
Clive Emsley has, over the past few years, established a formidable reputation as a historian of the police, and in particular has played a major part in challenging what might be described as the Whig interpretation of English police history. His latest book marks a logical, if nonetheless exciting and innovative, progression from his earlier work. Over much of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Europe, a model of policing prevailed which was very different from that epitomized by the English ‘bobby’. This was provided by the gendarme, a militarized policeman, usually operating under different conditions, and upon different assumptions, from those provided by the English model, attractive though those were to liberals over much of Europe. As Emsley demonstrates, the gendarme model was appropriate for those large areas of Europe which were still rural, while the various gendarmeries, as the title of the book suggests, both helped to facilitate and at the same time symbolized the processes of state-formation in modern Europe.

The model was, of course, initially a French one, owing its immediate origins to the *marchéchaussée*, a rural police agency dating essentially from the late seventeenth century which was subjected to a number of rationalizations in the eighteenth. The members of this force were spread thinly, operating largely on their own initiative in ‘brigades’ of six or fewer men. During the Revolution, this force was reorganized and renamed, becoming the *Gendarmerie Nationale* in 1791. This force carried on with the work of the *marchéchaussée*, detecting and arresting criminals and carrying out sweeps against vagrants. The conditions of warfare which prevailed soon after the *Gendarmerie*’s inception meant that its members were increasingly involved, too, in assisting in the smooth operation of France’s
military machine, and were occasionally remustered as fighting troops. Despite its associations with the Revolution, the Gendarmerie proved so useful that successive regimes retained it, and it remained a distinctive part of both the French policing system and French rural life.

But, importantly, this type of police system was to become one of France’s most significant exports. The administrative modernization which Napoleon’s conquests brought to many parts of Europe included an adoption of the model of policing provided by the Gendarmerie. As Emsley demonstrates, largely from south German evidence, a number of rulers had, from the mid eighteenth century, attempted to counter the endemic problems of brigandage and vagrancy with police reforms, and this process was intensified – and was provided with a useful model of how these matters might be organized – by the French conquests of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras. Both the processes of administrative reform and the development of Gendarmerie-type police forces continued after 1815. One of the major achievements of this book is its breadth: Emsley begins with the French model, and then turns his attention to a number of other case histories: the German territories, not least Prussia; Piedmont, whose carabinieri system, despite the reservations of liberals, was retained after Italian unification; Belgium; the Hapsburg Empire; Russia; and, perhaps most interestingly for English readers, Ireland, where a gendarme-model police force, although clearly thought of as inappropriate for England, was imposed in the form of the Royal Irish Constabulary.

Obviously, some of these national case histories are more deeply researched than others, although it is clear that Emsley has a good grasp of printed sources, and has also carried out research in French, German and Italian archives. He is sensitive to, and deploys much detailed evidence about, the problems of recruiting and discipline, to the problem of relations between the gendarmerie commanders and their superiors in government, to issues of everyday policing and to the reception which these various police forces enjoyed in the countrysides they had to police. As might be expected, public attitudes to the various gendarmeries varied according to national styles and to specific contexts, with the agents of state power in many areas assuming a broad policing and administrative role. And, of course, the aspects of state power they represented varied enormously. In Ireland, for example, the most consistent business of the Royal Irish Constabulary, those agents of not merely the state but also of British Imperialism, was the enforcement of the dog-licensing laws.

Overall, then, this is an excellent introduction to a little-studied aspect of police history which, quite apart from its intrinsic interest, illuminates the history of the modern European state from an unusual angle and from a comparative perspective. It is to be hoped that those national experiences to which Emsley can only devote limited attention here will, at some future point, form the basis of full-scale studies.

