

**Laurent Jalabert (dir.), Les prisonniers de guerre (XV<sup>e</sup>–XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle). Entre marginalisation et reconnaissance, Rennes (Presses universitaires de Rennes) 2017, 296 p., ISBN 978-2-7535-5671-3, EUR 29,00.**

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The protagonists of war are ostensibly those that fight and civilians that suffer the consequences. For quite some time now historians have been drawn to the fragile »in-between« status of prisoners-of-war. Essay collections such as »Les prisonniers de guerre dans l'histoire«<sup>1</sup>, »In der Hand des Feindes«<sup>2</sup> and »Prisoners and Detainees in War«<sup>3</sup> have shed revealing light on the transhistorical dimension of this problem. The book under review – likewise an edited volume that brings together scholars with diverse expertise – adds to the burgeoning interest in continuities and changes over the *longue durée* by investigating experiences of captivity between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. As Laurent Jalabert emphasises in the introduction, only during the modern period states assumed full responsibility for captives and the latter came to enjoy the protection of international law. He also posits that in contrast to medieval and twentieth century warfare the intervening period remains under-researched. While this claim rests mostly on a survey of the French literature and omits significant advances in foreign scholarship, Jalabert and Olivier Chaline's concluding remarks nevertheless raise important questions about the peculiarities of modern warfare in relation to captivity.

Building on this premise, the volume's 18 contributions are grouped into three themes that accentuate different aspects of captivity. The first segment engages with discursive representations of prisoners, the second with the legal framework of imprisonment and the third with actual conditions on the ground. As is perhaps to be expected, not all temporal and geographical contexts receive equal treatment. The seventeenth century takes pride of place, as do western European theatres of war. Only Özkan Bardakçı's reflections on the role of the prisoner as a transnational trope in European and Ottoman accounts of the Candia campaign (1667/1669) and Philippe Martin's intriguing analysis of the meaning that both sides attached to the ritualistic torture of French missionaries at the hands of Amerindian tribes situate the discussion in a wider framework. However, the volume's narrowness of focus is to some extent remedied by the multinational background of the authors and the bilingualism of the contributions (16 in French and two in German).

<sup>1</sup> Sylvie Caucanas, Rémy Cazals, Pascal Payen (ed.), *Les prisonniers de guerre dans l'histoire. Contacts entre peuples et cultures. Colloque international*, 24 et 25 mai 2002, Toulouse 2003 (Regards sur l'histoire).

<sup>2</sup> Rüdiger Overmans (ed.), *In der Hand des Feindes. Kriegsgefangenschaft von der Antike bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Cologne, Weimar, Vienna 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Sybille Scheipers, *Prisoners and Detainees in War*, Mainz 2011 (European History Online).



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The first section sets the stage well for the other contributions in the volume with Jérôme Delaplanche's essay on the aesthetic conventions that guided the depiction of military prisoners in public monuments from Greek Antiquity to the French Revolution. He shows that although sculptures made consistent reference to enchained enemies, the feelings and political messages they were supposed to evoke altered considerably over the centuries. Hugues Marquis extends Delaplanche's conclusions through an examination of the shifting philosophical attitudes towards captivity during the Age of Enlightenment. Heidi Mehrkens takes this line of enquiry forward into the nineteenth century based on a case study of the Franco-Prussian War (1870/71) by arguing that the customs relating to prisoners of war ultimately proved slow to catch up to the realities of industrialised mass warfare. Bringing up the rear in terms of discursive variety (though not necessarily chronological progression), Bruno Maes scrutinises the cults that emerged around prisoners' patron saints during the Middle Ages and into the seventeenth century.

The second part of the volume tackles the more concrete subject of prisoner's rights. Remy Ambühl's succinct overview of the state of play at the end of the Middle Ages reminds us that prisoners of war only came into existence as a legal category in the 1420s, at least in France and England. Defined at first in opposition to criminals and traitors, they won the protection of the state thanks to a convergence of the customs of war, royal ordonnances, contemporary honour codes, bilateral contracts and the principle of reciprocity. The essays by Frédéric Chauviré, David Rouanet, Jean-Michel Chaumont and François Cochet in turn trace the trajectory of this »humanisation« of military captivity into the nineteenth century. Meanwhile Stéphane Perréon and Sandrine Picaud-Monnerat fill in some of the details with a look at specific test cases, the Nine Years' War (1688/1697) and the War of the Austrian Succession (1740/1748) respectively.

The final section elaborates on the previous themes by studying the challenges captives encountered and the means they used to overcome their vulnerability. Max Plassmann hones in on the parallelism of violence and malnourishment on the one side and order on the other that shaped prisoners' lives in the Nine Years' War and the War of the Spanish Succession (1688-1714). Like Paul Vo-Ha in his ruminations on the aftermath of the battle of Fleurus (1690/1691), he underlines that the coincidence of restraint and violence was often not accidental but stemmed instead from deliberate policy choices, be it the desire to recruit desperate prisoners for one's own army or to secure a military advantage. The duality of prisoner regimes is also the leitmotif of Willem Frijhoff's and Youenn Le Prat's essays. Frijhoff pays particular attention to opportunities for peaceful encounter between Dutch prisoners of war and French civilian populations during the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, whereas Le Prat underscores the systemic abuse and lack of provisions that awaited British prisoners of war in France at the height of the French Revolutionary Wars (1794/1796). Vo-Ha notes for his part that not so much national differences but rather rank distinctions demarcated by »honour« decided which treatment prisoners would receive. Martin demonstrates that among Amerindian tribes, too, captivity could take on different forms: while some victims were killed, others became slaves and a privileged few were accepted into the community.

In sum, »Les prisonniers de guerre (XV<sup>e</sup>–XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle)« is a welcome addition to the literature on prisoners of war. Although the non-



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chronological grouping of the essays is puzzling and a firmer editorial hand would have avoided thematic repetitions (e. g. as regards prisoner exchanges and the mechanics of parole), the volume showcases effectively the richness of current approaches to captivity. Maes' work on saints' cults and Delaplanche's dissection of sculptural representations exemplify how much the subject can offer not only to military historians but cognate fields and other disciplines as well.



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