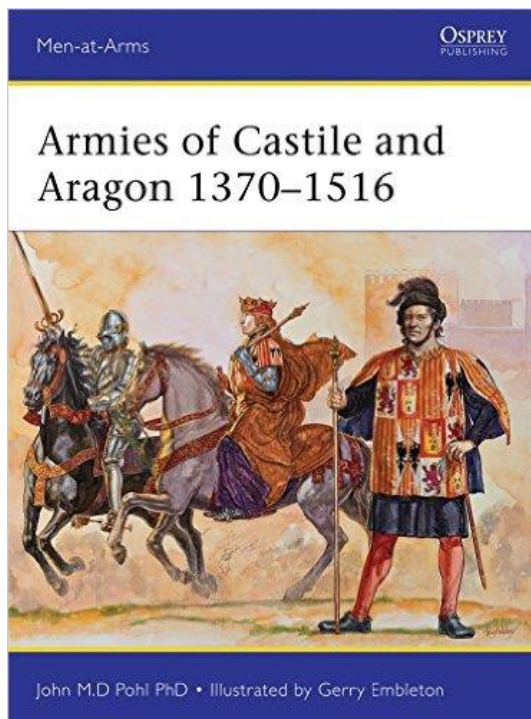


Armies of Castile and Aragon 1370-1516
Osprey Men-at-Arms series No. 500 (2015)
By John Pohl; illustrated by Gerry Embleton

Review by Rob Morgan

An Osprey long overdue!

The introduction is refreshing, the chronology is perfect and sets the text firmly in place. Dr. Pohl begins by dealing with the reign of Pedro the Cruel, in which there was some significant English and French military involvement, and ended with his death in which Bertrand du Guesclin had some hand! The book shows its merits in the concise description of weaponry and usage and the campaigns of the late 1300s, when John of Gaunt arrived. There's potential for a tremendous solo campaign wargame here, with Gaunt attempting a traditional multi-national *chevauchee* deep into Castile's territory, only to be confounded by a more effective Spanish tradition, the *Razzia*, raids and persistent small-scale ambushes on the column, which was already reduced by sickness. The *Razzia* has potential for solo wargame development which has I think, never been truly recognised, and in a military fashion continued into Bonapartist and even Civil War times.



There's a short section on sea power, compact and useful, recording another splendid Iberian commander overlooked by most writers, Pero Nino. By 1420, Castile was a formidable sea power at a time when England was selling off Henry V's ships and abandoning the sea! There follows an account of the campaigns of Fernando I and Alfonso V, both against Granada and in Italy, again campaigns and encounters which have very much to offer the medieval wargamer, though not perhaps as solo games. I enjoyed the short section on castles versus cannon, in particular. Pohl considers the hold Alfonso gained over Naples and over much of the Mediterranean, of course, and writes the book as a Renaissance text, slipping Machiavelli in very neatly! Some SWA readers may remember the motto of the old US journal *The Reiter*: It is better to be feared than loved.

The rise of Isabel and Ferdinand next follows, and this is the core of the text (I'd recommend reading it alongside Osprey's Campaign No.53 *Granada 1492*) and the author describes the careful and skilled development of their joint army. He also touches on the vital role of Aragon's fleet in the conquest of Islamic Spain. There's a brief consideration of the Caribbean adventures, and so Columbus does appear! The book ends on the upbeat note of the much overlooked Commander De Cordoba and his splendid victories in Italy including the victories at Cerignola and Garigliano in 1503, and a description of the new tactics he created to take apart the Swiss pike blocks. The

bibliography is substantial, but in fact since this is a well known and oft-examined period in European history publications, it could easily have been double those listed!

A splendid production, well supported by maps and line illustrations, and by the Embleton plates; in the latter, quite a few monarchs compared to rank and file soldiery, but plate B3 of a light javelinman of the late 1300s is exceptionally useful, as is the plate E of ordnance and archers serving in Italy. While the Neapolitan foot soldier at plate D3 has to be the most exotic uniform job in medieval history, he would make a Landsknecht look drab! The plate of Isabella of Castille is magnificent, and a figure (I don't know of one) in this outfit has serious table top command potential! This is another hit as an Osprey.

In wargaming terms, well in 20mm scale LW make a Spanish Army which will supply late-period foot figures, about half of the box will serve, and Red Box, not the easiest of figures to find, make two sets of mounted Jinettes, which again will serve in part. After that, well, even converting some of the Swiss infantry and odd artillery around, you'll be struggling.

Not a great deal better off in 15mm scale either. Irregular Medieval series of knights will give you one early Spanish knight, along with some others, AB 29 will make a good Castillian. You'll find a couple of Jinettes (as in plate B2) and suitable figures for Granadan horse archers in Spanish service. AB 31, a slinger, is useful and typical as an auxiliary foot soldier. Take a look at Peter Pig's 15mm Wars of the Roses range for later Castilians, particularly gunners, pikemen and characters. If the colonial adventures post-1492 interest you, then try ERM's 16th century range, which will add a few more Europeans, as will their Colonial Portuguese, but be very selective. Natives (Plate G3) can be from Mick Yarrow and Peter Pig. Just a few suggestions, often it's the paint job which will make the difference.

On the subject of figures, I have been criticised and on more than one occasion for not specifically mentioning one particular American manufacturer or another, but the simple fact remains that if a company doesn't advertise beyond its own narrow borders, and simply is unknown to the rest of the world, how can those figures, even if magnificent, be included in a review? I have to rely on those who know telling and not criticising.

Of course a Spanish late 14th and early 15th century fleet is much easier to make, using the old Airfix Santa Maria kit, around in several company guises if you look, and with the right heraldry at the mast-tops too!

Now a Castilian fleet, that's another story.