

*Captives: How Stolen People Changed the World*. Catherine M. Cameron. Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 2016. ISBN: 0803293992

Catherine M. Cameron's work traces the experiences and the cultural significance of a group of people often overlooked in historical study. *Captives: How Stolen People Changed the World* is a cross-cultural exploration of the common patterns exhibited in world history regarding captive-taking and the experiences of captives. Part of a series of books entitled "In the Borderlands and Transcultural Studies," this research is wide-reaching. Ethnographic in intent, this monograph synthesizes previous studies on ethnohistory, slave literature, warfare, and archaeology to describe the forgotten experiences of people held captive in societies around the globe. A solid collection of secondary literature successfully presents captive-taking as a global phenomenon, and Cameron's work ultimately argues that "captives were a significant mode of cultural transmission and a source of culture change" around the world.

Cameron begins her work by exploring the role of the captive in space, time, and mind. Warfare was the primary fashion in which groups acquired captives, and in fact the procurement of captives—and the prestige of attaining them—was often the most desirable result of warfare. Nonetheless, Cameron is quick to note that "captive" and "slave" are not pure synonyms: many captives later became full-fledged members embraced in their new communities. Moreover, Cameron notes that trends of warfare, capture, and socioeconomic enslavement permeated every region of the world, making this a truly global history.

Central to Cameron's research is the depiction of captives as key conduits of cultural transmission. Even when captives were treated poorly and remained outsiders to their captors' communities, she writes, "there is no doubt that captives acted as a powerful avenue of cultural transmission." Rather than looking at economic trade or social interactions between free people,

Cameron contends that captives brought new skills and practices with them to their new communities, and that captors were highly receptive of new skills that they could use to their advantage. For instance, Spanish explorer Alvar Nuñez Cabez de Vaca was held captive by indigenous people on the Gulf Coast because they wanted to learn medical skills he had that they did not possess. The captive, regardless of race, was a significant actor in the dispersal of knowledge. Likewise, Germanic captives contributed to early Roman pottery improvements. Smiths captured by Islamic raiders radically transformed the iron skills of Persian traders. Within sub-Saharan Africa, certain groups learned about drought-resistant agriculture centered around sorghum from their captives. Ultimately, the lowly captive was pivotal in introducing improved cultural practices.

*Captives* is a broad study and as such Cameron stresses the importance of her methodology at the onset of her work. A comparative study, Cameron relies heavily on research by archaeologists, anthropologists, and ethnohistorians on warfare, slavery, coerced labor, and female captivity. While she occasionally uses primary sources, including firsthand accounts of captives and their captors, Cameron's goal is to use an extensive collection of secondary sources to develop an understanding of the experiences of captives in primarily small-scale societies. Additionally, Cameron is quick to note criticisms surrounding cross-cultural comparisons. She notes that critics accuse cross-cultural studies of being selective in order to prove their points about commonalities of societal behaviors. Nevertheless, Cameron notes that anthropologists and archaeologists are embracing the value of cross-cultural investigations. She argues that her volume serves as a first step down a path of research that could prove helpful for those fields and sponsor future study. As she dives into the stories of captives using a methodical research approach, Cameron asserts that it is inappropriate to ignore the presence of "subordinate people,

including captives, in small-scale societies” and how their presence in the lowest strata of their community could be transformative.

*Captives* presents a clear argument, but it is also a work that tries to advocate further research into the role of captives and their transformative position in molding societal practices. Its intent is to help stimulate a new field of study strictly based on “forgotten, stolen people.” Perhaps because of its fervent inclination to promote that, the book frequently uses first person argumentation. The book also uses parenthetical citations, and there are only four footnotes used in the entire text. These attributes, however, do not weaken Cameron’s work as a whole. She asserts that captives affected the construction of social groups throughout time, that future research into captives is deserved, and Cameron does a strong job in validating her thesis.

*Captives: How Stolen People Changed the World* aptly reaches a wide audience and does so with clear writing and disciplined analysis. Students and scholars alike can easily find the stories of captured people and their productive places in foreign lands gripping. Cameron successfully places captives in a commanding role. Ironically, people in the lowest levels of society bore great power and influence through their practical knowledge. Their agency is compelling to read. Furthermore, as the author reaches out to ethnohistorians and archaeologists, *Captives* makes a convincing argument that scholars in those aforementioned fields must study people living in captivity because the development and expansion of social groups greatly depended on these prisoners. While captives are “invisible people” to many histories, Cameron states they should not remain hidden. Downplaying the role of captives is not only unjust to those overlooked in the historical record—it creates a void in the histories of cultures and societies that gleaned insight from people forcibly infused into a foreign people group.

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