

over the causes, consequences, and meaning of the turbulent middle decades of the seventeenth century.

Eduardo de Mesa, *The Irish in the Spanish Armies in the Seventeenth Century*. Irish Historical Monograph Series. Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2014. xviii + 242 pp. + 13 illus. + 68 tables + glossary. \$120.00. Review by ELLEN J. JENKINS, ARKANSAS TECH UNIVERSITY.

During the Eighty Years' War or Dutch War of Independence against Spanish Habsburg rule of the Netherlands (1568–1648), Spain's strict adherence to Catholicism appealed to the Catholic Irish against the Protestantism of the Netherlands' Seventeen Provinces, as well as against England's rule of Ireland and exclusion of Catholics from political and military office. In 1587, several hundred Irish troops sent by Elizabeth I to support the Dutch changed their allegiance to Spain. At first, these were merged with Spanish troops, but by 1605, Irish soldiers were serving in independent Irish regiments of the Spanish Army of Flanders. Eventually, a number of Irish *Tercios* were formed. These were small, elite units made up of between ten and thirteen companies.

The Irish troops who came to serve Spain in Flanders from 1621 and on the Iberian Peninsula from 1638 were known for their fearlessness, many of them seasoned veterans who were valued for their military skills and their fighting spirit. Irish troops never represented a large force among Spain's military numbers, though the author, Eduardo de Mesa, emphasizes that they were such a valued group that the Crown frequently made concessions to their demands. Eventually, recruiting problems led to the decline in numbers of Irishmen in the service of Spain or periods of surges followed by scarcity, a situation that would last until the flight of James II and many Jacobite supporters from England in 1689–1690.

In this work, Eduardo de Mesa attempts to redress the problem of histories that focus upon the native Spanish troops, including the *Tercios Viejos* and elite cavalry units, overlooking the many troops who came from the Spanish king's territories outside Spain. That the Habsburg ruler had the ability to draw from other parts of his mul-

tinational empire in raising his armies was, de Mesa argues, one of the chief assets of the Spanish monarchy of the early modern era, not the outdated catastrophe others have called it. Historians have lauded the Dutch and Swedish armies of the period as the most modern and innovative, a claim that Mesa refutes, claiming that the *Tercios* had great flexibility and range.

In addition, the Spanish armies included foreign soldiers from Ireland, England, Germany, and other parts of Europe. The logistical processes that supported the Irish *Tercios*, as well as their relationships with military leaders, the Church, local populations, and the Habsburg Administration form the core of Mesa's book.

De Mesa points out that while the Irish in the Spanish armies have attracted academic attention over the past several decades, recent historians' accounts have been rooted in research done extensively in the Belgian archives, instead of those of Spain. He specifically mentions works on these Irish "Wild Geese" by Brendan Jennings, Gráinne Henry, and Robert A. Stradling as among those flawed by one-sided source materials. Mesa's sources include archives in Brussels, Barcelona, Valladolid, Madrid, London, and Dublin, as well as extensive primary and secondary published materials.

The author provides statistical breakdowns from available records of Irish Catholics who fought in Flanders with the Spanish armies from 1605 to 1644, pointing out that they reached the peak of their strength during the reign Philip IV. De Mesa provides charts with the numbers in each component company of the Irish *Tercios* under the Earls of Tyrone and Tyrconnell from the resumption of hostilities in 1621 after a twelve-year hiatus arranged in 1609. Over the following years, three more Irish *Tercios* were formed.

Recruiting was always a challenge. Though the largest contingency of Irish troops came from Ulster (61), troops ultimately represented all parts of Ireland. The difficulties of religious conflicts, living conditions, and employment in Ireland should have made levies reasonably productive, but there were times when Charles I, married to a French Bourbon princess, closed the ports to keep men from migrating to the Continent. England's Civil War created additional problems, and unless Spain and England were at peace, levies could not be carried out at all. Additionally, levies were the financial responsibility of the

captains, which was an additional deterrent. Ultimately, the appeal of serving under members of noble Irish families in exile faded with time and the passing of generations. Overall, de Mesa explains, the numbers of Irishmen serving in the Spanish army have been calculated on a theoretical 250 men per company, when Irish companies never reached that figure, even in the early years (66).

Another problem was the expense in keeping Irish soldiers content enough to remain in the *Tercios*, instead of leaving and signing on with France. When pay was slow to arrive, money was scarce, or food supplies low, such defections were a constant threat, not the least because camp followers also had to be taken into consideration. As de Mesa writes, "The army's 'tail' was often longer than the army itself" (151).

Irish *Tercios* were deployed on the Iberian Peninsula during the period 1638–1644, at the siege of Fuenterrabía in 1638, the Catalan Revolt of 1640, and at Rosellón 1640–1641, the sea battle of Barcelona in 1642, and the battle of Montijo in 1644. In these, ironically, they fought against fellow Catholics. In several campaigns, the Irish suffered heavy casualties, resulting in the dissolution and reformation of companies. De Mesa emphasizes that the myth of the backward Spanish armies can be dismissed, since their performance on the Iberian Peninsula provides evidence of the most up-to-date tactics of the day.

With *The Irish in the Spanish Armies in the Seventeenth Century*, de Mesa has revitalized the reputation of the multinational Habsburg armies of the early modern period. He has also added valuable material to the scholarship of the era. Oddly, though, the present work is extremely dry, with the tone of the book more in keeping with the government reports he consulted than with the abundance of diaries, letters, and memoirs listed among his primary sources. The result is scholarly but not lively.