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Thomas Munck is a specialist in Danish history and author of a respected monograph, *The peasantry and the early absolute monarchy in Denmark, 1660–1708* (1979). He has since (in 1990) published an admirable textbook, *Seventeenth-century Europe, 1598–1700.* Moving forward in time, his latest book is another text aimed squarely at the undergraduate market. It is best approached as a social history of the eighteenth century related to changing ideas. The Enlightenment was essentially an educational movement and it is appropriate that Munck devotes three out of his eight chapters to discussing education, literacy and the world of print. Other chapters cover topics such as the alleged distinction between popular and elite culture; keynote ideas such as man’s place in nature; and changing notions of politics and ‘public opinion’. The devices of using pen-pictures of contemporaries like Hogarth (to exemplify developments in visual culture) and summaries of the views of historians like Darnton (on the knotty issue of the dissemination and reception of Enlightenment ideas) work well. Munck recognizes how protean the Enlightenment was for contemporaries and remains for modern scholars, writing (on pp. 99–100): ‘The enlightenment was different things to different people even at the time, just as it has been ever since.’ He focuses on London, Paris and Hamburg. There are many broader comparisons, but the discussion is principally of north-western Europe (‘the enlightenment epicentre’) with very little on Italy, Spain or Portugal, or the east. There is a judiciously selected bibliography which favours books in English. There are also works in French and German, but the Anglophone bias seems to be a sensible choice driven by the tastes and abilities of the student audience at which he is aiming. Some additional items of specialist periodical literature (which drives forward Enlightenment studies even more than most historical fields) are included in the footnotes.

Munck’s main contribution is to place social history much more in the centre of his analysis than many of the older general surveys which dominate teaching texts. For example, he recognizes why inequalities of wealth, power and opportunity shaped the responses of thinkers and policy makers to the perceived problems of the age. Social context for most intellectual historians seems to mean an allusion to clubs and salons; many (like John Dwyer) do not even attempt to understand the context in which ideas did or did not have an impact. There is indeed a world of difference between this book and one with a similar title written a generation ago, for example, Anand Chitnis’s *The Scottish Enlightenment: a social history* (1976). Munck ably explores the political, material and cultural context which helped to spawn and then help or hinder the dissemination of the ideas associated with the Enlightenment. Chapters 6 and 7 contain good analysis of the effect of ideas on areas of social policy such as the poor and the sick. There are obvious comparisons to be made with John Brewer’s *The pleasures of the imagination: English culture in the eighteenth century* (1997). Munck’s geographical coverage is
superior (though Brewer manages subtly to include comparative perspectives) and his is closer to a straightforward textbook than the sustained and lively argument which is Brewer’s tour de force.

Munck’s is, nevertheless, a thoroughly worthwhile endeavour. On a subject which can receive abstruse treatment, and where scholars tend to dwell on ideas and their impact on a restricted circle, Munck writes in a clear and accessible yet balanced and authoritative way which will make this excellent introductory reading for undergraduates. The only problem with recommending this as a textbook is that, while well produced, it is expensive in both hardback and paperback. And undergraduates who read ‘Sade … marquis de (1740–1814), French writer and sexual pervert’ in the index will be sorely disappointed by what they find at page 156.

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Since Maria L. Cioni’s study of Chancery (Women and law in Elizabethan England, with particular reference to the Court of Chancery (London, 1985)), equity jurisdictions have been seen as particularly favourable to women in early modern England. Stretton’s impressive examination of the Court of Requests allows a more comprehensive consideration of this question, meeting the criticisms of those who caution against drawing sweeping conclusions from a single court.

Known as the ‘poor man’s chancery’, the Court of Requests was seen as having had a particular duty to protect the interests of widows and orphans, although in practice, as Stretton demonstrates, their poverty was likely to be merely temporary, even for those litigating ‘in forma pauperis’ (p. 98). As such, it might be expected that Stretton’s research would amplify Cioni’s conclusions in seeing equity courts as women’s allies, and as agents in the improvement of the position and status of propertied women. However, the author wishes to question the sharpness of this contrast (p. 28), noting that women were proportionately as likely to litigate in common law as in equity jurisdictions (p. 40), and that legal developments, such as the introduction of separate estate, heralded by Cioni and others, only benefited married women. The clarity of this questioning is complicated by a confusion of aims, since Stretton sets out to examine women’s experience of litigation, rather than to establish the women’s position before the law (p. 20), but his emphasis on access and pleading strategies also involves some consideration of outcomes.

