

Sverre Håkon Bagge

ROUTLEDGE

State Formation in Europe, 843–1789

A Divided World



STATE FORMATION IN EUROPE, 843–1789

State Formation in Europe, 843–1789 follows the formation and development of the European state from the division of the Carolingian Empire to the French Revolution.

The book's primary focus is on Europe's patterns of internal and external development in comparison to political organization in other parts of the world. By analysing Europe as a single unit, rather than dividing it into nation states, it reveals the broader historical connections within the Continent. Bagge takes the reader through a discussion of how kingdoms evolved into states, introducing the influence of the Church and the town on these state structures. The relationship between state, Church and town is traced to explain how these different power struggles played out and why the territorial state became the dominant form of organization. Finally, the book clarifies why Europe developed in this way and the global consequences of this development.

By observing Europe through the perspective of the rest of the world, readers gain insight into trends common to the whole Continent while crossing the traditional border between the Middle Ages and early modern period. This book is essential reading for students studying medieval and early modern political history, state formation and Europe in a global context.

Sverre Håkon Bagge was Professor at the University of Bergen from 1991 to 2012. His books in English include: *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla* (1991); *Kings, Politics, and the Right Order of the World in German Historiography, c. 950–1150* (2002); *Cross and Scepter: The Rise of the Scandinavian Kingdoms from the Vikings to the Reformation* (2014).



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PREFACE

This book has its origins in an almost lifelong interest in European history, although, previously, my research has mainly dealt with limited parts and epochs of it, notably the Scandinavian countries in the Middle Ages. The Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Bergen, of which I was the director 2002–12 and the many colleagues and visitors there were an important source of inspiration. My retirement in 2012 offered new opportunities to deal with larger topics and address a more general audience, which then resulted in the present book. I am very grateful to Gunner Lind and Gerd Althoff and three anonymous reviewers who have read the whole text and given good advice. I dedicate the book to the memory of Jacques Le Goff, a great historian who was never afraid of addressing the big questions and of whom I have many fond memories.

Thanks also to Chris Given-Wilson, Zoe Opačić, Martyn Rady, John Watts and Hilde de Weert for help and advice. Finally, it has been a great pleasure to work with Routledge in the final phase; my best thanks to Lydia, Morwenna, Zoe, Susan, Megan, Christina and Gail.

INTRODUCTION

Today we take the state for granted. We grumble about its demands; we complain that it is encroaching more and more on what used to be our private concerns, but we can hardly envisage life without it. In the world today, the worst fate that can befall a human being is to be stateless ... This was not always so. There were periods – not long ago as historians measure time – when the state did not exist, and when no one was concerned that it did not exist.¹

With these words, the American historian Joseph Strayer draws our attention to one of the most fundamental changes in the Western world – and, by implication, also the rest of the world – the formation of the state, which he dates to between 1100 and 1600, with the thirteenth century as a particularly crucial period. Although there can hardly be any doubt about the importance of Strayer's observation, both the chronology and the character of European state formation have been subject to extensive debate.

What do we mean by the term state? The definition of a state in contemporary international law is based on the Treaty of Montevideo of 1933: a state must have a permanent population, well-defined borders, a government and a capacity to honour international obligations. By contrast, there are no demands regarding the quality of government, internal sovereignty, impersonal bureaucracy, etc., which play a major part in the discussion of the origins of the state and of European state formation in the Middle Ages and the early modern period. The borders of many of the new states were the result of the divisions of territories between colonial powers, without consideration of linguistic and cultural homogeneity. Despite – or rather because of – the arbitrary character of these borders, the United Nations and other international bodies insist on their permanence, fearing that concessions on this point would endanger the whole system.²

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If we turn to the scholarly literature, we find widely different uses of the term. To social anthropologists, any larger territory governed by one or a body of rulers is a state, in contrast to localized tribal society.³ Historians tend to have stricter definitions, including some amount of bureaucratization and a distinction between private and public, the monopoly of violence and a legislative authority. Concerning Europe in the period that is the subject of the present book, early modernists generally have a more restrictive attitude than medievalists, although there are differences among the latter regarding the term and its use.⁴ In this context, however, it is important to note that different uses of the term do not necessarily correspond to different opinions about the historical reality. In the following, the term will be used in a relatively loose sense. In accordance with the Montevideo definition, considerable attention will be paid to the elementary meaning of a territory formally governed by one ruler, whereas the degree of 'stateness' regarding internal conditions will be subject to a separate discussion.

Strayer's book summarizes the thought of a school of medievalists in Britain and the USA reaching back to the early twentieth century, a school that had rejected the picture of the dark Middle Ages current in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment as well as the Romantic view of the exotic Middle Ages often to be found in the nineteenth century.⁵ The Middle Ages were the period when the European state was formed, not only in the sense that the modern division of the continent into separate political units took place at the time but also that the origins of their basic institutions can be traced back to this period. Although mostly dealing with individual states, these scholars had a stronger focus on the institutional aspect and regarded the development of law and administration as an attempt to solve the practical problems of government and the distribution of power. Thus, the Middle Ages laid the foundation for the modern state, far more so than classical antiquity or even the Renaissance had. State formation therefore represented a clear progress, replacing ruthless warlords in mutual competition with predictable government and the rule of law, or at least marking the beginning of a development in this direction. Strayer himself can hardly be accused of idealizing medieval government but he had a strong sense of government as an alternative to chaos.⁶ Southern was more fascinated by the intellectual and cultural achievements of the Middle Ages but had a similar understanding of the practical aspects of government as Strayer.⁷ This view can to some extent be understood against the background of English history. England was 'a much governed country' in the Middle Ages – probably the 'most governed' in Europe – and several of the medieval institutions, like Parliament, still exist in the twenty-first century. However, this is not the only explanation; Strayer's main field was French history, to which he made a number of important contributions, including his biography of King Philip IV. Within the social sciences, this approach has a parallel in Max Weber's studies of the emergence of the rational and impersonal European state, in contrast to the dominance of personal links and charisma in earlier ages.⁸

A reaction against this interpretation began in the 1970s.⁹ Interest turned towards social and cultural history and the history of the common people, women,

the poor and marginal, history from below rather than above. The trend can easily be illustrated by the space allotted to political history compared to other fields in general overviews, such as *The New Oxford History of England* and, somewhat less, *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, compared to their predecessors. The difference between the past and the present was more strongly emphasized and a negative view of the state became prominent. There has been a renaissance for early medieval history, which has often appeared in a more positive light: pre-state society was also able to solve conflicts; the introduction of public justice and royal government were more in the interest of the elites than the common people. The rise of the history of mentality, post-modernism and deconstructionism represented a reaction against the idea of progress in previous research.¹⁰

