
The study of masculinity has become a hot topic recently, as historians of gender have begun to recognize that ideas of manhood in the past were as much cultural and social constructions as those of womanhood or femininity. This belief lies at the heart of this pioneering study in which Foyster convincingly demonstrates the benefits that may be gained from analysing the gender identities of men and women in early modern England in relation to each other.

Foyster’s principal aim is to explore the workings of patriarchal marriage in seventeenth-century England, showing the importance that power over women had in the formation of men’s identity. Getting married confirmed a man’s entry into patriarchal society, conferring new social roles and responsibilities. But it was also a testing-ground for manhood, as men’s honour depended on their ability to maintain an orderly household – the key to which was not just rational self-control but also the sexual control of women. Men who failed to live up to this ideal, such as hen-pecked or cuckolded husbands, were subject to ritual mockery. Patriarchy thus not only had implications for women’s position in society but also profoundly affected men’s personal relations, creating ‘hegemonic’ and ‘subordinate’ masculinities.

Using an impressive variety of literary, prescriptive and legal sources, Foyster charts the ways in which ideals of honourable manhood were achieved, asserted, lost and restored. Drawing on popular ballads and drama, she richly demonstrates the derision and abuse directed against cuckolded husbands, providing much evidence to support her argument that, although a man’s honour might be damaged by a variety of non-sexual behaviour (such as dishonesty, theft and drunkenness), to be called a ‘cuckold’ was the worst rebuke a man could face. Though few men actually sued for defamation on these grounds, an analysis of the background to
suits for sexual slander brought to the early-seventeenth-century Durham consistory court and the Restoration court of Arches reveals that some suits in which married women complained of being called a ‘whore’ were supported and financed by their husbands, concerned about the implication that they were cuckolds. Cases were brought to court not simply as a means of settling neighbourhood disputes but also as a means of saving marriages threatened by insults. Matrimonial cause papers are used effectively to show the damage to men’s public standing caused by a wife’s adultery and to shed light on men’s responses to their marital difficulties. Foyster subtly analyses marital violence, showing that although assaults against wives may have been a common response to jealousy or adultery, with some official sanction, excessive force was condemned and might result in further shame and dishonour. Though men appeared to have greater opportunities than women to regain lost sexual reputation, the stigma of cuckoldry seems to have been difficult to remove. The best a man could do was to act swiftly and decisively to prove that he was not ‘contented’ with his cuckoldry or a ‘wittol’ – a willing participant in his wife’s adultery.

Due to the nature of the source materials consulted, much emphasis is placed on the role of community in regulating patriarchal marriage and brokering sexual reputations. More intriguing is the question of how adultery and related issues affected a man’s self-esteem. One of the most interesting sections of this book compares literary representations of jealousy with the diarist Samuel Pepys’s account of his jealous feelings about his wife’s relations with her dancing-master. The issue of how cuckolds saw themselves, and the ways in which perceptions of cuckoldry differed according to individual circumstances, receives less attention. While this book greatly enriches our understanding of patriarchal marriage, Foyster’s focus on married men makes the reader wonder how their understanding of manhood and sexual honour compared to those of bachelors, widowers and homosexuals. If, as Keith Wrightson and others have argued, getting married in early modern England was a privilege enjoyed by those who had the economic resources to set up a household of their own, questions arise about how single men perceived their ‘manhood’. Much remains to be written on this topic. Foyster has opened up this exciting field of historical study in a vivid and compelling survey that undergraduates will find accessible and with which historians of early modern gender relations will have to engage.

