

*A Short History of Police and Policing.* By Clive Emsley. Oxford: University Press, 2021, 224 pp.

Sadly a posthumous work by Britain's leading historian of policing, this is an excellent introduction to the history of police and policing and one that in particular moves away from British exceptionalism and also from Whiggism. Instead, there are attempts to assess policing and its history as an aspect of the broader regulatory nature of governance. Accordingly, there is much on France and the German states alongside England, but Emsley also ranges more widely, providing, if not quite a global account, not least being weak on East Asia, at least one that is impressive in what it covers. There is also a valuable chronological range, with a beginning essentially with Pharaonic Egypt and some interesting discussion of Athens and Rome before moving, via Christianity, to medieval Europe. Again, there is insufficient on Asia.

A change is seen as taking place with the Enlightenment as princes in much of Europe began to issue ordinances clearly defining the role of police as involving the general well-being of their territory, while a few paid police institutions developed. The Revolutionary and Napoleonic period saw this policy extended. Linked to this, Emsley argues, in a somewhat overly-teleological fashion, that political police were developed to cope with threats to what increasingly resembled the modern state. Internal violence is presented as a threat to such a state, but it is unclear that this was more the case than during the 'Wars of Religion.' The role of the metaphysical struggle in general attracts insufficient attention, but bodies such as the Inquisition were important to policing.

The question of political policing brings to the fore an ambivalence of police and policing, one that overlaps with military history and the role of armies. Indeed, there is a convergence between policing and military history, with armies very frequently employed for internal control, rather than state-to-state conflict. Latin America since the 1930s exemplifies this point, but it has a much longer genesis. Thus, to at least a degree, the history of policing is very much not that of police. Instead, if force is part of a dimension of policing, then those agencies who have access to force can be seen as an aspect of police. Emsley indeed discusses the religious police in Saudi Arabia. Separately, other forms of protection can be considered, including institutional, commercial and individual security.

The book argues for the growing complexity of policing from the twentieth century, not least as a consequence of mechanisation in the shape of cars, digitalisation, immigration, and terrorism and in contexts including decolonisation. There is a sense of a dynamic situation.

The pages are small, and the print size reasonable, and not small. Nevertheless, despite relatively few words, Emsley fits a lot in, including detective fiction (all-too-briefly) and political contention, domestic and international, about policing. A highly-impressive last work that deserves attention.

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