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THE FORUM

FORUM: IN THE BEGINNING THERE WAS NO WORD (FOR IT): TERMS, CONCEPTS, AND EARLY SOVEREIGNTY

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It is difficult to overstate the importance of the concept sovereignty for international relations (IR). And yet, understanding the historical emergence of sovereignty in international relations has long been curtailed by the all-encompassing myth of the Peace of Westphalia. While criticism of this myth has opened space for further historical inquiry in recent years, it has also raised important questions of historical interpretation and methodology relevant to IR, as applying our current conceptual framework to distant historical cases is far from unproblematic. Central among these questions is the when, what, and how of sovereignty: from when can we use "sovereignty" to analyze international politics and for which polities? Can sovereignty be used when the actors themselves did not have recourse to the terminology? And what about polities that do not have recourse to the term at all? What are the theoretical implications of applying the concept of sovereignty to early polities? From different theoretical and methodological perspectives, the contributions in this forum shed light on these questions of sovereignty and how to treat the concept analytically when applied to a period or place when/where the term did not exist as such. In doing so, this forum makes the case for a sensitivity to the historical dimension of our arguments about sovereignty—and, by extension, international relations past and present—as this holds the key

to the types of claims we can make about the polities of the world and their relations.

Keywords: sovereignty, historical international relations, concepts

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Introduction: The Emergence of Sovereignty: More Than a Question of Time

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The conceptual centrality of sovereignty in international relations (IR) cannot be overstated. Generally understood as the principle creating domestic authority, sovereignty is at the origin of the inside/outside divide, making it constitutive of the (modern) international. As Poggi has argued, "the state's sovereignty and its territoriality, jointly produce a most significant consequence: the political environment in which each state exists is by necessity one which it shares with a plurality of states similar in nature to itself" (1990, 23). Despite its centrality, understanding the historical emergence of sovereignty in IR has long been curtailed by the all-encompassing myth of the Peace of Westphalia—a myth that IR scholars have swallowed hook, line, and sinker (see Leira and de Carvalho 2018). 1648 has marked the boundaries of the historical imagination for generations of IR scholars, and it is only in the last two decades that IR scholars have started refuting the myth (Croxton 1999; Krasner 1999; Osiander 2001). This opening up of a space for historical inquiry into the origins of sovereignty and the historicity of international politics, however, has also brought to the fore important questions of historical methods and methodology relevant to IR. For, although some traditions of thought in IR have felt the Westphalian straightjacket more lightly than others—claims about the continuities in thinking from Thucydides until today being a case in point—applying the modern framework of IR to distant historical cases is far from unproblematic.

Through a discussion of work on early sovereignty, the contributions in the present forum seek to shed light on two particular points of contention. First, they discuss the temporal and geographical origins of sovereignty: can we speak of sovereignty before the sixteenth century? Or is it not until much later in the nineteenth century that we can meaningfully use the term? Similarly, is sovereignty a European concept? Or can we find parallels and trace its origins beyond the so-called West? Second, they address the (methodological) basis upon which we can make such judgements: how far can IR concepts travel? Can we ascribe the concept of sovereignty at all to historical actors, even though "they had no linguistic means to express" it, to paraphrase Gad Prudovsky's (1997) provocative exchange with Quentin Skinner? What type of historical analysis allows us to determine this? In discussing these issues, this forum argues for more explicit investigation of the origins and the boundaries of sovereignty, as this is not only crucial to better understand its historicity but also a necessary endeavor to better understand and expand the analytical potential of IR itself.

Pinpointing Sovereignty

Jean Bodin defined sovereignty as "the absolute and perpetual power of a commonwealth" or (in the Latin version) as "supreme and absolute power over citizens and subjects." (1992 [1576], 1) From Bodin onward, sovereignty has performed all kinds of tricks in IR theories, ranging from being responsible for the anarchical character of the international system (Waltz 1979) and the main culprit behind the "decentralization, weakness and ineffectiveness of supra-national institutions" (Morgenthau 1985, 300) to being confused with state capabilities for independence and autonomy by liberal and neoliberal scholars (see Biersteker and Weber 1996, 6) or even understood as synonymous with the state. Opposing this indiscriminate use, constructivist authors have increasingly emphasized the inherently contingent and constructed character of sovereignty and the necessity to explore its historical trajectory and variations. For, as R. B. J. Walker warned, "the very attempt to treat sovereignty as a matter of definition and legal principle encourages a certain amnesia about its historical and culturally specific character" (see also Bartelson 1995, 166). This constructivist push toward historicizing sovereignty was important, as it paved the way for a series of inquiries into the historical emergence of sovereignty, all seeking to abandon the "big bang" account of Westphalia (see de Carvalho, Leira, and Hobson 2011 for an overview).

Yet in spite of this research, by and large, IR still hangs on to its original myth. Thus, a discipline that should have relegated 1648 from Leo Gross' "world charter" or "majestic portal which leads from the old into the new world" (Gross 1948, 20, 28) to the ranks of more common peace treaties has on the whole stubbornly refused to engage in a renewed effort to understand its scope conditions. Given the place Westphalia occupied in the traditional historical account of international politics, a move away from Westphalia was bound to lead to a certain unease within the discipline, not least because if Westphalia was not the origin of sovereignty and the international system, then what was?

This question is of course not entirely foreign to IR scholars, as some strands of scholarship have sought to broaden the temporal scope of IR by analyzing sovereignty before and beyond Westphalia. For example, some have argued that sovereign state systems can be found in premodern European history, most notably in ancient Greece and in the Renaissance (e.g., Wight 1977; Watson 1992; Reus-Smit 1999). Taking stock of this literature, some of the contributions in this forum propose alternative periodizations of sovereignty. Thus, Andrew Latham goes beyond the usual suspects and proposes that a recognizable notion of sovereignty may already be found in medieval European thought, while Benjamin de Carvalho locates it in the aftermath of the reformations of the early sixteenth century. Challenging Westphalia, however, can not only expand the temporal scope of sovereignty but also dramatically reduce it. Indeed, Jens Bartelson proposes that it was only in the nineteenth century that IR sovereignty, that is, a territorialized notion of supreme authority, emerged.

"Beyond Westphalia," however, is a matter of challenging not only established periodizations but also geographies. Indeed, Westphalia locates sovereignty squarely within a European context, thus opening up a way for a charge of Eurocentrism in the historical treatment of sovereignty and, by extension, in the conceptual apparatus of IR. This has been opposed by a number of scholars, who, in addition to thinking of sovereignty back in time, have also argued for the applicability of sovereignty beyond Europe. East Asia in particular has provided a host of case studies and historical evidence: while Kang (2010) has argued that in the early modern period, a particular instantiation of sovereignty was at play in the context of a hierarchical tributary system, Zhang has sought to prove that an ancient Chinese state-system in the eighth century BC already operated with an institutionalized, if not legally formalized, notion of sovereignty (2003, 47).

