

The Barbary Pirates 15th-17th Centuries
Osprey Elite series No. 213 (2016)
Text by Angus Kostam; illustrations by Gerry Embleton

Review by Rob Morgan

The value of this work for the wargamers is the chronology and the description of the far-ranging activities of this bunch of seaborne rogues. There's a good deal of background on the Arab conquests, the several dynasties and the Corsairs from around 1450 onwards, along the Barbary coast from the Straits of Gibraltar to Tripoli, controlling the southern shores of the Mediterranean.

The essential aspects are the sections that deal with the ships used by the Corsairs and their tactics and technique in battle. Konstam provides a very good and lengthy account of the chain of command in the Ottoman world, sometimes quite complex, of the nature of the captains and admirals, and the astonishing cross-section of renegades and hangers-on that crewed many of the ships and, crucially, of the Janissaries. All of the larger craft carried these elite troops. It's all useful campaign information and made for the solo gamer.

It's the ships used that provide the greatest interest in the book. The odd siege and land encounter are covered, but the success of the Barbary Pirates was afloat. The text considers the galley and the smaller galliot, oared and fast, and goes on to look at the slightly odder but no less successful craft, the xebec, usually three-masted and rowed if necessary, but essentially a very quick sailing warship. Konstam differentiates between xebec and polacre, the other major sailing type, useful craft in swift attacks, as were the smaller felucca and the oddly named tartan. The list he gives is not by any means all-encompassing. The Pirates used anything they could, as pirates must, including captured carracks and small craft of the type to be found in European hands. The book's text, ably supported by the superb plates, gives sufficient information to the naval wargamer to enable the seemingly complex sea forces of the Barbary States to be created on the table top.

The book ends with a series of notes on the limitations of the galley or galliot and on the hunting grounds of these pirates. (And don't forget, the British Isles, though far to the north, were often raided by them, even into the time of the Civil Wars of the 1640s. In 1625, they raided as far north as Iceland!) Konstam gives an interesting, again useful, note on the tactics in battle of the pirate swarms, which could be quite large, or simply a ship or two. As a table top force, a small group of Barbary Corsairs has tremendous uses and could be pitted against almost any European enemy, merchant or well-armed naval vessels.

The plates, by Gerry Embleton, are sound, though in naval wargame terms there's little value in a plate dealing with renegade sailors' gear, or depicting a sea-fight, hand-to-hand between armed Christian sea-soldiers and Moslem pirates. Take a look at Plate D, which

shows several beautifully painted Pirate craft, large and small, as well as Plate E, of a xebec, and Plate H, of a selection of small Pirate vessels. The galleys and galliots are also covered, and enough information for painting and decorating a fleet is provided, backed up by a score of line illustrations, many in colour.



There's a detailed bibliography of writers such as Guilmartin, Landstrom and Rogers all appear. The book is worth reading, especially if you're considering an opponent for your Spanish or Venetian men of war or later. Jack Aubrey encountered this lot in the Med in one of O'Brien's novels, 'The Hundred Days,' set during Boney's brief trip to Paris in 1815.

The standard scale of 1/1200th is best for wars involving the Barbary Pirate ships. I'd use my old Navwar galleys and galleases, (take a look at the photo of I can't bring myself to lose the masts on the galleys, which would be authentic for combat, of course, but it reduces the attractiveness of the models on the table top), adding a selection from the Langton Miniatures Renaissance list. Langton's are more costly, but are valuable in small numbers. Models such as the Saik, Fusta, the Sambuck and the coasters from this range will prove useful added to the galleys, and the smaller Navwar galleys will represent galliots, incidentally. There are a few carrack models around, although the Langton carracks, and smaller craft, are easy enough to add from numerous sources, such as ships boats with lateen sails added. Go into Spanish Armada and Dutch Wars ranges for opponents and for merchants. By the late 1600s, as the book shows in good black-and-white illustrations, the Barbary Pirates were using fairly standard ship types, see page 61 for a good example.

A good solo fleet.