

as those on *deschi da parto* (Italian trays given as birth gifts), or in frescoes of the birth of the Virgin Mary or of John the Baptist. One wonders whether late medieval artists knew of similar ancient Roman scenes, like those included by Berg in nicely presented black and white images. Or is it possible that medieval basins just continued to play crucial yet often overlooked roles in the human life cycle? This essay is a particularly good example of how further cross-chronological comparisons could have been even more illuminating.

The last essay of particular note in a rich collection is that of Hautala on the changing nature of medicinal drugs such as mithridatium between Ancient Greece and the sixteenth century. The interdisciplinary approach (the author is both an anthropologist and a classicist) argues that drugs and all ingredients contained within them are highly unstable substances with complex cultural histories and competing forms of expertise and authority over their use. Drugs are just as much cultural artefacts as texts.

All in all, this is a really interesting interdisciplinary volume. It will provide historians and archaeologists with interests in health and disability with much to think about for some time to come. Hopefully it will open up new avenues of *comparative* research across traditional chronological boundaries.

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**José María Borrás Llop** (ed.), *El trabajo infantil en España (1700–1950)* (Barcelona: Publicacions i Edicions de la Universitat de Barcelona, 2014), pp. 511, €25, paperback, ISBN: 978-84-475-3797-6; ISBN: 978-84-9888-550-7.

**Peter Kirby**, *Child Workers and Industrial Health in Britain, 1780–1850* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013), pp. 224, £17.99, paperback, ISBN: 978-18-438-3884-5.

If readers are interested in knowing how hard it is to preach in the desert, they can ask José María Borrás Llop. Like many other Spanish historians who have dealt with the issue of child labour, he had to resign himself to seeing his field of study relegated by a social history establishment much more interested in ‘heroic’ tales of the labour movement. The readers could not put the same question to Peter Kirby and that is what gives us the point of comparison between their work and cause to reflect in this review.

Borrás Llop makes it clear from the beginning that ‘social and economic history in Spain has experienced an intense renewal in recent decades, but until the publication of this book, the attention paid by historians to child labour was very limited’ (p. 11). The fact is that without work such as this presented by Borrás Llop, it is impossible for research like Kirby’s to be carried out in Spain. This is not a minor issue. As Kirby explains, he chose ‘the subject of child occupational health’ because the theme ‘has attracted little serious analysis’. However, the bibliography about child labour in England ‘[has] produced a growing number of monographical studies exploring the complex problem of child labour during the Industrial Revolution [and has] offered increasingly detailed investigations of child health and welfare in early urban and industrial society’ (p. 1).

The work of Borrás Llop coincides exactly with this last kind of investigation. The volume he has edited features a total of twelve studies by distinct authors about different aspects of the history of child labour in Spain, covering a large period of more than two and a half centuries, but showing a clear disproportion in their treatment. Only the first three chapters deal with child labour in pre-industrial times in Spain, that is between

the eighteenth and the mid-twentieth century. The remaining nine chapters face the much greater complexity of the problem in the industrial age.

The reader will find three different ways of approaching the question. The first five chapters try to approach the problems of child labour, from children born into pre-industrial family economies until their exploitation in specific industrial branches. All these studies show the difficulties of working with a small and incomplete corpus of sources, and of conducting intensive local researches. On the other hand, Chapters 9 to 11, attempt to present the question of children labour using a more general approach, linked to the two most important industrial regions of the country, País Vasco and Catalonia. The two specific models of industrial growth in these areas were based respectively on the new iron and steel industry, and the industrialisation of the old textile manufactures, offering a clearly differentiated reading of child labour development, linked to the adaptation of the old production systems.

The reader will find in these two blocks of research, Chapters 1–5 and 9–11, a socio-historical analysis, supported by quantitative evidences about the entry of children into the labour market and the disparity in their wages with respect to adults. This statistic analysis provides one of the main attractions of the work. It allows us to understand how the child labour in Spain was not only a response to the employer's economic strategies, but also to those of the families themselves. This puts on the table some questions of principal, like the culturally rooted disregard of women's domestic work in Spain. Also that the true niches of child labour in Spain were formed in the domestic work and the apprenticeship, family agricultural economies, domestic service or household work, 'archaic' systems of labour organisation that existed together with the gradual emergence of the new forms of production.

These first two blocks of research show child labour as a necessary reflection of the socio-economic variables that explain it, and as the social adaptation to the legal framework by which it was regulated. However, the image may be distorted depending on the use that is given to the sources. This group of essays take the form of the most orthodox socio-historical studies, encouraging the highest degree of objectivity provided by the quantitative data, and giving a secondary role to the sources with a principally socio-cultural or anthropological character. This is an appropriate method of analysis, but the complexity of the subject of study makes it not always equally valid or conclusive for all the aspects of research. An important example is the consideration of child labour as a socio-biological problem. This is precisely the issue that Kirby's work attempts to address, and the one on which Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 12 are centred in Borrás Llop's book.

Kirby analyses the period from 1780 to 1850, in which the social and health problems linked to child labour acquired a growing visibility. However, he shows that the most influential sections of the medical profession and the English political class showed no interest in knowing the production systems or the constraints of the material conditions of life of the working classes. They had a skewed vision of the problem, marked by prejudice about the new industrial production system. Because of that, the first Acts of Parliament of 1802 and 1844 underestimated the importance of child labour to household economies. The first of these Acts regarded the problem as linked to the helplessness and social exclusion of some groups of the poorest children. The second Act, reduced it to strictly to the level of the factory. Both laws led to measures with a very limited scope, such as raising the age of access to the labour market, or monitoring of hygiene in the work environment.