To what extent is sovereignty a European concept? Can we distinguish similar concepts in other regions? What connections across different regions may have enabled the emergence of sovereignty? In this forum, Ayşe Zarakol seeks to broaden these reflections beyond East Asia. Through examples from the Ottoman and Safavid empires, she argues that thinking about non-Eurocentric sovereignty can help us appreciate both the historical specificity of configurations of sovereignty and potentially also some broad patterns of international relations.

(How) do Concepts Travel?

The contributions in this forum, however, highlight that, far from being merely a matter of more empirical research to determine a new starting point or geographical scope, thinking about sovereignty before and beyond Westphalia raises a variety of conceptual and methodological problems. Conceptually, it involves a necessary reflection about what may or may not enable sovereignty as a concept to travel in time. Indeed, behind different locations and periodizations lie substantial (unspoken) differences of what sovereignty means. Thus, for many constructivist authors interested in sovereignty, beyond Westphalia has involved a necessary relaxation of the conceptual content of Westphalian sovereignty: while for Reus-Smit it signifies "territorially demarcated, autonomous centers of political authority" (1999, 159), for Wight it refers to "political authorities which recognize no superior" (1977, 23). Against this, some would argue that this fundamentally mischaracterizes the nature of sovereignty: being at the top may be necessary but is certainly not a sufficient condition for being sovereign. The sovereignty of the state also relies on a number of processes aimed at making the polity a sovereign one—be they processes of territorialization as geographers have emphasized (see e.g., Strandsbjerg 2010) or establishing control over the population (see e.g., de Carvalho 2016). Ahistorical conceptualizations run the risk of curbing inquiries into these processes, decreasing the upshot of comparative cross-historical exercises.

The conceptual work that is necessary to think of sovereignty beyond Westphalia as well as whether relaxation of the concept of sovereignty is such that it can ultimately lead to indistinction are some of the themes that we explore in this forum. Thus, on the one hand, Andrew Latham argues for abandoning a "presentist" understanding of sovereignty that would portray it as an exclusively modern phenomenon. Instead, sovereignty can be identified wherever discussions about the "locus, source, and character of supreme authority" have occurred. Against this, other contributions argue that sovereignty is more than supreme political authority: for Bartelson, it is only the conjunction of the latter with territoriality that yields a recognizable idea of sovereignty; for Costa Lopez, the additional defining features are connotations of equality between sovereigns and differentiation between these and nonsovereigns; and for de Carvalho, who places less emphasis on notions of equality, the defining feature is when sovereignty comes to define the polities as a whole and condition their policies.

Similarly, a second important set of issues that arises is of methodological nature: not only do we need to think explicitly about the conceptualizations of sovereignty but also how we can empirically observe its presence. On the one hand, as many scholars have highlighted, the meaning of the term "sovereignty" has changed in history, and these changes certainly have implications for what historical conclusions we can reach (Keene 2002; Bartelson 2006). Even more crucially, in the vast majority of contexts in which we want to think about sovereignty, the term itself was not present. This raises a number of methodological conundrums: is it possible to identify a concept in a language and a context that lacks the same word for it? How do we decide that a concept is equivalent to "sovereignty"? Can sovereignty be identified merely from practice even if it is not verbalized? Upon what basis can this be done?

Reflection on these methodological issues is all the more essential because they do not only concern the concept of sovereignty. On the contrary, in an endeavor such as IR whose object of study necessarily involves multiple languages and periods, thinking about the possibilities and limitations of our own (present and geographically situated) lexical formulations to grasp these contexts is crucial. One extreme nominalist position would understand the historical/spatial difference to be insurmountable, and IR would thus be limited to more-or-less close contexts with which we share a vocabulary. The other extreme would assume the ability of present concepts to capture all historical experiences. As with many things, the answer probably lies somewhere in the middle—and yet, the methodological basis for determining it is unclear.

While none of the contributors to this forum adopt a nominalist position, they offer different takes on the methodological challenges of studying early sovereignty. Thus, for both Latham and Zarakol, current IR concepts such as "supreme authority" have a plasticity and analytical purchase that facilitates their use across history and places. Against this, de Carvalho and Costa López adopt more historicist, yet still different, answers. While examination of historical (linguistic) practices is key for both them and Bartelson, for de Carvalho sovereignty is still observable in the absence of a particular word to designate it. Conversely, for Costa López, it is not enough to look for concepts that more or less capture supreme territorial authority, but rather we need to look at the ways in which these concepts are immersed in broader webs of concepts and the distinctions they create.

Altogether, the contributions in this forum do not present a unified voice or aim to introduce the single correct way to the historical study of sovereignty. What unites them is the conviction that rather than sweeping these matters under the rugs of grand historical statements about sovereignty or of apparently noncontroversial casual uses of the term, it is important to make them explicit and reflect upon the basis for our choices, for it is only by doing this that we can avoid talking past one another and critically examine the nature of our discipline.

Sovereignty and the Possibility of International Relations

Indeed, ultimately, for many scholars, the question of sovereignty is not only a matter of unpacking the history of one of the central concepts in the discipline but rather raises the question of the scope conditions of the discipline itself (see the discussion in Bartelson 2006). The myth of Westphalia is in many ways the most fundamental myth in IR, as it cements what the discipline has as its object of study: the sovereign state and the state system. As a result, thinking of sovereignty beyond Westphalia also brings forth questions about the explanatory power of IR: If sovereign states are the main focus of study of the discipline, the topic toward which its conceptual apparatus is geared, can IR deal with moments and places in history without a sovereign state system?

This question is certainly not a new one. Indeed, some scholars have long argued that IR is essentially a modernist endeavor (Walker 1995; Jahn 2000). Thus, thinking of sovereignty beyond Westphalia is crucial for relocating and recalibrating the scope of applicability of the discipline, but beyond these limits, IR has little to say. An alternative approach would deny the uniqueness of modern sovereignty and by entailment broaden the applicability of IR. Without having to fall into IR as a "realm of recurrence and repetition" (Wight 1966, 26), some posit that relations between human communities, while varied and historically specific, have some fundamental features that make them amenable to study and comparison (Ferguson and Mansbach 1996; Reus-Smit 1999). Even if the modern instantiation of sovereignty has its particularities, the modernism of IR's conceptual apparatus is not only not an impediment but rather facilitates this type of cross-historical inquiry (see Latham and Zarakol in this forum). A third option, sitting somewhat in between, accepts

that sovereignty is a modern idea and that IR's imaginary thus suffers from an embedded modernism. However, this does not mean that the scope conditions of IR need to be limited to modern international relations. On the contrary, for these scholars, the interest of thinking of sovereignty and international relations beyond Westphalia is precisely that it forces IR to abandon its modernism and broaden its own conceptual apparatus. In any case, thinking of sovereignty beyond Westphalia is never a purely historical, purely conceptual, or purely methodological matter. Rather, the centrality of sovereignty for IR means that any discussion of the term is inextricably bound with difficult questions about the discipline, its possibilities, and its scope conditions.

