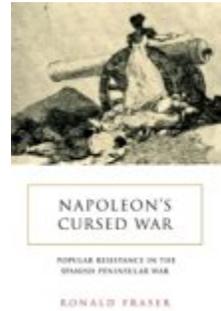


Ronald Fraser. *Napoleon's Cursed War: Spanish Popular Resistance in the Peninsular War, 1808-1814*. Brooklyn: Verso, 2008. xxxviii + 587 pp. \$54.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84467-082-6.

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Published on H-War (February, 2012)

Commissioned by Margaret Sankey



Spain's Cursed War

Ronald Fraser's *Napoleon's Cursed War* is a must read for anyone interested in the Peninsula war. Most accounts in English deal with the British experience and to a lesser extent the French experience. In contrast, Fraser, a Spanish historian, gives an excellent and refreshing account of the war from the Spanish perspective. The book's primary purpose is to explain common Spanish motives for fighting Napoleon and to give Spanish commoners "voice" to popular resistance. Fraser blends military, quantitative, and social history into a work that is both readable and academic.

Fraser recognizes the challenges of identifying sources from commoners of a mostly illiterate Spanish populace. He examines pamphlets, songs, newspapers, and diaries to assemble reasonable conclusions about Spain during the war. His use of Spanish archives, along with British archives, is impressive. Although the work concerns Spain and its involvement in the Peninsula war, it also would have been beneficial to include some archival sources from French archives. This is only a minor point though.

The work covers the entire revolutionary and Napoleonic periods. *Napoleon's Cursed War* does an adequate job in making the reader understand the complexity of Spain during this era. Even though the Spanish lost numerous battles they still won the war. The cost was high and it wreaked havoc on the old order of Spain, but the Spanish were well on their way to kicking out Napoleon's Imperial Forces without the help of

the British. British help only made Napoleon's forces exit quicker. Fraser does acknowledge the problems that would have occurred without any British assistance and the Duke of Wellington's leadership. The book could even be an example of how a modern insurgency starts. Mao's three phases of revolutionary warfare are clearly evident in the work, though Fraser stays away from modern examples.[1]

The Madrid rising in May 1808 and the following defeat of French General Pierre Dupont in July 1808 were great victories for the Spanish Patriots, but they were unable to capitalize on those victories and form an effective conventional force to prevent Napoleon from taking Madrid and most of Spain in 1808-1809. There was a fractured, localized resistance to the French presence in Spain from 1809 until the end of the war. The Catholic Church's influence on locals and the problems that the clergy had with the Cortes government was not overlooked. Fraser examines the complex relationship between the Afrancesados and how they played both sides of the conflict. Fraser also writes about the various Juntas that took local power into their own hands in the name of the imprisoned King Fernando VII while at the same time having a fractious relationship with the the Suprema Council. The demise of the Suprema did not thwart the efforts of the Juntas. Eventually their efforts were successful in getting Napoleon, desperate for troops in Germany, to release Fernando in 1813. Unfortunately, for the liberals, Fernando refused to abide by the constitution of 1812 and set out on a ruthless campaign to root out any

opposition to his rule.

Fraser has given an excellent account of the suffering of Spain during the Napoleonic wars and the role of popular resistance in defeating the Napoleonic Empire. This work should catch the attention of serious Napoleonic scholars. His ability to blend various sources and methodologies into a comprehensi-

ble history of Spain during the Napoleonic wars makes *Napoleon's Cursed War* a book worth having.

Note

[1]. Political Organization: Anti-Napoleon Coalition, Guerilla Warfare: Establishment of the Juntas, and Conventional Warfare: 1813-15 (earlier attempts failed from 1809 to 1812).

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Citation: Tim Fitzpatrick. Review of Fraser, Ronald, *Napoleon's Cursed War: Spanish Popular Resistance in the Peninsular War, 1808-1814*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. February, 2012.

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