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In presenting the English Reformation as an unwelcome and resented act of state, revisionist historians have laid much weight on the failure of Protestantism to take
firm root in local communities. But it has been a conspicuous feature of such work that it has drawn much of its evidence from the countryside – from detailed analysis of the impact of the religious changes of the mid-sixteenth century on rural society, on the inhabitants of small villages and outlying counties nearly beyond the reach of the stretching tentacles of central government. John Craig’s impressively researched monograph helps to redress one regrettable side-effect of this influential historiographical trend: the relative neglect of the Reformation in its urban context. Drawing on largely untapped borough and municipal records, as well as wills, churchwardens’ accounts and consistory court books, it consists of a series of careful case studies (or ‘thick narratives’, p. 179) of the growth of Protestantism in East Anglian market towns (Mildenhall, Bury St Edmunds and Hadleigh in Suffolk and Thetford in the south-west corner of Norfolk), supplemented by a set of useful appendices. Most of these chapters have appeared in some form elsewhere, but gathered together here they represent an important contribution to our understanding of the role played by men and women below the level of the gentry, mainly of the ‘middling sort’, in the making of the Reformation. Collectively they emphasize the extent to which the entrenchment of Protestantism involved both cooperation and negotiation between ecclesiastical and secular authorities and the town officials and magistrates who mediated, ‘brokered’, interpreted and implemented religious policies formulated by the Crown, Church and Parliament. They also reveal how far the Reformation in the towns was a fretful and hotly contested process, often accompanied by bitter dispute and factional conflict. In Bury, it was enmeshed in a contentious struggle for political control which manifested itself in the ‘stirs’ of 1578–1586, a struggle exacerbated by the spread of radical Brownist ideas and by the interference of Bishop Edmund Freke. In Thetford, it assisted in transforming what was essentially a squabble over office-holding into a spiritual war between the self-styled ‘godly’ and the ‘frowardly inclined’. In Hadleigh, the town immortalized by John Foxe as ‘one of the fyrst that received the woord of God in all England’, the progress of Protestantism was no less arrested and acrimonious: for nearly three decades advocates of reform wrangled with a group of conservatives for control, belying the compelling legend woven around it in the *Actes and monumunts*.

The way in which the language of theological division was repeatedly injected into and overlaid upon controversies which owed comparatively little to genuine religious divisions also highlights two other key points which emerge from this book: (1) the need for historians to be sensitive to the contexts in which confessional labels were used by contemporaries and to recognize their fundamental instability, and (2) the importance of adopting a definition of Protestantism which breaks free of the exacting standards set by Elizabethan and later preachers and which encompasses action as much as the conscious apprehension of truth. The highly textured picture the book paints is one in which the stark confessional polarities of ‘Catholic’ and ‘Protestant’ are replaced by a subtler and more dynamic spectrum of overlapping and evolving allegiances. In vividly recreating these urban landscapes, Craig also presents us with a set of intriguing vignettes and miniatures: of the female scrivener Margaret Spitlehouse, busy housewife and mother of eleven children, who drew up
and witnessed wills on the day before her own wedding, on Christmas Eve, and while eight months pregnant (pp. 121–5); of the Norfolk locksmith who spoke out against the ringing of bells to celebrate Elizabeth I’s Accession Day and ‘swore by godes mother yet shoulde never synk into his hart that a woman ought to be supreme hedd of the church’ (p. 144); of the remarkable parish library of Bury St Edmunds founded in 1595 (the inventory and donors lists of which are supplied as Appendices 5 and 6); and of the witty and spirited marginalia of the Hadleigh rector and Marian martyr Dr Rowland Taylor (detailed in Appendix 8).

Despite Craig’s efforts to stitch his case studies together with a series of overarching themes, in the end this monograph perhaps more closely resembles a finely executed patchwork than it does a seamless garment. In places the needlework is visible to the reader and in the three rather loosely linked chapters which precede the splendid triad on Bury, Thetford and Hadleigh the various competing threads of argument and emphasis raise some questions about focus, direction and shape. Nevertheless, these points do not significantly detract from the book’s overall achievement. As well as engaging in an illuminating way with the ongoing debate about the English Reformation, it sets a new standard of scholarship for historians of the urban Reformation.