Together, the contributions of this forum aim at opening up a space for rethinking not only the origins of sovereignty in practice and theoretical terms but also how more foundational questions about the nature of the polities inhabiting this world affect the type of relations they entertain between themselves. What's at stake in approaching sovereignty is no less than the scope conditions of international relations as our discipline has made sense of them. As the contributions show, settling a consensus view on the matter may not be possible or even desirable. The aim of this forum is instead to make the case for a sensitivity to the historical dimension of our arguments about sovereignty—and, by extension, international relations past and present—as it holds the key to the types of claims we can make about the polities of the world and their relations.

IR's Medieval-Sovereignty Debate: Three Rival Approaches
Introduction

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In recent years, IR scholars have begun to debate the degree to which, if at all, the concept of sovereignty can be applied to the medieval European world order. Several questions have framed and animated this debate, the most important of which are: When did a recognizably modern concept of sovereignty first emerge in Europe? Historically, can we point to a medieval idea of sovereignty? If so, how did this historically specific idea of sovereignty differ from its modern counterpart? Is sovereignty a generic signifier of supreme authority within a *political community* (territorial or not), in which case it might well be applicable to medieval Europe? Or does sovereignty imply/require a particular form of (modern) territoriality, in which case it is in no way applicable to the medieval European order? Even if we concede that a historically specific idea of sovereignty existed in the medieval era, did it constitute what Waltz and later Ruggie called a "mode of differentiation"—that is, the organizing principle around which the medieval world order was structured? Or, as John Ruggie famously argued, was that order structured around a radically different organizing principle—that of "heteronomy"—in which case, even if they had the idea of sovereignty, it was of little practical significance? Finally, why have IR scholars asked and attempted to answer these questions? Or, to put it slightly differently, what's at stake in what I will call the "medieval-sovereignty debate"?

In this article I trace the outlines of three basic approaches to the questions raised above. In part one, I describe what I call the "presentist approach"—that is, the approach that holds that sovereignty is an artifact of modernity and that it is therefore anachronistic to apply it to the premodern era. In part two, I outline the "genealogical approach," which maintains that even though sovereignty is

a distinctly modern idea and institution, it should be viewed as the apotheosis of a centuries-long medieval tradition of speculating about the locus, source, and character of supreme authority. The third part of the article describes what I call the "historicist approach," which is an approach that insists that the concept of sovereignty can usefully be applied to illuminate the dynamics of any world order in which (a) questions regarding the locus, source, and character of supreme authority over a political community have been asked, (b) these questions have been answered in ways that frame a given political order as comprising a number of independent political units interacting in an acephalous system or society, and (c) these answers are institutionalized as organizing principles, which, in turn, constitute the mode of differentiation at the heart of that world order. Finally, the article concludes with some reflections on the significance of the medieval-sovereignty debate for the field of international relations.

The Presentist Approach

The first, and I would suggest predominant, school of thought regarding medieval sovereignty is what I will call the "presentist" approach. According to proponents of this approach, sovereignty is the distinctively modern *organizing principle or mode of differentiation* of modern international order, and it is therefore anachronistic to apply it to the medieval European world order. On this view, sovereignty is defined as "supreme authority within a territory" (Morgenthau 1985), where "supreme authority" means highest power, and "territory" denotes geographic location within a set of borders. As Wendt put it, sovereignty is best understood to be both a unit property and a social relationship (Wendt 1999, 280). As a unit property, (internal) sovereignty entails the concentration of supreme authority over a territory (understood as a precisely delimited or bounded space) in the hands of the state. As a social relationship, (external) sovereignty entails the mutual recognition of claims to internal sovereignty by all polities within a system.

According to the presentist perspective, sovereignty emerged as both an idea and an institution in the early modern period. Among students of political thought, the consensus was that the *idea* of sovereignty was an artifact of the work of early modern thinkers like Bodin or Hobbes (Skinner 2009)—thinkers who essentially invented the idea out of the raw material furnished by the Renaissance and Reformation. Among IR scholars, on the other hand, the conventional wisdom was that the *institution* or constitutive norm of sovereignty was an artifact of the Peace of Westphalia—a set of treaties that they long claimed created the European state system. More recently, however, some scholars of political thought have nuanced the presentist understanding, claiming that a truly modern concept of sovereignty—one accounting for both internal and external sovereignty—was a product of eighteenth century thinkers such as Emer de Vattel (Beaulac 2003). Similarly, IR scholars have largely abandoned the "myth of Westphalia" in favor of either variations on the early modern account (Osiander 2001; Philpott 2001; Larkins 2010) or more radical claims that the institution of sovereignty only fully emerged in the high modern era (Teschke 2003; Branch 2014).

Significantly, the presentist approach has been adopted by scholars across the IR theoretical spectrum. So, for example, realists, such as Kenneth Waltz (1986), Stephen Krasner (1999), and Robert Jackson (2007), have all argued for the historical specificity of the modern system of sovereign states and have limited their analyses to that system. Similarly, constructivists, such as John Ruggie (1993), Daniel Philpott (2001), Nick Onuf (1991), Andreas Osiander (2008), and Jordan Branch (2014), have all argued that the sovereign state and its associated system are socially constructed artifacts of the modern era. Marxists, such as Justin Rosenberg (1994) and Benno Teschke (2003), have demonstrated how the sovereign-states system was historically a product of modern capitalism. Finally, poststructuralists, such as

Cynthia Weber (1995), have explored the political work done by representations and discourses of sovereignty in the modern period. While these scholars disagree profoundly in all sorts of ways, they share the view that a radical rupture separated the medieval and modern eras—a rupture both registered and induced by the invention of the institution or constitutive of sovereignty sometime between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The Genealogical Approach

A second approach—which I will call "genealogical"—accepts that sovereignty is a distinctively modern and European political phenomenon but insists that, rather than marking a rupture or caesura in political thought, modern sovereignty is actually the apotheosis of a centuries-long medieval tradition of philosophical speculation about the locus, source, and character of supreme authority. On the genealogical view, sovereignty is primarily a concept or idea and, therefore, properly the object of intellectual history. Approached in this way, sovereignty appears not as a radically new invention of Bodin in the late sixteenth century but as a concept with a long history stretching back to the late eleventh century. Put slightly differently, on this view, Bodin's real contribution to the history of sovereignty was not that he invented the concept but that he bundled a variety of ideas that had been evolving between the onset of the Investiture Controversy in 1075 and about 1400 into a single master concept, which he called "sovereignty" (and marketed shamelessly).

