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Review of Charles J. Esdaile, *Outpost of Empire: The Napoleonic Occupation of Andalucía, 1810-1812*

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Charles J. Esdaile. *Outpost of Empire: The Napoleonic Occupation of Andalucía, 1810-1812*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012.

It is always a pleasure to see the publication of new work pertaining to Spanish history of the early nineteenth century – a period too often overlooked in the corpus of historical scholarship on Spain. Charles J. Esdaile has published extensively on the military history of the “Peninsular War” (a phrase that remains common in British literature on the subject despite a Spanish preference for the more patriotic sounding “*La Guerra de la Independencia*”). Among the more recent in a long list of titles by Esdaile, *Outpost of Empire: The Napoleonic Occupation of Andalucía, 1810-1812* delivers a provocative and somewhat controversial account of the French occupation of southern Spain. In one respect, *Outpost of Empire* adheres to the model of standard military history, figuring as part of the Campaigns and Commanders Series published by the University of Oklahoma Press. The book offers an addendum to the author’s 2004 book, *Fighting Napoleon: Guerrillas, Bandits, and Adventurers in Spain, 1808-1814*, which examined the role of non-regular soldiering units that offered resistance to the French. Nonetheless, Esdaile makes a conscious effort to situate his more recent study in the fold of “occupation studies” – a relatively new subfield that examines the dynamics of collaboration and resistance that emerge between occupier and occupied. As the focus of the study, the brief two and half year occupation of Andalucía offers fertile ground to explore such dynamics.

In contrast to the popular nationalist myth of a Spanish rally to the patriot cause in the wake of the French invasion of 1808, Esdaile argues that little evidence exists to support such a narrative. At least, a groundswell of patriotic fervor was not seen in Andalucía, which was perhaps an unusual case. The system of land tenure prevalent in southern Spain, with its emphasis on rural latifundia, meant that elites played a more significant role than elsewhere. Additionally, the highly urban nature of the region magnified the position of elites who had key symbolic and administrative resources at their disposal. Thus, the collaboration of a small number of elites in Andalucía had the potential to tip the allegiances of the region to the French cause more readily than elsewhere. These structural features were coupled with a dire political situation. Despite the celebrated local response of *juntismo* to the virtual decapitation of the Bourbon monarchy, the reality on the ground was one of chronic disorder. The Junta Central created in response to this crisis failed to mobilize effectively the human and material resources of the region and, more often than not, left an exasperated population harassed by both urban disorder and rural banditry. As a consequence, many Spaniards were willing to support any challenger, whatever its national origin. Confronted with the French occupation, the immediate response of most *andaluces* was collaboration with the French regime, not resistance.

Indeed, Esdaile asserts that Andalucía was on route to become one of the more pacified regions of France's "inner empire" in early 1810. This fact was evident in the behavior of local elites who worked furiously to contain mob actions that would have threatened the French occupation, but that might have also upended the prevailing social system. Resistance grew with the brutal French oppression of the region. Additionally, the presence of a looming subsistence crisis and the inability to import additional grain from Morocco inhibited French efforts to restore normality. Within a short time, the volatile population of the region switched sides out of a sense of opportunism and not out of loyalty to incipient notions of Spanish nationhood. In this vein, the motivations behind guerrilla actions and those of other Spanish actors deserve closer scrutiny. As Esdaile succinctly summarizes his case in the closing lines of the book, "exaltation of the *partidas* has gone too far" (416). In this regard, Esdaile offers a compelling case for a revisionist history of, if not the wider war, then certainly at least, the role of guerrillas and other non-regular soldiers.

Before arguing excitedly in favor of the proverbial pendulum swinging in the other direction, some issues warrant further consideration. Romanticization of the guerrilla owes, in part, to a certain desire on the part of Spanish chroniclers to underplay the importance of Anglo-Portuguese armies in liberating Spaniards almost singlehandedly from the grips of the dastardly French. The need to craft a new Spanish hero emerged in response to a dismissal of Spanish regular forces in English accounts of the war. Wellington, in particular, displayed a firm dislike of the Spanish. Additionally, a conviction that victory was almost wholly the fortunate byproduct of British intervention lingers in accounts of Spanish liberation. The swashbuckling and honorable guerrilla – something between a Hobsbawmian "primitive rebel" and the righteous defender of a violated *patria* – nicely fit the bill of a patriotic and determined alternative to the disgraced regular Spanish soldier. The final chapter of Esdaile's book offers a useful corrective to accounts of frailty on the part of Spanish regular troops; it rehabilitates the role of the Spanish regular army as part of the larger war in the Iberian Peninsula and demonstrates the supporting role played by *partidas* in an unintentional and uncoordinated fashion. Esdaile accomplished this task without excessive surrender to the British nationalist myth of the Peninsular War. British soldiering aside, Esdaile affirms that armies of regular Spanish troops and *partidas* were successful in consistently harrying the French armies of occupation, which frequently had to reorganize to field both large numbers in open engagements and small units to assault remote, mountain strongholds.

Esdaile's use of the available source material also offers some points for contemplation. English language sources play a central role in supporting Esdaile's account. Admittedly, Spanish language sources concerning the experiences of guerrillas are comparatively few in number. Nonetheless, so much

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of Esdaile's appraisal of both regular and irregular soldiering on the Spanish side owes to non-Spanish sources. A number of French voices are introduced, like that of the Count of Miot de Melito, a close confidant of King Joseph. However, efforts to piece together the mindsets of collaborators and advocates of resistance would seem to require further recourse to sources produced by their own hand. Nonetheless, Esdaile uses the available sources to his advantage. Overall, this book presents a well-structured argument and an admirably readable text that ought to figure into any serious treatment of the French occupation of Andalucía.

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