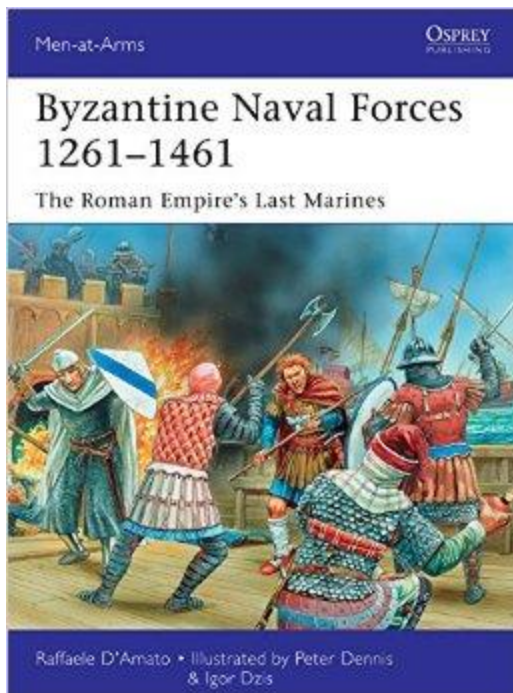


**“Byzantine Naval Forces 1261-1461.”.....Raffaele D’Amato**  
**Illustrations by Peter Dennis and Igor Dzis**  
**Osprey Men-at-Arms 502**  
**Reviewed By Rob Morgan**  
**Originally Published in *Lone Warrior* 198**

It’s not exactly what I expected at first sight! In fact it’s the volume’s sub-title ‘The Roman Empire’s Last Marines’ which is intended to be the true subject matter. Mind you it’s naval or warship illustrations (just six in the book) which are in short supply, but there is a little detail in the text on the warships of the Emperors. In wargame campaign ideas it has more to offer than it does for the table top naval wargamer I think.



The volume begins with the reconquest of Constantinople from the barbarous Latin Crusaders, and on pages 4-5, there’s a short chronology, a sad chronology too, as it indicates the steady decline of Byzantine naval power down to a mere two galleys surviving in the Morea in 1460. The text deals efficiently with the manning of the fleets, the early ie1260-1290AD operations and then what proved to be the beginning of the decline. Yes, there is a description of the ship types too, but all far too brief for the Byzantine naval enthusiast. The description of the ‘Regiments’ of soldiers aboard the Empire’s warships was new to me, and quite interesting; as was the comment on the character (?) and social status of the naval personnel. The account of the fleet’s organization and its intended strength are perhaps better known, and the notes on armament, including ‘Greek Fire’ are a very basic introduction to the matter, indeed shipboard ordnance is dealt with in a mere hundred words.

On Page 21, D’Amato moves into the heart of his work, the dress and equipment of the sea soldiers of Byzantium, thorough if short in length, it deals with weapons, and defensive gear, I liked the comments on shield blazons, useful and with potential for ship models perhaps! As was the note on naval flags, which is more naval wargamer oriented. This all shows beautifully in the plates, which are of a high standard, reminiscent of Angus McBride. Do note Plate G3, the Imperial Fleet standard bearer by the way.

A few of the plates, like A3 a ‘marine’ officer, and C2 and C4 show very elaborate costume. While *the* plate, is G2, is a posed Greek fire specialist, which may well cause some serious thought among late land gaming Crusaders, about the nature of this weapon in action. From the naval point of view a little more lethal than a crossbow when closing for action!

Plate D2 intrigued me, as it shows a c1275 sea soldier armed with a long hafted double bladed axe, with no explanation given at all. Do take a careful look at the illustration on page 33 of a group of bladed polearms, several of which defy description and are to say the least thought provoking in terms of their use and handling in combat. Others are easily identified as destroyers of rigging or as longer ship-to-ship versions of 'land' staves with known names, glaive, boar-spear, fork and trident for instance. D'Amato gives his source for these splendid and often exotic blades as ex-Babuin. The Bibliography tells us this is from a volume published in 2009, but the title is in Greek only, and leaves another mystery. There are some 50+ titles in this section, incidentally, but apart from four well known David Nicolle Ospreys, and two older Ian Heath titles they are all well out of the naval wargamers mainstream of reading.



This is the most academic title I've ever read in an Osprey format, and it will I suspect sell far beyond the wargames world. Naturally, reviewing a title of this nature means that I have to mention the point which has cropped up so often when Byzantine forces at any point in the long life of the Empire is concerned- the complexity of the Byzantine terminology. From 'Megas Dukas' to 'Gasmoulos', from 'Tzakones' to 'Toxotes', it's the names which, arguably, cause the problem in persuading gamers that this is a force worth adopting. The ship names are even worse! 'Monirai', 'Akatia' and 'Katargon' among them. I'm intrigued (again, twice in one review!) that the 'Karavion' (page 7) is in fact a Cog.

The book ends with four short descriptions of 'representative actions' of the fleet, Demetrias in 1275; the Likarios Campaigns of 1275-80; the relatively well known Battle of the Echniades islands in 1427, and in one short paragraph Galata, perhaps better known again. All arguably wargame

friendly, but no plan or map provided. A sensible and fine way to finish the book, and one which could well and valuably be adopted by other periodically long Osprey volumes in the future.

An excellent piece of work, by a skilled Italian academic, thought provoking and good reading. Fine art work too.

Osprey Men-at-Arms 502. NB These titles are now on sale at £10.99!

### **Wargames Figures and Models?**

Well, in 20mm scale, Orion make two packs of Byzantines from the later Medieval period (i.e. post-Manzikert) but frankly, they are poor. There's a better option in 15mm from Irregular

Miniatures, and they have a Greek Fire 'projectionist', which is useful. Essex Miniatures, in the same scale have a number of possible conversions, as well as some basic suitable Byzantine infantry figures. Old Glory's range of Byzantines, both 'Late' and Belisarian' (very early) are expensive indeed, so.....!

In terms of 28mm, Crusader Miniatures have a decent Byzantine range which you can play about with, good quality too. Gripping Beast's 28mm range is more extensive, and at Pack BYZ17 they have a 'Greek Fire team', which is ideal! On the whole, despite the sheer size and variety of the Byzantine forces on land and sea, they are poorly provided for in manufacturer's lists.

Nor are the Fleets of Byzantium well represented, though there are always the two stalwarts.....the Navwar 1/1200<sup>th</sup> Dromons. AGS17, a small one, and AGS18, the larger. I prefer the 'small' Dromon as a warship, the larger, in fact longer might be a better term, is more sleek, but not as powerful looking. You need to swap the masts and sails for lateen versions incidentally, and can 'beef up' the fleet by adding vessels from the Rod Langton 1/1200<sup>th</sup> medieval range. More expensive but attractive. Or dip into the 'Tumbling Dice' 1/2400<sup>th</sup> scale medieval range, plenty there.

Rob Morgan.  
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