Infanticide, secular justice, and religious debate in early modern Europe. By Adriano Prosperi. (Europa Sacra, 10.) Pp. vii + 410. Turnhout: Brepols, 2016. €110. 978 2 503 53174 8

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In Bologna, one December morning in 1709, Lucia Cremonini, an unmarried widow's daughter and servant girl, was accused of committing infanticide. According to reports, Lucia had given birth to a fully-grown baby boy, before killing the infant and attempting to conceal the body. Despite having apparently hidden her pregnancy from her mother and neighbours (and potentially even having denied it to herself), Lucia's actions quickly become public knowledge. Legal and religious authorities swooped on the case, leaving behind detailed documentary records. Prosperi unpicks and unravels these documents, weaving a tightly researched narrative. The work sheds light on the interactions between the Italian Church and State, as well as on early modern attitudes to infants and to the women who gave birth to them.

Prosperi's book is an updated and translated version of his *Dare l'anima: storia di un infanticidio* (Turin 2005). The work is, in part, a history of childhood. As Prosperi argues, 'the history of children is the latest arrival in humanity's slow progress towards a knowledge of its past' (p. 135). It is also a history of crime, womanhood and infancy. Prosperi incorporates the methods of micro-history, following the style of such works as Carlo Ginzburg's *The cheese and the worms* (Turin 1976). Each section of the book invites readers to follow a theme or part of Lucia's story. The early part of the work covers her scandal-free young life (in the chapter 'Una figliona grande, giovane fatta' ['A grown girl, a mature young woman']). Later on, the work explores her encounter with a priest which led, it seems, to Lucia's possible rape (something she perhaps did not fully understand herself), the conception and pregnancy. The book then examines the young woman's actions around her labour, and the act of killing the baby boy, referred to, tellingly, as 'creature' ('the corpse of a creature' was found under Lucia's bed, p. 151). Prosperi uses intimate details and revelations to illuminate wider themes, including what he calls the early modern 'obsession' with infanticide (alongside witchcraft, one of the well-known 'female crimes par excellence', p. 43) and issues relating to virginity, sexual honour and rape. The book also considers debates surrounding ensoulment (when a foetus, or infant, is believed to receive a soul); the rite of baptism; and finally legal and religious questions about sin, punishment, repentance and forgiveness.

The book's rich tapestry of themes and arguments demonstrates the close, and at times contradictory, forces of legal and religious powers in early modern Italy. But at the heart of this work is a very human and compassionate tale of two 'characters': Lucia and the dead infant. Lucia's story, and the cultural and social context in which she lived, is presented with great sensitivity: 'Lucia had not reached the point of doing what she did because of any innate evil or because she despised the bonds of nature which unite a mother and a child. She had been driven by the need to safeguard her own honour, an asset to be protected above all else' (p. 14). Even the legal sources detailing her investigation and trial do not, illuminatingly, lack compassion for a woman who was hitherto of unblemished character. Amid contemporary fears and folklore surrounding the idea of the infant-

devouring and cruel mother, which were closely linked to perceptions of witches and mistrusted midwives, Lucia's contemporaries recognised that the crime of infanticide existed: infanticide, Prosperi argues, 'is a fact that has accompanied the history of our species like a dull background noise' (p. 21).

Lucia is a difficult character to recreate, her emotions hidden from us, her words brief and unemotional within the confessions of her actions. Unlike many women who were accused of infanticide, Lucia was alone (as discussed in chapter viii: 'I was always on my own'). Lucia seems to have been only too aware of this fact, saying to the courts that 'I do not have a husband, nor have I ever been married' (p. 24). Often women accused of infanticide or child murder were uncovered in family groups made up of women desiring to protect the honour of those who had conceived out of wedlock. As the legal world knew well, this was 'the secret world of the suppression of unwanted babies' (p. 124). Lucia did not have such protection – her mother denied all knowledge of the pregnancy, and disowned her daughter. We do not know whether she knew she was pregnant and planned to kill her newborn, or whether she did so in panic (her own testimony says she believed herself to be unwell, not pregnant). But what Prosperi's narration of her story reveals to us is that these boundaries and perceptions (when was a pregnancy defined, for example) may have been understood very differently by those living in the early modern world.

