

Graciela Iglesias Rogers, *British Liberators in the Age of Napoleon: Volunteering under the Spanish Flag in the Peninsular War*. London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012. Pp. viii, 342. £65. ISBN 9781441135650.

This book is the first examination of the phenomenon of Britons volunteering to join the Spanish army and fight against Napoleon's attempted subjugation of the Iberian Peninsula between 1808 and 1814. These volunteers, where they are mentioned in the existing works, are often portrayed rather dismissively as romantics and the epitome of quixotic endeavour, but this monograph offers the first comprehensive exploration of their background, motives, activities, and legacies. In undertaking this exercise, *British Liberators* challenges scholarship that is largely riven by divergent nationalistic prejudices, with a British tendency to concentrate on the British army and Wellington under the umbrella of the Peninsular War, whilst Spanish historians focus on their 'War of Liberation'; indeed the nomenclature of this conflict is in itself indicative of the divide. In contradistinction to this, *British Liberators* is firmly rooted in the framework of an Atlantic world and a transnational approach to history. Additionally, it demonstrates a thorough understanding of the complexities of society, culture, and politics in Spain at the time, something that is not always appreciated in the English-language work on the subject. In these regards alone the book is worthy of attention.

Immediately, the book has to deal with the question of cataloguing and categorising these volunteers, with their selection detailed in the introduction that clearly sets out the criteria for who will and will not be discussed. This results in a total of 42 individuals for the basis of the study. Throughout, the author is careful to use their stories to explore themes rather than present a conglomeration of biographies (although short biographies of the volunteers are provided as an appendix). This is handled through the arrangement of the chapters, which work through their previous backgrounds and experience, why they volunteered, their ideology (in the sense of what they hoped to achieve), their role in mediating and shaping Anglo-Spanish relations and cultural awareness of each other, along with a consideration of their changing identity and impact after the wars. Although the British volunteers were not large in number, a convincing argument is made for their influence and impact. They are shown to have effected social change in Spain, albeit sometimes unwittingly, for example championing education in the armed forces as a prerequisite for an effective army of liberation. Furthermore, at particular moments they were determined and effective leaders that shaped the politico-military situation in Spain, yet within the broad cause of Spanish liberation and notably eschewing opportunities to seize power. Perhaps some of the most interesting material delves into the volunteer's cultural role. For example, John Dowie's *Legion de Extremadura* (a particular study of Chapter 5), in which Dowie appealed to a Spanish golden past to encourage recruitment and motivate its men even to the extent of dressing the unit in sixteenth-century uniforms, is transformed from a military oddity to a cultural signifier of great value in understanding the motivations and beliefs of the British volunteers and Spanish resistance fighters. This and other examples serve to interestingly nuance the prevailing view of Romanticism, with the author showing that appeals to emotions and spontaneous acts sprang from reasonable and rational motives. Additionally, this case, and others discussed, points to the important role that the British volunteers had in creating the image of Spain in the British consciousness; one that was long-lasting and rooted in a perception that Spain was the last bastion of ancient moral values.

The academic credentials of the book are impeccable, and it is a model for future studies of conflict. As its bibliography demonstrates, *British Liberators* embraces material from archives

across Britain and Spain, both at national and local levels. Half the book's pages are turned over to appendices, notes, the index, and its bibliography, all of which ought to be invaluable as a stimulus for further research. This painstaking level of research underpins cogent, thought-provoking, and well written analysis. It is a pleasure to see that already this book is available in paperback and as an e-book, as it is certainly a monograph that anyone with an interest in the period and history of Spain should read.

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