In many ways, however, it is perhaps the sections of the work on the experience of litigation which provide the reader with the fewest surprises. That the ideal female litigant should not be too loquacious or assertive, that poor-widow stereotypes were used and that in marital disputes both parties were likely to resort to the most extreme portrayals of negative gender stereotypes is as we might
expect. This account demonstrates convincingly that pleading strategies were gendered, but it is less clear how this affected the process of litigation. Stretton asserts (p. 53) that women more than men were judged not just on their guilt or innocence but on their motivations. If demonstrable, such a conclusion would be of great interest. However, the two examples cited in support, although stressing motivation as befits an equity court, do not provide a basis for the comparison of its legal decisiveness in gender terms. Given the nature of the evidence, the failure to sustain this assertion here, and in the rest of the work, is unavoidable. This is so not because of the small number of cases which went to final judgement, but rather because the importance of motivation in reaching those verdicts cannot be assessed.

In fact, despite his professed aims, Stretton’s account of the Court of Requests makes its main contribution precisely in the terms of Cioni’s study of Chancery. What is striking is the extent to which the Court was willing to develop new procedures, and to be flexible in its attempt to circumvent the weaknesses of potential litigants in other courts. Of course, as Stretton stresses, such devices only affected a tiny fraction of female litigants, and we should therefore be cautious in emphasizing the significance of maintenance cases and the role of Requests in developing the concept of alimony. Similarly, Stretton’s treatment of coverture and strategies for its evasion is judicious. Noting that many courts tempered the severity of coverture in practice, he downplays the general distinctiveness of married women’s litigation in Requests, but maintains that allowing separated wives to sue their husbands in their own names was ‘arguably the most innovative development within the Requests jurisdiction’ (p. 145), especially given the radical definition of separation adopted by some of the Masters which encompassed not only those couples who had been formally separated by a church court, but also cases in which the marriage had disintegrated and interim assistance was sought.

There is much of value in this study, and in its detailed elucidation of the work of Requests in terms easily comprehensible to the non-lawyer, the book successfully redresses the balance of gendered analyses which have focused on criminal law and ecclesiastical courts. In comparative terms such a study is ambitious: cases brought before Requests involved a variety of legal contexts, and any larger assessment of the contribution of Requests requires an understanding of these procedures. Put simply, we need to know whether the Masters reached decisions in different ways or whether their role was chiefly to circumvent the undue influence of one party. This question is particularly pertinent for the Court’s dealings with cases involving manorial custom. Chapter 7, an extended version of Stretton’s contribution to J. Kermode and G. Walker’s edited volume Women, crime and the courts in early modern England (London, 1994), highlights some of the difficulties in the context of cases involving widow’s freebench and copyhold tenure. Seemingly unaware of the discussion by historians of the later mediaeval manor court, such as Bonfield, about the nature of custom and customary law, Stretton develops a view in which customary law seems rigid, but only recent custom really counts, instead of exploring the extent to which Requests and the manor court can both be seen as equity courts. In upholding a widow’s claim to freebench, the Court of Requests was redressing issues of power which would have
influenced a local decision similarly based on factual equities, whereas in awarding and enforcing payments of alimony the court was going beyond the possibilities available to litigants in other courts, whatever the balance of power between the parties.

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This gracefully written book sets out to explore the evolution of social manners in early modern England, especially forms of deportment and feelings of shame relating to the body. Since historians can never observe social behaviour directly, Bryson focuses on conduct manuals and other texts that discuss concepts of courtesy and civility. She is too imaginative a scholar, however, to confine herself entirely to textual analysis. A certain tension results between Bryson’s rigorous but somewhat constraining methodology and her determination to pursue large questions requiring a more expansive and eclectic research strategy. But if that tension occasionally raises problems it also makes for a stimulating book.

A long introduction reviews theoretical work bearing upon the book’s subject, dealing among others with Freud, Norbert Elias, Foucault and the anthropologists Erving Goffman and Pierre Bourdieu. Bryson acknowledges a debt to the study of mentalité by the Annales school, while criticizing English revisionist historians for failing to examine the cultural forms and practices through which political authority worked.

