

Simon Thijs, **Obsidibus imperatis. Formen der Geiselstellung und ihre Anwendung in der Römischen Republik**. Philippika. Altertumskundliche Abhandlungen, volume 129. Publisher Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 2019. XII and 261 pages.

This book presents a detailed examination of the role and position of hostages in the Roman Republic whose taking was common throughout Greco-Roman antiquity. However, a monograph on the subject has not yet been published, so that comprehensive discussion is very welcome. Interestingly, taking hostages did not necessarily ensure that the defeated population remained loyal. In many cases peoples rose against Roman domination soon after. Thijs therefore argues that these temporary captives were not only important to ensure loyalty, but also held symbolic value within the political culture of the Republic.

In the introduction the author offers Ole Weaver's desecuritization approach as an analyzing framework. This is the process that makes something a security problem in order to justify extraor-

dinary measures to solve the problem, which means military intervention. Thijs argues that this model is not applicable to the Roman situation, since warfare was an unusual occurrence in Roman Republic. Instead, the author offers ›desecuritization‹ as a model: the Romans knew how to start wars, but had considerable trouble in concluding them in a definitive manner. Hostages were an instrument that could contribute to ending a war definitely, as they – in theory – secured the loyalty of the defeated people. That this theory was not so easy to practice is consistently proven in Thijs' book.

The second chapter investigates the definition of the term ›hostage‹, usually ›obses‹ in Latin. This mostly refers to cases in which such guarantors of peace were accepted according to an agreement. Prisoners of war were regularly taken, but were not treated in the same way as hostages and did not enjoy the same position in society nor the same role in Roman internal politics.

Chapter three discusses the various ways in which someone could become a hostage. The most prominent of these was ›deditio‹, in which a leading enemy submitted himself or a descendant to the Roman commander's power. This would usually ensure that their city and people would be spared, but the hostages had to be given in order to ensure the peoples' loyalty to Rome. In many cases, the defeated enemy's independence was restored, after which a ›foedus‹ was concluded between them and Rome. In theory, the convention was between equals, so that hostages were not required. In practice, a treaty often included the obligation to pay indemnities to Rome, and this was often secured by giving hostages. In fact, in the Eastern Mediterranean, they primarily ensured the payment of these indemnities, rather than the overall loyalty of the treaty partner. There was, as Thijs argues, little legal systematization about when exactly hostages could be taken. A Roman commander could always request them if he was afraid the enemy population might not remain loyal. Furthermore, there were no fixed regulations about how long the captives remained in Rome's custody, although in many cases they were exchanged for new individuals after a set number of years. The author thus demonstrates the diversity of the phenomenon, for which very few set regulations existed in Roman law or practice. However, it was generally accepted that hostages should be treated civilly, since their abuse was seen as barbaric.

The fourth and largest section of the book investigates each of the main theatres of war in turn, in order to see whether there were any regional differences between the ways the Romans treated the people they defeated, as well as chronological developments. This section feels slightly long in places, as the author explains the military history of each area in some (unnecessary) detail. Thijs sets

out with Rome's early conquest of northern Italy and the Alps, where hostages are rarely attested. Nevertheless, he assumes that they were common. Unfortunately for the Romans, the Gauls in this region consisted of many heterogeneous groups, so that agreements were often broken, since Gauls did not feel bound by treaties concluded by leaders of other groups. The Romans' answer was taking captives from several Gallic groups, in the hope of strengthening their loyalty.

For the Iberian Peninsula, it is noteworthy that the Roman commanders, such as Scipio, were mostly intent on creating a personal bond with the peoples they subjected. They often did not demand hostages or did set them free. Apparently, they considered this lenient treatment a more certain long-term guarantee of the loyalty of the Iberian tribes. It cannot be denied that these arrangements may have been colored by Roman historiography, which notoriously emphasized the clemency of the Scipiones, contrasting them with the Carthaginians' cruelty.

The next section offers more reliable information about Gaul, Germania and Britannia. Caesar's works form the main source for this area, so that the evidence is not fully contemporary. The following section on the Eastern Mediterranean goes back in time, while perhaps a more chronological order would have been more useful in order to determine developments. Thijs, unfortunately, does not explain whether the treatment of hostages as described by Caesar matches what happened earlier, and whether there had been changes in treatment. He does point out that other sources confirm hostage-taking and similar instruments among the Celtic tribes to create bonds between them, such as the fostering of exchanged children, which Caesar translated simply as ›obsides‹. In Caesar's case, it is clear that he wanted to impress his Roman audience and convince them of his military success, as well as of his clemency. In an interesting case, Caesar describes how he took some Gallic ›principes‹ ›in the place of hostages‹ (›obsidium loco‹) with him to Britain, hoping to maintain the loyalty of their Gallic tribes during his absence from Gaul. The difference from regular hostages is that these princes tied themselves to Caesar personally, rather than serving as representatives of their tribes. As seen for the earlier wars with Celtic tribes in northern Italy, Caesar's work shows that the imposition of hostages was not very successful, since a lasting peace was not achieved. The most important thing that bound a tribe to Rome was the personal connection with Caesar and his threat of punishment if any tribe were to be disloyal. Indeed, when a tribe that had given hostages revolted, Caesar usually punished the people severely – the breach of a treaty was considered a serious crime against the gods and Rome.