Women like Lucia have histories, as do their actions, as does the act of infanticide. Which brings us to the second 'character' key to Prosperi's work – the dead infant, 'the said creature' (p. 41). How, Prosperi asks, do we as historians treat those who have little or no history? Those who had no life or very fleeting lives? Whose very existences as human beings was, according to the society in which they were born, denied? As Prosperi writes, 'the newborn, the baby murdered, on the very threshold of existence, even the unborn, is not absent from the historical process just because it is devoid of speech' (p. 136). However, the work questions whether it is truly possible to write the history of 'someone' who did not live. According to the mindset of Lucia's age, and the centuries preceding it, the infant was 'the subject which a moment earlier was part of its mother's womb: to deny it life, to kill it, was a way of eliminating the fact of its birth by throwing it back to its condition as an object. Then life could begin again, leaving the episode of that morning as a secret parenthesis' (p. 130). This was why, Prosperi argues, women in the birthing room (both labouring women and their midwives) were in such a potentially powerful position, and one of conceivably great liminal danger, as in their bodies and hands they held beings who were as yet 'devoid of divine protection' (p. 33). This divine protection came later, through the spiritual washing and second birth of baptism. For early moderns, whether or not one held personhood potentially rested on this second birth. Baptism was believed to give a child a name, and to welcome it into the community, and, as Prosperi illustrates, allowed deceased infants access to the afterlife.

Prosperi's book is open to the social, cultural and legal complexities surrounding the act of infanticide (as well as those around conception, pregnancy and childbirth). In a few places it would be possible to push for more careful definition. Prosperi argues that, 'today the growing importance of social problems such as abortion and medical practices concerning the embryo have forced us to question

past ideas and knowledge of conception and childbirth: this has been brought together under the heading the "history of the unborn"' (p. 135). It is certainly worth comment that this work chimes with such divisive contemporary religious and legal debates. However, to describe contemporary abortion as a 'problem' is difficult, even disappointing, as Prosperi appears to be making a judgement in an otherwise largely objective work.

Similarly, Prosperi's use of the term 'the unborn' (largely adopted by 'pro-life' supporters) also holds (here unacknowledged) contemporary connotations. Sara Dubow's *Ourselves unborn: a history of the fetus in modern America* (Oxford 2011) suggests that how any society perceives a foetus reveals more about its views of women and gender roles than about any reality of the existence of the 'unborn'. This work is not acknowledged by Prosperi. As we see here in the case of Lucia, these debates centre on the bodies of women, how and when they may become pregnant, and what role various authorities have in defining where a woman's life sits in relation to the child she may be carrying. As Prosperi's work shows, history has much to offer to these debates.

Overall, then, this book is meticulously researched and densely argued. It transports the reader from the intimacy of Lucia's experiences – her secret pregnancy and her lonely bedroom birth – through to the wider legal and religious implications of her actions. The work goes beyond the history of childhood, contributing something to the largely unexplored area of the history of infancy. It also ventures into the history of the very meaning of how our human past has interpreted and understood what it means to be human: at what point is life (spiritual and physical) perceived to begin? And it tells us much about historical perceptions and experiences of womanhood: how have human societies dealt with the questions that arise from the fact that women, as in the case of Lucia, are not always willing, or able, to be mothers?

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The chronicles of Nazareth (The English convent), Bruges, 1629–1793. Edited by Caroline Bowden. (The Catholic Records Society.) Pp. xxxiv + 555 incl. colour frontispiece, 2 maps, 6 figs and 1 table. Woodbridge–Rochester, NY: Boydell Press (for the Catholic Records Society), 2017. £50. 978 0 902832 31 2

English Catholic nuns in exile, 1600–1800. A biographical register. Edited by K. S. B. Keats-Rohan. (Prosopographica et Genealogica, 15.) Pp. xciv + 614 + CD-Rom+ frontispiece. Oxford: Occasional Publications UPR, 2017. £75. 978 1 900934 14 5

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These two publications present important insights into the nature of English Catholicism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. K. S. B. Keats-Rohan's *English Catholic nuns in exile* is a most valuable research tool, a work staggering in size; it is comprised of 4,136 individual entries, containing information not only on the nuns themselves, but also on their families and social networks. Caroline Bowden's equally impressive edited volume, *The chronicles of Nazareth*, provides an invaluable, first-hand insight into the existence of an English Catholic convent in exile, for a period of some 160 or so years.