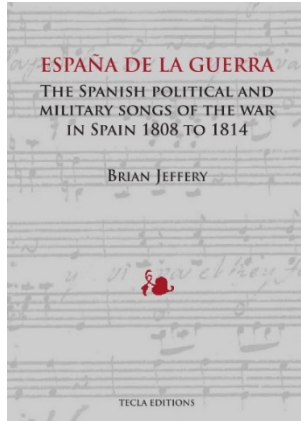


The Napoleon Series Reviews

Jeffery, Brian. *España de la Guerra: the Spanish Political Songs of the War in Spain 1808 to 1814*. London: Tecla Editions, 2017. 417 pages ISBN: 9780906953556 Paperback. £27.



On 2 May 1808, the people of Madrid, who were unhappy with the French occupiers of their city, met at the Royal Palace to protest the departure for France of Francisco de Paula, the 14 year old son of King Charles IV, who was going to live with his father in France. King Charles had been forced by Napoleon to abdicate the crown and his son Ferdinand VI replaced him. Ferdinand too was in exile in France. Soon the crowd outside the Royal Palace was stirred up with patriotic speeches and songs and broke into the palace's grounds. The French moved in and dispersed them with artillery fire. Before long the whole city was up in arms and a full scale rebellion against the French broke out.

Within weeks this rebellion exploded throughout the country and became the Peninsular War.

The focus of *España de la Guerra* is on how patriotic songs were used for propaganda and to keep the population fired up to defeat the French, especially during the dark days of the early years of the war. It should be noted that not all the songs were anti-French, especially prior to the uprising of 2 May. Many of those songs were in protest against King Carlos IV and his prime minister, Manuel Godoy and supportive of the new King Ferdinand. It was only after the uprising and the defeat of the French at Bailen in July did the songs truly become anti-French.

As the war went on, the more popular these songs became. They were sang in the cities and towns throughout Spain. It was not uncommon for officers in Wellington's Army to write about them. Many of the songs were written and composed by popular musicians of the time, including Fernando Sor, one of the country's best known classical guitarists. The author notes on his website why the songs were so effective:

I see the songs as a part of the propaganda of the time, in fact as one of the most powerful aspects of that propaganda because in these songs, the recipients of the propaganda not merely heard the message but participated in it by actually themselves singing the message of the propaganda.¹

Brian Jeffery spent many years scouring the libraries in Spain, Portugal, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and even the United States, for copies of these songs. He was able to unearth 160 of them. *España de la Guerra* discusses many of these songs and places

¹ <https://tecla.com/shop/books/jeffery-brian-espana-de-la-guerra/>

them within the political and popular culture of the time. The book consists of three very long chapters, three, appendices, and a catalogue.

Chapter 1 covers the political situation prior to 1808 that led to the uprising of 2 May 1808. They include the anti-Godoy and pro-King Ferdinand songs. He also compares and contrasts how the songs changed after the Spanish victory at Bailen.

Chapter 2 looks at the songs that were popular in 1809, including those about the siege of Saragossa, the situation in the South American colonies, King Joseph's pro-French government in Madrid, and the Junta in Seville.

Chapter 3 is an overview of the years 1810 – 1814. It discusses how the British reacted to the songs and even has Wellington's favorite song. It continues to look at the political songs, including those about the Cadiz Constitution and King Ferdinand, and popular songs that celebrated victories over the French.

España de la Guerra includes three appendices:

Appendix 1: the Coleccion de canciones partioticas, (Collection of Patriotic Songs) published by Gomez de Requena. This is a discussion of 16 songs published in Cadiz in 1809 and where they can be found now. Surprisingly, the songs that were sold had the lyrics.

Appendix 2: The collection of songs of the war in Madrid held in the Senate Library. This appendix provides a description of the manuscripts containing the 27 popular songs sung during the war that are held by the Senate Library in Madrid.

Appendix 3: Peninsular Melodies. This is a detailed description of a book written by George Hodges, a British Army officer who served in several different regiments in Portugal and Spain. He fell in love with the local music and during his spare time he took copious notes about what he heard and when possible bought the scores. He eventually published a book on the songs.

The author closes with a "Catalogue of Individual Songs of the War in Spain". This is a 100 page guide to the songs, including a description of each song, whether it has the musical score with it, and which library it can be found in. He even includes the manuscript number for those interested in seeing the originals! The publisher has a website with a page just for [España de la Guerra](#). Among other things there is a sound clip of one of the songs mentioned in the book. In this case a three minute audio file is worth a thousand word description of the song! However Mr. Jeffery does not say what the name of the song is or who the composer was.

I do have one minor problem with *España de la Guerra*. The author assumes that the reader can read Spanish. Although he translates many of the passages from Spanish sources, he does not do so for all of the songs. Translations of all the songs would have been helpful for those of us who do not speak Spanish.

España de la Guerra is definitely a labor of love that will appeal to those who are interested in Spanish politics during the Peninsula War and Fernando Sor. Because the author included the scores and words for fifteen songs, re-enactors of Spanish units of the Peninsular War will find the book particularly valuable. Recommended.

Unfortunately I was not able to find a copy of *España de la Guerra* on Amazon in the U.S. It is available on [Amazon U.K](#) or via [Tecla Editions](#).

Reviewed by [Robert Burnham](#)

Placed on the Napoleon Series: November 2017