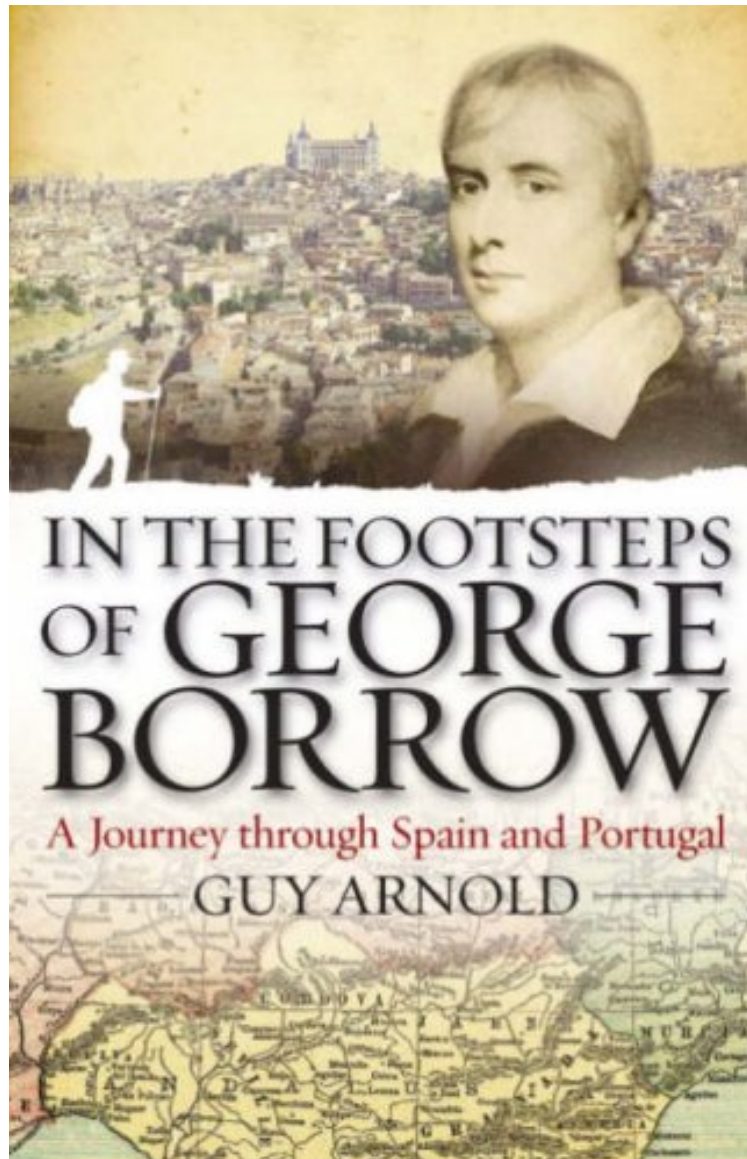


(Free) In the Footsteps of George Borrow: A Journey Through Spain and Portugal

# In the Footsteps of George Borrow: A Journey Through Spain and Portugal

*Guy Arnold*

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**Guy Arnold : In the Footsteps of George Borrow: A Journey Through Spain and Portugal** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised In the Footsteps of George Borrow: A Journey Through Spain and Portugal:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Better to read Borrow or Dalrymple By John Dekker This book

relates the author's travels through Spain, retracing the steps of George Borrow, who made the journey in the 1830s. This puts the book in the same genre as William Dalrymple's wonderful *In Xanadu* (in which Dalrymple retraces Marco Polo's route to China) and his even more brilliant *From the Holy Mountain* (in which he follows in the footsteps of the Byzantine monk John Moschos). Sadly, this book doesn't measure up to either of those works. I love George Borrow. I have read three of his books - *Lavengro* and *The Romany Rye* describe his dealing with gypsies in England, while *The Bible In Spain* relates how he went around the Iberian peninsula distributing New Testaments on behalf of the British and Foreign Bible Society. This is the book that Arnold is interested in, as he retraces Borrow's steps. Arnold admits that he is irreligious, and that colours his interpretation of Borrow. He tends to take a cynical view of Borrow's work, and suggests that *The Bible in Spain* is not the book of a missionary, but "the highly coloured, exciting work of an adventurer" (p. 175). Arnold argues that Borrow "employs the piety of language expected of religious people - after he had learned or assumed it for the benefit of his paymasters, the Bible Society" (p. 168). Arnold's lack of knowledge in Christian matters comes out in his misunderstanding of scholastic philosophy (p. 160) and his notion that G. K. Chesterton's poem *Lepanto* is written from a "cruelly partisan" Protestant view (p. 135). I can't really recommend this book. Rather, I urge the reader to instead read William Dalrymple or George Borrow, or preferably both.

George Borrow - brilliant linguist, expert on gypsy culture and author of "*Wild Wales*" (1862) - remains an enigmatic character whose fiction and travel writing mix autobiography and invention. From 1835 to 1840, he worked as an agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society, attempting to distribute Protestant Testaments in fiercely Catholic Spain. The outcome of this controversial and risky enterprise is - though not the one that his employers expected - as "*The Bible in Spain*", an account of his wanderings published in 1843. The book, a classic of travel and observation, has been in print ever since. A century and a half later, Borrow enthusiast Guy Arnold followed in the footsteps of the restless and eccentric Bible salesman, tracing his route through Spain and Portugal. Visiting the same places, staying where possible in the same inns, and taking the same roads, Arnold explored the varied landscapes and cities of the Iberian Peninsula in a journey that took him through Madrid, Lisbon, Toledo, Seville, Cadiz, Salamanca and Segovia as well as many small towns and villages. Braving blisters, angry dogs and over-inquisitive hoteliers, Arnold walked over a thousand kilometres, taking buses and trains where Borrow had used horses, mules and carriages. In the course of his journey, he looked at cathedrals and churches, palaces and convents, castles and ruins. He also encountered a broad cross section of humanity, Spanish and foreign, on the long road. "*In the Footsteps of George Borrow*" brings to life the scenery and culture of Spain as well as the complex personality of the man who described it in the 1830s. In the course of his travels, Guy Arnold considers Borrow's ambiguous religious beliefs, his avowed taste for the social lowlife and his mysterious liaison with a widow from Norfolk. He also compares modern Spain with that of Borrow's time and finds - civil war and brigandage apart - that much remains surprisingly the same.

About the Author Guy Arnold is a freelance writer and lecturer, specialising in international affairs. The author of more than forty books, his travel writing includes *Down the Danube* and *Journey Round Turkey*.