These tendencies were partly anticipated by previous French and German traditions. The French *Annales* School originally had a strong focus on social history. Thus, the state and even more traditional political history have a subordinate place in Fernand Braudel's monumental *La Méditerranée* (1949) and local studies on social and economic history largely replaced political history during the following period. Later, the history of mentality resulted in a number of important studies dealing with social ideas, political behaviour and royal ideology.¹¹ However, this school tended to emphasize the similarity rather than the difference between the Middle Ages and the early modern period, referring to the whole period until the French Revolution as the Old Regime (*l'ancien régime*). Moreover, the increasing importance of social history as a result of the influence of the *Annales* School and Marxism has led to a stronger focus on the social consequences – often the negative ones – of the development of the state. Both traditions have been influenced by social anthropology and have in turn influenced international scholarship, including the English-speaking world.¹²

German historiography for a long time had a strong focus on the imperial power in the period until the thirteenth century, in contrast to the decline and dissolution in the following period, thus, on the rise and decline of the state. More recently, a new perspective has been introduced, focusing on personal relationships rather than institutions and questioning the idea of state building under the Ottonians and their successors.¹³ To some extent, this perspective was anticipated in the inter-war period by Theodor Mayer's 'Personenverbandstaat' and Otto Brunner's 'Herrschaft',¹⁴ as well as by Percy Ernst Schramm's studies of the rituals of rulership.¹⁵ There is still a strong emphasis on cultural factors, political thought as well as symbols and rituals.¹⁶ Regarding the use of the term 'state' for the medieval period, there has been some uneasiness among German and Austrian scholars, as illustrated by the big volume of papers from a conference in Vienna in 2007 about the early medieval state.¹⁷

Politically, the development of the European Union has questioned the idea of the national state as the logical conclusion to a development going back to the Middle Ages and the early modern period. By contrast, there has been a new interest in the Holy Roman Empire,¹⁸ as well as a stronger emphasis on the difference between the contemporary state and its medieval and early modern

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predecessors. Admittedly, this is not a totally new approach; the focus on political division was usually combined with an awareness of the cultural unity of Europe.

Whereas the importance of the European state has been reduced after 1945, the opposite is the case with the rest of the world, where the number of states increased from 51 to 193 during the post-war period and some kind of a national state for the first time in history became the normal political organization all over the world. This development formed the background of Charles Tilly's project on European state formation. When and why did the state become the normal political unit in Europe and how could this development be used as a model for the new states in other parts of the world?¹⁹ In practice, this latter aim proved difficult to achieve and the main importance of Tilly's and his collaborators' work lies in their interpretation of the European development.

Tilly's understanding of European state formation is succinctly expressed in the statement 'War made the state and vice versa.'²⁰ States were formed through military competition, in particular through the military revolution in the early modern period: the formation of large armies and navies, equipped with more advanced weapons, and large and complex fortifications, led to higher taxation, increased bureaucracy and increased interference from the states in the lives of their subjects. A logical consequence of this emphasis was to date the formation of the state to the early modern period; there were no real states in the Middle Ages. Tilly here continues the tradition from German scholars like Otto Hintze and Norbert Elias, who in different ways regarded the European state as an epochal novelty.²¹

Tilly later developed his theories in a separate monograph, covering the period 990–1990.²² Here he introduces the distinction between coercion and capital, the former characterizing agrarian states, the latter urban ones, although the most successful states are combinations of the two. Tilly agrees with the Marxists in emphasizing the oppressive character of the state but does not regard it as an instrument of the landowning aristocracy.²³ On the contrary, the state is an independent variable, dominating and controlling its inhabitants, including the aristocracy. A series of other scholars followed in Tilly's footsteps, partly developing his theories, partly modifying them.²⁴ Tilly also had considerable influence on the great project on state formation funded by the European Science Foundation, 1988–92. However, there have also been reactions against Tilly's exclusive focus on war as the driving force in state formation.²⁵ In a recent discussion of state formation, in a global rather than European perspective, Francis Fukuyama emphasizes the weakness of the European states rather than their strength and pays greater attention to the development of civilian institutions.²⁶ While Fukuyama follows Tilly in mainly focusing on the early modern period, the gradual formation of the nation state in the Middle Ages is a central theme in Michael Mann's analysis of social power.²⁷ The European state has also played an important part in the discussion about why Europe came to dominate the world during the last few centuries.²⁸

From a historical point of view, tracing the ancestry of the state back to the early Middle Ages is relevant whether we believe in its transformation by the European Union or not. Recent developments have made us more aware of the various

forms a state could take and the difference between the classical national state and its earlier predecessors. Not only the Holy Roman Empire but also a number of other units form a reminder of this. The national state is no longer the obvious political unit it was when Strayer wrote 50 years ago. Europe no longer has the central place it then had in historical research and teaching. Concerning the former, however, a comparison with the rest of the world increases the importance of the political division of Europe and its origins – there is no other example of an area of similar size being divided in this way. Concerning the latter, a history of Europe over a period of a thousand years must inevitably imply some comparison with other parts of the world, despite the obvious difficulty in gaining sufficient knowledge of these areas. Fortunately, a number of works have appeared recently which make comparison easier.

Geographically, the present book is confined to Western Christendom, i.e. the part of the continent that adhered to Roman Catholicism in the Middle Ages and was later divided between this religious adherence and that of Protestantism. ‘Europe’ is simply a short and convenient, although not quite correct term for this unit. As the focus will be on common features or at least variations within a common culture, of which religion is an important expression, the European Continent in a strictly geographical sense, covering the whole area west of the Ural, would be too large and complex to handle over nearly a thousand years.

During this long period, we are dealing with great changes, which, however, would seem to be minor compared to the ones that took place between 1789 and today. In 650, the population of Europe is estimated at around 11 million, which increased to around 130–40 million in 1750. In 2014, it was 520 million.²⁹ In the late eighteenth century, there was hardly any industry according to modern definitions of the term; with the exception of a few, rather primitive machines, all work was carried out by the muscular force of humans or animals. Land transport could not be faster than a horse could run and sea transport, although faster, was limited by the strength and directions of winds and streams. The average life expectancy was around 30 years, against 70–80 today in the Western world; this of course mainly because of the high child mortality; people surviving until adulthood might expect a further 20–40 years, largely depending on social status. Politically, there was no democracy in the modern sense. The existing states were ruled either by absolute kings or by small elites controlling the representative institutions. The state provided only very few of the services we expect from it today, such as education, health care, transport and control of the safety and welfare of its inhabitants. The state system itself has also changed significantly during the last 200 years, from more than 400 units in 1789 to only 25 after 1870, followed by new increases in 1918–20 and in the period after 1989. Finally, the sovereign European state, whose origins have been traced to various dates between the thirteenth century and 1648, has had its independence reduced as the result of the European Union and may possibly, at some point in the future, be replaced by the United States of Europe.

