

Nippel (W.) *Public order in Ancient Rome (Key Themes in Ancient History)*. Pp. x + 163. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. £32.50; \$49.95 (Paper, £11.95; \$17.95). ISBN: 0 521 38327 7 (0 521 38749 3 pbk)

This interesting introductory study provides surveys public disorder in Rome from the Middle Republic to about AD 400. The book contains both a bibliographical essay and a full bibliography, concentrating mainly on comparatively modern works.

The fundamental argument of the book is that modern standards of policing are unnecessary for the proper functioning of a political community. This argument is initially illustrated by showing how the modern concept of policing in Britain developed from political debates in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These present a familiar eighteenth-century division in the ruling oligarchy between those who favoured modernisation and extension of state power, particularly into areas that were the preserve of the traditional 'gentry', and those who feared that any such reforms eroded fundamental liberties and smacked of the revolutionary changes that had devastated the French aristocracy. The eventual development of a police force owed much to fears concerning the ability of the traditional oligarchy to control the 'urban under-class' of the growing cities. N.'s conclusion, with which few I think would disagree, is that there was no similar modern-style police force employed in ancient Rome in either the Republican or Imperial periods.

N. concentrates largely on the Republican period. In common with others who have worked on this field, N. suggests that a certain amount of violence, in certain circumstances, was considered legitimate in Roman political life. Use of violence could be justified to deal with potential tyrants or other threats to the Republic or as an expression of popular feeling, especially when other more pacific routes were closed to popular representatives. Violence was a way of overcoming a political impasse and the very fact that a politician could control a violent mob was evidence of a popular mandate. This legitimising of violence in politics was in part a result of the state's (whatever 'state' may mean in this period) failure to monopolise violence through such institutions as a police force. It was necessary for Romans to rely upon self-help and aid offered by neighbours to ensure domestic and personal security and so violence offered in the political sphere could be seen as an extension of the public duty to protect and defend the community. N. argues, therefore, that 'it was the crises of the political system that led to violence' (arguably the case for many societies), 'not violence that created the crises' (p. 46).

The latter part of this assertion seems questionable for the period of Clodius' activities. In the second century BC, the senators were able to assert their authority and prestige and overthrow popular leaders whose ability to mobilise popular support had waned somewhat. N. argues that Clodius established a far more resilient network of popular support that allowed for organised and violent expression of discontent even after Clodius' death. The only recourse available to the senatorial leaders was military force. The use of soldiers in this way was, however, illegitimate and resulted in 'a collapse of constitutional principals' which were only re-established under Augustus. One may view, therefore, the collapse of the Republic as either being reflected in or in part caused by (N. is not explicit here) changes in the organisation and pattern of public disorder. This is an interesting perception since it places Clodius and the *collegia* at the centre of the political crisis, though the differentiation of these disturbances from those of the previous generations (which were also suppressed by troops of various kinds) is not entirely convincing.

One can see parallels between the situation in Rome in the first century BC and that in the cities of the industrial revolution: large heterogeneous urban populations, fear of popular discontent, and traditional power structures under threat. If N. is right in perceiving a change in the nature of popular disturbances in the 50s BC, then one must wonder whether the changes in the administration of Rome and the introduction of the various military units into the city under Augustus were solutions to an essentially similar problem.

N. is surely right to argue that new 'state agencies' in themselves were not capable of being or intended to be an effective state police force, but even modern policing agencies rely heavily on public support and there is no reason to suppose that a mixture of military police, neighbourhood associations and other groups did not prove effective. Such a plurality of groups does not mean that the streets were disorderly, or that there was no effective 'state' control. It is, therefore, rather a pity that more attention is not given to the militias, neighbourhood organisations, and other groups that might have contributed to maintaining public order.

N. tends to emphasise differences between modern and ancient policing, but parallels also emerge and one must agree with the conclusion of this thoughtful and valuable study that 'more comparative work on the maintenance of public order in pre-modern as well as modern societies should help to increase our understanding of the... system of public order in ancient Rome' (p.119).

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