In my own ongoing research, I am attempting to trace the evolution of a number of concepts related to the *character of supreme authority* across a number of distinct sites of political theorizing (canon law, Roman law, various polemical literatures, and the works of theologians and philosophers) over the course of several centuries (1075–1576). Among the more important of these concepts are *legibus solutus* (loosed from the laws), *plenitudo potestatis* (fullness of power), *potesta absoluta* (absolute power), *pro ratione voluntas* (by reason of will), *persona ficta* (fictitious legal personality), *imperium* (power to command), and *dominium* (control or ownership). The argument I am developing is that, in the course of a number of political disputes over the course of the Middle Ages, the meaning of these terms evolved in ways that ultimately furnished the early modern theorists of sovereignty with the conceptual raw materials necessary for them to "invent" the idea of sovereignty. In a similar spirit, I have also attempted to trace the roots of modern sovereignty's assumptions regarding the *source* and *locus* of supreme authority. With respect to the source of supreme authority, two strands of thought crystalized during the Middle Ages: a *lex regia* strand that holds that supreme authority is derived from "the people" and a more theocratic strand that asserts that such authority is derived from God. Finally, drawing on the work of scholars such as Jordan Branch, Jeremy Larkin, and Stuart Elden, I have sought to understand how medieval conceptions of "territoriality" evolved across a similarly diverse set of sites across a similar span of centuries, resulting in the transformation of the medieval understanding of territory as *place* into a more modern one of territory as *space*.

The Historicist Approach

A third approach to the medieval-sovereignty debate—which I will label "historicist"—recognizes the uniqueness of the institution of sovereignty that crystalized in early modern Europe but insists that the later medieval political order was also underpinned by a constitutive norm of sovereignty. On this view, any political order (in my case, medieval, but the logic can also apply to non-European orders) in which questions regarding the locus, source, and character of supreme authority within a polity are raised and in which the answers are to some degree institutionalized can be said to be underpinned by a concept of sovereignty. To be clear, this is

not to make the anachronistic argument that all historical political orders are some-how sovereign-states systems. Rather, it is to make the claim that, for some historical orders at least, historically specific understandings of the locus, source, and char-acter of supreme authority have combined with historically specific conceptions of territoriality to generate historically specific sovereign-state systems. These systems will not look exactly like the modern sovereign-states system. They will, however, bear a strong family resemblance.

In addition to a genealogical reading of the roots of sovereignty, in my own work I have sought to understand how evolving ideas and institutions of "supreme author-ity within a polity" constituted the later medieval world order—a world order that, while distinctively medieval, was in many ways also "recognizably modern" (Latham 2012). At the risk of oversimplification, I did this by first mapping the historically specific constitutive norm of "supreme authority" (with its own historically specific form of territoriality). I then argued that this constitutive norm served as a kind of "cultural script" that shaped the way in which medieval political actors under-stood, and thus acted in, the world. Finally, I demonstrated how the enactment of this script by powerful political actors resulted in a competitive process of "state-building" in which various polities, organized on various scales (city-states, leagues, kingdoms, empires), sought to consolidate control over their imagined territories. The resulting dynamic culminated in a system of competing polities in which a rec-ognizably modern concept of internal sovereignty was the defining (if in some sense still *emerging*) unit property. To be sure, the unit properties of the medieval "state" were in some ways different from those of its early- and high-modern counterparts. For example, medieval states were sovereign only with respect to temporal affairs; they shared sovereignty with the Church in spiritual matters. Similarly, medieval sovereignty involved the *control*—rather than monopoly over—legitimate violence. Ultimately, however, I concluded that the late medieval political order was under-pinned by a historically specific instantiation of a generic organizing principle of sovereignty rather than heteronomy, hierarchy, or some other exotic organizing principle. Similarly, I argued, as a result of this dynamic, a recognizably modern but still distinctively medieval set of social relations (external sovereignty) evolved that were characterized by reciprocal recognition between *some* types of polity (es-pecially between kingdoms) but not *all* types (kingdoms often did not recognize the sovereignty claims of lesser polities).

Conclusion: What's at Stake?

What are the theoretical implications of approaching the issue of medieval sovereignty in these various ways? To begin with, both the presentist and historcist approaches say something about the scope conditions of IR—that is, about the pa-rameters of the field itself. It perhaps goes without saying that IR presentists gener-ally assume that the scope conditions for the discipline are the study of the sovereign state and its associated or derivative structures and institutions. Having asserted, as-sumed, or argued that sovereignty did not exist prior to the modern era, they then conclude that the scope conditions for IR theory must, therefore, be limited to the modern era. IR theories cannot, therefore, be applied to the premodern era. A logical corollary of this is that theories and concepts developed to illuminate the medieval world order can tell us little if anything about modern international rela-tions. The net result (or is it a cause?) of this "Great Divide" (Bagge 1998) is that the medieval era is rendered an "orientalized" Other comprising an exotic congeries of ideas, institutions, and structures that are so alien as to render the epoch simultane-ously both irrelevant to the study of modern international relations and inaccessible to the contemporary IR scholar.

If, however, one adopts the historicist perspective, then it becomes possible to see how various IR concepts and theories might indeed be usefully applied to the

medieval era. There are the very real dangers of anachronism, of course—a fact amply attested to by Markus Fisher's (1992) deeply flawed effort to apply the insights of realism to medieval geopolitics. But as I hope I have demonstrated in my own work, it is certainly possible to apply the methods and concepts of, say, IR constructivism to the international relations of the later Middle Ages (Latham 2011, 2012) and to do so with effect. Indeed, I would suggest that, done with due care and a healthy historical sensibility, applying constructivism and other IR theories to the premodern political order is no more inherently anachronistic than applying approaches and methods originally developed to analyze the high modern sovereign-states system to the postmodern post-sovereign-states system of today.

On the other hand, adopting a genealogical approach can also remedy some of the shortcomings of the presentist perspective. Simply put, adopting such an approach reveals that the modern sovereign-states system—which IR scholars typically regard as being predicated on a rejection of medieval political theology—is in fact constructed out of raw materials largely furnished by that political theology. The presentist approach, of course, is based on the assumption or assertion that the modern idea of sovereignty crystalized in response to the religious wars of the seventeenth century and that the roots of the concept need be traced back no farther than that. It is also based on the assumption or assertion that, as a result, the character of the modern concept is devoid of theological content—a view that is itself part of the broader mythical narrative that juxtaposes an increasingly advanced (because increasingly secular) West and a backward (because perpetually religious) rest. The genealogical perspective described here, however, undermines this secularist narrative by demonstrating that the ways in which Bodin, Vattel, and their successors (including contemporary IR scholars) have thought about ideas such as "absolute power," "supreme authority," and the fictitious legal personality of the state all bear the mark of late medieval political theology. In other words, the genealogical approach reveals that, despite our disciplinary mythology, the modern concept of sovereignty actually represents a continuation of, rather than a break with, the long medieval political-theological tradition that modernity was supposed to have superseded. While the concept of sovereignty and its constituent ideas have no doubt been secularized, this secularization has really only been superficial. Understanding this, as a genealogical approach demands, allows us to understand more fully the theological origins of the modern sovereign-states system and, in so doing, allows us to avoid odious essentializing dichotomies such as that between a progressive secular Western civilization, on the one hand, and a hopelessly backward religious Islamic one, on the other.