Despite these changes, there is much to suggest that the medieval and early modern period were crucial to the development of the state we know today. First,

there is more continuity in the European state system than it would immediately seem, in a way that makes the continent unique or almost unique in a global context. Second, existing differences between various European countries can to some extent be traced back to the period before 1789. And third, despite the immediate impression of the period 843–1789 as static compared to the following one, important changes took place, which largely serve to explain what happened later. While Western Christendom in the mid-ninth century was a marginal area compared to the great civilizations in the Mediterranean (the Arab Empire), India and China, Europe in 1789 had for a long time dominated the Baltic and Mediterranean Seas, had taken possession of most of America and established colonies in Asia (mainly India), Africa and Oceania. Internally, military technology, bureaucracy, finance and political thought and debate had reached a level of complexity and sophistication far beyond what existed in the ninth century. Thus, the history of European state formation during this period forms an important part of the explanation of the dominance of European or more correctly Western civilization (including the USA) which has characterized the last two centuries, although we may now be approaching its end.

It may be objected to this time limit that it omits the period when the greatest changes in the European state system took place and when European superiority over the rest of the world was firmly established. Apart from practical considerations – length and the author's greater knowledge of the earlier period – the period before 1800 has the advantage of presenting Europe at a stage before its superiority became obvious and before the breakthrough of modern industrialism and mass democracy. There can be no doubt about the importance of the latter period for European dominance, but it is a greater challenge to trace the trends in this direction in the earlier period.

The main aim of the following is to discuss the European state as a phenomenon, not the individual states. The book will therefore deal briefly with many great events that have played an important part in historical literature. Instead, it will focus on the general patterns of the internal development of the European state, building on the tradition of bureaucratic and administrative history as well as ideological and cultural features. Of course, it will also be necessary to deal specifically with various individual states, which makes it difficult to avoid that some of the Great Powers, notably England and France, receive particular attention. These countries also have the advantage of illustrating the two main types of government: constitutionalism and absolutism. The attempt at tracing the characteristic features of the European state logically leads to a comparison with political organizations in other parts of the world. Here the contrast between European division and the great empires, notably China, becomes an important issue. Why was Europe divided and what were the consequences of this division? This in turn leads to a discussion of the reasons for the European dominance of the rest of the world which seems to have been well under way in the late eighteenth century.

Second, the book will be less exclusively focused on administrative and bureaucratic history than many previous accounts, including intellectual history,

courtly culture and the difference between absolutist and constitutional government. It will also include state-like organizations like the Church and the city, both of which were of crucial importance for the development of the European state system. Finally, without neglecting the importance of warfare for state formation, it will maintain that this factor worked in a different way from the formation of the great empires; it was more important for internal development than for the formation of territories. By contrast, the latter was to a considerable extent the result of legal and ideological factors: the rise of dynasties.

The following discussion will be divided into three main sections, based on themes rather than chronology. The first section (Chapter 1) will focus on the division of Europe into separate states and the importance of war and military competition in this. The second (Chapters 2 and 3) deals with the main features of the internal development of the European state, while the final section (Chapters 4, 5, 6) takes its point of departure in the changes introduced in the early sixteenth century: the Renaissance, the Reformation and the European expansion to other parts of the world. The focus will then be on the difference between the various states, notably between absolutist and constitutional ones, and the reasons for this difference. This section will mainly focus on the early modern period, although some of the differences will be traced back to the Middle Ages.

Notes

- 1 Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins*, p. 3.
- 2 Østerud, 'State Formation'.
- 3 For example, Service, *Primitive Social Organization and Origins of State and Civilization*; Fried, *The Evolution of Political Society* and Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel*, pp. 265–92.
- 4 See e.g. the discussions between Johannes Fried and Hans-Werner Goetz about the Carolingian state and between Susan Reynolds and Rees Davies about the use of the term for the Middle Ages as a whole: Fried, 'Der karolingische Herrschaftsverband' and 'Gens und regnum'; Goetz, 'Zum politischen Denken', pp. 113–16, 170–3 and 183–9; Reynolds, 'The Historiography' and 'There Were States'; Davies, 'The Medieval State'. Whereas the former discussion seems to be about the character of the Carolingian Empire, the latter is mainly about terminology, without any profound difference of opinion about the historical reality.
- 5 Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages*, pp. 48–78, 245–86, 337–70, with references to scholars like F.W. Maitland, Charles Homer Haskins, R.W. Southern and, of course, Strayer.
- 6 *Ibid.*, pp. 277–83.
- 7 Southern, *Medieval Humanism*, pp. 206–33, on Henry I's government and *Western Society and the Church*, pp. 100–33, on the development of papal government.
- 8 Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*.
- 9 Iggers, *New Directions*; Freedman and Spiegel, 'Medievalisms Old and New'.
- 10 Cf., in particular, Foucault's studies on justice, opening with the destruction of Damien's body in the eighteenth century and continuing with the total control of the soul in contemporary justice in *Surveiller et punir*. However, I tend to share Pinker's surprise at the paradox that the present age, which, according to a number of criteria, represents a clear progress compared to earlier periods, has been subject to such criticism by a number of intellectuals; see Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, pp. 395–409.
- 11 For example, Duby, *Les trois ordres*; Le Goff, *Saint Louis*.

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- 12 Burke, *History and Social Theory and Varieties of Cultural History*; Geary, 'Living with Conflicts', and Koziol, 'Begging Pardon and Favour'. Bartlett, in *England 1075–1225*, pays considerably more attention to factions, personal alliances and political culture than does traditional constitutional historiography.
- 13 Althoff, *Freunde, Verwandte und Getreue: Kaiser Otto III; Spielregeln*; Keller, *Zwischen Regionaler Begrenzung*; Reuter, *Germany*.
- 14 Mayer, 'Die Ausbildung', and Brunner, *Land und Herrschaft*.
- 15 Schramm, 'Die Krönung in Deutschland'; *Der König von Frankreich; Geschichte des englischen Königtums*, etc.
- 16 Skinner, *The Foundations and Visions of Politics*, vols II, III; Blanning, *Culture of Power and Pursuit of Glory*; Althoff, *Die Macht der Rituale*, cf. also Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual*. For a general discussion of the new trends, not confined to the question of the state, see Freedman and Spiegel, 'Medievalisms Old and New'.
- 17 Pohl and Wieser, *Der frühmittelalterliche Staat*, where the term 'Staatlichkeit' frequently occurs, although there are also a number of examples of 'Staat'. Nevertheless, 'Staat' in German is used in a more restricted sense than English 'state', as pointed out by Jussen, 'The King's Two Bodies Today', p. 107.
- 18 For example, Scales, *The Shaping*; Wilson, *The Holy Roman Empire*, pp. 655–86.
- 19 Tilly, 'Reflections'.
- 20 Tilly, *Coercion*, p. 67.
- 21 Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*; Hintze, *Staat und Verfassung*; Elias, *Zivilisation*, vol. II, pp. 123–311.
- 22 Tilly, *Coercion*.
- 23 Anderson, *Passages and Lineages* form examples of this interpretation.
- 24 Downing, *The Military Revolution*; Tallett, *War and Society*; Ertman, *The Birth of Leviathan*; Hui, *War and State Formation*; Nexon, *The Struggle for Power*; Hoffman, *Why Did Europe?*
- 25 Spruyt, *The Sovereign State*.
- 26 Fukuyama, *Origins*, pp. 229–89, 402–57.
- 27 Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, pp. 416–49.
- 28 Tilly, *The Formation*; Hui, *War and State Formation*; Morris, *War*; Hoffman, *Why Did Europe?*
- 29 The numbers are based on statistics for the whole of Europe, with deduction of the countries outside Western Christendom, notably Russia. Russia was very sparsely populated in 1750; its total population was probably less than that of France, which is estimated at 20 million. This and a little more for the other non-western countries thus have to be deducted from the 163 million inhabitants of Europe as a whole.

