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0521482224 - Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe

Thomas Ertman

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For many years scholars have sought to explain why the European states which emerged in the period before the French Revolution developed along such different lines. Why did some states become absolutist and others constitutionalist? What enabled some to develop bureaucratic administrative systems, while others remained dependent upon patrimonial practices?

This book presents a new theory of statebuilding in medieval and early modern Europe. Ertman argues that two factors – the organization of local government at the time of state formation and the timing of sustained geomilitary competition – can explain most of the variation in political regimes and in state infrastructures found across the continent during the second half of the 18th century. Drawing on theoretical insights developed in the fields of historical sociology, comparative politics, and economic history, and on the most recent historical research, this book makes a compelling case for the value of interdisciplinary approaches to the study of political development.

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BIRTH OF THE LEVIATHAN

BUILDING STATES AND
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EARLY MODERN EUROPE



THOMAS ERTMAN

Harvard University



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book began life as a doctoral dissertation written in the Sociology Department at Harvard University under the title “War and Statebuilding in Early Modern Europe.” The dissertation’s principal aim was to analyze the impact of sustained warfare on the methods of administration, finance, and military organization employed in England, France, Spain, and Prussia from about the 14th century to 1789. After I took up a position in the Harvard Government Department in 1990, persistent questioning by my colleagues there led me to rethink that project and direct my attention to a set of issues with much broader resonance for political science: namely, why had some states developed in a constitutionalist direction during the formative centuries of European statebuilding, while others had become absolutist? And why had military pressures driven some states to construct effective, proto-modern bureaucracies, while others remained wedded to administrative methods that seemed highly dysfunctional? In order to address this subject in a satisfactory way, I was forced to expand substantially the scope of my research in terms of both the cases examined and the period covered. In consequence, little now remains of the original dissertation. I hope the results justify these efforts.

Over the last five years, I have incurred many debts. The Clark and Milton Funds of Harvard University provided support which allowed me to make several crucial, short research trips to Europe. The Center for European Studies most generously provided additional travel funds during a semester of leave, over the course of which I was able to write a good portion of this book. The Institute of Historical Research in London placed its vast resources at my disposal and provided an intellectual home away from home.

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