Merum Imperium and Sovereignty in the Later Middle Ages

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The starting assumption of IR scholars is often that sovereignty is a modern concept not applicable to the Middle Ages. Indeed, with Westphalia as one of the foundational myths (Osiander 2001; de Carvalho et al. 2011), the idea of the modern sovereign-state systems would seem to rely on the existence of a medieval nonsovereign world (Davis 2008). However, as the previous contribution indicates, some historians have, for a long time, been comfortable with talking about medieval sovereignty, and IR scholars are increasingly doing so as well (Latham 2012; Bain 2017). In this brief contribution, I argue that despite the existence of a variety of

concepts to discuss "supreme authority over a territory" in the later Middle Ages, understanding these as indicating sovereignty might be unwarranted. The reason, I suggest, is that too much attention has been devoted to finding concepts that resemble the definition of sovereignty and, in doing so, a key dimension of the question of how concepts travel has been cast aside: the way in which concepts, both past and present, are used in broader webs of concepts, which specify and qualify each other's connotations beyond their lexical meaning. I illustrate this argument through the case of one such concept: *merum imperium.*

Sovereignty in IR: Beyond Supreme Territorial Authority

(How) can we meaningfully talk about sovereignty in the Middle Ages? If this is the central question for this short intervention, it is helpful to distinguish from the start two (interrelated) meanings. The first one is a purely historical one, about displacing the common dating of sovereignty into the period called the Middle Ages, or about tracing the origins of the idea of sovereignty into the period. There is however a second meaning with broader implications for the discipline: does the concept of "sovereignty," as currently used in IR, adequately convey the nature of political organization in that period irrespective of its links to modern sovereignty? In a time when scholars are at once increasingly interested in liberating IR from its modern and Eurocentric vocabulary and in thinking about current dynamics beyond the nation state, the question of the ability of concepts like "sovereignty" to travel beyond their historical boundaries is pressing.

Answers to this question in IR have focused on the lexical definition of sovereignty, thus arguing that this is a matter of whether the idea of supreme authority within a bounded territory can be identified (see Latham in this forum). This, however, forgets that, much like any other concept, sovereignty connotes more than its lexical definition: sovereignty is immersed in a web of other IR concepts and also derives meaning from how it is used in relation to them. Indeed, in addition to the idea of "supremacy over a territory," sovereignty as used in IR connotes two core distinctions between actors, one based on identity and one on difference (Walker 1995). First, it points to a division by which all those who possess it are instances of the same thing: all sovereigns are equivalent to one another. As Poggi argued, sovereignty entails that "the political environment in which each state exists is by necessity one which it shares with a plurality of states similar in nature to itself" (Poggi 1990, 23). Thus, whether we refer to this as a "symbolic form" (Bartelson 2014), as an organizing principle (Reus-Smit 1999), or as an institution (Bull 2002), (represented) sameness of sovereigns is central within the IR discourse. The second core distinction is that of difference: sovereigns constitute a distinct type of actor that is qualitatively different from nonsovereigns. Indeed, sovereignty involves a hierarchical distinction between those who are sovereign and those who are not, to the point that we no longer understand them as being actors of the same kind (Viola 2013).

Consequently, thinking of sovereignty in history as merely expressing supremeness over territory effectively decontextualizes it from the IR language in which it is embedded and within which it signifies more than that. Thus, my contention here is that, when thinking about how well sovereignty "travels," we cannot pretend to cast aside these connotations and restrict its meaning to "supreme authority over territory," for in IR it also invokes a whole imaginary of a sovereign state. In the following section, I illustrate how keeping in mind these two additional connotations of sovereignty in IR alters the way in which we interpret the role of a core political concept in the Middle Ages, and thus, the question of whether one can meaningfully talk about sovereignty in the period.

Merum imperium in the Middle Ages

Claims to the existence of medieval sovereignty in a recognizable IR sense have been based on a variety of juristic concepts that would denote supreme territorial authority, among which stands that of *merum imperium* (Canning 2011; Latham 2012; Lee 2012). The claim that it is a medieval term for the concept of sovereignty has certainly much grounding in medieval sources. Medieval legal discussions repeatedly emphasized the elements of supremacy and territory: the most commonly used legal treatise of the late thirteenth century, for example, explained that it was "supreme power" (*suprema potestas*) and that it applied to all matters "in a territory" (Durantis 1602,134–35).[1] While this might seem to indicate something akin to sovereignty, for it is almost an exact match for the lexical definition of sovereignty, if we look at the way in which it was elaborated upon, how it stood in relation to close concepts, and, ultimately, how it was used, it is clear that the political imagination on which it is based is different than that of a sovereign system.

Indeed, moving beyond broad affirmations of territorial supremacy, jurists did not conceive of *merum imperium* as a self-standing concept. Instead, its use to signify political authority depended on its inclusion under a broader concept: *iurisdictio* (jurisdiction). Although originally separate, juristic commentary subsumed *imperium* as one of the two main types of *iurisdictio* (Vallejo 1992, 71 ff.). Thus, a popular commentary by Paulus de Castro could claim that the "definition of *iurisdictio* comprises all types of said jurisdiction, of which one can say there are three: *imperium merum*, also *imperium mixtum*, and *simplex iurisdictio*" (De Castro 1585, ad D.1.21.1). *Merum imperium* was therefore a *species*, a type, within the broader *genus* of *iurisdictio*.

This subsumption is particularly crucial, as it problematizes the characterization of holders of *merum imperium* as a distinct type of actor. *Iurisdictio* was commonly defined in legal books and judicial practice alike as "a power [*potestas*] publicly introduced with the goal of saying the law and establishing equity" (Digest 2.1.1). As such, it described the activity and powers of all rulers, irrespective of their rank or territory: Durantis, for example, could talk about both the pope, kings, and municipal magistrates as having jurisdiction (1602, 133 ff.) Despite signifying supreme authority over territory, therefore, *merum imperium* was not conceived as an independent category that differentiated a distinct kind of actor—sovereigns—but rather operated within a broader unitary framework of political authority as *iurisdictio*.

Not only this, but a second aspect of the way in which it was used also problematizes its understanding as sovereignty. Indeed, when developing *merum imperium*, lawyers would proceed by creating long lists of issues that would fall under it: capital punishment, corporal punishments, imprisonment, or exiling, for example. As such, *merum imperium* did indeed involve a hierarchy, normally signifying higher-ranking rulers within the broad scheme of *iurisdictio*, but besides this, it was understood as a series of specific ruling, enforcing and legislating powers that a particular ruler could have in any particular combination. The result of this disaggregation into individual rights was that *merum imperium* did not connote the second dimension of sovereignty we have identified, that is, identity or equivalence between its holders.

