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CEGESOMA - State Archives

NEWSLETTER

No 72 - February 2022



NEWS

RESEARCH

CegeSoma has been commissioned to investigate the National Railway Company of Belgium's role in the deportations carried out during the Second World War.

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WIKIBASE RESISTANCE

Six important steps that will allow you to search for the men and women who were members of the resistance in the near future.

► [Read more](#)

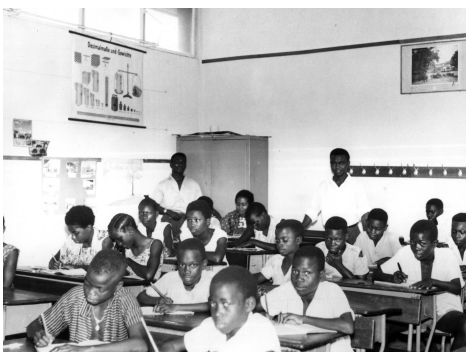
THREE QUESTIONS TO....

We meet the quality control manager for digitization projects at CegeSoma.

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FOCUS ON THE COLLECTIONS



'OUR CONGO' ... IN THE LIBRARY OF CEGESOMA

Some 2,500 books on Congolese history of the 'short 20th century' to discover in our reading room.

► [Read more and watch the video](#)

PUBLICATIONS

SHORTAGE AND HUNGER IN OCCUPIED EUROPE

A new, ambitious publication of wide-ranging sources sheds light on how ordinary people coped with food shortages in occupied Europe during the Second World War.

► [Read more](#)



Fighting Hunger,
Dealing with Shortage



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Research: the role of the Belgian Railway Company in the deportations during WWII



On 27 January 2022, the Belgian government announced that it had entrusted CegeSoma with the task of investigating **the role of the National Railway Company of Belgium (NMBS/SNCB) in the deportations carried out during the Second World War**. This mission was assigned by Senate President Stephanie D'Hose and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Mobility Georges Gilkinet.

During the Second World War, at least 25,490 Jews and 353 Roma were deported, mainly to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Tens of thousands of political prisoners and forced laborers were also deported to concentration camps and prisons, labour camps and work sites. The NMBS/SNCB played an important role in this and, similar to research that has been carried in some of our neighbouring countries, the Belgian government is seeking to clarify responsibilities.

CegeSoma has already carried out an official investigation into the responsibilities of the Belgian authorities in the persecution of the Jewish people in Belgium between 2004 and 2007 (*"Gewillig België/Belgique Docile"*), so this new study can be considered a follow-up. This research is limited to the historical questions and will therefore not make any policy recommendations. In the scientific tradition of CegeSoma and the State Archives, this research will be conducted in full autonomy with an emphasis on the historical context and attention to all the complex nuances of occupation history.

The research will start with the recruitment of a researcher: at this moment the actual research has not yet been launched and we are therefore in a preparatory stage. The research will be led by [Nico Wouters](#) and will result in a

final report in 2023.

Other news

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[Belgium WWII: from the closure of the Free University of Brussels \(ULB\) to the archives of repression](#)

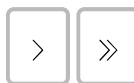
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Wikibase Resistance : a six-step process



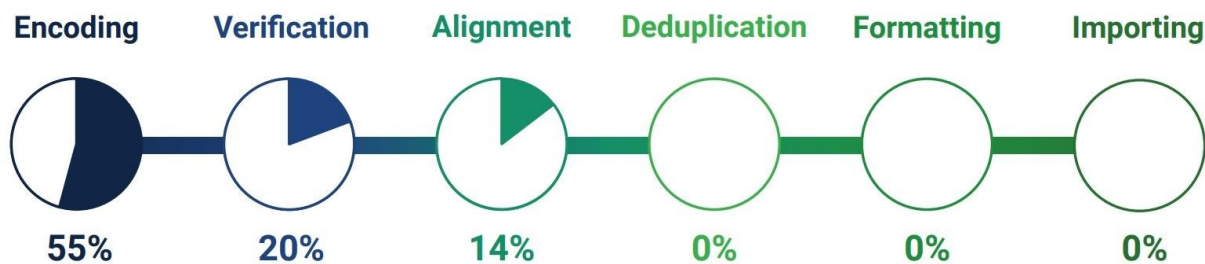
As we explained [last November](#), Cegesoma is coordinating an ambitious project, [Wikibase-Resistance](#), aimed at creating an advanced research tool on people involved in resistance activities in Belgium during the Second World War.