This attitude in the British medical and political establishments can be compared to what happened in Spain during the second half of the century. Far from preventing the

health and social problem of child labour, the care services imposed by the laws since 1873 tried to control its effects, regulating the age of access to the labour market, of course without success. Nor did subsequent initiatives, in the last years of the nineteenth century and in the first decades of twentieth, seek to create measures to prevent the recruitment of children into the labour market, albeit significantly improving inspection systems.

Although the content and socio-cultural context of social reform in England and Spain differ significantly, there is a clear parallel route in relation to health issues. Kirby emphasises that the underestimation of the importance of child labour in the English society was a common factor attached to the overestimation of the negative effects of factory work as the decisive cause of childhood illnesses in the most industrialised regions. He says that this error of assessment accounts for the almost complete lack of interest in the harmful effects of traditional forms of production outside factories, due to such factors as their lower technological development or their better match with the patterns of acceptance in culture and tradition. Nonetheless, most of these old forms of work bore harder on the physical and psychological conditions of the working classes, and especially on the children.

This situation was not comparable in size in a country with a lower degree of industrialisation like Spain. As Martínez Carrión, Puche Gil and Cabañete Cabezuolos say in Chapter 7 of *El trabajo infantil en España*, the lack of true and objective data was an obvious obstacle to doctors in late nineteenth-century Spain, an obstacle that was overcome in the next century with the generalisation of official medical reports, like those made for military recruitment. In contrast to the data provided by Kirby, these three authors point out that the effects of child labour were higher in industrial areas, focusing on an important part of the phenomenon in the poor conditions of technological development in Spanish factories, without denying, of course, the harmful effects of another series of factors, such as the further worsening of general living conditions in urban areas.

This kind of analysis highlights the methodological question previously indicated. Although the empirical relationship between industrial child labour and the deterioration of social-health rates is a fact, it may not be wise to link the lack of attention of the Spanish medical classes during the second half of the nineteenth century with the lowest level of development of their discipline, much less use the example of England five decades before. The history of medicine in Spain has amply demonstrated in recent, and not so recent years, that the claimed theoretical delay in nineteenth-century medical discipline had not so much to do with the structural backwardness of the country as with the ideological and moral options taken by a significant number of physicians.

This situation is partly remedied by subsequent chapters. In Chapter 8 Bernabeu Mestre and Galiana Sánchez compare different medical treatises to show that even though doctors had developed the technical and theoretical methods, they remained in an 'ambivalent position' about child labour. Contrary to what Kirby points out for England, paternalistic policies were the dominant note in the Spanish socio-medical discourse of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This did not result in a lack of interest in improving their knowledge about the 'real' causes and consequences of child labour, but it is clear that in their projects the solution of the problem was seen more from an ideological than a scientific framework.

Anyway, Spanish paternalism and English social protection legitimise Kirby's strong final conclusion: 'it would be extremely unwise to attribute to early nineteenth-century child labour legislation any measurable advancement in the physical health or general well-being of industrially employed children' (p. 161). Both models of behaviour mainly aimed

at measures encouraged by hygienic and moral reasoning, playing an important role in the building of the modern sociological and cultural limits of childhood. But they were not built on a rational scientific basis, and that had serious consequences. Both models failed not only by not ending child labour, but also by increasing the precariousness of children's lives. In the long term, families did not find that social reforms rebuilt the economic and biological calamity linked to the unemployment of any of their members, and the reforms increased the supply of their own children's labour.

Borrás Llop treats this problem throughout the last chapter of his edited volume, prioritising the use of sources created by the labour movement over medical-official sources. As he says 'in labour history the general approaches need to be nuanced, contrasted, with *micro*-approaches, to give diversity in a defined context' (p. 447), but he is aware of the small amount of what he calls '*egosources*', and his use of the working-class press seems not only justified, but also clever. Borrás does not seek to analyse the programmatic positions taken by different working groups about child labour, his main interest revolves around identifying the importance that child labour had in the daily life of workers. This question posed to this source gives results very similar to those that Kirby obtains using the personal testimonies of doctors, politicians and workers who criticised the government's labour reforms.

This last piece of research, in Chapter 12, gives greater precision to the subject of study of the whole book and it leads us to reflect on how following in the footsteps of work like Kirby's is becoming the dominant trend in Spanish historiography on child labour in Spain, offering an optimistic picture of its future. Borrás has offered his discipline a more solid ground, and now it is desirable that, taking his example, new researchers become much more aware of simply mimicking of the methods of historiographical traditions such as the English or German ones, driven by the quality and quantity of their sources. Faced with this situation, the Spanish historian must demonstrate a greater methodological versatility.

But, after all, what readers should learn in a historical work about child labour is that although this phenomenon has been virtually eradicated in our immediate environment, it has been a continuous variable throughout the history of human societies. Many of our new living standards are still contrasted by the survival of child labour in more distant places, and that is why beyond rejection and victimisation, the work of the historian should move toward reflection about the complexity of the causes of this persistence. In doing so, Kirby and Borrás have achieved outstanding work.

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**Andreas-Holger Maehle**, *Contesting Medical Confidentiality, Origins of the Debate in the United States, Britain and Germany* (Chicago, IL, and London: University of Chicago Press, 2016), pp. 168, \$40.00, hardback, ISBN: 978-0-226-40482-0.

Medical confidentiality has long provoked territorial disputes, falling – somewhat uneasily – between medical and legal spheres of influence. These disputes have become more nuanced in modern times with the magnified role of patient autonomy and the emergence of electronic health systems. Nonetheless, there is still much to be gained from scrutinising the discussions of the past, which helped shape contemporary understandings.

In *Contesting Medical Confidentiality*, Professor Andreas-Holger Maehle delves into these discussions, providing a broad account of the seminal arguments over medical