1

THE FORMATION OF THE EUROPEAN STATE SYSTEM

In a pamphlet published in 1637, the Jesuit Guido Aldeni reported that his Chinese friends, when told about the many kings in Europe, asked how Europeans could avoid war. Aldeni's answer was that the problem was less than it seemed, because the kings were related by marriage and, if a war broke out, the pope might intervene to stop it.¹ We do not know whether the Chinese were convinced by these arguments, but in any case, modern historians and social scientists have to admit that they were right in their assumption: the division of Europe did lead to almost constant war and competition. However, modern scholars also tend to think that this competition was a dynamic element, which forms part of the explanation for Europe's later supremacy.

In trying to explain this division, we first have to note that great empires are not the normal political organization of world civilizations, i.e. the parts of the world characterized by intensive agriculture, urbanization, social stratification and organized government. It goes without saying that societies of hunters and gatherers are not organized as empires. Permanent settlement, agriculture and a certain population density are necessary for the formation of states and empires, which, within Eurasia, are mainly to be found in a zone stretching across the Continent, mostly between around 20 and 40 degrees north, 'the lucky latitudes', as Ian Morris calls them. This area has a temperate climate and is the home of 50 out of 56 edible plants and 9 out of 14 large mammals domesticated by humans.² The corresponding latitudes to the south might have had similar advantages, at least climatically, but they cover much less land, respectively in South America, South Africa and Australia, divided by large stretches of sea.

To the extent that we can talk about a 'normal' pattern among historical civilizations, it must be periods of empire alternating with periods of division. This applies to India, the Middle East and the Mediterranean region. Thus, both China and Europe are exceptions, China forming a great empire during most of its history

since 221 BC and Europe being divided into various numbers of political units since AD 843 at the latest.

Terrain and ecology are often used to explain this feature of Europe.³ The Alps, the Pyrenees and the Carpathians form strong barriers between north and south. The great plain north of the Alps would seem easier to unite, but a number of rivers, mostly going from south to north, create problems for the movements of armies. In the early Middle Ages, large parts of this area were also covered by forest, which, of course, increased the difficulty. However, nor should the geographical difficulties in China be underestimated; China is actually more mountainous than Europe.⁴ More important is the fact that it was apparently more densely populated, with a large part living in the fertile areas along the rivers Yang-Zse-Kiang and Hoangho. Rivers had a similar importance in Europe, particularly in the flat areas north of the Alps but there were more of them, so that the population was more dispersed. Moreover, rice, the main staple in southern China, yields more than grain and thus allows a greater population density than in Europe. Finally, it has been pointed out that China covered a smaller area than Europe – China, at the time of unification, was significantly smaller than it is today. Nevertheless, China was far from easy to unite; the conquerors had to cross high mountains and numerous rivers, whereas Europe north of the Alps would seem relatively easy to cross.⁵

A less distant example of unification is the Roman Empire which covered the lands around the Mediterranean combined with parts of Western Europe. If the Romans had not conquered this area, it would have been easy to find reasons why it could never have been united; the lands along the northern coast of the Mediterranean are extremely mountainous and the whole area was never united again after the fall of the Empire. The original core area of the Empire, Italy, was one of the most divided parts of Europe until the nineteenth century. When the Romans nevertheless managed to conquer the Mediterranean area, the explanation must be sought in their superior military tactics and organization: heavily armed and armoured as well as trained and disciplined infantry,⁶ and, above all, in the political field. Although they were ruthless in war, they were also able to make defeated enemies into allies that could be used for new conquests.

Once united, however, the Empire had the advantage of the sea as a communication area, where provisions for Rome and other great cities could be transported on ships, armies could be moved to conquer new areas and crush rebellions and cultural exchange could take place. By contrast, no such line of communication existed between the inland parts of the European Continent north of the Alps, which became the centre of medieval and early modern Europe. Admittedly, Europe as it developed during the Middle Ages, had a northern parallel to the Mediterranean, namely, the North and Baltic Seas. Here, however, the sailing season was shorter and the surrounding areas less densely populated.

Actually, both these seas became European in the Middle Ages and most of the following period – the Ottoman dominance of the eastern Mediterranean in the sixteenth and parts of the seventeenth century was the main exception – but in a

different way from the Roman period. The dominant forces were divided, partly in different states and partly in cities or leagues of cities. This points to an important difference between the Roman Empire and its successors in the following period, not only the competition between states but also the greater independence of merchants and city communities.

Most large empires seem to have been formed by nomads or warlike peoples in the highlands or outskirt areas invading wealthy and densely populated agricultural regions. This applies to the Persian, Arab, Mongol and Ottoman Empires. It does not directly apply to the Romans, although they were clearly less culturally and economically advanced than the peoples they conquered, first, various peoples in Italy, including Etruscans and Greeks, then the countries in the Eastern Mediterranean. China shows a somewhat similar pattern. The principality of Qin, which carried out the unification of China, was relatively poor and situated on the outskirts of the cluster of competing countries. China was divided into a number of petty principalities over a period of around 1000 years (c. 1200–220 BC). A gradual reduction of the number of polities took place during this period, until only seven were left between 475 and 221.⁷ Finally, one of them, the Qin, conquered the others and founded the first imperial dynasty, which was shortly afterwards (202) replaced by the Han. The unification of China was extremely bloody. There were almost continuous wars between 770 and 221. Up to 8–20 per cent of the population was mobilized in the army, against 1 per cent in Rome and even less in early modern Europe. The casualties were apparently also enormous, estimated at up to 450,000 in a single battle. Although the sources may exaggerate, this nevertheless suggests a different scale than in Europe, where the Romans are said to have lost 50,000 men in their greatest defeat, the Battle of Cannae in 216 BC.

As we are dealing with a culturally homogeneous area with almost constant competition, it is difficult to explain Qin's victory by specific technological or organizational differences; nor can the final victory of one principality be regarded as inevitable, although the intensity of the competition makes this more likely than in the case of Europe. The main factor would seem to be better organization and larger armies, which was developed gradually, notably from the mid-fourth century.⁸ Once the country had been united under the Qin and Han dynasties (221 BC–AD 220), later divisions always proved temporary, despite a period of more than 300 years between the fall of Han and the rise of Sui and Tang from 581.

