

Rachel Dixon, *Infanticide. Expert Evidence and Testimony in Child Murder Cases, 1688-1955* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022). 222 pp. ISBN 9780367438890.

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Rachel Dixon's *Infanticide. Expert Evidence and Testimony in Child Murder Cases, 1688-1955* is a detailed and solid history of medical expert evidence in infanticide cases in England. More specifically, the book focuses on the areas of London, Middlesex, and Hull, building mainly on the Old Bailey Sessions Papers and newspaper articles as sources. The approach of the book perfectly meets the spirit of the editorial series of which it is part, 'Explorations in Crime and Criminal Justice Histories' by Routledge and the SOLON consortium: this work is a clear example of interdisciplinarity research (it both illuminates, and is written from, the intersection of law, midwifery, legal medicine, and psychiatry; the author is both a lawyer and nurse herself), and it touches upon a historical topic with relevance nowadays (the difficult question of the epistemic standards for expert witnesses in the forensic arena).

The first two substantive chapters of the book, chapters 2 and 3, focus on the crucial change in the professional profile of expert witnesses in infanticide cases that took place around the eighteenth century: from (women) midwives to (men) surgeons. The author argues that one of the factors that led to this change was the courts' demand of certainty, which the practice of autopsy, and particularly the hydrostatic lung test, apparently promised to deliver. Yet, interestingly, Dixon finds in her primary sources that the level of certainty that physicians were in fact able to provide was low, so that, in terms of certainty, there was hardly a difference between midwives' and physicians' performance in court. This similarity, Dixon argues, implies that 'the medicalisation of infanticide has been overestimated by commentators' (p. 83).

In chapter 5, Dixon covers the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (until 1955), when the new professional figure of the pathologist arose as that of a specialist both in conducting the necessary medical procedures for investigating violent deaths and in interpreting and communicating them for legal courts. Dixon demonstrates that, despite this specialization, uncertainty was still a characteristic of medical testimony in that later period. Although more theoretical attention could have been given to the concept of "(un)certainty", the author shows clearly, with court cases, how judges increasingly questioned

medical witnesses in infanticide court cases and how, despite this inquiry, physicians continued to express inconclusive statements. Moreover, the author, following other historians' arguments about modern perceptions of infanticide, convincingly explains why this uncertainty was 'welcome by the courts' (p. 194): uncertain evidence allowed the jury to give a verdict in line with the growing sentiment of sympathy towards (especially young, unmarried, and primiparous) mothers who killed their newly born child, given that the crime was explained by shame and observance of female virtue. In chapter 5, moreover, Dixon observes that in infanticide cases from the nineteenth century onwards, the mind and motives of the accused became the main theme: this shift implied that the previous attention given to the child's body and medical evidence – as well as its (un)certainty – was diluted.

In line with the cases' attention to the mothers' mind, chapter 4 provides an elaborate analysis of psychiatry and insanity defenses in infanticide cases, covering only the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (1863–1955), given that the chapter starts from the moment the diagnostic category of 'puerperal insanity' was coined. The chapter reveals that the verdict of 'guilty but insane' was rare in nineteenth-century infanticide cases, although it persisted in some cases even after the enactment of the 1922 and 1938 Infanticide Acts. Moreover, Dixon also quantifies how evidence regarding mental impairment or derangement was also infrequent in cases of infanticide. Besides typical cases including discussion of a transitory derangement or diagnoses of idiocy, which are familiar to historians of infanticide, the chapter also briefly covers the more original theme of deafness and communication in court (pp. 128–130) – a contribution that will also be relevant for historians of disability.

The book is overall an impressive analysis covering nearly three centuries, which reads easily as a result of its rich and valuable selection of court cases, narrated by the author in detail throughout chapters 2 to 5. What one finds missing is more international comparison, both in the analysis and in the meticulous 'historiography of infanticide' conducted in chapter 1. This omission might otherwise have shown interesting contrasts regarding the history of lenient infanticide laws, and it would have been most relevant for the history of forensic medicine, given that this historiographical subfield has witnessed a notable expansion recently. Nevertheless, due to its rich and systematic analysis of court cases, its compelling arguments, and the elaborate historical background provided by Dixon in all chapters, this book is an

indispensable addition to the historiography of infanticide and forensic medicine alike.

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Erik Odegard, *Patronage, Patrimonialism, and Governors' Careers in the Dutch Chartered Companies, 1630-1691. Careers of Empire* (Leiden/ Boston: Brill, 2022). 283 pp. ISBN 9789004513266.

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In this, his third book, Erik Odegard looks at the careers of two seventeenth-century Dutch colonial governors who went far beyond what was expected of them. Count Johan Maurits of Nassau-Siegen (1604-1679) and Rijcklof Volckertsz van Goens (1619-1682) are remembered as empire-builders: Johan Maurits in Dutch Brazil, Van Goens in Dutch Ceylon and Java. The study's purpose is not so much biographical as heuristic, using their careers to examine the workings of the two most prominent agents of the Dutch empire, the West India Company (WIC) and the East India Company (VOC).

Odegard places the colonial careers of his two protagonists squarely in the context of these two companies, through which the Dutch Republic organized its empire. For an empire it was, Odegard contends, pointing out persuasively the many connections between the ruling class of the Republic and the colonial administrators. The directors of the companies were frequently also the rulers of the cities that dominated Dutch politics. He shows that the WIC and the VOC were rather more than trading companies: to men like Johan Maurits and Van Goens, the Dutch colonial enterprise was not just about trade but about territorial rule as well. Van Goens, for example, envisioned a Ceylon completely under Dutch control; Johan Maurits clearly acted like a prince in Brazil, developing a new city and building a palace.

Odegard shows in a lucid chapter how both companies were part of a system of devolution of responsibilities, fitting in the institutional structure of the Dutch Republic: in addition to the WIC and the VOC, there were, for example, the admiralties and other forms of devolved power, in which particular interested parties were responsible for particular tasks. It worked on the whole quite effectively – but not always, as Odegard shows.