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This very useful, well-produced book is a companion volume to one on London and Dublin between 1500 and 1840. The contributions originated in a symposium and were revised in the light of the discussions held there, and many of them probe – to a greater or lesser extent – the comparative development and nature of urban society in England and Ireland between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. The principal themes will be familiar to specialists, but the comparative dimension stimulates much interesting comment. Comparisons are necessarily somewhat tentative, and important shades of difference can readily be discerned between contributors on significant issues. Part of the challenge here is also that urban society in this period, even excluding the capitals, comprehended such a diverse body of communities and places. Ireland presents an added problem here in that many, but not all, Irish towns were relatively recent foundations, a product of the plantations or of landlord-led improvement; the basis of the English urban network had already emerged by the later middle ages, and growth was largely accommodated within this framework.
Borsay and Proudfoot’s introduction fully acknowledges these problems, and also attempts to draw together the comparative strands in the volume. This in itself is a very helpful exercise, and will offer considerable food for thought to those thinking about the value and nature of British history in this period. The other contributions are uneven in interest and ambition, but several stand out as very valuable additions to the current literature on urban history. In a richly documented chapter, Toby Barnard explores the cultures of Irish towns in the eighteenth century. In so doing, he emphasizes the limitations of landowner influence in at least some Irish towns, and the significance of towns as sites of political, social and – unsurprisingly perhaps in the Irish context – religious division (although this did not preclude accommodations across the religious divide). Several of the other contributions also explore the issue of landlord influence in Ireland, including those by W. H. Crawford on Ulster towns and Proudfoot on market and fair formation (and survival) in Ireland between 1600 and 1853, although no consensus on the issue emerges from these. Barnard focuses too on the importance of festival and ritual as a component of urban life, a theme that is not taken up elsewhere in the volume. This is perhaps a missed opportunity, because it has such a crucial bearing on how we represent urban society and values in the eighteenth century, as civic or polite, or perhaps more fruitfully on how these perspectives were in practice and in many contexts melded together. Jon Stobart, meanwhile, portrays the development of Chester in the eighteenth century from the perspective of its developing connections to a series of wider economic, social and political worlds. The primary interest here lies less in the basic point being made – about how closely urban fortunes depended on shifting networks of communications, a point taken up in a chapter by Alan Dyer on small towns in England between 1600 and 1800 – than in the nature of the evidence (records of horse sales and executors of wills) used to illustrate his theme. Borsay examines the rebuilding of the central area of Warwick after a fire in 1694, a process which, he argues, by offering an unusual opportunity to construct from new, furnishes unusually clear evidence of provincial attitudes towards urban design and the urban environment in the later seventeenth century. Because the process was directed by a formally constituted body, the Fire Court, with an attendant bureaucracy, it has also left very full records. The Fire Court was dominated by the county elite, particularly by Lord Brooke, and Borsay’s account provides a caution to those who might be too quick to discount landlord influence in the English context, although (as he also acknowledges) Warwick, overshadowed by the castle, where Brooke was resident, was hardly typical. Rosemary Sweet further develops her earlier work on town histories by examining, from a comparative perspective, the paucity of such histories produced in Ireland for most of the eighteenth century. Given the lack of similar comparative work, British historians especially will welcome this volume, although it will undoubtedly (and rightfully) command a much broader readership.

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In the two decades since Peter King first began to publish the findings of his widely cited 1984 Cambridge PhD thesis on the processes of prosecution, sentencing and punishment in eighteenth-century Essex, the historiography of criminal justice has developed at a remarkable rate. Historians of crime and punishment have experimented with positivist readings of the utility of serial analysis of indictments as an index of the incidence of crime (Cockburn); with interactionist models of negotiation and decision-making during the criminal trial (Lenman and Parker, Herrup); with `neo-positivist' revisions of the relationship between property crime, dearth and demobilization (Hay, Lawson); and with post-modern analysis of depositions to reconstruct the mentalities through which understandings of criminal behaviour were refracted (Gaskill). Throughout, King's early discussion of `decision-makers and decision-making' has proved to be one of the most influential paradigms in the field, standing toe-to-toe with Douglas Hay's controversial reading of the criminal law as a selective tool of class oppression as an essential starting point for discussion. To note, therefore, that this monograph has been keenly anticipated would be one very significant understatement; another would be to report that it amply fulfils the potential of King's early articles and essays.