Turning to Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire, we can identify one factor that made the emergence of a great empire unlikely, namely, the absence or relative absence of invasions. After the Germanic invasions that led to the fall of the Roman Empire in the west, no invaders managed to conquer large parts of Europe. Magyars and Slavs formed kingdoms in East Central Europe and Scandinavian Vikings raided large parts of the British Isles and the Continent but did not permanently change the political geography of any larger part. The Mongols invaded Poland and Hungary in the thirteenth century and caused considerable damage, but withdrew quickly. They only made a lasting impact further east, destroying Kievan Rus, while modern Russia, centred on the principality of

Moscow, developed partly in alliance and partly in conflict with the Mongols. Finally, the Ottomans posed a serious threat in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, but by that time, European fortifications and military technology had been sufficiently developed to limit their advance to the Balkan area. Thus, neither conquest from the outside nor defence against such a conquest led to the formation of a European empire. Europe could enjoy the luxury of a number of units competing with and fighting each other without risking conquest from outside.

The relative absence of invasions may be explained partly by the distance from the core area of the nomads in Central Asia and partly by the poverty of early medieval Europe. The Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East were more attractive areas, at least until the thirteenth century. Nevertheless, these factors are hardly sufficient to explain why Europe did not become a great empire; we also have to examine the actual formation of political units after the fall of the Roman Empire in the west. This will also address the second big question raised by the comparison: how and why was there a system of relatively stable smaller units rather than fluctuations between larger and smaller ones? And what explains the actual divisions between the European kingdoms?

After the fall of the Roman Empire, there would seem to have been an open future. Admittedly, the Roman provinces of the western parts of Europe, Italy, Spain, Gaul and England, might form a point of departure but with the partial exception of Gaul, all of these underwent radical changes in the following period. There also seem to have been few existing divisions within the new areas that were eventually included in Western Christendom. Thus, the formation of the later state system began in the early Middle Ages. If we want a precise date, the treaty of Verdun in 843, which divided the Carolingian Empire between the three sons of Louis the Pious, seems the most obvious. Admittedly, it was later replaced by several other treaties and there was no awareness at the time that this was a permanent division, nor did the three units much resemble states in the modern sense. However, the division between the two main powers on the Continent, France and Germany, became permanent. Later conquests and/or conversion to Christianity led to the establishment of new kingdoms.

In explaining these developments, we must first eliminate a factor that has played a considerable part in earlier historiography and has seen some revival after the Fall of Communism in 1989, namely, the idea of the state as the expression of national identity.⁹ As we shall see, national ideas were not without importance in the medieval and early modern period, but they are not able to explain the origins of states. Taking the most obvious expression of national identity, language, there are relatively few language groups in Europe which only partly correspond to national borders. The three main Indo-European language groups are Romance, Germanic and Slavonic, distributed respectively in the south and west, the centre and north and the north and east. In addition, there is Celtic in the west, parts of Britain and France, and Baltic in Northern Germany and along the Baltic Sea, now confined to Lithuania and Latvia. Finally, there are the non-Indo-European languages

Basque in the Pyrenees and Finno-Ugric in Finland, Estonia and Hungary. The languages are localized in a way that in many cases led to the dominance of one language or language group – although mostly with considerable differences between dialects. However, states were created from above, not from below, so to the extent that language was important, it was that of elites. Besides, the liturgical and administrative language was often Latin, which reduced the importance of linguistic differences.

By contrast, terrain would seem an obvious factor. There are also some clear examples of this. The Pyrenees form a natural border between France and the Spanish kingdoms, although even this border was disputed. The Alps separate Italy from the areas to the north, but this did not prevent the German and French kings from interfering in Italy and, from the sixteenth century, together with the king of Spain, dominating most of the peninsula. Further north, both Hungary and Bohemia had core areas in the form of lowland protected by mountains, whereas Poland lacks this and had more changing borders.

The sea can divide as well as unite. It is striking that the earliest and most stable borders are to be found along the Atlantic coast. Later, the middle zone, along the Rhine and the other great rivers as well as across the Alps, became the most divided, whereas the Eastern zone, dominated by the kingdoms of Poland, Bohemia and Hungary and larger German principalities like Saxony and Prussia, was in an intermediate position.¹⁰ Whereas the Atlantic coast formed an efficient border, the situation was different in the Mediterranean and the North and Baltic Seas. The original borders between the Scandinavian countries were established at a time when the most important military power was sea power; therefore, the southern part of what is now Sweden plus most of the surrounding islands belonged to Denmark, while Norway got hold of a sea empire to the north and west.¹¹ Aragon established a sea empire from the thirteenth century onwards in the Mediterranean, and England expanded across the sea to Ireland and across the Channel to France.

Nevertheless, terrain explains relatively little. Most of the central part of the European Continent consists of flat land, increasingly cultivated from the last centuries of the first millennium onwards, with no obvious divisions in the terrain. In the south, the Iberian and Apennine peninsulas are both mountainous, but the former developed strong kingdoms which were eventually reduced to two, whereas the latter became one of the most divided parts of Europe. Similarly, France and Germany are topographically fairly similar but politically different; France united under one king and Germany divided into around 400 principalities. Moreover, the most divided parts of Germany were not the forested and mountainous parts in the south and east, but the intensely cultivated ones in the west and the centre. Further north, the highly divided Low Countries present the same picture. Thus, rather than being determined by topography, the borders must be the results of some kind of human activity, the most obvious of which is warfare. However, as will be shown in the following, dynasties and group formation are even more important factors.

Warfare and state formation: from the age of invasions to the eighteenth century

Arguing that war was the driving force in the formation of the European state, Charles Tilly points to the existence of around 1,000 states in medieval Europe which were eventually reduced to 25. However, he fails to examine the chronology of this process, which, as we shall see, does not support his argument. Comparing China until the formation of the Empire in 221 BC with Europe in the early modern period, Victoria Hui also points to warfare as the main factor determining the development in both places. Nevertheless, while continuous warfare over around 1,000 years in China led to the gradual reduction of political units until the whole area had become one empire, nothing similar happened in Europe. Hui explains this with the inefficiency of the latter.¹² War became too costly in Europe, because of the extensive use of mercenaries and the merchants and technicians who profited from selling new types of arms to the competing rulers. This explanation seems paradoxical. Whereas apparently no technological change took place in China, only organizational ones, the changes over a similar period in Europe, both organizational but above all technological, were enormous and increased the costs of waging war manifold. Would this not lead to a faster and even more drastic reduction of political units than in China?

We can distinguish between four phases in the military development of medieval and early modern Europe.¹³ During the first phase, warfare was highly mobile and fortifications mostly simple, although the large empires of the Carolingians and the Ottonians were based on great and well-organized military forces, in particular, heavily armed and armoured infantry. Fortifications were also important, partly remains from the Roman period, partly new constructions.¹⁴ People in East Central Europe used light cavalry, whereas the Scandinavians fought on foot and above all at sea. Slavs and Magyars made quick raids into Christian countries and returned with their booty before their enemies could mobilize against them, while the Viking ships had the same effect: large enemy armies suddenly appearing out of the great seas, as expressed in contemporary chronicles. Socially, sea warfare and infantry combined with light cavalry indicate relatively little difference between elite and people, at least less than later, although we should not underestimate the wealth and status of the aristocracy in the Carolingian Empire and its successors. During this phase, the defenders also had less advantage over the attackers. Although fortifications did exist, they needed far larger forces for their defence than their counterparts in later ages.¹⁵ This was also a period when kingdoms and principalities were relatively vaguely defined, and borders could change easily.