At present, data from more than 72,000 personal files of resistance fighters **kept by Cegesoma** have been encoded. This progress has been made thanks to the efforts of a team of 15 people (volunteers, and administrative staff), who dedicate one to three days a week to this task.

However, before this data can be uploaded, thereby making information on the actors of the Belgian resistance is searchable online, several steps are still necessary. In fact, encoding the data is only the first of six steps. Let's go through them:

- The first step, **encoding**, aims to encode data on these resistance fighters (such as their name, date of birth or membership in a resistance network) into a computer file. This work is based on the forms and personal files contained in archives relating to the resistance, such as the [Archives of the Intelligence and Action Services](#).

- The second step, **verification**, involves checking the quality and the coherence of the data as well as the form and the content, taking into account what has been encoded in the remarks column.
- The third step, **alignment**, consists of establishing links between the names of people or places and external databases (such as [GeoNames](#) for places or [Wikidata](#) for people), in order to limit ambiguities and enrich the data.
- The fourth step, **deduplication**, aims to identify, in a semi-automated way, if several records refer to the same person.
- The fifth step, **formatting**, is a technical step that adapts the encoded data to the destination format.
- The sixth and final step, **importing**, relies on the use of tools to upload all the content onto the data storage and publishing platform.



If you want to follow the evolution of this project, follow us [on the Cegesoma Facebook page](#), where we will be posting details about the content, technical aspects and behind-the-scenes of the project in the coming months.

Other news

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THREE QUESTIONS TO... Mathias Tuybens,

head of quality control for digitization projects at CegeSoma



Mathias, you joined CegeSoma in June 2021 to work on the quality control of digitization projects, and assist readers, whether by fetching documents from storage or by making reproductions on request. What does "quality control" entail and how does it help library users ?

I think my work is useful because I help make archival documents more accessible. First, I check that the digitized documents are correctly oriented, complete and legible. Then, I rename files in a logical and systematic way so they can be easily identified and found. I also describe what has been scanned in summary tables. Finally, I am responsible for OCRing documents with printed text. This means that we use optical character recognition software to create PDFs which can then be searched, for example, by keyword; this is a feature that is very popular with researchers.

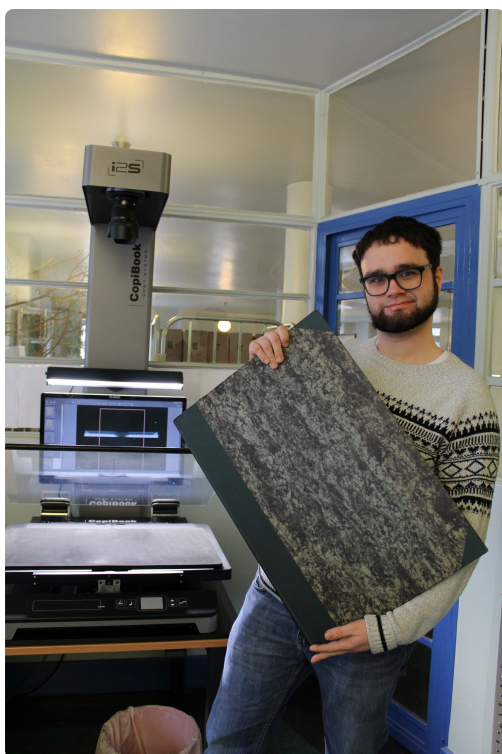
What are the most pleasant or interesting aspects of your job?

My office is right next to the reading room, which means I'm at the heart of the action, at the crossroads between the collections, the visitors and the rest of my colleagues. I like this key position, which allows me to feel useful and interact a lot. I also find it exciting to have a job that allows me to apply what I



learned during my education in library and information science while combining the two completely different dimensions of paper and digital archives.

What qualities do you need for such a job?



I think you need to be rigorous, but also patient, because you must repeat the same types of operation hundreds of times... Of course, you also need a good eye to spot mistakes, either on a scanned image, or in the numbering of files!

Thanks Mathias!

P.S. Do you have a memorable anecdote to share?

My family laughed a lot the day I told them about an academic who requested the reproduction of an archive of more than 600 pages... I counted them one by one in order to estimate the final cost which was quite high to say the least! In the end, the order did not come through. In such cases, we remind people who are interested that they can also come to our reading room and take, free of charge, photos of the documents that want reproduce themselves .