A brief example of the use of these concepts in an actual political dispute in the late fourteenth century illustrates this conclusion. The dispute in question concerned the holder of a castle in the Kingdom of Sicily. The castle had been in the family of the holder for four generations, and the family held almost full ruling rights—with the exception of judging cases of murder. After a murder occurred, the castellan intended to punish it, and Queen Mary of Aragon, at the time ruler of Sicily, opposed it. The legal crux of the matter, briefly explained, was whether, given that the queen and previous kings had not used their right to punish murders in that territory for at least thirty years, the right should prescribe, that is, be

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[1] Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

understood to now belong to the castellan. The dispute has reached us through a *consilium* (an advisory opinion written for a client) of Baldus de Ubaldis, one of the most important lawyers at the time (Baldus 1575, cons. 439). In it, Baldus displayed a wide range of arguments both in favor and against prescription. However, the setup of the case in question and his use of *merum imperium* in the argumentation are particularly telling for the issue of sovereignty.

The argumentation reinforces the points made above, about the disaggregation of particular governing rights and the centrality of the idea of *iurisdictio*: although the dispute in question concerned only the right to judge and punish murder cases, Baldus immediately identified it as a situation concerning the prescription and transmission of *merum imperium* and used this as the core category from which to draw conclusions. For example, one of the arguments that he considered is that "if *merum . . . imperium*, which comprises capital causes, can prescribe, then the right of creating notaries, legitimating bastards, . . . and granting pardons could also prescribe, since they are equally *merum imperium*" (Baldus 1575, cons. 439). *Merum imperium* therefore encompassed a series of nonetheless separate rights. However, even if it is a category of its own, it cannot be separated from its broad *genus* of *iurisdictio*: "and it is thus proved that everything prescriptible can prescribe, and indeed all *iurisdictio* is prescriptible, and therefore *imperium*, which is a type of jurisdiction, can prescribe, since that which is allowed for the *genus*, it should be understood as allowed for all the species." (Baldus 1575, cons. 439). *Merum imperium* was not, therefore, an exceptional category but rather a collective category to identify a number of rights to which similar rules applied. As such, we have no reason to believe that those holders of *merum imperium* were considered to be different in kind than those who held other types of *iurisdictio*.

The resolution of the case exemplifies how this leads to an imagination that does not accord with that of sovereignty. Ultimately, Baldus sided with the castellan, arguing that the *merum imperium* right that once belonged to the queen had prescribed. This however, did not mean that the castellan was now above the queen—Baldus' language is clear that it is a case of prescription from a superior to an inferior. Nor did it mean that the possession of this particular *merum imperium* right by the castellan somehow made him independent or not part of the Kingdom of Sicily. Thus, in this *consilium*, we find a holder of *merum imperium*—contemporarily defined "supreme authority" over a territory—who is not considered different in kind from other rulers and is even considered hierarchically inferior to some.

This illustrates that despite the clear connotations of supremacy present in *merum imperium*, its use in the later Middle Ages did not correspond to anything that in modern IR language could be understood as sovereignty: first, as specific powers under the broad category of *merum imperium*, its use did not imply that all holders of *merum imperium* were equal or had the same powers. Thus, the assimilation of all supreme rulers to one another that is connoted by "sovereignty" in modern IR discourse is not present. Second, yet related, the disaggregation of the different prerogatives means that the use of *merum imperium* did not imply absolute supremeness or independence of a superior and thus did not create a sharp distinction between those at the top and those under them.

Concluding Remarks

In this brief survey of the notion of *merum imperium*, we can find a category whose lexical meaning clearly denotes supreme authority over a territory and yet whose use does not resemble the modern IR imaginary of sovereignty. This however only becomes apparent when we examine the use of the term in relation to connected concepts and think about the distinctions it creates, in this case the connotations of identity between sovereigns and difference between these and nonsovereigns. While this might seem a rather restrictive interpretive framework, to conclude I want to

suggest that it is relevant beyond the specifics of late-medieval political authority, as it exemplifies the challenges for IR concepts to travel and thus forces us to reflect on the scope conditions of the discipline.

Indeed, arguing that we should not speak of sovereignty in the later Middle Ages begs the question: if not sovereignty, then what? Or in other words, can this nonsovereign imagination be meaningfully and productively described with an IR vocabulary, or does this automatically situate us outside of the bounds of the discipline? "Heteronomy" has, of course, been the concept of choice for IR to capture a nonsovereign imagination (Ruggie 1998), and yet, it does not take us away from presentist problems in sovereignty, as it is ultimately defined in perfect opposition to it (Costa Lopez 2016). Recent work that aims to explore order in diversity, hierarchies, or social spaces (Keene 2014; Phillips and Sharman 2015; Zarakol 2017a) is making large inroads both in understanding how nonsovereign systems operate and are integrated and in finding alternative concepts that can capture this understanding. Adding to this work, the discussion of *merum imperium* and its relation to various connected concepts, such as *iurisdictio*, in this contribution suggests that the answer may not lay in the emergence of a new "master concept" that can rival sovereignty but rather in the development of a vocabulary that allows us to capture the coexistence of diverse concepts and principles and the contestation for political authority that ensues.

Ultimately, adopting a strict criterion for the historical use of IR concepts means neither that IR has nothing to say about nonsovereign historical periods nor that these periods are irrelevant to IR (cf. Latham in this forum). On the contrary, IR scholars are interested in a multitude of dynamics beyond the sovereign state system, both past and present. Thus, confronting situations that make us aware of the historicity and limitations of our own concepts is essential if we are to come up with new concepts that help us capture a wider range of human experiences and imaginations.

The Emergence of Sovereignty in the Wake of the Reformations

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Understanding the emergence of sovereignty is a central concern to international relations (IR), as it involves an inquiry into its conditions of possibility and helps settle the question of the scope conditions of international politics. For if sovereignty is the sine qua non of international politics, then the question of "when sovereignty?" is not only also a question about "when international relations?" but has implications for what international relations is.

The elusiveness of the emergence of sovereignty represents a challenge to IR, as it leaves us with many possible beginnings. And as any new beginning marks an end, settling the question of sovereignty begs the question of how the world was without it. Did sovereignty mark the end of an era that would make little sense to IR and its sovereignty prism? In the present contribution I will take issue with such clear delimitations and make the case for a broad understanding of change grounded in the practical challenges of international politics rather than canonical statements about them. My argument is rooted in a dissatisfaction with extant accounts seeking to redraw the temporal limits of international politics in the wake of the fall of the foundational myth of 1648 and the Peace of Westphalia.

Since the "fall of Westphalia," there have been a number of attempts at redating the origins of international relations (see Buzan and Lawson 2014 for an overview). Notably, there has been a push toward closing in the temporal space of international relations, by dating its origins in the early nineteenth century (e.g., Osiander 2001; Buzan and Lawson 2015). The argument for such a narrow temporal field rests on the fact that only from the nineteenth century and onward can we observe a (more or less) full-fledged international state system encompassing the globe and with units similar enough to our current-day states. Against this modernist narrowing, I will make the case instead for a broadening of the temporal scope of international relations.