During this period, the political map of Europe was created in its main outlines. The permanent division of the Carolingian Empire into the kingdoms of Germany and France is usually dated to around 900. The division was originally the result of the fact that Louis the Pious left three sons, who all claimed a part of his heritage. In the following period, the territorial divisions would seem to have been a direct consequence of the number of sons the previous ruler left at his death but

eventually, it became the norm that one son inherited the whole of his father's realm. This led to the permanent division between the kingdoms in the west and east which became France and Germany. The development was gradual, but an important factor was the change of dynasties in both realms; in France in 987 and in Germany in 911. Three kingdoms in Scandinavia, Denmark, Norway and Sweden, and three in East Central Europe, Poland, Bohemia and Hungary, emerged between the late ninth and early eleventh century. They all developed dynasties which lasted until the fourteenth century. Anglo-Saxon England, which had for a long time been divided into separate kingdoms, was united by King Alfred of Wessex (870–99). This was a direct consequence of the Viking attacks, which destroyed most of the petty kingdoms in the country. Alfred defeated the Vikings and, together with his successors, united most of the country. Alfred's successors ruled the country until the eleventh century, when it was conquered first by Cnut of Denmark (1017) and then by William the Conqueror (1066).

Scotland developed as a kingdom from the mid-ninth century, having been converted to Christianity in the previous period. The later dynasty traced its ancestry back, directly or indirectly, to Kenneth MacAlpin, of whom very little is known. Linguistically, the country was divided between the Gaelic-speaking north and the English-speaking south; in the latter area, there was no sharp distinction between England and Scotland. By contrast, Ireland never became really united under one ruler.¹⁶ There were many kings, respectively of superior, intermediate and lower rank. The superior king, ruling the whole country had little actual power and the office was often vacant. Nor was there any proper dynasty and the rules of succession were vague. This made Ireland vulnerable to external interference. The first Scandinavian Vikings arrived in Ireland in 795 and from 841, they had a permanent stronghold in Dublin and the area around it. Later, this area was conquered by the English and formed a starting-point for the conquest of the whole island in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The fact that defenders had little advantage over attackers may partly explain the importance of this period for the formation of the European state system. However, the new kingdoms were not solely the result of warfare. The division of the Carolingian Empire was not peaceful, but its basic principle was dynastic rights. The formation of new kingdoms on the European periphery may at least partly have been the results of struggles between various local chieftains about which we know little but also of friendship and alliances with European rulers, particularly the German king. Above all, the introduction of Christianity is a crucial factor. The Church created permanent institutions which strengthened the power of the king. Christianity was introduced partly by missionaries from Christian countries, notably England and Germany, and partly by indigenous rulers who had been converted abroad. Politically, the rise of Germany as a great power in the tenth century was a particularly important factor. Political pressure from Germany was an incentive for the kings of the neighbouring countries, Denmark and the three kingdoms in East Central Europe, to convert, while at the same time, Germany was not strong enough to conquer these countries.

The transition from the first to the second phase in the military development was least partly a response to the various invasions of Europe from the seventh century onwards, the Arabs in the south and the Scandinavians and Slavs in the north and east. The introduction of the stirrup was important for the development of cavalry with heavy armour, fighting with lances to charge at the enemy, instead of as earlier with bows and arrows or light spears that were thrown. Castles were built for defensive purposes during the invasions in the post-Carolingian period and eventually developed into very elaborate constructions, partly through the adaptation of the superior fortification technology of the Byzantines and the Arabs which became known to the Europeans during the Crusades. From the eleventh century onwards, stone castles gradually became the norm, which gave the defenders a significant advantage over the attackers.

There are many examples of the superiority of heavy cavalry and castles over the previous military technology, including the German victories over Hungarians and Slavs in the tenth century and the Norman Conquest of England in 1066. However, the main examples of conquests or spectacular victories during this phase are to be found on the outskirts of Western Christendom, in the Baltic area, Spain, Southern Italy and the Eastern Mediterranean, including Byzantium and Palestine. The importance of the military technology in this is open to discussion. Most probably, it was decisive in the Baltic area which was conquered through the establishment of castles and fortified towns. Heavy cavalry also had some success during the Crusades in Palestine and the eastern Mediterranean, Sicily and Southern Italy and Spain. It was normally superior in pitched battles on flat ground but was vulnerable to numerically superior light cavalry in mountainous terrain and on marches. However, in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, the enemies had a well-developed fortification technology; as a matter of fact, the European technology was largely the result of influence from these countries. They also had well-trained armies and competent commanders. The most important strategic advantage the Europeans gained in the Mediterranean in the crusading period was dominance at sea. On land, the First Crusade (1096–99) was a spectacular victory, but mainly because the enemy was unprepared and, in addition, weakened by internal division. The conquest of Constantinople in 1204 would hardly have taken place without the struggle over the succession to the Byzantine throne. Once the Ottomans had taken control of the Eastern Mediterranean in the fifteenth century, the Europeans were repeatedly defeated.

By contrast, they were more successful in Southern Italy, Sicily and Spain. Knights from Normandy in northern France, descendants of Scandinavians settled there in the early ninth century, conquered Southern Italy and Sicily from the Arabs and the Byzantines in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. The success of the Normans can be explained both by the division of their enemies and the decline of the Byzantine Empire, which at the time had controlled parts of Sicily and Southern Italy, as well as with their alliance with the pope, but an important factor is also their qualities as warriors, notably their ferocity. The Christian conquest of Spain began when the Caliphate of Cordoba dissolved in

1031 and was divided into separate units.¹⁷ In the following period, a number of smaller Christian kingdoms became united through marriage alliances and dynastic succession and eventually conquered most of Muslim Spain. After the mid-thirteenth century, only the Muslim kingdom of Granada in the south-east remained, sheltered by high mountains and generally difficult terrain. It was eventually conquered in 1492. Most of the new territories became parts of Castile. Portugal conquered Lisbon in 1147, which remained a border town until 1250, when the coast of the Algarve was conquered, and Lisbon became the capital. In the east, Aragon conquered the area around Valencia (1238) and the Balearic Islands (1229–32), both of which became kingdoms in a personal union with the crown of Aragon. Aragon continued its expansion with conquests or attempts at conquest of Sicily, Sardinia and parts of Greece. The conquest of Spain is often depicted as a continuous crusade, but the reality is more complex; there were also alliances across the religious borders and rivalry between the various Christian powers. Nevertheless, the crusading ideology clearly contributed to the success of the conquest.

