

Zitierhinweis

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Walter Bruyère-Ostells, Benoît Pouget, Michel Signoli (dir.), Des chairs et des larmes. Combattre, souffrir, mourir dans les guerres de la Révolution et de l'Empire, 1792–1815, Aix-en-Provence (Presses universitaires de Provence) 2020, 270 p., ISBN 979-10-320-0277-3, EUR 25,00.

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Sources dictate history. We must constrain our writing to what clues the past sees fit to leave behind. As a result, the study of French military medicine in the long 18th century has produced many works on the *hôtel des Invalides*, that quasi hospital, quasi retirement home for disabled veterans founded by Louis XIV. This focus on les *invalides* stems in no small measure from the several hundred registers that that institution produced, which are now held at the Service historique de la Défense at Vincennes¹.

In contrast, historians looking to write on soldiers' health in the long 18th century (as opposed to veterans' health) encounter a relative dearth of sources. The museum at Val-de-Grâce houses the most important collection of thirty odd boxes, with Vincennes holding perhaps another forty. Likely the strains of wartime healthcare led to poor record keeping. Hence, fewer works on the army's proper medical services have been produced².

For this reason, »Des chairs et des larmes« comes as a breath of fresh air to a stale field. Through its interdisciplinary approach, it has mustered new archeological sources to augment the medical history of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Specifically, it looks at experiences of suffering and dying from combat or disease. As a historian of military medicine working with government-produced archives, I was struck by the plentitude of sources available once one looks away from the rigid bureaucratic concerns of the state.

¹ To name two works among many, see Isser Woloch, *The French Veteran from the Revolution to the Restoration* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); Élisabeth Belmas and Joël Coste, *Les soldats du Roi à l'Hôtel des Invalides* (Paris, CNRS Éditions, 2018). For more, see Belmas and Coste's bibliography which gives a selected list of ten other monographs.

² For example, the last book in English was released in 1975: David Vess, *Medical Revolution in France, 1789-1796* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1975). Several works in French exist, including : Monique Lucenet, *Médecine, Chirurgie et Armée en France au Siècle des lumières* (Paris: Édition I&D, 2006); Alain Pigeard, *Le service de santé aux armées de la Révolution et de l'Empire, 1792-1815, Chirurgiens, médecins, pharmaciens* (Paris : Editions de la Bisquine, 2016). To this list we could add several official histories produced by the army's medical service and a couple dissertations.



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The fruit of a colloquium held in 2017, this edited volume contains seventeen papers written by researchers from a variety of fields including history, biological anthropology and bioarcheology. It is also the result of a collaboration between the laboratory Anthropologie bio-culturelle, droit, éthique et santé (ADES) at the university of Aix-Marseille and the research center Croyance, histoire, espace, régulation politique et administrative (CHERPA) at the university of Sciences Po Aix. The work is divided into three sections. The first contains seven chapters on the physical effects of battle. The second includes six chapters on soldiers' health outside of battle as they dealt with common military diseases and lingering wounds. The third section has four chapters that investigate suffering through the use of memoirs.

In terms of novel sources, the chapters that use »biological archives«, stood out (p. 25). For example, Élodie Cabot's chapter on the battle of Mans in 1793 relies on a biological archive composed of the skeletal remains of 154 bodies found in a mass grave to contextualize the biased textual sources on the civil war in the Vendée. After demonstrating that these bones belonged to members of the royalist army and that on average the dead each suffered 3,7 major wounds, Cabot argues that the battle was waged without pity. The republican army wanted to decimate the royalist army and therefore took no prisoners (p. 27). Multiple blows from bladed weapons ensured no prisoners were taken. Leslie Quade and Michaela Binder's chapter uses the remains of 30 soldiers excavated on the Aspern battlefield to prove that younger troops suffered from pleuritis and other respiratory diseases at higher rates than their older compatriots. This evidence confirms that green soldiers had to acclimate to the disease environment of the military by developing resistance or immunity. Older soldiers already possessed such immunity (p. 82). Many other excellent chapters use biological archives similar to the above examples.

Of those chapters produced by historians, several move away from administrative archives, using memoirs to reproduce soldiers' attitudes towards their own wellbeing. For example, Claire Decoopman's chapter illustrates varied attitudes towards death. Natalie Petiteau examines emotive relationships between soldiers and animals, notably horses and dogs. Nebiha Guigua uses »*journaux de routes*« and memories to illuminate the tension memorialists balanced when trying to both record their individual experiences of being wounded and the collective experience of battle felt by a unit or an army.

Other historians still turn to administrative archives. Olivier Aranda compares naval combat in the Old Regime to naval combat during the Revolution concluding that revolutionary engagements were not more deadly, but more emotionally charged thanks to the patriotism incited by the Revolution (p. 39). Benoît Pouget uses the archives at Val-de-Grâce, specifically documents related to scabies, to document the twin processes of the »medicalization of war« and the »militarization of medicine«. Interestingly Jacques-Olivier Boudon and François Houdecek venture outside of Paris to



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departmental archives where fresh military-medical sources may still be found. Boudon examines the plight of prisoners of war held in France, while Houdecek looks at the hospice at Charenton where soldiers who suffered from mental illnesses recovered.

In the final assessment, this book is a work of great utility. It offers military-medical historians a guide for diversifying their source base and employing a truly interdisciplinary approach. It also expands upon our knowledge of the lived experiences of soldiers in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. And finally, as the introduction suggests, the volume's interdisciplinary approach permits a return to the dormant »totalization« of war debate³. By looking closely at experiences of soldiering, the editors posit that the relationships between the ideological impact of the Revolution and the level of violence on the battlefield can be better determined. This claim applies to many chapters, but not all, and each entry should be taken on its own with regard to this historiography.



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³ See: David Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007); Jean-Yves Guiomar, *L'invention de la guerre totale: XVIIIe-XXe siècle* (Paris: Le Félin, 2004).