Introduction

David Stasavage

in States of Credit: Size, Power, and the Development of European Polities

This book examines two distinctive features of European state formation: the invention of the concept of political representation and the development of a system of public credit. Using systematic data on public credit and political representation for thirty-one European states over the period 1250–1750, the book asks whether the presence of an intensive form of representation facilitated access to credit for the former, allowing them to survive and their economies to prosper. It also explores how this joint emergence of credit and representation affected broader trends involving war, state formation, and economic development. The book argues that the presence of an intensive form of representation characterized by an assembly that could monitor and modify expenditures played a key role in facilitating access to credit by European states. The book also discusses the prerogatives and level of activity of representative assemblies in territorial states as compared to city-states.

City-states at the crossroads, 1300–1450

Tom Scott

in The City-State in Europe, 1000-1600: Hinterland, Territory, Region

City-states north of the Alps are distinguished by their relatively late formation and by expansion as a collective civic endeavour, not driven by factional interests. These cities often formed leagues (Hansa, Swiss Confederation), though their purposes varied. Northern city-states
also used rural citizenship (outburghership) alongside landholding and protective treaties to buttress territorial expansion. Hansa cities in particular acquired territories by mortgage, and in general northern cities were more concerned with axial expansion along trade routes than with radial control of a market hinterland. Several city-states (Cologne, Augsburg, St Gallen) used putting-out to dominate their hinterlands’ economies without ever acquiring sovereign territories. In general, initial economic/commercial or political/jurisdictional motives for expansion were superseded in the fifteenth century by fiscal and military needs.

**The City-State in Europe, 1000-1600**

Tom Scott


This book provides the first comprehensive study of city-states in medieval Europe for more than a century. Rather than highlighting the political and cultural achievements of city-states, above all those of central and northern Italy, it offers a detailed comparison of city-states in an urban belt which spanned the Alps from Italy to Switzerland, Germany, and the Low Countries, focusing on their territorial expansion: Why, how, and with what consequences did cities as communal polities succeed (or fail) in their efforts to construct landed territories and so become sovereign states in their own right. For the first time there is full coverage of the Swiss city-states and the imperial cities of Germany. In contrast to the typologies of city-states put forward by social and political scientists the study argues that city-states were not a spent force in early modern Europe, but survived by transformation and adaption. Furthermore, it suggests that a historical framework for the city-state which embraces both time and space should be sought in a regional approach which does not treat city-states in isolation but within their wider geopolitical context.

**Survival and transformation, 1450–1600**

Tom Scott

in The City-State in Europe, 1000-1600: Hinterland, Territory, Region

City-states after 1500 were not a spent force; rather, they survived by transformation and adjustment, even if their increasingly aristocratic governments have been denounced as oligarchies which betrayed republican liberty. The Swiss Confederation continued to exert a political pull, though sometimes by overt aggression (Bernese conquest of the Vaud). The Dutch United Provinces display some similarities with city-states. Many cities bargained with their rulers (especially capital cities and ports as outlets of commercial empires) to carve out autonomy. Others adapted to foreign rule internally or entered into new commercial/financial alliances externally. In Italy, the attraction of the city-state encouraged lesser towns to emulate them, even acquiring their own small contadi (quasi-città). Only a very few city-states disappeared, in the sense of being stripped of territory and autonomy.

The Evolution and Importance of Public Credit
David Stasavage

in States of Credit: Size, Power, and the Development of European Polities
Published in print: 2011 Published Online: October 2017
Publisher: Princeton University Press DOI: 10.23943/princeton/9780691140575.003.0002
Item type: chapter

This chapter examines why access to credit was important for European states and provides extensive new evidence on the evolution of public credit across five centuries, from 1250 to 1750. The ability to borrow was critical in medieval and early modern Europe because it allowed states to participate in wars, either defensive or offensive. In order to better understand this fact, the chapter analyzes the movement that took place from compulsory to paid service for soldiers, along with opportunities to finance wars through current taxation. It also explains when states first borrowed long-term and measures the cost of borrowing, focusing on interest rates based on nominal rates at issue when these are available, and based on the fiscal proxy when they are not. The chapter highlights the difference between city-states and territorial states, with the former enjoying an apparent financial advantage that allowed them to begin borrowing earlier and to obtain access to lower-cost finance.

