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## STATE, THE

All human communities have some type of political organization that governs the behavior of its individual members. However, state forms of government are distinct from other forms of political organization such as tribes, clans, and gens. As Brian Nelson states in his 2006 study, the state is best defined in terms of its basic structural characteristics, which are territoriality, sovereignty, law, centralization, legitimation, and class stratification. And as both Elman Service (1975) and Ted Llewellyn (1983) note, in contrast to earlier forms of political organization, which were based on lineage and heredity, the state is a form of political organization based on territorial jurisdiction. The state is also a sovereign entity, which means it claims a monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory, as argued by Max Weber (1978). The state's sovereignty depends on its ability to successfully enforce a monopoly of coercive force in relation to all inhabitants of its territory, against the claims of neighboring states, and against the claims of competing forms of political organization (e.g., tribes) within the same territory. Thus, for a state to exist, it must centralize the coercive powers of law, administration, and military force because sovereignty does not exist when governmental authority is retained by competing social units, such as clans or tribes, or where inhabitants' political loyalties are retained by local units of government that function independently of the state's central authority. Consequently, Charles Tilly observes (1975), "state-building" has been a lengthy and violent historical process involving the subordination of competing forms of political organization to the state's sovereign authority and the defense of its territorial boundaries against rival states.

The state's structural characteristics of territoriality, sovereignty, and centralized government are exercised through the application of general laws that are considered authoritatively binding on the territory's inhabitants. These laws are always reinforced by a corresponding form of state consciousness or ideology of legitimation. The state always derives its legitimacy from an operative myth of the state's origin or foundation, such as a belief that the law is received by a state's priests or wise men directly from the gods, or that the state is founded by heroes with exceptional virtues, or that the state was established by contract among its citizens. Yet, as a matter of fact, all states arise from a system of class stratification, which is reproduced by the state as one of its main political and economic functions. Class, as Friedrich Engels (1972) argued, is not the only kind of social stratification that exists in state societies—it generally coexists with gender, racial, or ethnic forms of stratification—but class stratification is a unique attribute of state forms of governance.

## ORIGINS AND FORMS OF THE STATE

Scholars have proposed many different typologies of state forms, but historically, as Nelson (2006) states, there are four fundamental forms of state: (1) ancient city-states, (2) ancient empire-states, (3) modern city-states, and (4) the modern nation-state. The origins of the state are generally traced to the late Neolithic period (3000–4000 BCE), or about 34,000 years after the first *homo sapiens*. The first archaic states emerged on the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers (Mesopotamia), the Nile River Valley (Egypt), the Yellow River Valley (China), and the Indus River Valley (India).

Geography was a key factor in the origins of the state, because the fertility of these river valleys supported large settled agricultural populations, while the agricultural surpluses generated by these peoples made it possible to store and redistribute crops and to support the specialized craftsmen, warriors, priests, and administrators critical to state formation. Karl Wittfogel's (1957) hydraulic thesis of state formation notes that complex irrigation and flood control systems were necessary to realize these agricultural surpluses, while the construction and maintenance of these systems required increasingly centralized forms of political control. As Morton Fried (1967) and Jonathan Haas (1982) observe, this centralization of political authority and the emergence of social differentiation based on function mark the origins of the archaic state.

## ANCIENT CITY-STATES

The first archaic states were created by the Sumerians of Mesopotamia about 3500 BCE, but within a few hundred years (3100–2320 BCE) many of these archaic states had

evolved into fully developed city-states. The first real states were city-states, and the largest among them sometimes had tens of thousands of inhabitants. The ancient Sumerian city-states were typically warlike and in some cases expansionary. The fact that many ancient cities were defended by walls and fortifications suggests that the city-state, which quickly spread to other parts of Mesopotamia, did so partly as a result of the conquest of other peoples and partly as a way to defend against the threat of the Sumerian city-states. Significantly, these states not only centralized political authority within a defined territory, but eventually developed concepts of law that were first enunciated in the Hammurabic Code, a code of written law promulgated by Hammurabi, a king of Babylonia (1792–1750 BCE). Hammurabi's Code influenced the emergence of legal systems in other Near Eastern states and was transmitted as a model to other empires in the Near East, Mediterranean, and later Europe.

The Egyptian state emerged almost simultaneously with the Sumerian city-states in 3100 BCE. In both regions, the sovereign authority of the state and its legitimizing religious myth were embodied in the person of a king, who claimed power either as a deity (Egypt) or as the voice of the gods (Sumeria). The centralized bureaucratic, military, economic, and ideological power of these kings far surpassed that of any previous tribal chieftain or clan elder. These kings commanded a formal state-military hierarchy, sat atop a rigid class system, and exercised pre-eminent religious influence within the state.

