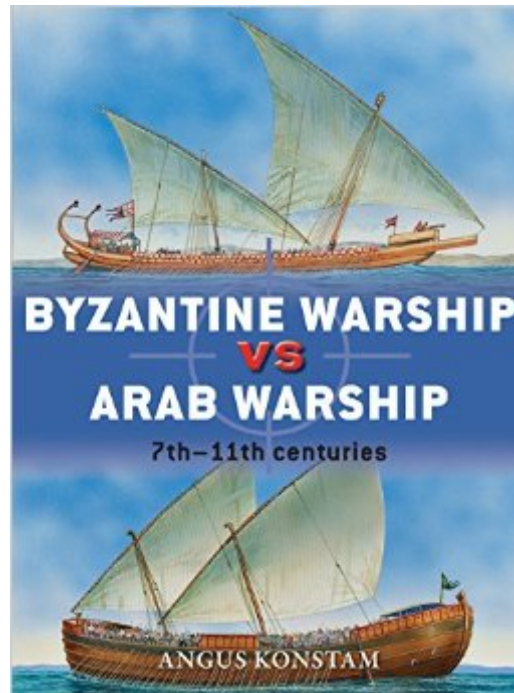


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Byzantine Warship Vs Arab Warship: 7th-11th Centuries (Duel)



Synopsis

This engaging study pits the the Byzantine dromon against the Arabic shalandi in the prolonged struggle for mastery in the Mediterranean in the four centuries after 630 AD. For four hundred years the Byzantine Empire's naval forces vied with the warships of the Islamic world for mastery of the Mediterranean. At the heart of this confrontation were the fighting vessels of the two powers, the Byzantine dromon and the Arabic shalandi, both oared warships. In those four centuries of warfare between two major maritime powers, both the Byzantines and the Arabs left us records of their doctrine and tactics, as well as of how their ships were built. Featuring full-colour artwork and rigorous analysis from an authority on naval warfare, this enthralling book offers a glimpse of the long-lost world of war at sea in the age of Byzantium.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book, like all in the Osprey 'Duel' series of which it is a part, is rather short. It is only 80 pages long and about a third of these consist of illustration of one type or another. Hence if one is looking for an academic tome on the subject this is not the book to read. A more appropriate question is, considering the limitations of the format it is part of, how well does it do at covering its topic? The answer is quite well. The author, Angus Konstam, is an eminent naval historian who has written dozens of books on the subject of naval warfare, many of which have been published by Osprey. In addition, many of his books are on vessels and naval tactics that were crudely similar to those covered in this book. For example, he has written 'Renaissance War gallery 1470-1590' and 'Lepanto 1571' (both published by Osprey). His expertise on vessels and naval warfare

show through in this book. He discusses, in some detail, the construction methods used in both Arab and Byzantine vessels (very similar) and places these in historical evolutionary context. He describes how warship design moved away from the solid (but inflexible) construction techniques used in ancient Greek warships to the utilization of more flexible building techniques. These techniques made it much more difficult to sink warships via ramming, which was the preferred method in antiquity. As a result, tactics instead emphasized melees leading to boardings and attempts to sink vessels not through ramming but the utilization of fire. The Byzantine forces were much more effective here as they possessed something called 'Greek Fire', a liquid that burned on anything (including water) that was sprayed via a flamethrower like device at ranges of up to 40-50 meters.

This 'Duel series' title is a great primer, summary and overview, written by someone who knows the topic well and has definitely done his research. The context of the 'duel' between the two types of ships and, more generally, between the Byzantine and 'Arab' fleets is well presented, despite the limited space that is available in such series. 'Muslim' or 'Islamic' might have been better terms, since at best only a minority on board would have been ethnic Arabs, but this is more a quibble than anything else. The identical starting points, that is the Late Roman Empire's liburna legacy and its improved design (the early Dromon or 'racers') is also well emphasised. So are the parallel evolutions of the two types of ships and fleets over a period of more than four centuries. At times, this little book can get quite 'technical' when describing the techniques for building these ships, how they evolved and what the specifications were. This may put off some potential readers, although if they persevere a bit, they will see that the 'design and Development' and the 'Technical Specifications' sections are useful and necessary. They will also see that they fit in very well with the rest of the book and, for the most curious readers, that they are largely a streamlined version of the much more complex explanations and descriptions that can be found in more specialised titles (in 'The Age of the Galley', edited by Robert Gardiner, in particular). The other sections are also great, including the one on 'analysis' which clearly shows the logistic limitations of naval warfare under oars in the Mediterranean throughout Antiquity, the middle Ages and the Renaissance.

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