The remaining chapters begin with a nuanced critique of J. G. A. Pocock’s argument that a disclosure on ‘civil’ manners, as opposed to ‘civic’ affairs in the public sphere, emerged only in the eighteenth century. Bryson sees a more complex conceptual and linguistic transition, through which terms like ‘civility’ and ‘civil conversation’ came to refer to conduct in both public and private spheres, in ways that associated the political authority of social elites with their mastery of codes of personal behaviour. Erasmus and later humanists normally contrasted civility with brutishness, the condition of animals and the lower orders, who lacked the ability to control their bodies and sensual appetites. Inculcating civility therefore meant developing a sense of shame and restraint, especially with respect to activities like eating, sex and defecation. But the resulting codes operated within hierarchical social contexts in which ‘relaxation indicate[d] superiority and inhibition respect’ (p. 86), so that civil behaviour varied with social contexts, in ways that allowed a man to ‘define and redefine his relationships’ with others (p. 96).

There was, however, a growing tendency to treat behaviour as a kind of bodily rhetoric, through which individuals expressed inner psychological states associated with ideals of gentlemanliness or courtliness. This sensibility was conveyed mainly
through new ways of organizing social rules, involving ‘modes of urbanity’ rather than ‘modes of lordship’. Fifteenth-century treatises were overwhelmingly concerned with table manners during meals in great houses, and defined courtesy in terms of fixed ‘hierarchies of services and … allegiance’. By contrast, the ideal of civility advanced by humanist treatises was displayed primarily by a man’s conduct within a society of near-equals. Bryson thinks urbane concepts of civility were initially transmitted through European manuals before town life became important to the aristocracy (p. 62). The royal court provided an alternative locale for the development of a ‘salon mentality’ (p. 112) until a gentrified metropolitan society emerged shortly before 1600. In the seventeenth century ‘modes of urbanity’ spread into the countryside, displacing older rituals of hospitality even among rustic gentry.

This is a highly suggestive analysis but one that might have been extended and refined. The concept of ‘salon mentality’ is imprecise and begs questions about precisely how European social ideals were assimilated. Bryson provides brief and suggestive comments concerning possible direct influence by French salons, the significance of changes in country-house architecture and the role of changing educational practices in shaping codes of manners. But none of these subjects receives sustained attention. She says almost nothing about the role of poetry, drama and painting in expressing ideals of civility, although figures like Ben Jonson and Anthony Van Dyck certainly appear relevant to the story she traces. Similarly the final two chapters on ‘Objections to Civility’ and the sort of ‘Anti-Civility’ displayed by the seventeenth-century rakes and libertines provide enlightening but somewhat limited discussions of how codes of manners sometimes generated adverse reactions. Bryson’s analysis of these topics tends to emphasize general intellectual trends, rather than specific social, political and polemical contexts in which conflicts between civility and incivility arose.

Yet if this book does not always provide fully developed answers to the important questions it raises, it never fails to offer illuminating insights which point the reader in fruitful directions while stimulating further thought. This is an important study that deserves not only wide readership but active engagement from other historians interested in elite culture.

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Massacres have been a constant element in human history, but have perhaps featured more prominently in the political use of the past than in scholarly debate. This fine collection of essays is an attempt to apply a more dispassionate analysis to this emotive and contested topic, without losing sight of the human tragedy. Originating in a 1995 conference at Warwick University, the volume contains 13
expanded contributions arranged chronologically, as well as an introductory essay by Mark Levene, which tackle central problems of definition and interpretation using case studies ranging across Europe, Asia, Africa and North and South America.

Among the many insights offered by Mark Levene’s introduction is the fact that massacres often have greater impact through their subsequent interpretation and commemoration than through their immediate bloodletting. This theme is taken up by many of the contributors, beginning with Laura Jacobus' examination of the Biblical massacre of the innocents in later-medieval art and drama, which argues that depictions reflected the theology of a divine plan for salvation and male fantasies of female subordination. At the other end of the timescale, Robin Okey suggests that the controversy surrounding the killings at the Croatian Jasenovac death camp in 1941–1945 were a major factor in the break-up of the former Yugoslavia. Though cloaked as legitimate historical debate, writers used the controversy over the number of deaths to peddle ethnic hatred within the Communist Yugoslav state, formally committed to ‘brotherhood and unity’.

