

material funerary culture from an archeological-historical point of view. Suhr, Kroesen and van der Ploeg, for example, respectively focus on the *longue durée* history of graveyards, pre-Reformation priestly tombs and images and image-critique in the long history of Christianity as a whole.

As the research project aimed at developing tools and ideas for further research from an interdisciplinary perspective, the collection also includes several methodological contributions mapping out possibilities for future research. In this vein, the essays of König and Schiefer present the development of a gravestone database of eastern Friesland and the northern Netherlands, comprising graves' personalia, as well as contextual socio-cultural information. The rich corpora of possible sources for funerary research (ranging from testaments to death certificates) in the Niedersächsisches Landesarchiv in Aurich are presented by Michael Hermann.

*Memento Mori* offers new and interesting perspectives on rural funerary history. Not in the least, it does so by revealing the work remaining to be done and pointing out that scholars ought not to overlook local dynamics in rural regions in writing a socio-cultural history of death – the cultural heritage of which is today often threatened by policy-makers, too. However, the inclusion of a conceptual, methodological or historiographical introduction would have allowed the reader to gauge more easily each essay's position within the academic and public spheres of funerary research. Although each individual essay more or less explicitly dives into the rural context of dying and burying, a clearly outlined overarching conclusion on how rural funerary culture in the border region of Eems-Dollard was different from that in its neighboring urban centres might have been stressed more. Nevertheless, *Memento Mori* convincingly shows the range of possibilities left to explore in writing the history of death in the Dutch-German border region.

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Cassia Roth, *A Miscarriage of Justice. Women's Reproductive Lives and the Law in Early Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Stanford (CA): Stanford University Press, 2020). 376 p. ISBN 9781503611320.

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*A Miscarriage of Justice* promises to be a history of women's reproductive lives and the law in Brazil in the early twentieth century. In practice, this book attends to many more dimensions of analysis that converge into a monograph

embedded in the field of social and political history but does not refrain from entering the domains of intellectual history and the history of medicine. Roth departs from the original premise that studying reproduction implies putting together fertility control – including the practices of abortion and infanticide – on the one hand, and pregnancy and childbirth, on the other. The scope of the book is restricted to Brazil's capital, Rio de Janeiro, and it is based on a great variety of sources that include mostly court files of abortion and infanticide of the period 1900-1940. Notably, the author aims at overcoming the restricted use that historians have made of either court files or medical and legal publications: crossing these two types of sources, she wants to integrate 'medical, legal, social, and political trends' (p. 8).

Each chapter of this book focuses on a specific layer of analysis, but all of them include the consideration of everyday practices and embodied experiences. Chapter 1 sets the scene for the rest of the book, presenting the intellectual trends behind the first criminal and civil codes, the gender ideology, and the racial-eugenicist movement in Brazil after the abolition of slavery in 1888. Chapters 2-4 focus on medical history, attending to the expansion and changes in Rio de Janeiro's reproductive healthcare institutional network (chapter 2), comparing the project of medicalization of childbirth with the popular reproductive practices of the period (chapter 3), and analyzing obstetrician's discussions on fertility control, including their suspicion of midwives and their alleged 'abortion industry' (chapter 4). Chapters 5-7 attend to three aspects of the criminal prosecution of abortion and infanticide: first, denunciations and gossip; second, the practices of the police (that was in charge of the investigation phase, before submitting it to the public prosecution); and finally, case law. In these three chapters Roth combines, on the one hand, the observation of trends in prosecution and judgements, and, on the other, the qualitative analysis of the defence strategies and the rationales behind the jury's verdicts and the judge's final judgements.

Roth presents three main theses. Firstly, the author argues that the processes of medicalization and criminalization of women's reproductive practices were based on both the continuous surveillance and the infantilization of women. Importantly, Roth interprets the diminishment of women's criminal responsibility in the letter of the law and in court practice as the expression of the ideology that deprived female practices of fertility control from 'agency and rationality' (p. 15). Secondly, Roth argues that reproduction was central to state formation in Brazil. More concretely, the author demonstrates that practices of reproduction made a transition from a patriarchal familial control to a bureaucratic and centralized management that, in Vargas' era, was embedded in nationalistic rhetoric. Roth remarks that Catholic views on reproduction

remained central during this process, although they were combined with the ideas of scientific motherhood and racial harmony.