Next, the author turns to the Eastern Mediterranean. Taking hostages was common among Greeks and Carthaginians. It was common with the Greek states to ensure their treaty partners remaining loyal by taking high officials or designated successors of the kings as hostages. The Romans took over this practice, as shown by the many Greek princes who spent some time in Rome from the second century B. C. onwards. Thijs shows, that third-century exploits in the East were not always accompanied by hostage-taking. The Romans had to find an alternative to ›deditio‹, which was not possible in the Greek states, but hostage-taking proved a viable solution. As previously discussed, these prominents were treated well, with sufficient money and some freedom of movement included. Therefore, being a hostage was no reason for shame; however, people who had spent a long time in Rome, once they returned home, were often seen with distrust by their fellow countrymen. Alternatively, Rome could host these prisoners in a third city, thus testing the loyalty of both their hometown and the town in which they were housed.

In this chapter, the author again emphasizes the importance of hostages for the military commander as proof of a victory, meriting a triumph. In a short chapter, Thijs discusses whether hostages who had spent several years in Rome were ›romanized‹ and, after their return, contributed to the ›romanization‹ of their own states, as is often suggested by previous scholarship. The author argues that the Romans did not intend to familiarize hostages with the Roman culture, in order to create reliable and loyal allies. Only during the Imperial Period, this became a standard Roman practice. This was accompanied by a change in the importance of hostages for individual commanders, as now all the glory went to the emperor.

In chapter six, the author discusses the role that hostages played in the political career of senators, especially in triumphal processions. Although such captives are only mentioned in triumphs in a few cases, Thijs assumes that they were often present. Furthermore, the senator could continue to mention them among his other achievements long after his victory, such as in displays in his house and on his tomb. Hostage-taking was often presented as the first-place argument to deserve a triumph: the commander could claim that he had ›successfully concluded‹ the war and therefore deserved a triumph. The fact that hostages were actually present in Rome – long after the triumph, since they often spent many years in the city – explains, according to the author, why they were rarely depicted on coins or monuments. One could argue (though Thijs does not make this point), that the same applied to other symbols of victory, such as statues that were part of the spoils, or temples donated in memory of a

victory, but perhaps a living person was a more efficient reminder of the victory than a monument.

The author suggests that the internal message communicated by hostages was almost more important than their role in ensuring adherence to treaties. Despite hostage-taking, treaties were often broken by the defeated group. But, even if that happened, the vanquisher usually had already achieved his aim of gaining a triumph. This was also important in establishing the image of a dynasty. Later family historiography often ascribed the taking of hostages to a ›founding father‹, such as Scipio Barbatus. Conversely, hostages are hardly ever attested for families who later disappeared from the ruling class, which reinforces the role of family history in creating a specific image for each individual member of the elite. Hostages often appear in the historiography of founding fathers of Rome itself, such as Camillus. Thus, hostage-taking was firmly established as a vital element of international politics throughout the Roman Republic.

Thijs concludes that the ›desecuritization‹ concept can be applied to hostage-taking in the Roman world. The Romans did not hesitate to start wars, but it proved difficult to end them in a satisfactory manner; Rome was never quite certain that a defeated population would not revolt. Even the taking of captives could not secure absolute obedience. Nevertheless, they were rarely punished for their home town's disloyalty; usually they were not killed in such cases, but simply sent back home.

The author presents an interesting overview of the importance of hostages for Roman external as well as internal politics. Some issues could have been treated in more depth, such as the role of women and children, for example, and when and why they were given as hostages. In some cases, Romans were taken as hostages – the question would be, how and why this happened and whether the Roman state felt obliged to adhere to any agreement that involved Roman hostages. Also interesting is the connection between embassies and hostages – sometimes ambassadors were turned into hostages; when and why did this occur? Furthermore, the point of view of the hostages themselves is not discussed, though there are some sources by former hostages of Rome, such as Polybius.

Nevertheless, this work should be of value to anyone interested in the military and political history of the Roman republic, specifically the way in which military achievements had direct influence on a commander's career; thus external politics had direct impact on internal political events in Rome. Furthermore, the book elucidates the important role of hostages in the Roman foreign policy throughout the Roman republican period.