The Indus Valley Civilization emerged at about the same time (3300 BCE) on the Indian subcontinent, but this civilization did not achieve a state-level society until about 2600 BCE. Romila Thapar (2002) explains that, as in Sumeria and Egypt, the irrigation of the Indus River Valley generated large agricultural surpluses that supported burgeoning urban centers by 2500 BCE, and, over the next six hundred years, Indus Valley Civilization spread to the Ganges River basin and northern Afghanistan. However, it was not until 1000 BCE that the first recognizable city-states appeared on the Indian subcontinent, although by 500 BCE there were sixteen monarchies known as the Mahajanapadas covering the Indian subcontinent. These city-states, Vincent Smith (1981) notes, followed the earlier pattern of legitimizing the right of a king to his throne with genealogies devised by priests that ascribed divine origins to the rulers.

In their history of China, John Fairbank and Denis Twitchett (vol. 1, 1978) note that the Huang He Valley emerged as the first cultural center in China in the late Neolithic period (2100–1800 BCE); by the end of the second millennium BCE, the Zhou Dynasty (1027–771 BCE) was established in the Yellow River Valley and later in the

Yantgtze River Valley (770–221 BCE). The first Zhou king invoked “the Mandate of Heaven” to legitimize his rule, a concept that would influence almost every subsequent Chinese dynasty. During the Zhou Dynasty, the city-state spread throughout China until several hundred warring states were finally consolidated into seven states toward the end of the fifth century BCE.

#### ANCIENT EMPIRE-STATES

The ancient city-states were aggressive and expansionary regardless of where they originated, and their wars resulted directly in the formation of the first ancient empire-states. In most cases, Nelson (2006) observes, the basis of early state formation was the city, with empires arising as a secondary state formation from a city-state's imperial expansion. The Assyrians built the first empire-state, starting with Sargon of Akkad, who became the first king to successfully assert political control over inhabitants living beyond his city-state (2371 BCE). Assyrian kings gradually asserted hegemony over all of Mesopotamia and the Fertile Crescent (2371–612 BCE), including Egypt for a short period (745–612 BCE). In building an empire of city-states, the Assyrians established the model for all subsequent ancient and classical empires, including the Persian, Macedonian, and Roman Empires, as well as many smaller empires, such as the Athenian, Phoenician, and Carthaginian Empires.

In India and the Far East, comparable configurations emerged from the warring city-states. During the time that large parts of India were subjected to the Persian and Macedonian Empires, the first Indian empire-state was the kingdom of Magadha, which emerged as a major power in northeastern India after subjugating two neighboring states (684–26 BCE). Numerous empires rose and fell in different parts of the Indian subcontinent, including the Satavahana Empire (230 BCE–199 CE) in southern and central India, and the Gupta Empire (240–550 CE), which united northern India. In 1526 Babur established the Mughal Empire, which was the first empire-state to unite most of the Indian subcontinent by 1600 CE. Its successor, the Maratha Empire, stretched across the entire subcontinent by 1760 but was eventually displaced by the British Empire (1757–1947 CE).

In China, the Qin Dynasty (221–207 BCE) was the first to subdue large parts of the core Han Chinese homeland and unite them under a centralized Legalist government. It also imposed a common system of writing and developed a state ideology based on Confucianism. China was an empire-state for most of its history, although historians generally divide its political development into early imperial (221 BC–588 CE), classical imperial (580–1234 CE), and later imperial (1279–1911 CE) phases. However, as Peter Farb (1968) explains, there is

considerable debate as to whether the Meso-American empires, including those established by the Olmecs (1200–400 BCE), Mayans (250–900 CE), Incas (1197–1533 CE), and Aztecs (1248–1521 CE) should be considered ancient empire-states, archaic states, or a distinct tribal (i.e., non-state) form of tributary empire.

### MODERN CITY-STATES

The ancient empire-states were often disorganized and short-lived in comparison to modern states. As S. N. Eisenstadt (1963) observes, it was not uncommon for empires to be conquered by rival empires, nor was it uncommon for empires to disintegrate back into warring city-states or into forms of feudalism because of weak political leadership, natural catastrophe, invasion, or rebellion. However, city-states and empire-states are the only known forms of state until the emergence of the modern state.

The basic structural characteristics of the modern state are identical to those of earlier state forms. However, most modern states tend to manifest these characteristics on a different territorial scale (the nation) and to vest sovereignty in an impersonal legal system. In the modern state, sovereignty is asserted to reside in the impersonal state form, and not in the ruler as conceived in the archaic and ancient states. Thus, in the modern state, there is a firm distinction between the state and its government (rulers), which is a distinctive ideological characteristic of the modern state compared to earlier forms of state. As Nelson (2006) notes, the modern state has also evolved in tandem with the capitalist form of economy and is therefore generally linked to the reproduction of specifically capitalist forms of class stratification.