This is a magisterial book in every way, presenting with clarity and conviction the findings of sophisticated quantitative and qualitative research on a vast body of manuscript and published material. Its conclusions are simply and elegantly argued, its insight born of prolonged and painstaking reflection on the issues. King escorts his readers along the corridor of the criminal justice system, passing into and out of the various rooms where discretion was exercised by the protagonists in the decision-making process. Where Hay focused on the life-and-death decisions made in the rooms furthest down the corridor, and especially on that awful moment of terror and majesty when sentence was passed by the judicial bench, King is at pains to point out that more popular initiatives, taken long before a judge was robed or even a jury was empanelled, were of far greater significance in determining the fate of the accused. His rationale is that historians have for far too long focused on `the tiny but brightly illuminated figure representing the indicted', and paid only cursory attention to the `huge looming presence of the dark figure of unrecorded crime' (p. 132). Indeed, King is one of the few historians seriously to attempt measurement of the undoubtedly immense dimensions of this `mere silhouette'. In the 1790s, Colquhoun argued that a maximum of one offender in ten was indicted in late-eighteenth-century London, and other evidence suggests that even this figure might be optimistic. King hammers home the implications: `even if the ratio for most indictable property offences averaged out at around one in ten, this would have meant that indictment levels were ten times as sensitive to changes in the proportion of victims who chose to prosecute them than they were to changes in the absolute level of offences being committed’ (p. 12). Not for nothing, therefore, does King spend three carefully argued chapters analysing pre-trial processes,
in order to locate those ‘alternative’ exits along the corridor of justice, doors which did not lead even to indictment, let alone to conviction. This is the most original and striking section of the book, and the jewel in its crown is a brilliant reconstruction of summary justice, teasing out the subtlest of implications from treacherous sources. Those early-modernists who have spent years groping for the fuse wires which ignited formal prosecution will be full of admiration for the patience and perseverance King has applied to the cursory notations scrawled in magistrates’ notebooks. One of its fruits is a picture of ‘prosecutor nullification’, the bringing of ‘faint evidence’ by victims in order to mitigate the seriousness of the charge even before the petty jury got the chance to scrutinize the evidence. In this respect, and in so many others outlined in this book, ‘the decisions that pulled the levers of fear and mercy were not taken by propertied men alone’ (p. 358).

There is far more to admire here than can possibly be conveyed in a review of this length, but it would be a dereliction of duty to omit reference either to King’s ground-breaking work on the implications of life-cycle change on sentencing policy or to his nuanced reading of the pardoning archive in HO 47, a source made familiar by Gatrell’s brilliant study of Robert Peel but here subjected to a forensic examination which reveals a far greater degree of popular agency in the politics of the pardon than has previously been suspected. It is not often that a reviewer reaches the end of a book of this length and longs for more, but it is probably true to say that this study would have been even better for a few thousand more words. King’s analysis of the Great Gleaning case of 1788 has already demonstrated his facility for micro-history, and one wishes that he had the chance to offer a thick description to bear comparison with that offered in Gatrell’s Hanging tree. Nonetheless, this book will for many years to come dominate the historiography of eighteenth-century criminal justice. And rightly so.

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This is not a book whose acclamation as erudite and exhaustive, but also lucid and readable, should arouse mortal envy of the reviewer’s preternatural concentration. It has every potentially stultifying quality but is genuinely readable, even gripping, keeping one from one’s bed in the small hours, resistant to the delay of note-taking. This is partly due to its true magisteriality: Murray has sufficient space to marshal all his evidence and to expound source criticism, his reasoning and methods of interpretation and investigation fully; he demands no prior knowledge, often addressing his readers as if we were together, in a lecture or seminar room.

