

Book review: Memórias de Dorothée Duprat de Lasserre: Relato de uma prisioneira na Guerra do Paraguai (1870)


Reseña del libro: Memórias de Dorothée Duprat de Lasserre: Relato de uma prisioneira na Guerra do Paraguai (1870)

Abstract: This is a critical review of Memórias de Dorothée Duprat de Lasserre: Relato de uma prisioneira na Guerra do Paraguai (1870), a book organized by Prof. Dr. Francisco Doratioto, which reveals the horrors of the Paraguayan dictatorship from the perspective of a French prisoner of war.

Keywords: Paraguayan War; Paraguay; Brazil Empire.

Resumen: Este texto presenta una revisión crítica de Memórias de Dorothée Duprat de Lasserre: Relato de uma prisioneira na Guerra do Paraguai (1870), un libro compilado por el Prof. Dr. Francisco Doratioto sobre los horrores de la dictadura paraguaya desde la perspectiva de una prisionera de guerra francesa.

Palabras clave: Guerra del Paraguay; Paraguay; Brasil Imperio.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Next year, the Paraguayan War (1864-1870)—also known as the War of the Triple Alliance—will mark 160 years since the beginning of hostilities. This was the largest conflict in South America, in which hundreds of thousands of people were victims of war and of infectious diseases such as pneumonia, cholera, and dysentery, due to the theater of operations' environments.

The consequences of this conflict still resonate to this day; present in the arrangement of South American States and as one of the central factors of Paraguayan nationalism. The Paraguayan War also serves as a rhetorical device in the international arena to erode the Brazilian image in the debate on the renegotiation of the Annex C of Itaipu (2023).

Due to its historical relevance, the conflict had its roots examined via several prisms and by numerous historiographical schools. Júlio José Chiavenato (1979) shows it as a Brazilian genocide against the Paraguayan people. From this perspective, the Brazilian State would be a (sub)imperialist power, an instrument of Great Britain. However, Francisco Doratioto (2022) and Alfredo da Mota Menezes (2012), supported by abundant documentation, refute this thesis and analyze the complex causes of the conflict, such as the theme of boundaries and freedom of navigation in the Plata Basin. Other authors highlight episodes such as the Retreat from Laguna (Taunay, 2003).

Despite the large number of works on the subject, some historical gaps still persist, such as reports on the Brazilians' lives and the violence suffered by them during the Paraguayan invasion of the province of Mato Grosso.

Memórias de Dorothée Duprat de Lasserre: Relato de uma prisioneira na Guerra do Paraguai (1870) makes a significant contribution to understanding the conflict. By describing the daily hardships and bitterness of the French political prisoner Madame Larresse, this work reveals the regime of terror and totalitarianism in force during the dictatorship of Solano López (1862-1870).

[...] Dorothée's account is the only one written in Paraguay by a woman during the war and constitutes a precious contribution to the torments of those who ended up in misery due to the Dictator (Doratioto, 2023, p. 77, free translation).

Several of the "*destinadas*," as the prisoners were known, were arrested and sentenced without having committed any crime. The mere suspicion and/or anonymous complaint from one's antagonist was enough for the authorities to arrest "possible" opponents and their families. This was Mrs. de Lasserre's case (2023, p. 45).

The "*destinadas*" clung to the slightest thread of hope to survive until the end of the conflict, because they were victims of all kinds of violence (such as starvation, robbery, forced labor) by Paraguayan troops. Dorothée was saved by Brazilian forces in Ygatimí, during a forced marching to Espadim.

Encouraged by Colonel Pinheiro Guimarães, Dorothée wrote her biography, from her marriage and her participation in the court of Solano López to her imprisonment during the war. It is an exquisite and detailed account that portrays the misfortune of the author and her family.

In the analyzed work, Francisco Doratioto makes a detailed, reasoned, and contextualized exposition of the history of Paraguay, from the international tensions prior to the outbreak of the conflict to the days of Mrs. Lasserre, which makes the account even more interesting and important; highlighting the author's impressive knowledge about Paraguay and its "Cursed War."

Doratioto's text is fluid and well written and is a highly recommended reading matter for those who want to understand the intricacies of the López regime and the impact of the Paraguayan War on the country's society. The author refutes the simplistic models of analysis of this important historical fact and shows the horrors of war.

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