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'Our Congo' in the Cegesoma Library

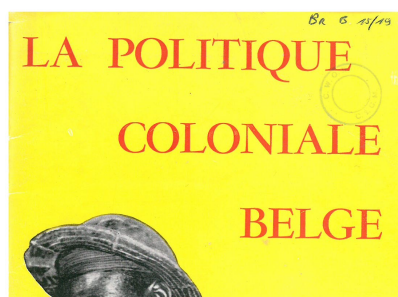
"Our Congo' in the Cegesoma Library'. Under this title, we invite you to discover the tenth theme of our series 'The Librarian's talks'. Each theme will be the occasion to dive into our collections and will be illustrated by a video and a text to complete the information contained therein.

Watch the tenth episode of our video series 'The Librarian's Talks: 10. "Our Congo' in the Cegesoma Library'.

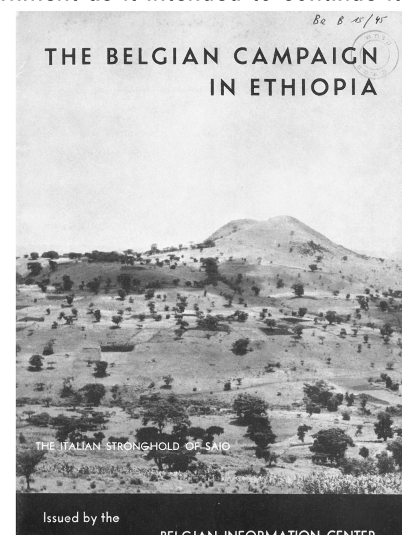
'Notre Congo' - 'Onze Congo'



While the Allies did not expect a substantial contribution of from the colony at military level, the phenomenal natural resources of Belgian Congo (copper, cobalt, zinc, gold, bauxite, manganese, diamonds, coltan and... uranium) were indeed a key element of the war effort and a strategic asset for the Belgian government as it intended to continue its fight side by side with the Allies. While the Public Forces fought honourably during the Ethiopia campaign against the troops of Mussolini, one cannot say however that their mission was decisive in the outcome of the conflict. However, as everyone knows, large amounts of uranium from Katanga were used in the composition of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima.

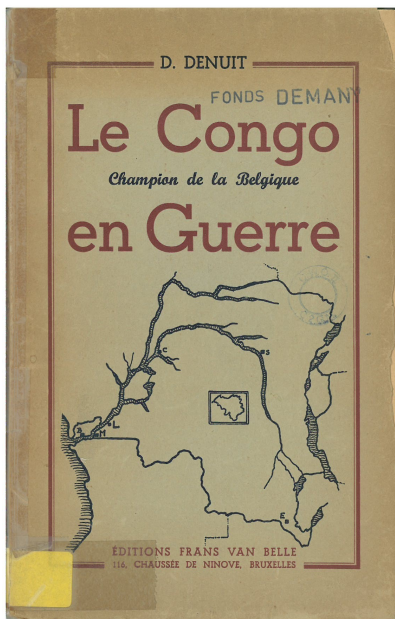


In any case, since its creation, our institution has not overlooked the "case of Congo" in its library, and, with the widening of its scope over time, it has even surpassed the narrow chronological frame that was initially allocated for this subject (ca.





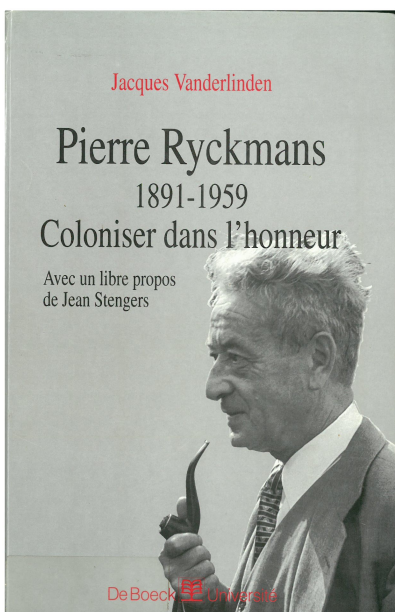
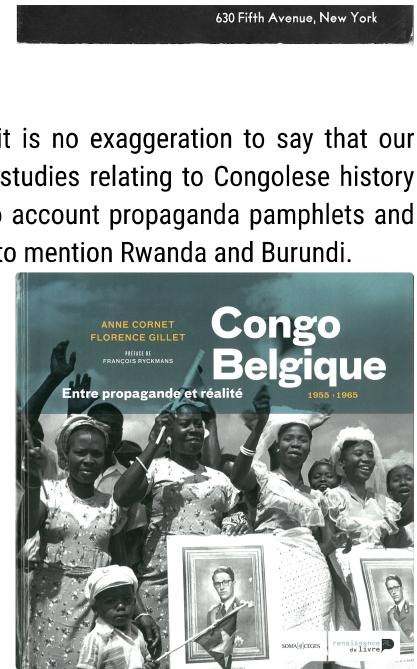
In the beginning, the *INBEL* fonds (*Office belge d'Information de Londres*) was the first source that fed the collection in this regard, as it holds a number of propaganda pamphlets that reflect the period 1930–1950 and its stakes. Numerous other sources then followed, representing the many ways Congolese society interacted with the different levels of colonial power.