Murray’s quarry is the origin of the Western European medieval curse on self-murder, that is, the cause of horrendous treatment of suicides’ bodies, the threat of destitution for their kin, the teaching of a certain destiny in Hell for their souls.
He travels through many fields: the pre-medieval Christian tradition; Greek and Roman philosophy; medieval theology and law; Dante; ancient and medieval attitudes to Judas and to despair. *En route* he summarizes debate and consensus, and offers original conclusions, on points outside as well as within the medieval period. Suicide was at some early time seen as an economic injury to the perpetrator’s lord. The intellectual tradition – even within its subdivisions – was inconsistent in its attitudes to suicide: broadly speaking, ancient philosophy and law were softer than Christian tradition, but the difference was between two centres of gravity rather than two bodies of opinion and both hardened over time. Medieval theological reticence or comment are explicable in terms of the broader intellectual context, rather than by changed opinion. Of the split (suicidal and non-suicidal) traditions about Judas, Pontius Pilate and Herod, the non-suicidal was the earlier.

Murray establishes that, in terms of its own internal rationale and Scriptures, Christianity could have gone either way but proved to favour the hard line. Its explanations of why suicide is wrong are a rationalization rather than a cause of this position. The leniency of society to attempted suicides, and its severity towards possible but unproven ones, suggest that the explanation is in anthropology’s court, the fear of pollution. This attitude to suicide Murray finds not only in ancient Graeco-Roman and Jewish sources, early German and medieval Islamic attitudes, but also in societies with which medieval Europe had no relationship: ancient Egypt, India and nineteenth- and twentieth-century African and Native American tribes. He concludes with reflections that he may have written the history of an institutionalized swear-word, and remarks about the nature of time. This reminds us that history can be conceived as related to ultimate realities. Medieval people would easily draw from this book the conclusion that the taboo-on-suicide curse arose because suicide is wrong.

We have then a study of continuity and an illumination of its changing mechanisms and faces. One might wonder why the ancient taboo proved so enduring, colouring the attitude of the Church, resisting ecclesiastical tendencies towards greater compassion than the community in its application, for it could have been different. Murray’s brief excludes general paganism–Christianity comparison, but when he does compare, for example with the esteem for virginity, he finds more similarity than contrast. Yet there were huge differences between their beliefs and their behavioural ideals; conflicts and compromises are apparent in every society which has converted to Christianity, and sometimes there was massive change. As Peter Brown has shown, the late-antique/early-medieval cult of the relics of saints, encouraged by the élite, involved a reversal in attitude to dead bodies. Some changes and continuities are explicable by their social function – the saints’ cults in the decaying Roman Empire gave roles to women and the poor and promoted local cohesion – but a good many are not, such as the attachment to red and purple, instead of the ecclesiastically promoted white, as mourning colours. The legal texts’ frequent, seemingly unnecessary, concern with methods of suicide Murray explains in terms of the horror that the sight of a successful suicide provoked in the onlooker, without dwelling on whether this proceeded from any sense.
of the taboo or from its ‘objective’ horror. Perhaps such personal trauma – in the highly personalized societies which are Murray’s subject, a long way from Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined communities* – was as much the food as the flower of the taboo.

This book is generously footnoted but its extremely select bibliography (pp. 599–601) is unhelpful for finding reading on particular points and, more importantly, for sensing how well and recently studied suicide is. The index (pp. 603–20) does not do justice to the comprehensiveness of the book, rendering thought-provoking arguments untraceable, for example that on the two-tier (élite and popular) model of piety (pp. 526–31). One must read Murray twice.

