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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  
REGIMES IN MEDIEVAL AND  
EARLY MODERN EUROPE



THOMAS ERTMAN

*Harvard University*



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, United Kingdom

40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA

10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

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First published 1997

Typeset in Baskerville

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Ertman, Thomas.

Birth of the leviathan : building states and regimes in medieval and early modern Europe / Thomas Ertman.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-521-48222-4. - ISBN 0-521-48427-8 (pbk.)

1. Europe - Politics and government. 2. Europe - Constitutional history. 3. Local government - Europe - History. 4. Comparative government. I. Title.

JN5.E77 1997

320.94 - dc20 96-19582

CIP

*A catalog record for this book is available from  
the British Library*

ISBN 0-521-48222-4 hardback

ISBN 0-521-48427-8 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2004

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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.

Many scholars and colleagues have sought to improve this study through their comments and criticisms. I am deeply grateful to my *Doktormutter*, Professor Theda Skocpol. Her course on revolutions, which I took in 1977, first fired my interest in problems of history and politics, and her own works have been a constant source of inspiration ever since. Orlando Patterson and John A. Hall both encouraged me to

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think in the widest possible terms, unconstrained by disciplinary boundaries. Alberto Alesina, Henry Brady, David Collier, Jonah Levy, Bob Powell, Robert Putnam, and John Zysman valiantly read much or all of the manuscript at a crucial moment and forced me to clarify my thinking on many points. Peter Dickson, David Laitin, Paul Langford, Paul Lucas, Gerhard A. Ritter, Lawrence Stone, Charles Tilly, and the participants in seminars at Harvard, M.I.T., Princeton, Berkeley, Oxford, and the University of Munich provided insightful feedback on various versions of the argument. Edwina Barvosa helped with the preparation of the final text and Mala Htun provided invaluable editorial assistance.

Sam Cohn, Matthew Evangelista, Ann Goldgar, Roger Gould, Gary Herrigel, Percy Lehning, Lella Pileri, Carlo Ruzza, Barbara Schinko, Annette Schlagenhauff, Rosemary Taylor, Genevieve Warwick, and Christoph Wielepp offered unstinting moral support and intellectual stimulation while this book was taking shape. John Brewer, Eckhart Hellmuth, Jo Innes, and above all Peter Hall, friends and mentors all, deserve special mention. Without the faith which they showed in this project from the very beginning it never would have gotten off the ground. Andy Markovits has been there through thick and thin, and the same is true in even greater measure of my family – and most especially my mother, whose belief in me has been a constant source of strength.

My greatest debt, however, is to my wife, Susan Pedersen. Despite a burden of academic obligations far heavier than my own, she read the entire manuscript several times, helped out with tasks large and small, and constantly revived my sagging spirits. By casting an historian's skeptical eye over many of my assertions, she more than anyone else forced clarity upon my muddled ideas. She has had a hand in nearly everything that is of value in this work. Its shortcomings are entirely my own. I dedicate this book to her in love and gratitude.

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