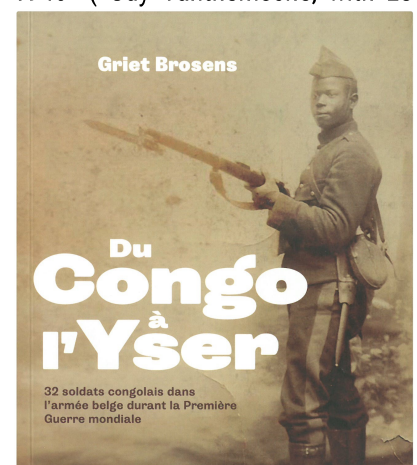
1930–1950) and it now covers the whole period of 1914–1960... and even a little beyond (if one intends to keep a certain historical coherence). Ultimately, it is no exaggeration to say that our library has come to possess some 2,500 studies relating to Congolese history during the “short 20th century”, taking into account propaganda pamphlets and articles selected in scientific journals, not to mention Rwanda and Burundi.

The collection has thus seen a shift in focus from very Belgo-centric and paternalistic approaches (for example, Désiré Denuit, *Le Congo en guerre, champion de la Belgique*-1945) to a treatment of historical data that is far more scientific and multidisciplinary (see *Le Congo belge durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Recueil d'études / Bijdragen over Belgisch-Congo tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog*-1983), without omitting specific themes (Marc Depaepe & Lies Van Rompuy, *In het teken van de bevoogding. De educatieve actie in Belgisch-Kongo*-1995 or, more specifically about the conflict, Jacques Vanderlinden, *A propos de l'uranium congolais*-1991 it now serves shed light on the

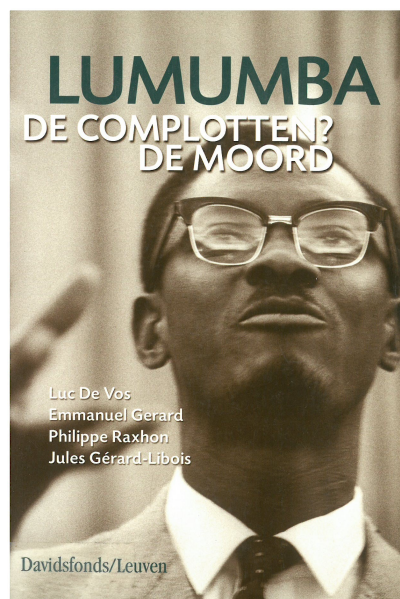
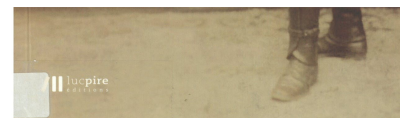
interactions between the two countries, including collective representations (Peter Verlinden, *Belgisch-Kongo : 50 jaar koloniale herinneringen*-2010 or Luc Vints, *Kongo made in Belgium. Beeld van een kolonie in film en propaganda*-1984).