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In view of the illness of the Dalai Lama and the complicated recent history of the position of the Panchen Lama, Tibet may soon be in the news again. In the course of making clear that it was already in the news a century ago, Tatiana Shaumian casts some light on the ethnic and religious diversity of the Russian and the Chinese Empires and discusses one of the respects in which Asian affairs played a part in the pre-1914 European balance of power. It is stimulating to read a book which contextualizes Russia’s Buddhists. In April 1913, the tsar’s foreign minister told the Chairman of the Council of Ministers that ‘our interests in Tibet … are based exclusively on the fact of the Russian Kalmyks and Buryats professing Lamaism headed by the Dalai Lama’ (p. 182). Although, in this letter of 1913, Sazonov was emphasizing that Russia’s Tibetan interests were minor (with the result that he may have deliberately downplayed the non-religious considerations which underpinned them), it is interesting to note that he did not confine Russia’s celebrated concern for her co-religionists to the Orthodox co-religionists of the Balkans. Nicholas II may have been equally broad-minded, to judge by his cordial relations with the Buriat healer Petr Badmaev (who sometimes looks like a sort of well-behaved proto-Rasputin at the court of the last tsar). Unlike Sazonov, however, the tsar and one or two other incautious Russian leaders were interested in Tibet for geopolitical as well as for religious reasons. In 1900 they wondered whether the country could be turned against its Chinese masters in the wake of the Boxer Rebellion. In 1904 they looked to extract advantage from the British occupation of Lhasa, which on the one hand obliged the Dalai Lama to flee to Mongolia (nearer Russia) and on the other obliged the Chinese to abolish his office (in order to simplify Anglo-Chinese negotiations). Unfortunately, from the point of view of tsarist expansionism, Russia was preoccupied by war with Japan in 1904 and could not easily make the most of the exciting contemporary events in Tibet. She was still able to make a little of them,
however, in the negotiations which led to the Anglo-Russian Entente of 1907. The Dalai Lama duly returned to Lhasa in 1909, but thereafter received no help whatever from Russia. St Petersburg did not assist him when Chinese troops entered his capital in early 1910 (obliging him to flee to India), and did not take up the cause of Tibetan independence after the fall of the Manchu dynasty in China in 1911. Having got what he wanted out of Tibet (an extra way of putting pressure on the British in the run-up to the 1907 Entente), the tsar appears to have rested on his laurels. Thus, historiographically speaking, Shaumian’s tale exemplifies the Soviet tradition of vilifying tsarist unscrupulousness.

Her book is indeed a Soviet rather than a post-Soviet work, for, as she acknowledges, it is ‘a substantially revised and expanded version’ of a Russian-language book of 1977 which was itself the product of a 1966 thesis (p. viii). Insofar as the study brings to light unpublished data from Russian and Indian archives, it is welcome. It cannot be called impartial, however, and in view of the fact that it chiefly relates ‘what one clerk said to another’ and does not always read smoothly, it is not exactly user-friendly either. Attractive minor features (apart from the various appearances of Badmaev) include the story of the construction of the Buddhist Temple in St Petersburg between 1909 and 1914. Minor irritants include the lack of a map, the assertion that Peter Fleming was American, the invention of an early-twentieth-century British Foreign Secretary called ‘Lord Gray’ and the ascription of the initial ‘S.’ to Konstantin Nabokov, the uncle of the future novelist who served as Russian Consul-General in India before ending his diplomatic career as chargé d’affaires in London.

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This book consists of an introduction and ten provocative essays on the history of urban public health in northern and western Europe from sixth-century Trier to early-twentieth-century Düsseldorf. The chapters exhibit several of the approaches which characterize contemporary scholarship in the area. They are provocative in that singly or in juxtaposition they call attention to assumptions, questions and methods historians use to investigate urban health, and also in being, for the most part, suggestive rather than fully persuasive – necessarily so, since the arguments are bigger than chapter-length allows.