Not surprisingly, such questions of language feature prominently in several of the other contributions. As Mark Greengrass points out, the word ‘massacre’ derives from the French for a butcher’s chopping block and acquired its modern meaning in the course of the religious tension in sixteenth-century France. His examination of contemporary accounts of the French Wars of Religion explores the language of violence. Hatred of rival sects was expressed in both word and deed and he concludes that there was no simple relationship between religious confession and any particular form of killing. Vilification of the victims was clearly important, however, and was even extended to non-human targets, as Peter Coates’ examination of the extermination of wolves in modern America demonstrates. He underlines the point, made repeatedly elsewhere in the volume, that the massacre of humans is related to, and may even originate in, the mass killing of animals. Though the largely defenceless nature of the victims is identified as a key element in the definition of the concept, it is clear that the perpetrators of such mass violence perceive their target as a threat nonetheless. Robert M. Levine demonstrates that the largely pacific millenarian community of Canudos was destroyed by the Brazilian army in 1897 because it was thought to endanger the very existence of the troubled Brazilian Republic. Tilman Dedering also locates the almost total destruction of the Hereros in the hysteria of the outnumbered German colonists after their initial defeats in 1904. The number of victims in this case, together with the deliberate policy of annihilation conducted by the German commander, raises questions of the relationships between massacre and genocide. Though no definitive conclusions are drawn, this topic is nonetheless addressed directly in Stephen D. Shenfield’s discussion of the massacre and forced deportation of the Circassians by imperial Russia in 1860–1864, which is described as ‘ethnic cleansing’.

Questions of intent are also clearly prominent and are examined by a number of the contributors, many of whom argue that massacres are not simply an unfortunate breakdown of legitimate authority but result from deliberate state policy. For instance, John Gittings seeks evidence for external, western complicity

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in the Indonesian massacres of 1965–1966, while Callum MacDonald interprets the Nanking massacre of 1937 as a punishment expedition to underline alleged Japanese racial superiority and to consolidate their imperial hold over China. Robin Clifton re-appraises the bloodletting in mid-seventeenth-century Ireland and draws somewhat different conclusions. Though hatreds were well-founded and mutual, actual killings were often the result of miscalculation and not necessarily intended. Events in England for the same period are also re-examined by Will Coster who suggests that, while still relatively rare, massacres were as much a part of the English Civil War as they were of continental struggles. Those in authority come off rather less well in Allan I. Macinnes’ account of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Scotland, while John Edwards concludes that the killing of the conversos in Córdoba in 1473–1474, though more a bloody riot than a ‘massacre’, was but the ‘prelude to the institutional violence’ of the Spanish Inquisition. Altogether, this volume reveals much of the darker side of human history.

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The historical significance of being a ‘singlewoman’ has been vastly under-studied in British historiography. Ever since the Protestant reformers deemed marriage to be the natural and ideal state, being single has been seen either as a transitory state to be ended by a marriage or as an anomaly requiring explanation. Singleness has been constructed as an embarrassing failure on the part of an individual woman, the consequence of demographic imbalances which meant that there were ‘not enough men to go round’. Even feminist historians have had limited interest in singleness, for much of their focus from the 1970s was on recovering the previously ignored embodied experiences of women, of which motherhood seemed the archetypal example. Yet singleness, as one of the essays in this rich collection shows, may also involve sexuality and motherhood. Susan Moshe Stuard traces the unhappy condition of girls in slavery, ancillae, who might marry but whose children were themselves born into slavery, to be sold in their turn.

Single women have been seen as marginal to the important subjects of social histories, especially to the history of the family. Yet single and married people did not, as the editors point out, inhabit different worlds: singleness is central to the history of marriage and family. Marriage was not universal in early modern Europe. Even demographers, as Maryanne Kowaleski shows, have underestimated the extent of singleness by classifying as single only those who were never married at the age of 50; many women may have been single for their whole lives, but simply did not, in times of heavy mortality, live for 50 years. A woman’s economic
independence affected her decision to marry. General prosperity increased matrimony; female prosperity decreased it. Amy Froide argues that singlewomen were a large proportion of the householders in early modern English towns; many of them were of advanced years and higher social status.