From the reformations onward, building on the confessionalization paradigm championed by Wolfgang Reinhard and Hans Schilling (see de Carvalho 2014 for an overview), I argue that we can discern a shift in the language of politics, which represents a break from past practice (see de Carvalho 2016 for a detailed account). This shift is especially salient when speaking of the domain of sovereignty. For our current purposes, I take a sovereign entity to be a polity characterized by a territorially bounded form of political authority, and which, in the exercise of its autonomy, recognizes no superior. The reformations were crucial in breaking down authority ties between European polities and Rome, and this fragmentation of the order of the Respublica Christiana, in turn, marked a shift in the workings of European "inter-polity" relations. While not legitimized through explicit references to the term sovereignty, the restructuring of legitimate political authority that ensued, as I briefly illustrate below, happened in conformity with an idea of sovereignty. I therefore argue that IR can make sense of international relations from the early sixteenth century onward with reference to sovereignty and that, as such, that period ought to be an integral part of the temporal horizon of the discipline.

Doing so represents a few challenges that need overcoming, most notably the one dealt with in the essays of this forum: (how) can we use sovereignty as an analytical tool when historical actors themselves did not have a word for it (yet)? While there has been a tendency among conceptual historians to equate the emergence of a concept with its linguistic emergence, my current contribution is a warning against such a formalistic position. There is to my mind little doubt that the *concept* of sovereignty must have preceded the modern usage of the *term* sovereignty, as historical actors involved in the religious disputes around the reformations (and possibly even before) seem to have made use of the concept when thinking about the restructuring of political authority, *even though* they had no term for it (see the argument in Prudovsky 1997; this argument dovetails with Croxton 1999). Even though it may be historically anachronistic, it may nevertheless be necessary for analytical purposes to recognize that historical actors came to understand what we can inelegantly term "presovereign" "international" politics in terms of sovereignty *before* they were able to linguistically describe it as such. The *idea* of sovereignty, so to speak, informed their transformative actions. I illustrate this point below with a few historical examples.

The Henrician Reformation in England, 1529–34

There is ample evidence that historical actors before the publication of *Les six livres de la republique* in 1576 made sense of their actions with reference to the frame sovereignty imposes on supreme political authority. Take for instance the famous rejection of the See of Rome in favor of independence from formal "outside" authority under Henry VIII. In the fundamental document of the Reformation, the Act in Restraint of Appeals, sovereignty can be read between the lines:

> It is manifestly declared and expressed that this realm of England is an empire, and so hath been accepted in the world, governed by one supreme head and king . . . unto whom a body politic . . . be bounden and owe to bear next to God a natural and humble obedience . . . and whereas the king . . . made sundry ordinances, laws, statutes, and . . . to keep [this realm] from the annoyance as well of the see of Rome as from the authority of other foreign potentates attempting the diminution or violation thereof. (24 Henry VIII c. 12)

The act furthermore firmly established the king's jurisdiction as the final authority within the realm: "The king's highness, his nobles, and commons . . . enact, establish, and ordain that all causes . . . shall be from henceforth heard . . . and definitively adjudged and determined within the king's jurisdiction and authority and not elsewhere" (24 Henry VIII c. 12). While there is no invocation of "sovereignty" to legitimize the break from the supreme authority of Rome, the polity explicitly described in these acts is remarkably "sovereign." If early modern polities didn't talk sovereignty, they sure seemed to walk it.

Confining our search for innovations in sovereignty to canonical texts of political theory, we may miss the fact that many of the polities of the early modern era, in fact, by and large, described themselves and behaved like we would expect sovereign states to act—at least in international affairs—claiming supreme authority within and, by corollary, no-one above (but God). With England's break from Rome, Henry VIII not only became the head of his own "national" church but also made sure no one else—be they princes, kings, emperors, or the pope—had any right to jurisdiction within the English polity—be it in religious matters or otherwise. England promoted itself to the rank of empires—with no one else above—while it simultaneously demoted the pope to the rank of bishop, ranking below the king: the "bishop of Rome."

As the Henrician reformation indicates, while Europe may not have witnessed a full-fledged sovereign system in the sixteenth century, we can already discern more than the contours of an understanding of political authority largely aligned with the principle. This is true both in theory and in practice. While it leaves open where this idea came from, it seems nevertheless likely that an idea of it was at work.

1555, Augsburg, "and All That"

A similar example to the English one can be found in the politics of the Holy Roman Empire in the period leading up to the Peace of Augsburg in 1555. Augsburg has been something of a darling to IR scholars in search for Westphalian alternatives, as it is said to have granted rulers of the Holy Roman Empire the right to decide on religious matters within their polity through the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*—a principle often read as an early form of sovereignty, since it implied the negation of the "supranational" authority of the See of Rome.

However, just like Westphalia, Augsburg was no Europe-wide charter of state rights, and there was no mention of sovereignty there either. And just as the treaties of Westphalia do not make any mention of sovereignty, so too is there no explicit mention of "*cuius regio, eius religio*" in the Peace of Augsburg. In fact, it is fairly well established that the formula emerged only in the late 1570s in the works of Joachim and Mathias Stephani, both Protestant lawyers. Central to our current argument about the genesis of state sovereignty as the absolute authority within the polity and no one above except god is the principle of *ius reformandi* or "right of reformation," which was what made it possible for protestant princes to determine the religion within their lands.

As has been noted in passing by a few IR scholars (e.g., Nexon 2009, 160) the understanding of *cuius regio, eius religio* antedated 1555 and can already be encountered at the Diet of Speyer in 1526. But the Diet of Speyer did not consecrate the

principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* either, providing instead only a temporary relieve from the emperor's drive to keep the religious homogeneity of the empire, allowing Lutheran rulers to act as *Notbischofe*—bishops of exception. Nor was it possibly the origin, as some Lutheran rulers had already broken their ties with Rome *before* the Diet.

The first secular territorial reform within the Holy Roman Empire happened in Prussia in the lands of the Teutonic Order, where the grand master of the order, Albert [Albrecht] of Brandenburg, in 1525 transformed the lands of the order into a secular duchy, effectively breaking with the See of Rome (see Dixon 2002, 121). While this was not a case of full-fledged territorial sovereign reform, it indicates that a new conception of the rights of polities was circulating amongst reformist preachers and princes and guiding their actions.

The point here is not to expound at length on the possible origins but to show that, just as with the Stephanis' post-facto coining of the maxim *cuius regio, eius religio*, a bundle of practices which came to make up what was later theorized as sovereignty emerged *before* Bodin wrote about them. For even though there was no agreed upon formula, rulers throughout Europe sought to solve political tensions or challenges that had arisen with the reformations or—as in the case of England—used the reformation to solve other (pressing) challenges. Throughout Europe, these were resolved by giving rulers broad—generally supreme—jurisdiction within their realms in both religious and temporal matters. Thus, it seems, Bodin did not come up with a new way of organizing or compartmentalizing political authority. As Bodin himself stated in 1576, it was necessary to define sovereignty "because no jurist or political philosopher has defined it, even though it is the chief point, and the one that needs most to be explained, in a treatise on commonwealth." (Bodin 1576 [1992], 1) As Bodin himself admits, the concept had been around for some time, and what was needed was a definition or a term.