The Greeks
Antony Black

in A World History of Ancient Political Thought
Published in print: 2009 Published Online: May 2009
Publisher: Oxford University Press DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199281695.003.0009
The polis (citizen-state) was ruled by warrior-citizens. Political debate kick-started philosophy and science; Aristotle later argued that humans fulfil their potential only in a polis. The Athenian ideals of equality before the law, freedom of speech, and government by the people were reflected in popular law-courts and the citizens' assembly (direct democracy). Aeschylus portrayed the goddess Athene replacing divine vengeance with trial according to evidence and testimony before a citizens' jury. Plato, widely regarded as the founder of political philosophy, grounded political order on a theory of knowledge and rational dialectic; he wanted to replace democracy with philosopher-kings. But he later proposed a balance between experts and a citizen assembly under the sovereignty of the laws. His method was more influential than his conclusions. Aristotle undertook empirical investigation of actual states (political science); he concluded that a mixture of rule by the few and the many was best.

Representative Assemblies in Europe, 1250–1750
David Stasavage

in States of Credit: Size, Power, and the Development of European Polities
Published in print: 2011 Published Online: October 2017
Publisher: Princeton University Press DOI: 10.23943/princeton/9780691140575.003.0003

This chapter examines the evolution of representative assemblies in Europe during the period 1250–1750. Numerous historical sources provide evidence of a clear distinction between the financial roles played by representative bodies in city-states and by those in territorial states. Within city-states, representative bodies met frequently, they played a direct role in controlling government finance. Within territorial states, representative assemblies were sometimes an obstacle to a government's efforts to obtain credit. The chapter first provides an overview of the origins of representative assemblies before discussing the prerogatives of representative assemblies in city-states and territorial states. The evidence relates to long-standing historical arguments about the emergence and evolution of political representation. The chapter also highlights the pronounced difference in the activities of representative assemblies in city-states and territorial states.
Three City-State Experiences
David Stasavage

in States of Credit: Size, Power, and the Development of European Polities
Published in print: 2011 Published Online: October 2017
Item type: chapter

This chapter examines public credit and political representation in three European city-states: Cologne, Genoa, and Siena. The goal is to identify the mechanisms at work that determined whether a state had access to credit and at what cost. The chapter considers how public debt was an issue of strong and often violent social conflict within city-states, along with the importance of political control by merchants. The experience of Cologne, Genoa, and Siena shows that there was nothing more effective in ensuring access to credit than being ruled by a merchant oligarchy. Evidence also suggests that when merchant control was challenged, this had negative consequences for access to credit.

Assessing the City-State Advantage
David Stasavage

in States of Credit: Size, Power, and the Development of European Polities
Published in print: 2011 Published Online: October 2017
Item type: chapter

This chapter examines whether the difference in the activities of representative assemblies in city-states and territorial states had implications for the evolution of public credit. It first develops a basic game theoretic model that demonstrates how both political representation and public credit might emerge as an equilibrium outcome dependent on an underlying cost for representatives of monitoring public finances. It then uses the model to conduct empirical tests in order to identify what factors were correlated with the initial creation of a long-term public debt. Three hypotheses are tested: that access to credit depended on commercial and economic development; that access to credit depended on the presence of representative institutions; and that access to credit depended on the differing underlying conditions in city-states and territorial states. The results show that greater commercial and economic development favored access to public credit.
Mesopotamia, Assyria, Babylon
Antony Black

in A World History of Ancient Political Thought
Published in print: 2009 Published Online: May 2009
Publisher: Oxford University Press
DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199281695.003.0004
Item type: chapter

In Sumer government, religion, and culture were based on city-states, ruled by kings who were personally chose by the city god. Unlike Egypt, supreme authority circulated from city to city. Royal absolutism developed when the Akkadians introduced tribal dynastic authority, and, further north, in Assyria. There was a generalized notion of kingship, or the state, which had to perform certain functions: maintenance of the god's estate, of justice and prosperity. Kings were to redress grievances of the poor against the powerful. Some kings issued law codes. There were assemblies of citizens, corresponding perhaps to the gods' assembly. Whether there was primitive democracy has been disputed, but citizens appear to have had some judicial and commercial powers.

