

Tram Company compensated Siamese victims with irregular and ad hoc compensations, which harked back to the traditional practice of indemnification.

Forensic medicine was an authoritative form of knowledge that could be used to reinforce the social and legal privileges enjoyed by foreigners. The unequal treatment of the dead and injured in this plural legal environment drove officials in the Siamese bureaucracy to turn to new forms of medical and medico-legal expertise. This mirrored earlier turns to new forms of expertise, especially in mapping and law, intended to strengthen the Siamese state's claim to sovereignty. Forensic inquests needed to produce appropriate evidence so that consular courts could no longer dismiss criminal complaints against foreign residents suspected of having harmed Siamese subjects. The last chapter of the book recounts the fascinating story of the first two practitioners of forensic inquests in Siam – the British doctor Percy A. Nightingale and his Siamese assistant Mo Meng Yim. Both had impeccable credentials and the required expertise, and Meng Yim managed to translate the findings into an idiom comprehensible to the Siamese bureaucracy. During two inquests at the end of the nineteenth century, the two doctors produced documentary evidence acceptable to the standards of the consular courts. This episode was, though, short-lived – Nightingale returned to England and from then on medical experts recruited from abroad focused more on issues of public health. The Siamese administration counted deaths and recorded their causes, but the main concern was health at the level of the population and not anxieties about limited sovereignty.

Pearson presents a compelling study of medico-legal practices and legal subjectivity in an environment characterized by limited sovereignty and transnational flows of expertise, while at the same time giving space to subaltern voices. This book is a noteworthy contribution to studies of medicine, law, society and politics in the colonial and semi-colonial worlds.

doi:10.1017/S0007087422000541

Claudine Cohen, *Nos ancêtres dans les arbres: Penser l'évolution humaine*

Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2021. Pp. 319. ISBN 978-2-0211-7599-8. €23.00 (paperback).

Peter J. Bowler

Queen's University Belfast

Readers of *BJHS* will be familiar with the translation of Claudine Cohen's *The Fate of the Mammoth*, which explored the mythology surrounding this iconic extinct creature. The title of her book on human origins is a nice play on words: the popular belief is that we became human when our ape ancestors climbed down out of the trees, while evolutionists have traditionally represented the process by phylogenetic trees purporting to show the relationships between the various ape and hominid species. This is a comprehensive survey of debates on the topic, but it is more than a conventional historical account. The first part includes details of the latest scientific developments and is designed to highlight the impact of the genetic techniques which have revolutionized thinking on the relationship between modern *Homo sapiens* and our recently extinct cousins. Changing perceptions of the degree to which we are related to the Neanderthals are

outlined in detail and there is a whole chapter on the Denisovians, the species known only from the remains of its mitochondrial DNA. The modern debates are woven into an analysis of how the shape of the phylogenetic tree has been transformed, becoming steadily more ‘bushy’ and showing ever less evidence of a ‘main line’ leading toward ourselves as the ultimate goal of the process. Cohen also explains why palaeo-anthropologists have followed taxonomists in abandoning the tree model in favour of cladograms that denote degrees of resemblance without presuming to identify lines of descent.

The rest of the book follows a more standard historical format, offering surveys of how perceptions of various evolutionary models have changed through time. Misia Landau’s thesis that the theories of hominization proposed since Darwin’s time have a narrative structure analogous to folk tales and adventure stories is used to argue that these are far more than abstract phylogenetic connections. There are chapters on the decline of racist assumptions, changing ideas about the significance of skull capacity and shape, the role played by women, and the problems centred on the origin of language and the development of cultures. All contribute to emphasize the decline of a linear model of development and the roles played by ideological concerns at every point in time. There are some interesting comparisons of the different concerns shown by Continental and English-speaking scholars. These are necessarily fairly broad-brush surveys, but they are comprehensive and sophisticated. If it were translated, this would be a very useful introduction for anyone teaching a history of ideas on human origins.

doi:10.1017/S0007087422000553

Felix Lüttge, *Auf den Spuren des Wals: Geographien des Lebens im 19. Jahrhundert*

Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2020. Pp. 279. ISBN 978-3-8353-3680-3. €28.00 (hardback).

Alexander Stoeger

Leiden University

Amongst the most famous pieces of nineteenth-century literature dwells Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, a story not so much about a whale as about the obsession and fate of those hunting it. Just like Melville leading his readers through philosophical, scientific, mythological and polemic reflections about the whale, Felix Lüttge takes us on a comprehensive journey following the massive mammal in and through different media in his book *Auf den Spuren des Wals* (On the Trail of the Whale). In five wide-ranging chapters, the author manages exceedingly well to combine examples from a wide variety of interest groups and approaches to show how the whale became an epistemic, political and industrial artefact during the nineteenth century while simultaneously escaping all attempts to grasp it fully. The author shows how the whale’s habitat, its so-called ‘medium’, challenged those who wanted to catch and study it. Highlighting different protagonists, he also gives an insight into how this clash of media coined modern-day oceanography, geography and zoology as much as imperial approaches and the industrial development of the Western world.