

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF THE ANCIENT STATE:  
NEAR EAST AND MEDITERRANEAN

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PURPOSE

The nature and function of the state (from city-states to transcontinental empires) is of crucial importance to our understanding of the ancient world. This volume provides a systematic comparative analysis of the state in western Eurasia from the emergence of the earliest state-level systems up to the beginning of the Middle Ages (very roughly from the late fourth millennium BCE to the late first millennium CE). Our focus on a clearly delimited sphere of interaction ensures that all ancient states that developed jointly or in close proximity (from the Atlantic to Iran) will be covered in this volume. (Largely or entirely separate state systems from India and China to the Americas remain outside the scope of this project.) In keeping with the aims of the handbook series, we do not wish to produce yet another historical narrative overview of the history of states in this region. Rather, we seek to introduce the audience to current debates and developments in the study of these states, and to provide a coherent and systematic critical survey of the main issues that determine our understanding of the workings of ancient states.

FORMAT

The volume has been written by eighteen experts on the history of specific ancient states. The chapters vary in length depending on the relative significance of each subject. All contributors address the same set of questions and issues, such as constitution and state organization, war-making, internal repression, cooperation and cooptation, resource extraction, adjudication and enforcement, economic services, belief systems, systems of communication and representation, identity, and the end or transformation of states. This shared focus ensures unprecedented coherence and facilitates comparative study. Our choice of questions and issues is determined by our desire to take proper account of two otherwise largely separate strands of scholarship, viz., anthropological research on early state-level societies around the world (e.g., S. Sanderson, *Social Transformations: A General Theory of Historical Development* (1999); B. Trigger, *Understanding Early Civilizations: A Comparative Study* (2003)) and historical and political-science research on the emergence of the European states from the Middle Ages onwards (e.g., C. Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States AD 990-1992* (1992); H. Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors: An Analysis of Systems Change* (1994); T. Ertman, *Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (1997)). In general, the individual case studies are informed by theory and questions that are derived from these comparative studies. This (1) ensures coherence within our volume; (2) enriches the study of ancient Near East and Mediterranean states by introducing concepts from neighboring fields; and (3) makes the volume more readily accessible to anthropologists and historians of other periods.

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