The origins of the modern state are found in the medieval towns of Europe, which, as a general rule, stood outside the stateless feudal system of political relationships based on personal rule. The medieval towns developed their own governing system based on the idea that the town (i.e., the state) was an abstract entity (corporation or *universitas*) that was by right free from outside control. Joseph Strayer (1970) notes that these commercial centers evolved into independent states, most notably in Italy and Germany in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The German city-states of the Hanseatic League, which emerged from the mid-fourteenth century onward, constituted a trading and military alliance of modern city-states but never became a true state in itself. Venice is the only modern city-state to build a commercial empire-state (800–1797 CE) by asserting control over other cities and islands in the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas. Despite being largely displaced by the nation-state, Singapore, Monaco, and Luxembourg survive today as successful and prosperous modern city-states.

### THE MODERN NATION-STATE

The modern state became largely synonymous with the nation-state beginning in Europe in the early 1300s. In parts of the world, such as Europe in the medieval era, China, and Japan, there was sometimes a concept of “the nation” or “the people,” which was united by geography, language, literature, custom, and religion; but there were not actual states with territorial boundaries coinciding with this legitimating idea. Indeed, following the collapse of empires in Europe, China, Japan, and India, and their disintegration into feudalism, the state often ceased to exist as a form of political organization. Feudal forms of political organization were premised on structural characteristics that are the opposite of a state: (a) extreme decentralization *and* (b) the privatization of social, economic, and political power.

The modern nation-state originated in Europe as powerful monarchs in France, England, Russia, Spain, Sweden, and Denmark waged continuous wars to unify their “nations.” The political and religious wars that engulfed Europe for four centuries finally culminated in 1648 in the Peace of Westphalia, which codified the modern system of nation-states as international law by recognizing fixed national boundaries and the sovereignty of states within their territories. However, the system of European nation-states was not actually completed until the unification of Germany and of Italy in 1871.

It has been argued that, because most of the major and minor European nation-states were all colonial and imperial powers from the 1500s onward, the major nation-states have always been nation-state-empires. In fact the nation-state as codified in the Westphalian system was largely transferred to other regions of the world through European colonial and imperial expansion. Some of these postcolonial states, such as those in North America (1700s), Latin America (1800s), China (1911), India (1947), and Africa (1950s–1970s), were established by revolutions of national independence. Other states established in Africa and the Middle East were artificial “nations” created by the retreating colonial powers after World War I and World War II. For this reason, however, many of the postcolonial states lack the fundamental characteristics of either a nation or a state, such as a founding or heroic myth to legitimize the state. These “nations” often have a stronger history of internal tribal and religious conflict, while they sometimes lack a common language or religion except as a legacy of the colonizing state. The shared characteristics of nationhood are often most common among political and economic elites but are not shared evenly by inhabitants, who continue to speak local dialects, follow traditional religious practices, or retain political loyalties to local tribes and clans.

## THE FUTURE OF THE NATION-STATE

New nation-states have proliferated in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries as resurgent nationality and ethnic groups withdraw from artificially constructed nation-states or reassert their independence from nation-state empires. Membership in the United Nations increased from 51 members in 1945 to 191 members in 2002. However, as Martin Van Creveld argues in his 1999 study, the future of the nation-state appears uncertain: Many existing states are combining into new forms of transnational political association, while many of the state's economic and military functions are being taken over by organizations that are not states.

The reassertion of ethnic and religious identities within and against established nation-states has also led to the proliferation of failed states among many of the artificial postcolonial states. This has resulted in a number of tenuous governing entities best described as quasi-states or proto-states; in other cases it has resulted in long periods of stateless anarchy, where small areas are governed by competing warlords in a system sometimes described, as by Gianfranco Poggi in his 1990 study, as modern feudalism.

On the other hand, many nation-states are responding to the contemporary challenges of a new era of globalization by delegating or ceding partial sovereignty to transnational, international, or supranational organizations that perform the statelike functions of internal governance (European Union), economic regulation (World Trade Organization), health and welfare provision (United Nations), and military defense (North Atlantic Treaty Organization); but these organizations, as both Kenichi Ohmae (1990) and Martin Shaw (2000) point out, are neither nations nor states. It is not yet clear whether this emerging network of political, economic, and military organizations foreshadows the end of the nation-state or the establishment of a new global state.

**SEE ALSO** *Authority; City-State; Ethnicity; Gender; Globalization, Anthropological Aspects of; Globalization, Social and Economic Aspects of; Government; Law; Military; Nationalism and Nationality; Political Science; Political System; Politics; Race; Sovereignty*

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## STATE, STATIONARY

**SEE** *Stationary State*.

## STATE ENTERPRISE

A state enterprise is a large, complex economic organization owned and operated by a government rather than by a private individual or organization. Though an economic entity, it is totally encapsulated by the polity, with no separation of state and market. And very importantly, it also may transfer goods and services among suborganizations without explicit pricing of those transactions.