Origins of City-States
David Stasavage

in States of Credit: Size, Power, and the Development of European Polities
Published in print: 2011 Published Online: October 2017
Publisher: Princeton University Press
DOI: 10.23943/princeton/9780691140575.003.0005
Item type: chapter

This chapter examines the origins of European city-states. It has long been observed that within Europe, autonomous cities tended to emerge in a relatively narrow belt stretching from the Low Countries to northern Italy, and this empirical observation has generated a variety of explanations. Answering this question is critical to the conceptualization of the broad process of state formation in Europe. The chapter asks why city-states emerged in some European regions in the first place, whereas elsewhere territorial states became the dominant mode of state organization. It considers the principal existing explanation for the pattern of city-state development, the Rokkan/Tilly hypothesis, and compares it with the Carolingian partition hypothesis. Results of empirical tests show that city-states were able to emerge in Europe's central core because this was where central political control collapsed to the greatest extent after the partition of the Carolingian Empire.
This concluding chapter recapitulates on what the book has investigated: the development of a representative form of government and the establishment of a system of public credit in Europe. It has also explored the constraining effects of representative assemblies and the idea that geographic scale hindered the ability to sustain an intensive form of political representation. The chapter examines the implications of the book's findings for three broad debates concerning the role of war in the process of state formation, the possibility of using institutional change to solve commitment problems, and the sources of early modern growth. In particular, it considers the political determinants of economic development within European city-states. The chapter suggests that the same political conditions that were key to the early success of the so-called “states of credit” may have also ultimately set them on a path toward economic decline.

Islam retained clans and often tribes whereas Europe moved towards nuclear families. In Europe, significant social and political relationships were based on oath rather than kinship, whether between lords and followers (‘feudalism’) or among householders in city communities. Church and ‘umma remained as universal societies. In Europe, territorial units of government became more entrenched, and, unlike in Islam, the nation sometimes became a political unit. Islam was well-disposed towards commerce. In Europe, the idea of the corporation as a legal body with specific legitimate powers favoured the city-state. In both societies, social inequalities and classes were justified, in Christendom by the organic metaphor, in Islam by a theory of the four social ‘orders’.
This book provides the first comprehensive look at the joint development of representative assemblies and public borrowing in Europe during the medieval and early modern eras. It argues that unique advances in political representation allowed certain European states to gain early and advantageous access to credit, but the emergence of an active form of political representation itself depended on two underlying factors: compact geography and a strong mercantile presence. The book shows that active representative assemblies were more likely to be sustained in geographically small polities. These assemblies, dominated by mercantile groups that lent to governments, were in turn more likely to preserve access to credit. Given these conditions, smaller European city-states, such as Genoa and Cologne, had an advantage over larger territorial states, including France and Castile, because mercantile elites structured political institutions in order to effectively monitor public credit. While creditor oversight of public funds became an asset for city-states in need of finance, the book suggests that the long-run implications were more ambiguous. City-states with the best access to credit often had the most closed and oligarchic systems of representation, hindering their ability to accept new economic innovations. This eventually transformed certain city-states from economic dynamos into rentier republics. Exploring the links between representation and debt in medieval and early modern Europe, the book contributes to broad debates about state formation and Europe's economic rise.

Introduction

Tom Scott

in The City-State in Europe, 1000-1600: Hinterland, Territory, Region

The Introduction sets out the methodological approach of the book: it draws upon a tradition of regional historical studies, much indebted to economic and historical geography, to investigate the reasons why and methods whereby cities in an urban belt of central Europe constructed landed territories. It is not concerned to trace the political, juridical,
and cultural achievements of medieval city-states, especially those in Italy. The study is firmly comparative, but does not presume that a single archetype of the medieval city-state existed. Constraints of space prevent detailed treatment of regional economic systems, a topic on which much research remains to be undertaken. The book is divided into broad chronological chapters spanning around 150 years, the last of which examines thematically the capacity of city-states to survive by transformation and adaption.

