The Palgrave Handbook of Infertility in History

‘Infertility is not only, nor even primarily a bio-medical issue. Rather, infertility intersects with broader contextual and historical currents: religion, politics, economics and culture, notwithstanding the impact involuntary childlessness did, and does have on individuals and their families. *The Palgrave Handbook of Infertility in History* examines a vast array of varied historical and contemporary accounts ranging from deeply personal ‘stories’ of childlessness and attempts at assisted fertility, ancient through to modern-day medical attitudes to infertility and male and female impotence, and the politicisation of reproduction and population concerns at the sixteenth-century French court, in twentieth-century China and India, to the commercialisation of reproductive medicine and the commodification of body parts and fluids in a variety of global contexts.

*The Palgrave Handbook of Infertility in History* resists ‘easy assumptions’ and definitions of infertility. It raises difficult questions: how do we talk about involuntary childlessness, as scholars, as human beings? What does it mean to be ‘infertile’ in different global and historical contexts and from different perspectives? A truly inter and intra-disciplinary volume, *The Palgrave Handbook of Infertility in History* confronts readers with the hard reality that the ways we think and write about reproductive health and intimate bodily and familial concerns like infertility not only reflect, but also shape and determine the meanings we as scholars, and the societies in which we live, ascribe to infertility. The authors do not shy away from the responsibility that entails, inviting readers in turn to reflect on their own choices. A vital corrective to the preponderance of scholarship on procreation and fertility, *The Palgrave Handbook of Infertility in History* is an important contribution to scholarship on gender, feminisms, sexualities, families, emotions, colonialism and much, much more. An incredibly moving and informative volume; this reader learned a lot and was often moved to tears.’

—Cathy McIlvie, Department of History, Durham University, UK

‘An outstanding work of scholarship and a joy to read. This wide-ranging, eye-opening and exquisitely compiled handbook intricately examines infertility from historical, political, socio-economic and individual perspectives. It provides a much-needed reminder in the face of ever-advancing reproductive technologies that infertility has always been with us and has always had a profound effect on human lives. Everyone with an academic, professional or personal interest in infertility and its treatment should read this unique and illuminating book.’

—Susan Golombok, Department of Psychology, University of Cambridge, UK

‘At a time when biomedicine is increasingly stratified, unevenly offering solutions for unwanted childlessness, the time is ripe to look back and forge a new field of inquiry into infertility itself. In this excellent book, editors Davis and Loughran have assembled a wide-ranging historical consideration of infertility that until now has been missing from the scholarship. The captivating essays collectively uncover areas less-travelled by scholars of
reproduction and turn attention to the power, politics, and affective experience of infertility in history. In doing so they provide readers with a deeply feminist consideration of infertility that affirms embodied, socio-cultural, and political experience. This is a welcome companion to the literature and a fresh new perspective on the field.’

—Laura Mamo, San Francisco State University, USA

‘Davis and Loughran are to be warmly congratulated on assembling an excellent multi-disciplinary cast of scholars. They collectively demonstrate how much can be gained from taking a thoroughly historicist approach to a high-profile contemporary issue. Equally, how much historians can learn about an apparent absence in the historical record, when provoked by a salient concern today. They show, however, that infertility is far from a new personal or social dilemma, far from a technological or purely medical matter. The focus on an age-old phenomenon and the diversity of responses it has elicited provides an important new historical resource. This pioneering Handbook will be the starting point and guide for future historical scholars stimulated to explore further this intrinsically obscure, yet revealing topic.’

—Simon Szreter, Faculty of History, University of Cambridge, UK
Dedicated to the staff of the Assisted Conception Service, Glasgow Royal Infirmary, and their colleagues around the world (GD) and

To all the women and men, past and present, who have wanted children and have not been able to bring them into the world (TL)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This volume arose out of a conference we co-convened on ‘Infertility in History, Science and Culture’, held at the University of Edinburgh in July 2013. This volume has a substantially different shape to the conference programme – many of the contributors spoke at the conference, but not always on the same topics, and we have also accumulated many new authors. Nevertheless, the intellectually stimulating and supportive environment of the conference provided the initial spur to this edited collection (for more information on the conference, see http://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/ihsc/). We would therefore like to thank the Wellcome Trust for providing funding for the conference, and the History Departments of the University of Edinburgh and Cardiff University, plus the Society for the Social History of Medicine, for providing additional monies.

We are also extremely grateful to our contributors for their unstinting hard work. We have been fortunate to work with some of the most generous and helpful authors any editors could wish for, and they have been crucial in keeping this volume going despite the combined challenges of illness, death, and, much more happily, conception. As ever, thanks are also due to our partners (Steven and Matthew) both for their computer know-how and consistent support.
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<td>CDA</td>
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<td>DHS</td>
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<td>ESC</td>
<td>embryonic stem cells</td>
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<td>ESHRE</td>
<td>European Society for Human Reproductive Embryology</td>
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<td>Feminist International Network of Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering</td>
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