

Editor's Notes for *La Guerra de África (The War of Africa)*

About this Composition

As transcribed, this work is in the form of a *Cantata* for two choirs (STB-STBaritonB) and piano accompaniment. The original composition appears to have been scored for voices and orchestra. The title page on the printed original notes that this work was premiered at a special function held on April 15, 1860 by the Royal Conservatory of Music of Madrid as a benefit to the wounded “in that glorious campaign”, and is arranged in the score for piano and voices. The lyrics are from a poem by poet and playwright Buenaventura de la Vega y Cárdenas (Buenos Aires, Virreinato del Río de la Plata [today's Argentina], 1807 - Madrid, 1865), known by his *nom de plume* Ventura de la Vega, with music by Hilarión Eslava. The copy of the original score I used comes from Eresbil, the Basque music archive, and contains a handwritten dedication from Eslava to his friend, violinist, composer, and fellow Conservatory professor Jesús de Monasterio y Agüeros (1836-1903).

The music, alternating sung and recited parts, reflects the triumphalistic tone of the poem and contains elements of the *Pasodoble para banda militar* that Eslava would publish years later as an example of march for military band in his composition treatise *Escuela de Composición, Tratado Cuarto – De la Instrumentación*, published ca. 1870, which I have also transcribed and you can find along with some explanatory notes at <https://hilarioneslava.org/music/>.

I acknowledge that the lyrics to this work (which I have faithfully reproduced and translated) regrettably contain openly racist, offensive words, which while clearly unacceptable today, should be taken in the context of the time and circumstances in which they were written (more on the subject below). This will undoubtedly make public performance of this work a consideration to bear.

Historical Background

La Guerra de África (the War of Africa), was a four-month long punitive military action initiated by Spain in December 1859 against the Sultanate of Morocco. The Spanish government of the time, led by prime minister General O'Donnell, claimed that this action was in retaliation for attacks carried out by local Rif tribesmen on the Spanish fortifications around the Spanish enclave of Ceuta, on the northern coast of Africa. The truth, however, is that General O'Donnell saw this as an easy opportunity to strengthen his and his political party's hold on power and to preempt the sorts of military insurrections that were frequent in Spain at the time and that would continue well into the 20th century, by keeping the military engaged and by bestowing honors and titles at its conclusion. The war was enthusiastically supported all across Spain and its institutions, including the reigning monarch –Queen Isabel II, and the Church. In many instances, the war rhetoric also gave way to jingoistic patriotism, xenophobia, and openly

anti-Moroccan and anti-Muslim racism. Unfortunately, the words to the *Cantata* are a reflection this.

War operations began when 45,000 troops, supported by a small war fleet disembarked in Ceuta and proceeded to invade the Sultanate of Morocco. Despite being poorly trained, equipped, and led, the Spanish expeditionary force was victorious, occupying the city of Tetuán (Tétouan in the official Moroccan Arabic transliteration) on February 6, 1860 after a number of skirmishes and battles. The war ended when the Moroccan commander Muley Abbas signed an armistice in March 1860, followed on April 26, 1860 by the Treaty of Wad-Ras. Among other conditions, the Treaty granted the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla to Spain in perpetuity, allowed the temporary occupation of Tétouan, and imposed a punishing monetary compensation by the Sultanate of Morocco to the Spanish Crown.

The War of Africa cost 8,000 to 10,000 lives, 4,000 on the Spanish side, of whom nearly three quarters died not in battle, but of disease, mainly cholera. About 5,000 Spanish soldiers were wounded in the conflict. Ironically, and despite the apparent nationalistic upsurge that the war brought about, only six years later, in 1866, a military insurrection and a severe economic recession caused in part by the loss of access by the nascent Catalan textile industry to American cotton after the U.S. Civil War, led to a revolution (*La Gloriosa*, or “The Glorious”), which in 1868 culminated with the dethronement and exile of Queen Isabel II. This was followed by a period of great political instability in Spain that lasted until 1874, when Queen Isabel’s son, Alfonso XII was crowned king. Many of the key political players during the Revolution and its aftermath, like General Prim, had risen to prominence during the War of Africa.



ART: *General Prim at the Battle of Tetuán (Tétouan)*, by Francisco Sans Cabot (1828-1881). This oil painting, dating from 1865, depicts General Prim leading Catalan volunteers and members of the Alba de Tormes battalion as they storm the trenches of the Moroccan encampment around Tétouan. It is kept at the Palacio de la Capitanía General in Barcelona, Spain. (Public domain image)

Lyrics to *La Guerra de África* by Ventura de la Vega

(NOTE: Parts in the Spanish original marked below with strikethrough do not appear in the musical score. Words in red below are additions to the score)

