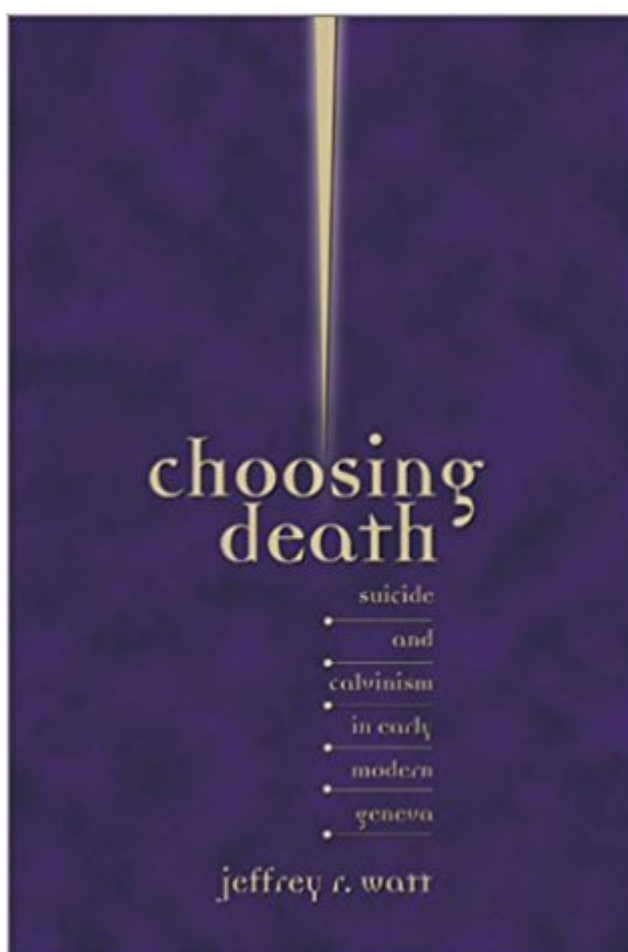


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Choosing Death: Suicide And Calvinism In Early Modern Geneva (Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies, V. 58)



Synopsis

Because of Geneva's uniquely rich and well-organised sources, this is the first study to provide reliable evidence on suicide rates for pre-modern Europe. Watt places his findings within a wide range of historical and sociological scholarship, and while suicide was rare through the seventeenth century, he shows that Geneva experienced an explosion in self-inflicted deaths after 1750. Quite simply, modern Geneva witnessed nothing less than the birth of modern suicide both in attitudes towards it -- thorough secularised, medicalised, and stripped of diabolical undertones -- and the frequency of it.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A stimulating and informative collection...an important contribution to the literature, certain to have heavy use in the classroom. --CHOICE

Choosing Death: Suicide And Calvinism In Early Modern Geneva by Jeffrey R. Watt (Associate Professor in History, University of Mississippi) is a thorough, scholarly, deftly presented case study of the Republic of Geneva and its history of suicide. From views of the suicide in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that regarded self-destruction as the result of demonic possession, and that harshly appropriated the property of those who took their own lives, to the late eighteenth century turn of thought that recognized the role that mental illness and personal trauma often played in suicide. Choosing Death is a fascinating, informative, thoughtful and thought-provoking social

history of an admittedly grim subject within the historical context of a proud and sovereign European nation.

This is an excellent book, but I have to take issue with its subtitle. By 1750 Calvinism was no longer a majority opinion in Geneva, at least, not the orthodox variety that had made Geneva synonymous with Calvinism. The ideas of the enlightenment had so thoroughly affected the Reformed movement that no conclusions can be drawn from Geneva's place as the capital of Calvinism and the increase in suicides there. In fact, a very good case could be made for the opposite. Although a scion of the famous Turretin family was Geneva's leading theologian at the time, it was his watering down of his father and grandfather's Calvinism that he was best known for. A better subtitle would have been "Suicide after the decline of Calvinism in Geneva".

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