Armies now became smaller and more professionalized, which had important social consequences. An aristocratic elite formed the core of the military forces, while the rest of the population consisted of peasants in various ways subordinated to the aristocracy. Castles could be used as defence against external enemies but also to control the peasants. Infantry did not disappear from the armies but became less important. Castles could thus be an instrument for kings or conquerors to secure control of territories. Eventually, however, they largely worked in the opposite direction. The castellan might make himself independent, and a country might in this way be divided into smaller principalities governed from castles. This happened to a greater or lesser extent in France, parts of Germany, the Low Countries and Italy. Kings and other lords gave land with or without castles to their subordinates as fiefs, i.e. not as permanent property, but as temporary possessions to hold on behalf of the lord, in return for service, normally of a military kind.

The development of heavy cavalry thus had obvious consequences for state formation, strengthening the power of the aristocracy and weakening that of the king. However, the differences between the various European countries show that there is no automatic correlation between military technology and political organization. English military technology was largely similar at the time, which did not prevent this country from developing a strong state and a government with extensive judicial powers. In Scandinavia and East Central Europe, where the new technology was introduced in the twelfth and particularly the thirteenth century, the aristocracy increased its power at the cost of the king, but this did not lead to a division of these countries into petty principalities. Of the older kingdoms, France and Germany used basically the same military technology but were politically very different. Both countries were dominated by strong princes and nobles who controlled larger or smaller territories from their castles, but while these rulers became largely independent in Germany, they became increasingly subordinated to the king in France.

Despite the superiority of defence over attack, however, some major changes between the main powers of Europe took place in the thirteenth century. In the previous period, France had mainly been ruled by a number of territorial lords under the formal supremacy of the king. One of these lords, Duke William of Normandy, had conquered England in 1066 and one of his successors, King Henry II (1154–89), had through marriage got hold of a number of fiefs that amounted to more than half the territory of the kingdom. In 1202–06, King Philip II Augustus of France managed to conquer Normandy and in the following period, his successors conquered large parts of southern France, partly from the English but mainly through participation in the Crusades against the Albigensian heretics in southern France. At about the same time, a marriage alliance united the Norman Kingdom of Southern Italy and Sicily with Germany. The Emperor Frederick II ruled both territories but had his main focus on the south. His and his successors' struggles against the papacy and a long interregnum after his death (1250–72) led to a substantial reduction of the imperial power in Germany which now became divided into around 400 smaller units, ruled by secular or clerical princes or independent cities. Thus, for most of the time until the unification of Germany in 1870, France was the strongest power on the European Continent. Admittedly, the difference between the two countries should not be exaggerated. France was far from the centralization that characterized the country from the Revolution onwards and Germany still retained some common institutions, including the Emperor and the Diet (*Reichstag*).

There is no clear military explanation of the changes that took place during the second period; the technology and organization were the same on both sides, although greater or lesser skill of the commanders cannot be excluded. The most decisive factor was probably the ability to gain adherents. There were normally no firm loyalties and there were legitimate claims on both sides. Philip Augustus could intervene against King John of England with the argument that he was his feudal overlord and in this way make John's vassals join his own cause. German vassals felt little loyalty to a ruler who was abroad all the time and were in addition under pressure from the pope who had excommunicated Frederick and his successors.

The third phase shows the revival of the infantry, which is expressed in the spectacular English victories over numerically superior French armies during the Hundred Years War (1337–1453), such as Crecy (1346), Poitiers (1356) and Agincourt (1415). The war itself had its background in the remaining English fiefs in southern France, which both kings regarded as an anomaly; they both wanted direct control of them.¹⁸ The development of stronger bows, first, crossbows, then longbows, increased the importance of the infantry. In the fourteenth century, an arrow had a range of nearly 300 yards when shot by a skilled archer and could pierce mail but not plate from around 100 yards. A skilled archer could fire ten to twelve shots in the minute with a longbow but only one or two with a crossbow.¹⁹ However, the victories mentioned above are not evidence of a general superiority of infantry over cavalry. Infantry cannot force cavalry to fight, nor can it win by attacking first.²⁰ In order to succeed, the English commanders had to find

an advantageous position and entice the enemy to attack, while at the same time avoiding the danger of being surrounded and besieged, which would force them to surrender because of lack of provisions. In this respect, the Swiss, who had the strongest infantry in the later Middle Ages, had some advantages over the English, as a force of pikemen was more mobile than one of archers, if sufficiently trained and disciplined. Despite a number of victories of infantry over heavy cavalry, however, there is no evidence of the superiority of larger political units over smaller, nor of the decline of the military aristocracy. Still, castles were the key to military success and the mobility of the cavalry an important factor. When France established a new army towards the end of the war, in the fifteenth century, it was still dominated by cavalry. The war ended with the French conquest of all English possessions in the country with the exception of Calais.

Once more, the outcome of the war is not exclusively determined by military factors. The English successes in the fifteenth century were not only the result of Henry V's military genius but also of chaos and internal division in France. From the Peace of Troyes (1420) onwards, the war also became a French civil war, as Henry married the daughter of the King of France and his son from this marriage, Henry VI, born in 1422, was presented as the legitimate heir to the throne, whereas Charles VII, son of the previous French king Charles VI, was said to have been the result of his mother's affair with her husband's brother. Despite some setbacks in the beginning, however, Charles eventually gained the support of the majority of the people. An important factor in this was Joan of Arc (Jeanne d'Arc),²¹ a young peasant girl who arrived at the court of Charles VII in Chinon in 1429, claiming to have received a message from God to save France from the English and establish Charles as the lawful king. Having convinced the king and his supporters, she was given the command of a troop of soldiers and won some spectacular victories. Most importantly, she was able to relieve Orléans from the English siege and to have Charles crowned in Reims, which at the time was in the zone controlled by the English and their French allies. The coronation actually became a turning-point; royal coronation had great prestige in France and thus gave Charles an advantage over his English rival. Although Joan was soon afterwards (1430–31) captured and burnt as a heretic, her brief career shows the importance of popular reactions against the English invaders and the use of religion and divine revelation for patriotic purposes,²² although the decisive change in King Charles' fortune was that the majority of the aristocracy began to support him, partly because they saw their interests best served in this way and partly because of the long tradition of lawful, dynastic kingship.²³

The fourth phase introduced the most revolutionary changes and is rightly referred to as the military revolution. This included the introduction of firearms, first, the arquebus, then the musket and, above all, the cannon. Such arms were used already in the fourteenth century but only became really effective in the fifteenth. As demonstrated by the French victory at the end of the Hundred Years War in 1450–53, and the fall of Constantinople in 1453, cannons had now become strong enough to make medieval castles obsolete. Whereas earlier, their walls could

easily be defended against largely superior forces and the means to conquer them were complicated and often unsuccessful, they could now be destroyed by a sufficient amount of artillery.²⁴ This introduced a short period of superiority for offensive forces and some spectacular conquests of formerly strong castles. However, it did not take long before the balance was restored. A new fortification technology, developed by Italian engineers in the early sixteenth century, resulted in walls able to withstand artillery. The tall and relatively thin medieval walls were replaced by lower and more massive bastions covered with sand, which reduced the power of the cannon balls. The shape of the bastions was also highly irregular, in order to make it more difficult to aim the cannons correctly.

