the transition may lead to conflict and struggle for the young people involved. Moreover, there are a number of weaknesses in the survey design, which the author acknowledges. In particular it is problematic to use a cross-sectional survey to analyse leavers’ expectations of leaving home, as their expectations might be modified by their own experiences. Furthermore by restricting the time period to one year, the long-term implications of leaving home are not addressed. In particular no reference is made to the possibility that leavers may return home in future years, and that rather than treating the transition as a one-off event as presented in this analysis, it may be more appropriate to regard leaving home as a process which unfolds over a number of years.

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The book contains revised versions of a selection of papers presented at a seminar on Child and Infant Mortality in the Past, organized by the Centre Jacques Cartier, the University of Montreal and the IUSSP Committee on Historical Demography in 1992.

It consists of a brief introduction and 16 chapters, and it is divided into 4 parts: I – the state of knowledge in Europe; II – the state of knowledge in America and Asia; III – the demographic, ecological, biological and epidemiological variables associated with infant and child mortality; IV – the social variables associated with infant and child mortality.

Two chapters contain reviews of the literature (as opposed to the results of empirical research): one (chapter 3) is by Rollet, who makes an important effort to reconstruct the cultural and political climate which preceded and accompanied the decline in infant mortality in developed countries, seeking to identify the role of the state, of medicine and of women’s movements in the growth of an attitude of protection towards children, culminating in the definition of the rights of the child. This kind of research should be systematically included at a local level in every study on the decline of mortality, in order to understand the cultural factors, the technological progress and the public measures which sustain any given mortality rate. The other review chapter is by Dupâquier (chapter 11), and it presents reflections and data taken from existing literature, useful for a history of prematurity, a major risk factor – then and now – which was generally ignored in studies on infant mortality in the past due to lack of information.

The book is most valuable in the temporal and geographical scope of its analyses: although most of the historical series presented date back to the 19C,
some of the studies present data which is much older, dating back to the 16C (Geneva, England and France) or to the 17C (Tuscany, the Veneto and North America), and the areas observed are: European countries, with a long tradition of collecting vital statistics; North America, where vital statistics are recent, but new databases of family reconstruction rivalling those in Europe have recently been constructed (in Canada) and samples of censuses from the early 1900s containing retrospective questions on infant survival have been made available (in the USA); India, where vital registration already existed prior to the end of the 1800s, but little use has been made of it until now; and Japan, where there was no reliable information on child mortality until the 20C. The availability and exploration of these sources opens up new horizons for our understanding of the historical decline of mortality.

The analysis gives, with a few exceptions, details of the age of death during the first year of life and extends beyond the first year of life up to 5 or 14 years of age. This extension of the ages observed is rightly recognized as being fundamental for our understanding of the causes of the beginning of the decline in mortality. The question of data quality is always taken into consideration in the various chapters.

The variables associated with mortality are divided into two categories: social (part IV) and others (part III). The social variables refer to the classical aspects of differential demography (foundlings, social class, level of urbanization, geographical area), to the limited extent to which these may be reconstructed. Some chapters are particularly valuable. For example, the chapter by Van Poppel and Mandemakers (chapter 16) presents the results of a record linkage between the births and deaths records of a sample of cohorts of children born in the period 1812–1912, using proportional hazard models to process the individual statistics and demonstrating the effect over time of different variables on neonatal, infant and childhood mortality. We may also note the chapter by Bardet, Dufour and Renard (chapter 14), which compares the mortality of foundlings in Paris in the second half of the 1700s to that of the children of the bourgeoisie and that of the children of nurses (wet and dry) offering new insights into the social conditions of the period.

The other mortality-associated variables, taken into consideration in Part III, are rather heterogeneous, ranging from the demographic to the ecological and from the biological to the epidemiological, and the distinction drawn between these and the social variables seems somewhat artificial, as the boundaries between the two types of variables are not always clear-cut, either in the theoretical frameworks or in the chapters themselves. The chapter by Breschi and Livi Bacci (chapter 9) concerns the influence of the seasons on mortality in the first year of life in Italy, Russia, Savoy and Switzerland and in the first two years of life in The Netherlands, Belgium and two Tuscan villages, in various periods during the 19C, according to the month of birth. The same subject is also dealt with by Thornton and Olson (chapter 13) on child mortality in Montreal in the second half of the 19C. However, this also considers causes of death and several other variables, ranging from ethnicity to the characteristics of the habitat, the length of the interval