Peregrine Horden’s essay, ‘Ritual and public health in the early medieval city’, sets the tone. Horden challenges ‘materialist’ historians who have excluded ecclesiastical responses to plague from the history of public health. And yet bishops mediated community and purity, central parts of a public response, as Horden points out. The chapter raises the issue of how far to stretch health, and some may
balk at the implication that the goods the bishops sought (which might never show up in mortality rates) were goods of health. ‘A temple is as useful as a dam’, to be sure, but for the same purpose? Colin Jones’s ‘Languages of plague in early modern France’ makes a complementary point, reminding historians what they should never have forgotten, that the great collection of plague texts of the period are, after all, texts, written for contemporary consumption, according to medical, religious or administrative conventions, and not as sources for social historians three centuries later. Though ‘flawed’ as sources of historical epidemiology, they tell us much about the contest for authority, Jones notes, but the chapter is too brief to explore fully how the texts work and what, if any, mode of source criticism might allow epidemiologists and social historians still to use them – they are, after all, the most accessible sources on the topic.

Three chapters treat the interplay between local and national state. To the question of how plague was finally extinguished from Europe in the eighteenth century, Peter Christensen offers the plausible suggestion that states finally became strong enough and their medical police techniques effective enough to prevent the spread of disease, all this notwithstanding that his case study of Copenhagen in 1711 reveals the usual mix of resistance and ill-coordination. While Christensen looks to the central state as guarantor of health and order, the authors of two studies of William Henry Duncan, England’s first urban medical officer of health (appointed by Liverpool in 1847), find a more complex picture. Noting that he has been lionized as a pioneer of medicalized public health, Paul Laxton looks closely at what Duncan actually did all day, and finds him acting arbitrarily and contentiously on matters both complicated and petty (at least in terms of the grand agendas of health and reform). Equity mattered much more than contagia or miasma in Duncan’s working environment; whatever he did would be seen as inequitable by someone. Gerry Kearns explores Duncan’s shrewd mediation between central and local government constituencies, particularly his role as a provider of countervailing statistical expertise. The need was not so much to claim that a dirty city was clean, but to protect an autonomous commercial centre from the simplistic and erroneous representation of it by central government statisticians and legislators who would make Liverpool serve their own agendas. Both chapters challenge a view of public health as an apolitical arm of a state whose interests in securing the general good transcend, contest and displace local interests, and which sees medical officers as instruments of that state, the rank and file of the revolution in government. For Laxton the real action is local, fine-grained and intensely political; for Kearns, though state and city operate in symmetrical ways in terms of information, principles, practices and enforcement, their agendas are different, as are the stakes.

Chapters by Flurin Condrau and Jakob Tanner on the response to cholera in mid-nineteenth-century Zurich and by Marjanna Niemi on anti-tuberculosis campaigns in turn-of-the-century Birmingham and Gothenburg focus on the relations between social structure, the representation of the relation between class and disease and public health action. Niemi elegantly relates response to social segregation. Where rich and poor live together, as in Gothenburg, environment cannot be to
blame, and the response to tuberculosis (not, however, a very successful one) is to hospitalize.

The final three chapters approach quantitatively some of the broad issues of urban disease experience in the transition years of the turn of the twentieth century. Using a selected sample of 36 mid to large English towns, Robert Millward and Frances Bell examine the relation between urban sanitary expenditure (and other social factors) and mortality decline. They find improved housing stock to be the most important factor. Public sanitary services were an (unquantifiable) component of this housing improvement, they recognize, but that further raises the question of how far the public enterprise of water and sewer pipes was undertaken to secure the private benefit of the clean and healthy house, and even whether a dichotomy between public and private sectors is adequate in such matters. Writing on the decline of infant mortality in Germany, the economist John C. Brown considers the possibility that rational choice by mothers or within families may explain demographic change. It is no easy matter to find the data sets to reflect the choices people may be presumed to have made, however, and summer temperature remains the most striking determinant of mortality. Finally, Jörg Peter Vögele, Wolfgang Woelk and Silke Fehlemann take up the argument that changes in milk supply and breastfeeding may account for the decline in infant mortality. Their close and critical study of milk stations in Düsseldorf recalls issues raised by Jones and Laxton: of how necessary it is to cut through the rhetoric of problem, policy and solution, and to see the reports of public health institutions as necessarily concerned with accountability, order, authority and morale.

