

1970 *On the Medieval
Origins of the
Modern State*

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Joseph R. Strayer

Today we take the state for granted. It dominates global political structures, and we can scarcely envisage life without it. But how did it come about? In *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State*, historian Joseph Strayer demonstrated the relevance of medieval his-

torical institutions to modern political organization. Strayer's brief and influential essay provided the key to understanding how and why the form of the European nation-state evolved.

For Strayer, the state enabled a more concentrated use of human resources than ever before; thus it is crucial to understand just how and why people's loyalty shifted from family, local community, or religious organization to the state and its institutions. Concentrating mainly on France and England, Strayer argues that the medieval rulers provided the foundation for the administrative and judicial practices of subsequent European monarchies. He points to jury trials, representative assemblies, and bureaucracies as examples of contemporary institutions with medieval roots and shows how medieval state builders had to invent and perfect instruments of justice and administration, create a cadre of loyal and efficient bureaucrats, and, most important, merit the allegiance that they demanded from their subjects.

On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State has become a classic of medieval and early modern European political history and a standard text in the field.