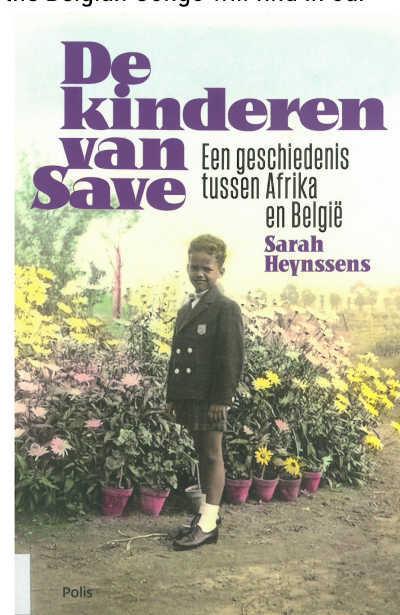
Needless to say, the centenary commemorations for the First World War allowed us to extend our investigations ([an issue of the *Journal of Belgian History* entirely devoted to the theme 'Congo at War' was published in 2018](#)) to the generation that preceded “the one of 1940” (Guy Vanthemsche, with *Le Congo belge pendant la Première Guerre mondiale. Les rapports du ministre des Colonies Jules Renkin...*-2009 got things rolling, so to speak, followed by Catherine Lucas, Griet Brosens... and a couple of others) while the most sensitive and conflictual issues surrounding the relations between Belgium and Congo were re-examined from an increasingly critical perspective, mainly (but not exclusively) by Dutch-speaking



researchers (Ludo Dewitte, with *Crisis in Kongo*-1996, Jef Van Bilsen with *Kongo 1945-1965. Het einde van een kolonie*-1993 or *Les secrets de l'affaire Lumumba*, edited by Luc De Vos, Emmanuel Gerard, Jules Gérard-Libois and Philippe Raxhon-2005).



In short, anyone interested in the history of the Belgian Congo will find in our institution the essential works by the most knowledgeable authors on the matter, ranging from Idesbald Godderis to Guy Vanthemsche, from Jacques Vanderlinden to David van Reybrouck. After all, the CegeSoma itself has been associated with this history in the course of successively approved research projects and by recently welcoming onto its staff a young historian and author of an innovative work about the fate of Belgian-Congolese *métis* children (Sarah Heynssens, with *De Kinderen van Save*-2017). This is but another opportunity to enrich the CegeSoma



library's collection on a sensitive theme that probes the depths of human nature over the course of the last century.

A.C.

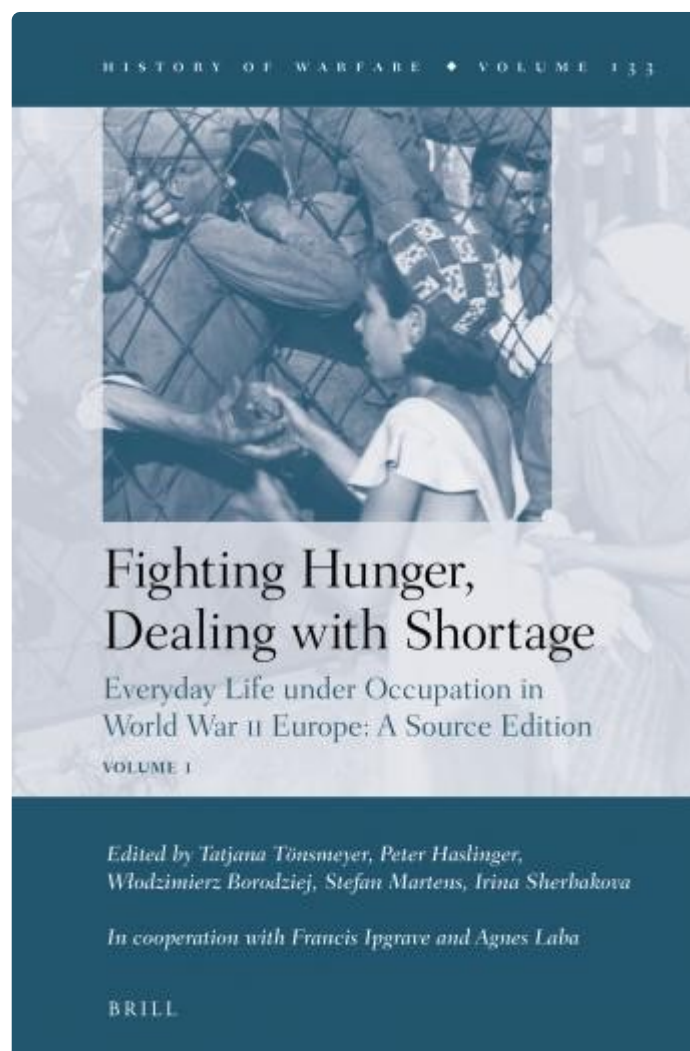
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Shortage and hunger in occupied Europe

A new publication of sources

World War II [Book](#)



World War II and the resulting occupation by Nazi Germany are inextricably linked to food scarcity and hunger. How acute the food shortage was varied from country to country and was often socially and racially differentiated. A new publication, co-authored by Tatjana Tönsmeier, Peter Haslinger, Włodzimierz Borodziej, Stefan Martens and Irina Sherbakova, in cooperation with Francis Ipgrave and Agnes Laba, sheds new light on this issue from sources that document the everyday life perspective.

