

married women's property, but also the way in which the Poor Laws were used to incentivize marriage and the compensation provided to certain family members in the event of fatal accidents. Chapter 6 considers the divergence from contract law of the action for breach of promise to marry and how issues as to the validity of marriages and divorces were determined within the developing field of conflicts of laws. Again, bringing these different elements together is valuable and illuminating. Yet breadth is inevitably achieved at the expense of depth: the Marriage Act 1836, for example, deserves more than a couple of pages, and Taylor's framing of civil registration as a convenient tool for government does not acknowledge that it was also the result of public demand, with Dissenters having been campaigning for such a measure for some years. Taylor also elides the Matrimonial Causes Acts of 1923 and 1937 in claiming that the former introduced new grounds for divorce.

There are also some questionable inferences. Taylor perhaps attaches too much weight to the fact that marriage was increasingly regulated by the state through the passage of legislation. Such legislation clearly demonstrates the increasing power of the state: it does not necessarily show that there was any greater emphasis on the public importance of marriage in the nineteenth century than in earlier periods. The fact that marriage was described as a "contract" in earlier periods does not mean that it was a matter of private agreement, as is evident from the way that seventeenth-century political theorists used the contract of marriage as an analogy for the contract between the sovereign and the people. While nineteenth-century commentators increasingly described marriage as a "status" in order to explain why it was not, or not merely, a contract, this also needs to be understood against changes to contract law.

Yet even if one does not agree with all of Taylor's conclusions, *Constructing the Family* is still a rewarding read. It deserves to be widely read by historians of the nineteenth century and by modern legal scholars alike, to remind us of the artificiality of legal distinctions and of the importance of maintaining conversations across disciplines.

doi:10.1017/S0738248023000469

E. Claire Cage, *The Science of Proof: Forensic Medicine in Modern France*

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. x, 237. \$110 hardcover (ISBN 9781009198332). doi:10.1017/9781009198356

Willemijn Ruberg

Utrecht University
Email: W.G.Ruberg@uu.nl

The field of the history of forensic medicine has grown in recent years, and E. Claire Cage's *The Science of Proof: Forensic Medicine in Modern France* is a welcome addition to this sub-discipline. The book is a meticulous and comprehensive history of the involvement of "medical men" (mostly physicians and health officers) in legal cases, both during the pre-trial investigation and at the trial itself. Their scientific publications on forensic medicine, toxicology, and to a lesser extent psychiatry and entomology (the study of insects attracted to decomposing corpses in order to determine time of death) form an important source for this book, in addition to archival records of criminal cases at French assize courts.

The five chapters discuss the engagement of forensic physicians with murder investigations, especially concerning poisoning, when they performed autopsies, but also their examinations and expert evidence given in cases of infanticide and sexual assault of children. Besides these types of cases, which are familiar to historians of forensic medicine, the book also covers more original themes, which are to some extent typical for France. French doctors, for instance, examined women charged with capital offenses during the Revolution when the latter claimed to be pregnant to postpone their execution. These physicians, moreover, acted as agents for the French state in uncovering malingering in soldiers trying to get out of military service during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (1792–1815), by pretending to be ill or disabled. This particular chapter on "Deception and Detection" also grippingly reveals a history of medical ethics since doctors attempted to detect fraud via methods involving pain, for example by cauterizing or burning the bodies of those suspected of feigning madness and epilepsy. These physicians inflicted pain on fraudulent soldiers to make them confess, which bordered on torture and therefore led to a debate on the ethics of forensic medicine in the late nineteenth century. Cage's attention to ethics is new in the historiography of forensic medicine and will stimulate a further exploration of this theme.

This well researched and nuanced book further presents a fascinating argument regarding the relationship between lay knowledge and expertise. Previous studies have already indicated that the boundaries between both types of knowledge were shifting and porous, particularly in the early modern period. This study confirms this finding, especially regarding the influence of cultural norms on gender and class on forensic doctors' statements in cases of sexual assault, where children were often seen as sexually precocious and lying, and doctors protected the male bourgeois suspect (the so-called "moral proof"). But Cage also adds a layer to this discussion of knowledge. The author argues that criminals were aware of new insights in forensic medicine and science and used this knowledge to be one step ahead of the forensic experts. Poisoners, for example, eventually understood that toxicologists, helped by new technologies such as the Marsh test, could find traces of arsenic; by 1860 these perpetrators—at least according to scientific writings—resorted to poisons that were harder to detect. One wonders here if the cause of this shift really lies in criminals' increasing knowledge of science, or if this argument reflects forensic physicians' self-fashioning in scientific texts on the importance of forensic expertise. After all, throughout the nineteenth century,

as Cage shows, forensic scientists were preoccupied with bolstering their own authority in their textbooks and public appearances. Whether forensic knowledge was really popularized is an intriguing question that deserves further study.

In addition to this dialectic between lay knowledge and expertise, the book also points to the paradox of an increasing influence of forensic doctors on investigations and court cases, while at the same time their performances frequently exposed the faults and limitations of forensic science. Besides these important contributions, the book has two weak points. First, the author does not explain which French assize courts have been studied, and how these archival legal records have been selected. No statistics on this source material are included. Second, a more extensive international comparison could have clarified how these conclusions about French forensic medicine compare to the international historiography, which in recent years has expanded significantly.

Nevertheless, this book includes many interesting findings on the history of forensic medicine, with much attention to gender, as well as to the French political, institutional, social, and geographical contexts. It confirms that the profession of forensic medicine was becoming more important in the nineteenth century, and also carefully demonstrates that the impact of this expertise was dependent on the type of legal case and that scientific knowledge was entangled with lay knowledge and cultural ideas.

doi:10.1017/S0738248023000445

Michael Ng, *Political Censorship in British Hong Kong: Freedom of Expression and the Law (1842–1997)*

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. xiv + 211. Hardcover \$39.99 (ISBN 9781108830027). doi:10.1017/9781108908580

Michael Lobban

Oxford University

Email: michael.lobban@all-souls.ox.ac.uk

In his 1997 address to the handover ceremony which marked the end of British rule in Hong Kong, Governor Chris Patten reflected that Britain's "contribution here was to provide the scaffolding that enabled the people of Hong Kong to ascend: the rule of law; clean and light-handed government; the values of a