The introduction will be invaluable for students and teachers, as it discusses the variables which influenced the lives of the life-cycle single women (who did eventually marry) and the lifelong-single, the ‘singlewoman’, as the editors term her. Whereas many historians have argued that a crucial distinction between women in medieval and early modern Europe was their marital status, between wives and widowed or single women, here Bennett and Froide contend that the crucial distinction was between the ever-married and never-married. While this is a significant difference, certainly one that the parish authorities would enforce, it may obscure another distinction, namely that between married women whose husbands were absent and other women without men. A deserted wife, a widow and a singlewoman may have shared similar economic difficulties, as they all lacked training and were paid at a lower rate than men. Yet the editors have a valid point; to be never married does make a difference to a woman’s own life and sense of identity. Singlewomen’s economic opportunities and social lives were shaped by time and place, as essays ranging over roughly 600 years and several different European societies demonstrate. Monica Chojnacka explores how singlewomen negotiated the rapidly changing economy of sixteenth-century Venice.

Representation of singleness in women and men has differed; ‘spinsters’ have had a bad press compared with bachelors. What social conditions, Susan Lanser asks, could prompt such extremes of contempt for the singlewoman? Part of the answer may lie in unspoken anxieties about the sexualities of the singlewoman. Ruth Karras looks at how medieval Londoners focused on prostitution, while Margaret Hunt points out that, by the eighteenth century, observers of the singlewoman feared lesbian sexuality. Hunt’s evidence shows that some singlewomen did focus their sexual lives on other women. Ultimately, the editors argue, most singlewomen’s emotional lives were centred on other women.

This is a rich collection, bristling with new questions and challenges. Literary scholars discuss different sources, such as verse and romance. Contributors focus on topics of such obvious importance that the book will be invaluable both as a teaching resource and as a stimulus to further study. Future scholars may take up questions of health and medical discourses which are not represented here. Nevertheless, this is an important collection, with clear and scholarly writing, informative endnotes to each chapter, and fine book production. While its appeal will be greatest to literary critics as well as medieval, early modern and gender historians, it deserves to be read very widely. And, as the editors point out, it is only a beginning.

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When the Nordic countries embraced Lutheranism in the sixteenth century, new uses were found for now-obsolete ‘popish’ books such as canon law books. Their parchment leaves were used as strong binding materials. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, scholars have been and still are attempting to piece together the old books from tens of thousands of fragments preserved in various libraries and archives. Like the canon law books themselves, the history of medieval canon law in Scandinavia was long neglected, partially in the romantic and mistaken belief that the native, ‘purely Germanic’ legal traditions left no place for canon law in medieval Scandinavian society. It is refreshing to see in the present book (mostly) young Scandinavian scholars piecing together some of the fragments of the role that canon law played in the Scandinavian countries.

Per Ingesman attacks the problem head on in his contribution, which argues that there was a canon law culture in late-medieval Denmark. Danes studied canon law at European universities or (after 1479) in Copenhagen; they owned and some even wrote canon law books. Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir discusses the way canonical doctrines about marriage were not only accepted by the Icelandic legal system, but also absorbed into the ideology of the population. Similarly, Mia Korpiola shows how ideas about consummation of and parental consent to marriage developed in medieval Swedish law under the influence of, and sometimes in opposition to, canon law. Kirsi Salonen draws on source material that has only recently been made available by the papal Curia to explore 35 Finnish marriage cases in 1449–1523 that were heard by the papal Penitentiary. They mostly concern couples who sought papal absolution for getting married despite being too closely related to each other, which illustrates the difficulties aristocrats had in a small country such as Finland in finding suitable marriage partners who did not break the church’s incest prohibitions.

The background of such prohibitions is a classic and still unresolved problem within medieval history. Michael H. Gelting proposes a new solution in what is perhaps the most interesting contribution in the volume. Taking his cue from the actual language used by medieval writers, Gelting argues that the incest prohibition must be seen in the context of the idea that kinship entailed binding mutual solidarity. During the Carolingian period, churchmen strove to extend this prohibition to the seventh canonical degree (including sixth cousins). This was also a period when endemic feuding between kin groups constituted a major social problem. Gelting argues that the purpose of the prohibition was to extend the kin group to which a nobleman owed solidarity, hence making it more difficult to sustain feuds. His suggestion represents a welcome and fresh contribution to the debate.