Lucca and its Territories in the Fifteenth Century: Politics and Administration
M. E. Bratchel

In earlier chapters, political, administrative, social, and economic ingredients were forged into an integrated history of the developing Lucchese state. For purposes of a more detailed analysis, the political and administrative features of the 15th-century Lucchesia have been separated from social and economic issues. This chapter looks at the mature political and administrative entity that was 15th-century Lucca. By the mid-15th century Lucca had attained the borders that it was to retain—with only minor adjustments—throughout the remaining centuries of independence. The picture that emerges is of a very weak state, which exercised a very fragile control, particularly in border areas. But the Lucchese state, as in previous centuries, was largely free of rival, autonomous jurisdictions within its borders. And its administrative structures remained highly centralized and intrusive. The chapter compares Lucca, as a somewhat anachronistic relic of the old-style Italian city-state, with the new regional powers of 15th-century Italy. This comparison is complicated by the diverse and fluid characteristics of the new regional formations.
The book traces the creation of the Lucchese state from classical antiquity to the end of the 15th century. It describes and explains the geographical configuration, institutional organization, and social structures of an Italian city-state that retained its independence in a world of much larger political entities. Medieval Lucca ruled over a relatively large city territory. The book argues that the region over which Lucca aspired to rule corresponded with its ecclesiastical diocese. Precise borders were the product of inter-city warfare; but in early medieval Italy the diocese provided a basic framework in a world of fragmenting authority. The early chapters discuss not only the origins and evolving shape of the city territory, but also the firm control exercised by the city over its territory. Though not unique in this respect, Lucca provides a particularly strong example of the centralization of political and juridical power upon the hegemonic city. Lucca was especially innovative and precocious in the early division of its dominions into compact vicariates. Indeed Florence's restructuring of its own dominions was modelled on lands conquered during the fourteenth century from its western neighbour. The book asks how far Lucca's troubled political history in the fourteenth century subverted the earlier development of administrative institutions. Neither the disasters of the 14th century nor the decades of princely rule at the beginning of the 15th century brought a radical change of direction. The overview of the history of the Lucchese state from classical times provides the necessary background to the book's ultimate objective: the analysis in the final two chapters of the politico-administrative and socio-economic characteristics of the state that emerged from the Florentine wars of the 1430s. The final chapters compare Lucca with the new territorial or regional states of the Renaissance that have figured so largely in the historical literature, and ask whether the defining qualities of a city-state retarded the greater market integration that historians have sometimes attributed to the newer political formations.

Overstrong Against Thyself: War, the State, and Growth in Europe on the Eve of the Industrial Revolution

J. Bradford De Long

in A Not-so-dismal Science: A Broader View of Economies and Societies

Published in print: 2000 Published Online: November 2003
Item type: chapter

A historical analysis of early modern Western Europe demonstrates that it was the interests of princes and kings, and the forms of government, that mainly determined whether there was economic growth or
stagnation—and that these even partly explain the Industrial Revolution. The different parts of the chapter discuss prince- and merchant-dominated city states in pre-industrial Europe, the military revolution (with sections on the decline of Spain, and the stagnation of the Dutch Republic), and the anomaly of Britain as the only nation state that continued to grow its economy under the burden of maintaining the military effort required of an early modern European great power.

Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle
A. W. Price

This book fully explores for the first time an idea common to Plato and Aristotle, which unites their treatments—otherwise very different—of love and friendship. The idea is that although persons are separate, their lives need not be. One person's life may overflow into another's, and as such, helping another person is a way of serving oneself. The book shows how their view of love and friendship, within not only personal relationships, but also the household and even the city-state, promises to resolve the old dichotomy between egoism and altruism.

Philip James Jones 1921–2006
Trevor Dean

Philip James Jones (1921–2006), a Fellow of the British Academy, was one of the most distinguished, complex, and challenging of medieval historians. His works on the Italian city-states of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries and on Italy's agrarian history are monuments built to last, benchmarks that defined the field for a generation. Jones was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1984 and was awarded the Serena Medal for Italian studies in 1988. He won a major open scholarship in Modern History at Wadham College, University of Oxford. Jones took a First in Modern History in 1945 and was appointed to a research studentship (Senior Demyship) at Magdalen College. He had also secured a temporary teaching post at Glasgow University. All Jones's
previous works flowed into the 700 pages of his mammoth book Italian City-State: from Commune to Signoria.