The third argument of the book is that the 'disciplinary structure' (p. 130) of fertility control was not created by legislators alone, but rather was also sustained by the internalization and naturalization of their values by people of all classes in Rio de Janeiro. Roth arrives to this conclusion applying Antonio Gramsci's theory, and G.M. Joseph and D. Nugent's theoretical concept of 'negotiation', to court cases that show, for instance, how intraclass denunciations and popular gossip frequently associated fertility control and blackness (in coherence with the attribution of hypersexuality to black people: pp. 141-145). In this sense, this book is an example of the growing appreciation of anonymous actors' agency that cultural history, medical history and women's history have witnessed since the 1970s. Besides, the author's attention to the spatial realities of communities and institutions in the city of Rio de Janeiro adds to the book's central articulation of lay embodied experiences and legal and medical practices.

Together with these three main arguments, Roth provides evidence for several other points that confront recurrent conclusions in the historiography. Attending to everyday practices, Roth is able to show, for instance, that midwives had an important role in the expansion of the – male-dominated – reproductive healthcare system, nuancing in this way national and international historical narratives that have observed a confrontation between midwives and obstetricians. When analyzing infanticide jurisprudence, the author also deviates from the previous historiographical focus on the legal concept of 'honor', which featured in the Brazilian Penal Code until 1942. Instead, Roth claims that the clause of temporary 'deprivation of senses and intellect' (referring to insanity, passion or unconsciousness) was the most usual and successful defence for female perpetrators in infanticide trials by jury, in early twentieth-century Rio de Janeiro.

Roth's text is exhaustive and detailed. Apart from offering the reader transparent notes on the sources and data of the study throughout the book and in annexes, the author's attention to multiple historical actors and arenas results in a narrative that shows, more than it explicitly tells, the needs and directions for future research. Remarkably, the pervasive inclusion of short and concise narrations of individual cases does not overshadow, but rather backs up and illustrates the arguments of the oeuvre.

The conclusion of this book goes beyond the recapitulation of the previous chapters: avoiding historical narratives of emancipation from repression, Roth attempts to connect its conclusions to contemporary debates and processes around childbirth and abortion in Brazil. In that manner, the author fulfils the

promise that '*A Miscarriage of Justice* is a feminist history of reproduction that centers the lives and deaths of women (...) in its understanding of the past' (p. 4), while trying to shed some light on the present as well.

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Walter Scheidel, *Escape from Rome. The Failure of Empire and the Road to Prosperity* (Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press, 2019). 670 p. ISBN 9780691172187.

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This book is so rich and complex, and ambitious and broad in scope, that it took me quite some time to digest it and write this review. It is without doubt one of the best examples of big history published in recent years, and a major contribution to the Great Divergence debate. Walter Scheidel is one of the most prominent ancient (economic) historians, a specialist of the Roman Empire, who has successfully branched out to other regions, empires, and time periods. This is one of the reasons to admire the book: his expertise hardly knows boundaries, and he manages to write with authority not only about the economic, political and institutional history of Rome and Western Europe, but he is equally knowledgeable about China, India and the Islamic world. The book ventures into the discoveries by the Polynesians, discusses the geography of Europe compared with China (and India and Southeast Asia), and all this is written in an elegant, highly accessible way. Chapeau!

Moving to contents: the big story is that the difference between China and Western Europe – the 'ultimate' cause of the Great Divergence – is that empire in China returned (after a crisis in the fifth-sixth centuries) and was alive and kicking throughout the entire 2000plus years covered by the book. However, after the collapse of Roman Empire, nothing comparable was re-established in Western Europe, resulting in a radically different, polycentral socio-political system there, which was the 'true' cause of its dynamic development in the Middle Ages and the early modern Period. States, small and large, competed intensely in Western Europe, which created, or allowed space for, the vibrant intellectual, technological, institutional and economic development of the subcontinent. Not only competition between states mattered, it also led to a different balance of power within states, with a far greater role played by civil society and organized interest groups in the West. This made possible the emergence of public debt and of dynamic capital markets – but this is one example