One cannot expect too much coherence or comprehensiveness in an edited book; the papers are, however, well written and well chosen, and the book could serve as a foundation for discussions of method. And yet the lack of convergence is considerable here; the book (correctly) reveals a field struggling for a paradigm. Urban public health history attracts scholars from beyond history (e.g., medicine, geography, economics) as well as a great variety of historians. They address their topics within multiple and often divergent trajectories of inquiry; the strange bedfellows who find themselves within the covers of a book like this may not even recognize one another’s charms (or intelligibility) when they awake. This is not necessarily a problem; it is a condition of the field. Greater convergence would be possible, perhaps using the concept of the urban body (which, despite the book’s title, gets only passing attention in most chapters) as a nucleus, but that will take time. That said, this volume remains a fine rejoinder to the complaints of ‘parish pump irrelevance’ sometimes levelled at its subject. For a great many people the parish pump and its analogues explored here were matters of life and death, and hardly irrelevant.

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Understanding, and presenting accurately for analysis, the records of ‘lower’ courts – ecclesiastical or secular – is no straightforward task. This edition of two major, if very different, clean-copy registers of cases before two local church courts, sitting in local parish churches, is in many ways exemplary. We can only be grateful for its lavish format: the texts are printed in extenso without recourse to any kind of calendaring, and the volume begins with a detailed ‘Introduction’ skilfully touching on all relevant contextual issues. It is worth pointing out, however, that for the study of texts of this kind the lack of an electronic searching facility will probably soon be seen as a serious shortcoming, a factor highlighted by the admission that the subject index is ‘necessarily a rough guide only’. Also, a glossary of Latin terms, as well as assisting the professional scholar, would certainly have helped to make the volume a little more accessible to a wider readership. Local history attracts, after all, a great range of intellectual endeavour.

The book makes no claim to present a re-interpretation of the complex cultural and social questions arising from the Church’s exercise of spiritual and moral controls and no claim to provide a comparative framework for the study of all the surviving evidence. Rather, it marks a decisive and significant step towards further work. The late-medieval records of local church courts survive in larger numbers than is sometimes implied, but they are all too often isolated examples for a particular jurisdiction. The two texts here are important in that, covering several years, they present quite a coherent picture of the continuities of the chosen courts’ procedures. Jurisdictional and administrative capacities were, of course, tied closely together, but often in complex ways: it is interesting, for instance, that some of the parish churches within which the dean and chapter of Lincoln were exercising spiritual jurisdiction were not in fact churches of their own patronage.

The courts were concerned, notably, with sexual offences, non-payment of debts, including tithes, and the probate of wills – and it should be noted that the Ely record consisted of a probate register interspersed with the court proceedings. The hearings demand to be assessed as a whole, session by session. Even so, individual cases (so often redeemed by a fine) are bound to catch the eye – the fornications, for example, of the schoolmasters of the parishes of Strubby and Hainton. However, it is not the fornication that surprises, but rather the fact that the parishes each had a schoolmaster – how many of the (unusually numerous) parishes of Lincolnshire had ‘magistri scolarum’?

The editor can have little to regret about his opus, except perhaps in drawing attention, on his first page, to Geoffrey Elton’s statement that these are ‘among the most repulsive of all the relics of the past’, for this sentiment is spotlighted by F. M. L. Thompson in his brief foreword. Thompson elaborates: the records demonstrate ‘an intrusion into the private lives of ordinary people – their
adulteries, fornications, incests, marital squabbles, petty misdemeanours and so forth – which were largely brought to the attention of the courts through village gossip and scandal-mongering’. This is an all-too-easy and highly debatable viewpoint, on which there is as yet little scholarly consensus. This work will assist the debate, and it is hoped that more than a few readers will move from the foreword to the judicious introduction and the painstakingly edited texts.

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