The book ***Fighting Hunger, Dealing with Shortage. Everyday Life under Occupation in World War II: A Source Edition*** covers the period from March 15, 1939 to April 6, 1945 and incorporates sources from all the countries occupied by Nazi Germany, not only in Western, but also in Central, Eastern, Northern and Southern Europe. Belgium is also covered.

Daily life

The book starts from the question of how 'ordinary people' experienced and dealt with food shortages and hunger. The sources must thus offer a bottom-up perspective, a great challenge for the teams collecting them in the

various countries. The project from which this publication emerged is coordinated by Prof. Tatjana Tönsmeier (University of Wuppertal) and Prof. Peter Haslinger (Herder Institute Marburg & University of Giessen). In the different occupied countries, partner institutions have been sought to collect, annotate and contextualize the sources on site. The Belgian partner is CegeSoma. [Dirk Luyten](#), briefly assisted by Laurence Petrone, took charge of the project and also co-authored the introduction.

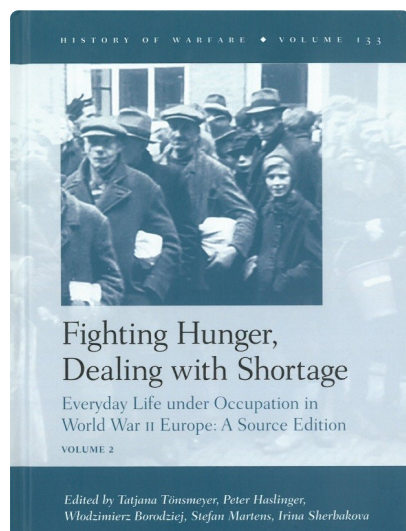
A wide range of sources

The researchers were sent out with a thematic list to look for sources that offered as broad a perspective as possible, so that hunger and shortage are not only viewed from the perspective of the male industrial worker, but also, for example, of children, the sick or the elderly.

In other words, the search was not limited to one or a few archival funds, but had to be broad. Apart from the CegeSoma collection of diaries, the Belgian sources come from the archives of the Société Générale, kept in the State Archives, or from the archives of administrations or control services where citizens made complaints or were fined for flouting regulations in trying to obtain food. The collection of final thesis from social schools kept in the State Archives library, which are often mini surveys of a very specific group such as pregnant women, provided original angles of approach.

At times, some creativity is required: the "back office" archives of the socialist cooperatives in Liège kept at the Institut d'Histoire Ouvrière Economique et Sociale, for example, offer indirect indications of the scarcity faced by consumers. Periodic reports were submitted to the Board of Directors on the stocks present in the central warehouse, where the products were neatly stored on shelves and each product was assigned a particular number on the shelf. Many numbers were either completely empty or only very limited in stock, so the store could not be supplied and the consumer had to go home empty-handed.

A source edition



The book, or rather the books, as there are two volumes, is nearly 1500 pages long and contains 600 documents, 58 of which from Belgium. These documents, often fragments, e.g. a diary entry of a certain date or an extract of a long report, are arranged chronologically and by country. They are indexed by place and subject, but also listed by country. Each document is introduced by an explanatory note that summarizes its contents and identifies the type of source.

All documents have been translated to English, making the book highly suitable for university teaching. An introduction situates the question of hunger and shortage historiographically. The methodology of collecting and editing the sources is explained in detail in a separate introductory article. [The work can be consulted in the CegeSoma library.](#)

PRODUCT DETAILS

Authors : Tatjana Tönsmeier, Peter Haslinger, Włodzimierz Borodziej, Stefan Martens, Irina Sherbakova, m.m.v. Francis Ipgrave en Agnes Laba (eds.)

Binding: hard

Number of pages: 1348 p. (2 vols)

Format:**Publishing date:** 2021**EAN/ ISBN:** 978-90-04-44824-7**Series:** History of Warfare, Volume: 133**Editor:** Leiden, BrillPRICE

249,00 € (Hardback of E-Book (PDF))

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