



Dominique Kalifa et Jean-Claude Farcy, *Atlas du crime à Paris du moyen âge à nos jours*, Paris : Éditions Parigramme, 2015, 220 p., ISBN 978-2-84096-872-6

Clive Emsley



Electronic version

URL: <http://chs.revues.org/1692>
ISSN: 1663-4837

Publisher

Librairie Droz

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 December 2016
Number of pages: 220
ISBN: 978-2-600-01953-8
ISSN: 1422-0857

Electronic reference

Clive Emsley, « Dominique Kalifa et Jean-Claude Farcy, *Atlas du crime à Paris du moyen âge à nos jours*, Paris : Éditions Parigramme, 2015, 220 p., ISBN 978-2-84096-872-6 », *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés / Crime, History & Societies* [Online], Vol. 20, n°2 | 2016, Online since 13 January 2017, connection on 21 January 2017. URL : <http://chs.revues.org/1692>

This text was automatically generated on 21 January 2017.

Dominique Kalifa et Jean-Claude Farcy, *Atlas du crime à Paris du moyen âge à nos jours*, Paris : Éditions Parigramme, 2015, 220 p., ISBN 978-2-84096-872-6

Clive Emsley

- 1 More than a hundred years ago mile Durkheim shocked his contemporaries by suggesting that crime was a normal social fact ; it was, after all, to be found in every society even though it shifted its form since the actions defined as crime might change as some activities were removed from the lists of those demanding penal sanction while others were added or modified. Dominique Kalifa and Jean-Claude Farcy do not discuss Durkheim in this book, but their exploration of Paris over some 800 years lend considerable weight to his suggestion – a suggestion that some today might also find shocking, and one that politicians and policemen avoid as they promise new laws and practices that they insist will win the war against crime.
- 2 As readers of this journal will know, Dominique Kalifa and Jean-Claude Farcy are two of the best historians of crime and the many issues and problems surrounding it currently at work in contemporary France. This book is a work of synthesis aimed at a much wider readership than the purely academic one. The authors declare their aim as being to provide a long-term identity of criminal Paris. They justify starting in the Middle Ages, specifically at the time of the Hundred Years War, by drawing attention to the shortage of documentation for the subject in the periods before the fourteenth century. Even so, the book has to race through time – 800 years in 220 pages. Overall, it wears its authors' learning lightly. It is beautifully and copiously illustrated and, as is to be expected from an atlas, it contains informative maps which, in this case, highlight places noted for different forms of crime at different times as well as jurisdictional divisions under the old

regime, old regime and modern police districts, sites of prisons and executions. There are seven chapters, each covering a chronological period and each subdivided into key issues or major, dramatic incidents. A glance at the contents page therefore makes it relatively simple to follow across time issues such as the perceptions of crime and criminals, prostitution and sexual crimes, and shifts in penal and policing institutions. Even so, a formal index at the end of the book would have been useful to enable the reader to do some cross checking without having to depend on memory. Having spent so much in producing such a fine and colourful book, the lack of a proper index is difficult to understand.

- 3 Well supported by the maps, Kalifa and Farcy argue that there has been a significant shift at least in the 'dangerous' areas of the city where the majority of those brought before the courts are to be found. From the Middle Ages until the nineteenth century the hurly-burly of the narrow streets in the city centre with their bars, churches and markets were the places for picking fights, planning and also committing all kinds of thefts. Some of these narrow streets, notably on the left bank around La Sorbonne and directly opposite over the Seine and Île de la Cité in the district of St. Merri, survived the building developments and social segregation of the Second Empire, but generally Haussmann's Paris saw the beginning of a significant shift to the outer quarters. From the late twentieth century there was a further shift to the banlieues. Across time 'criminals' were considered to exist primarily among the poor, especially recent migrants drawn to the city by the promise of a better life. There is a hint in the comments about most offending being petty, that these people were the victims as often as the perpetrators of crime. Overall, however, historical studies of the hot spots of petty crime are few and far between. Some of this is because of the shortage of evidence to explore the issue ; but it could also be the case that the victims chose either not to report an offence because of fear of the perpetrators or of the police, or because they hoped to enact their own revenge in their own way.
- 4 While most crime is petty, this does not make for good news stories. As might be expected given Dominique Kalifa's earlier work there is much here on media portrayal of criminality, especially in the form of newspapers, romans-feuilletons, romans-policiers and the memoirs of both policemen and major criminals. Pierre-François Lacenaire, for example, who saw himself as a poet of crime and wrote as such from the death cell, has a sub-chapter to himself. So too does Albert Soleilland whose murder of 11-year-old Marthe Erbeling was used by the press to campaign for the preservation of the death penalty and tough punishments. Yet while the novels and memoirs are well-represented, it might have been useful to have had something also on modern television equivalents: Engrenages, for example, set in contemporary Paris has a sixth series in production and covers many of the contemporary panics about sex murders, trafficking, drugs, police officers pushing the boundaries and corrupt officials.
- 5 But my quibbles are all very minor. Perhaps there will not be much here for the academic well-versed in the history of crime and penal institutions in France and in Paris in particular, though the maps and the splendid illustrations, together with the period sweep will make the book invaluable for quick reference. It should however, be required reading for politicians and media hacks who insist that crime is getting worse and come forward with what appears to be increasing regularity claiming to have found new and guaranteed solutions to old problems – to normal social facts perhaps, but that remains an area where the academic debate will continue.