Drill and strict discipline were introduced around 1600 – the great pioneer was Prince Maurice of Orange, the Dutch leader in the war of independence against Spain. This corresponded to the need for coordinated action and for firing as quickly as possible. The muskets took considerable time to load, but the soldiers were trained to do this as quickly as possible and at the same time. When the first line had fired, they moved to the back, so that the next line could do the same, and so forth. The strength of an army with muskets depended on how quickly it could fire; consequently, greater speed in firing would compensate for numerical inferiority. In addition, men were needed for fighting at short range, where guns could not be used. Therefore, soldiers with firearms were supplemented by pikemen, according to the Swiss model. The introduction of the bayonet from the late seventeenth century abolished this distinction, allowing the musketeers to fight at close range as well. In addition to these changes, the size of armies changed significantly. Whereas late medieval armies rarely counted more than 10,000 men, they might number more than 100,000 in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This was partly a matter of increased competition; size was of course crucial to military success, but also has to do with the increasing size and sophistication of fortifications, which necessitated large armies to conduct a siege.

Steady improvement in this field continued in the following period. The most spectacular example is the ‘iron ring’ around the exposed frontiers of France under Louis XIV, constructed under the leadership of the great military architect, Vauban (1633–1707). Vauban was educated in mathematics, which he applied to his engineering. His fortifications are still to be seen in many parts of France, for instance, Briançon in the south-east, which protected the border towards Savoy. The cost of the project was enormous, nearly 10 per cent of the total expenditure in the period 1665–96.²⁵ It may, however, have been worth the price; despite repeated French defeats in the Low Countries during the War of the Spanish Succession, allied forces never crossed the French border in this area. Moreover, the systematic construction of stronger and fewer fortifications reduced the number of men necessary to man them and thus made possible a substantial increase in the field army.²⁶

The Spanish were the pioneers in the military revolution.²⁷ The tactical unit in the Spanish army was the *tercio*, an infantry formation consisting of pikemen, swordsmen and arquebusiers or musketeers in a mutually supportive formation, in theory, up to 3,000 soldiers, although it was usually less than half this size. The

Spanish infantry army was developed during the war against Granada, 1481–92, and later during the wars in Italy. It was subject to strong discipline and was regarded as the best army in Europe in the sixteenth and well into the seventeenth century, when it was eventually surpassed by the French. The proud Spanish nobles who served as officers accepted leaving their horses and leading their men on foot.

The use of cannons contributed to the French reconquest of the English possessions in 1450–53 and some smaller political entities succumbed, notably some Italian city states, but otherwise, the number of political units remained as before and there were no great changes in the borders between them. Thus, in the period 1500–1789, the European powers had larger armies and better military equipment than at any time before and fought one another with greater costs and intensity. Nevertheless, the results were minor. Not only did most powers continue to exist – Poland and some Italian city states are the main exceptions – but most them had approximately the same borders by the end of the period as in the beginning. This not only applies to the major kingdoms but also to the around 400 German petty states. Thus, the obvious advantages the new military technology gave to larger and wealthier units had few practical consequences.

The state made war but war did not make the state

Returning to Hui's comparison between China and Europe, the paradox pointed out above has not become less after the previous survey. Whereas China, with apparently the same military technology throughout the period, underwent a radical change in political organization, Europe experienced an equally radical change in military technology with surprisingly few changes in political division. Even more paradoxical: the period of the greatest military changes was also the period with the least changes in political units and their borders. Hui's claim, that European military equipment was costlier than the Chinese and the political organizations less efficient, does not give an adequate explanation for this. There is no doubt that military equipment during the fourth phase was many times costlier than during the previous ones, but this would mean that only the strongest units could make use of it, which in turn should have led to a drastic reduction of them. When this did not happen, it is obvious that Hui's and Tilly's explanation is wrong: war was not the driving force in the formation of the European state system.

Tilly's argument about the reduction from 1,000 to 25 states between 990 and 1870 suggests a parallel to, for instance, the likelihood of newborn animals of various species to reach adulthood. Often only a few achieve this, while the rest disappear without trace. The analogy therefore suggests that the survival of a state was a rare occurrence, something only the strongest were able to achieve; in other words, that we are dealing with a parallel to Darwin's survival of the fittest. In the case of European state formation, however, the territory remains the same and the unsuccessful states do not disappear, but become building material for their

successful counterparts, in many cases, influencing them considerably and/or retaining much of their own character.

Tilly never specifies exactly what he regards as a state or how he arrives at the numbers respectively of 1,000 and 500, but he clearly regards the various fiefs in which large parts of continental Europe were divided as states.²⁸ There may be some arguments in favour of this, although what characterizes this period is rather a division of authority between the higher and the lower levels. There is no sovereign state; the king is the highest authority, but his territory includes a number of more or less independent vassals and princes. The Peace Treaty of Westphalia of 1648 is often regarded as the precise date when the European state system came into existence, including the around 400 German territories. Strictly speaking, this is not true; the only formal recognition of this kind in the treaty concerned the independence of the Dutch Republic from Spain. By contrast, the emperor was still regarded as the head of the German principalities, although this superiority had limited practical importance, as had already been the case for centuries.²⁹

An objection may be raised to the thesis about continuity that a kingdom in the twelfth or thirteenth century is not necessarily identical with a state and that the title of the ruler does not necessarily correspond to the importance of his realm. The answer to the former objection is that continued existence over several centuries is a fairly strong criterion of statehood. Whatever the limitations in power and efficiency, it shows that more than the will of individual rulers is involved. Concerning the latter objection, we can point to the example of Navarra, which was an independent kingdom until it was joined with France but was insignificant compared to the principalities of Saxony, Brandenburg or Savoy and above all to the Dutch Republic. However, this is an exception and not the rule. Most kingdoms were larger and more important than other principalities and the rulers of the most successful of the latter, Brandenburg and Savoy, actually managed to become kings, later (1815) also the Dutch stadholder. More importantly, although both kingdoms and other principalities might expand at the cost of their neighbours, there is hardly a single example of a state formed by a continuous struggle between independent princes within a particular area resulting in one of them conquering the others. The only possible examples of this are the earliest phases of the history of the new kingdoms in the north and east, of which very little is known. In the better-known cases that come closest to Tilly's suggestion, the unification of Germany under the leadership of Prussia (1866–70) and of Italy under the leadership of Savoy (1859–70), the unification would not have happened without a considerable popular movement in its favour. In the case of Germany, the unification also took the form of a union between the princes who retained considerable independence.

In its main features, the European state system seems to have been formed between the division of the Carolingian Empire and around 1200. At the latter date, there were fifteen kingdoms in Europe: England, Scotland, France, Castile, Aragon, Portugal, Navarra, Sicily, Germany, Poland, Bohemia, Hungary, Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Only two new kingdoms were added between 1200 and the new kingdoms that emerged after the dissolution of the Holy Roman