The volume also contains four articles which are not directly related to Scandinavian history but to the general history of canon law. James A. Brundage
writes about the lack in medieval juristic doctrines of the notion that communications between a lawyer and his client should be confidential, while medieval rules against conflict of interest survive in modern ethical guidelines. Christian Krötzl discusses (in German) the problems of using medieval processes of canonization as a source for social history. Some knowledge of canon law is necessary to understand correctly the documents produced in these processes, and Krötzl emphasizes that the detailed surviving documents from the process concerning Bishop Thomas Cantilupe of Hereford can help the scholar understand less detailed documentation from other processes. Virpi Mäkinen shows how canon law concerning the rights of the poor contributed to the philosophical discussion about Franciscan poverty in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and Jussi Varkemaa treats the fifteenth-century German theologian Conrad Summenhart’s polemics against contemporary jurists on the question of personal liberty.

The wide range of topics treated in the present book does not really make for comfortable and coherent cover-to-cover reading, but it testifies to how multi-faceted Scandinavian research on medieval canon law is, particularly – it appears – in Finland and Denmark.

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Victor Bailey, *‘This rash act’: suicide across the life cycle in the Victorian city.* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998.) Pages xvi+349. £40.00.

Victor Bailey has analysed a unique cache of coroners’ reports from the nineteenth century – 729 cases in all, from 1837 to 1899 – all relating to the population of the industrial port of Hull – tough, independent, relatively isolated, and rapidly expanding (pp. 5–6). His book provides a valuable case study and a methodological exemplar, which begins with a very useful review of the sociological and historical literature about suicide, and a new account of the role of Coroner’s Courts, as prologue to a fascinating ‘thick description’ of the lives and deaths of these hundreds of otherwise unsung men and women.

There are two distinct approaches to suicide by sociologists and historians. The first, originated by Durkheim, utilizes the statistics of suicide to try to explain the phenomenon as a consequence of the weakening of social ties in modern urban conditions. The second, associated with the more recent trend towards ethnomethodology, concentrates instead on eliciting the social meaning of suicide from detailed reconstruction and reporting of cases, and is sceptical of the ability of the first approach to produce valid results. Bailey insists that it is possible to draw conclusions regarding the potential for suicide of particular social groups using statistical data; equally, however, he also uses life-cycle, or, as he prefers, ‘life-course’ analysis, to illuminate the subjective meanings of suicide, which have been neglected by Durkheimians. His chapter summarizing the literature on the
urban life cycle in Victorian England is an excellent summation of the work of a whole generation of historians. He uses this as an interpretative framework to explore the Hull data, following its suicides through their early-life transitions (mostly low in suicide), into the prime of life and then to old age (much the highest).

One of Bailey’s chief conclusions is that we need to treat sceptically the popular nineteenth-century gendered theory of suicide, encapsulated in Rowlandson’s print of 1810, *She Died for Love and He for Glory*. Certainly, two-thirds of Hull’s male suicides were experiencing difficult economic circumstances at the time of their deaths, especially in the later nineteenth century, when, to judge by Bailey’s research, labour-market insecurity increased. However, the analytical power of the public and private spheres concept is called into question by his finding that emotional events affected men as well as women and that economic hardship affected women as well as men – especially young domestics and older widows.

Ultimately, argues Bailey, suicide is explicable in terms of emotional solitude. In this approach he has been influenced by Durkheim’s disciple, Maurice Halbwachs, who argued that the ‘unique cause of suicide’ was definitive and irremediable feelings of solitude. Previous historians, like Olive Anderson and Barrie Ratcliffe, have downplayed solitude as a cause of suicide – stressing the supportive existence of kinship, immigrant and neighbourhood networks. However, Bailey regards it as the key concept linking many different motives for suicide, interpreting it as emotional rather than physical isolation. Thus unemployment separated workers from the community of those who worked (as did illness), and from their former social status, especially where it was felt to be ‘a respectable position’. Secondly, there was solitude created by social disgrace, such as arrest, bastardy, embezzlement or infidelity. Thirdly, there were suicides reacting to the severing or weakening of kinship, romantic or neighbourhood ties. ‘Done by a deceitful wife’, said one; another fatally scolded his wife for arguing with the neighbours. Fourthly, patterns of illness, including old age and drunkenness, can be discerned as having stimulated suicide, although there was often an overlap with financial and employment problems. These, and other, more miscellaneous, examples of motives for suicide well support the centrality which Bailey gives to the concept of social isolation. Moreover, a pronounced suicide rate among lower-middle-class occupations also upholds the concept, for, by contrast, occupational groups with stronger internal solidarity had much lower rates. Finally, the overall analysis is supported by the author’s findings on the ecology of suicide (an aspect which has been neglected by previous historians); he finds the central business and retail Old Town area – with its ‘more transient, unmarried, lodging- and public-house population’ had nearly a third of all Hull suicides in the 1890s.