<p>CORO</p> <p>Grito santo asorda el viento: «¡A las armas! ¡Guerra, guerra! El infiel derriba en tierra, madre España, tu blasón. Cruce el mar la invicta hueste a salvar de vil mancilla los leones de Castilla y las barras de Aragón.»</p> <p>Al rumor del torpe ultraje, indignado el pueblo ibero, ya desnuda el fuerte acero y la vaina al viento da. Ya entre vítores tremola la bandera roja y gualda, que del Atlas en la espalda tinta en sangre flotará.</p> <p>RECITADO</p> <p>Alza en vano el Estrecho montes de olas; en vano el viento brama: que allá van las legiones españolas donde el honor las llama.</p> <p>Lanza en vano cien kábilas la sierra con ímpetu salvaje; que allí con sangre vil bañan la tierra que presenció el ultraje.</p> <p>Mas ruge el huracán: sopla la peste: la lluvia inunda el suelo. ¿Caerá deshecha la cristiana hueste por ti, Señor del Cielo?</p> <p>En medio al campo, sobre monte erguido, un altar se levanta;</p>	<p>CHORUS</p> <p>The holy cry deafens the wind: “To arms! War, war! The infidel tears down to the ground, mother Spain, your seal. Let the undefeated host cross the sea to save from vile dishonor the lions of Castile and the stripes of Aragon.”</p> <p>At the sound of the clumsy insult, the Iberian people in their outrage, bare the mighty steel and throw the sheath out to the wind. Already fluttering among cheers is the red and golden flag, that will wave drenched in blood from the back of the Atlas.</p> <p>RECITATIVE</p> <p>In vain does the Strait raise mountains of waves; in vain does the wind bellow: the Spanish legions go wherever honor calls them.</p> <p>In vain do the hills launch one hundred kabilas with savage purpose; which there, with vile blood soak the land that witnessed the outrage.</p> <p>But the hurricane roars: the plague blows: rain floods the ground. Will the Christian army fall undone for you, Lord of Heaven?</p> <p>In the middle of a field, on an upright mount, an altar rises;</p>
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~~y en sus humildes manos el ungido
eleva la hostia santa.~~

~~Hace salva el cañón; rompe sonora
militar armonía:~~

~~la hueste arrodillada a Dios implora
y su oblación le envía.~~

PLEGARIA

¡Señor!, hijos somos
de aquellos varones
que a ignotas regiones
llevaron tu cruz.
Tu cruz, que en Granada
con gloria plantada
lanzó por el orbe
su vívida luz.

¡Señor!, esta impura
fanática raza
tu nombre rechaza,
tu gloria no ve.
A España concede
que rasgue su venda
y en África encienda
la luz de tu fe.

RECITADO

Dios los oyó: se aleja la tormenta;
la mortífera peste va en su seno:
radiante el sol con majestad se ostenta
de un cielo puro en el azul sereno.
Siente en su pecho el adalid hispano
de inspiración la llama:
él nunca se abatió; ya en cien combates
su constancia y valor cantó la fama.
En bárbaras regiones,
émulo de Cortés, ora acaudilla
inexpertas legiones,
que al contacto de la árabe cuchilla,
al trueno del cañón, al rudo embate

and in his humble hands the anointed
raises the consecrated host.

The cannon fires; with its sound breaks
the military harmony:
the troop kneeling before God implores
and his offering to Him delivers.

PRAYER

Lord! we are the children
of those men
who, to undiscovered lands
carried your cross.
Your cross, which in Granada,
with glory raised,
launched across the orb
its vivid light.

Lord, this impure,
fanatical race
your name rejects,
your glory does not see.
Grant that Spain
its blindfold rip
and that in Africa shine anew
the light of your faith.

RECITATIVE

God heard them: the storm is going away;
the deadly pestilence leaving in its bosom:
radiant the sun with majesty is bedecked
of pure sky in the serene blue.
The Hispanic champion in his chest
feels the flame of inspiration:
he never was downcast; in a hundred fights
his perseverance and courage were sung in fame.
In barbarous regions,
emulating Cortés, now leading
inexperienced legions,
which at the feel of the Arab blade,
the cannon's thunder, the rough onslaught

del terco moro en desigual combate,
tórnanse luego en invencible tropa,
terror de Libia, admiración de Europa.
Nada resiste a sus heroicos bríos.
Ya surcando el desierto
por áspero camino, a hierro abierto;
ya cruzando altos montes y hondos ríos;
de victoria en victoria
que en bronce eterno grabará la historia,
a la vega feraz se precipita,
campo de nueva gloria,
do luchando otra vez, y otra vencido,
huye despavorido
el atezado Hamet. -La hueste grita:
¡TETUÁN POR ISABEL! -Y en la Alcazaba
el pendón español triunfante clava.

HIMNO FINAL

Magnánima HEREDERA
del celo de Pelayo,
tu diestra el ígneo rayo
al África lanzó.
Y el niño ALFONSO un día
sabrá que por tu mano
el suelo castellano
su límite ensanchó.

No más desde sus playas,
con bárbara osadía,
la tierra, suya un día,
aceche el musulmán.
No infeste el aire puro
la brisa de los mares,
trayendo a nuestros lares
los ecos del Korán.

El muro donde España
su enseña al aire ondea,
jamás flotando vea
las lunas del infiel.
Y de uno en otro siglo

of the stubborn Moor in unequal combat,
then turn into an invincible troop,
terror of Libya, admiration of Europe.
Nothing resists their heroic dash.
Already journeying across the desert
on rough paths, steel unsheathed;
traversing tall mountains and deep rivers;
from victory to victory
to be forever engraved in the bronze of history,
into the fertile plain they rush,
field of new glory,
where fighting again, and again defeated,
runs away terrified
the dark-skinned Hamet. -The host shouts:
TETUÁN FOR ISABEL! -And in the Alcazaba
the triumphant Spanish banner is planted.

FINAL ANTHEM

Magnanimous HEIRESS
of Pelayo's zeal,
your right hand the fiery lightning
toward Africa did cast.
And the boy ALFONSO one day
will know that by your hand
the Castilian soil
its border extended.

Never again from his beaches,
with barbarous daring,
from the land, once his,
may the Muslim stalk.
Let the pure air not be infested
the breeze of the seas,
bringing to our lands
echoes of the Koran.

The wall over which
the Spanish ensign flutters,
may never waving see
the crescents of the infidel.
And from one age to another

sin tregua se repita la voz que al mundo grita: ¡TETUÁN POR ISABEL!	let it be relentlessly repeated the voice that to the world shouts: TETUÁN FOR ISABEL!
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