The book is carefully crafted, clearly written and beautifully produced. The frequently poignant details of the suicides have a compelling human quality which few will be able to resist. Bailey believes that his method of interpreting his research findings through life-course analysis gives them analogous power for other large industrial cities, and I think he has established a powerful case.

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This book is essentially a study of generational change reflecting and illuminating the wider social and cultural developments of the period. The main protagonists are Sir Ralph Verney (d. 1696), a country squire, and his younger son John (d. 1717), a Levant merchant who eventually succeeded to the title and estate. The author draws on the massive family archive, and her study is based on the scrutiny of 12,000 of its papers. Some findings are presented in quantified form from a ‘sociability database’, and throw light on the social range of the Verneys’ networks. One striking feature is the frequent imbalance between writers and recipients, with dependent female kin faring worst; poor Aunt Gardiner penned 518 letters between 1692 and 1717 and received only 30 replies. The core of the book is its qualitative study of several inter-related themes. Whyman is especially interested in the relationship between city and country, and charts the capital’s rapidly growing impact on the lives and values of the landed elites. Even Sir Ralph, wedded to traditional country ways, was spending nine months of each year in London towards the end of his life. Whyman rejects any rigid division between city and country, showing how country networks were replicated in the city and how city attitudes came to permeate the worlds of those in the countryside. Particularly illuminating is her ethnographic study of changing patterns of hospitality and sociability. Sir Ralph liked to present his friends and kin with gifts of venison, which conveyed coded messages of status and masculinity and allowed carefully graduated signs of favour in the choice of joints. John abandoned the custom. After his first marriage he had to learn the new urban polite code of dinner invitations and visits, in which the use of opulent coaches was of key importance. As a parsimonious workaholic, John found all this distasteful, but his female relations convinced him of the necessity to conform. Whyman also studies the patterns of marriage formation over sixty years, exploring the principles behind the family’s choices and their outcomes. The Verneys drove hard bargains, and their use of the strict settlement was largely successful, through a combination of demographic luck and shrewd judgement. They were determined to limit jointures to widows, not children, and for over sixty years were not called upon to find any portions or pay out any jointures. John married three daughters of wealthy London merchants; the next generation, appropriately, married into landowning families. In both cases, significantly, the marriage negotiations themselves were conducted in the capital. The interests of the dynasty invariably came first; settlements were rarely generous to widows, daughters or younger sons. A final chapter explores the Verneys’ political lives, charting changes in culture and behaviour over the period. Sir Ralph, who evolved into a moderate Tory, did not stand for the Cavalier parliament but was an active candidate thereafter, with mixed results, partly through his principled reluctance to bribe and treat the common voter. John, who also evolved into a Tory and staunch supporter of
Sacheverell, had equally mixed fortunes. His own early failures sprang from parsimony rather than fastidiousness, and to a refusal to yield to voters exploiting party divisions to demand regular largesse as of right. John learned to swallow his pride, build alliances and dispense carefully calculated hospitality to voters of whom he felt secure. Whyman shows how deeply county elites were divided by the rage of party; John was not even invited to the funeral of a close neighbour, and Whigs rang church bells for joy on hearing the false news of his own demise.

Whyman is fully aware that the well-documented Verneys were not necessarily representative, and she draws on the behaviour of neighbouring landed families as a control. She also notes the absence of any strong matriarchal figure within the Verney family, though she has interesting material on the influential role of women in parliamentary elections and reveals John’s third wife, Elizabeth, as a calculating and effective political operator in her own right. The author makes no claim to have written a comprehensive study of the Verneys’ world, and readers will have their own regrets over aspects she chose to exclude. On its own terms, however, this is an important and stimulating work with a significance reaching far beyond the story of the family it chronicles.

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