Conclusion: Where Does This Leave Us, and Does It All Matter?

I have sought to address two questions here: When is sovereignty? And what do we make of a state of affairs that resembles a world in which we can discern the idea of sovereignty, even though that terminology is not in use yet? As alluded to above, one answer would be to discard it as "pre-international" relations and analyze it on its own merits alone. We would then, as IR scholars, focus on the period after the Napoleonic wars and use our modern international lenses to make sense of that only. The early modern period would then be nicely tucked away as a backdrop to the modern period or, at best, as the incubation period of the sovereign-state system. But while the attraction of such a tidy, compartmentalized world is not lost on me, I believe that bracketing out the problem of the emergence of sovereignty leaves an unresolved tension behind by overlooking similarities and parallels and closes off the early modern in an overly dramatic act of modern periodization.

For in practical matters, the post-reformations, "pre-Bodinian" polities that made up Europe during the early sixteenth century acted in ways largely recognizable to us today. On the whole, polities made alliances, sent and established embassies, collected taxes, demanded the undivided obedience of their subjects, and increasingly denied the existence of any other legitimate authority than God above them (see de Carvalho 2014). But, more importantly, they spoke of the limits of legitimate political authority in "sovereign" terms. I believe this to be crucial. If we are to venture with our conceptual arsenal into times when our modern terminology cannot be found, we must ensure that, at the very least, historical actors made reference to concepts similar to ours. As I have briefly illustrated above, the restructuring of political authority, which was a condition for autonomous entities to be constituted in sovereign terms, was a consequence of the religious fragmentation of Europe from the 1520s onward. This has two implications for the question of "when sovereignty."

While we can, with caution, make sense of Europe in sovereign terms after the re-formations, before the reformations, we cannot.

The transformation that Europe went through during the reformations in terms of the limits of political authority happened without references to a modern understanding of sovereignty, which came about only later. The reconceptualizations offered by theorists and lawyers such as Bodin, the Stephanis, and others should not be seen as innovations paving the way for a sovereign world but, instead, as attempts to make sense of political changes that had already taken place or of a transformation that they were experiencing. In claiming for themselves the supreme right over churches within their lands, rulers dramatically changed what political authority entailed, a change that begged to be addressed in political theory and law. Just like these theorists, we would do well to recognize that the decades in Europe from the reformations are an integral part of a system made possible by the concept of sovereignty—if not (yet) the term.

A Non-Eurocentric Approach to Sovereignty

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The idea that the concept of sovereignty emerged (first and exclusively) in Europe is so ingrained that most scholarship dealing with this issue does not even specify that its arguments are derived from European materials *only*. This is not to say that the sovereignty literature makes any explicit claims about the emergence of sovereignty outside of Europe (or even lack thereof); it is disinterestedly silent about other regions. This silence is then inevitably[2] filled in the reader's imagination with the usual assumption of the non-West temporally lagging behind the West on this issue as well. To their immense credit, organizers of this forum have not rested on such a problematic trope and have tasked me with discussing "sovereignty outside of the West." I will therefore focus on the broad issue of how thinking *comparatively* and *beyond the West* can radically change our thinking about modern sovereignty.

First, depending on how one defines sovereignty, one could make a plausible claim that aspects of it were much more developed outside of (Western) Europe earlier, including in regions with which "Europeans"[3] had contact. Confronting such a claim requires us to also entertain the hypothesis that "Europeans" borrowed some of their ideas about sovereignty from developments elsewhere. It is *only* a possibility that certain ideas about certain aspects of sovereignty travelled East to West, a possibility that can be proven or plausibly ruled out, but until now, the historical record has not really been interrogated with this particular hypothesis in mind. Second, even if there were no exchange of ideas from "East" to "West," the realization that certain aspects of modern sovereignty also arose in the "East" around the same time should give us pause. Even if such developments in the East and the West happened completely independently of each other, the synchronicity might point to larger systemic causes our current theories are not well-equipped to deal with. And more importantly, we would need ask why the earlier developments in the East did not culminate in the nation-state model as the slightly later developments in the West, which would then require us to revisit our theories of state and system evolution.

In the remaining, I illustrate these possibilities briefly via specific examples before turning back to the implications of this comparative rethinking for modern IR.

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[2] Given the social hierarchies that animate our understanding of the modern international order (see e.g., Zarakol 2011).

[3] I am using this term and others such as "international system" anachronistically for clarity of communication.

Supreme Authority: A Borrowed Idea?

As Bartelson notes, "making sense of sovereignty . . . entails making sense of its component terms—supreme authority and territory—and how these terms were forged together into a concept" (this forum). He then suggests, quite reasonably, that notions of supreme authority emerged (*in Europe*) sometime in the Middle Ages, followed in the seventeenth century by the evolution of the legal-political doctrine that this supreme authority should be exclusive and, only in the nineteenth century, that this exclusive supreme authority was properly married to territory. I agree with Bartelson's dating; but even those who do not would likely concede the chronological ordering he posits, that is, that the notion of supreme authority predates territorialization. In this section, therefore, I want to leave the issue of territorialization aside for moment and briefly consider whether the development of the notion of an (exclusive) supreme authority was unique to Europe.

The answer is a resounding no. In fact, from a comparative world-historical perspective, it could be argued that Europe was the clear laggard in the "invention" of this notion. Indeed, the literature is not just Eurocentric in this regard but dissonantly so: while non-European polities are remembered (often through the eyes of their contemporary European observers) as examples of "tyranny" (or later "Oriental despotism"),[4] they are almost never credited for having developed their own version of supreme authority or "absolutism" (considered an indispensable fundamental step to modern sovereignty in the European context).[5] This may be partly attributable to the fact that there is little to no awareness that non-European polities, like their European counterparts, had *also* been marked by a competition between what Hobbes called "*Temporall* and *Spirituall* government" prior to the emergence of notions of "supreme authority."[6] Non-European polities may not get credit for what is considered an innovation in the European context because, in their case, this has been rendered a "natural" part of their history.

Needless to say, it is a mistake to assume that non-European polities were static across time in this, or any other, regard. To take just one example, prior to the period contemporaneous with European late Middle Ages, Muslim societies were characterized by an utter divorce (from eighth and ninth century onward) between political authority, which had the power of sword but not the ability to make any law, and religious authority of the *ulama* who interpreted (and therefore made) law. From a law-making perspective, then, Muslim rulers, of say, the twelfth century, had even less authority than their Christian counterparts. At the same time, the clear of division of labor made it easier for Muslim rulers and the *ulama* to coexist, and these relations were not marked by the same competition that existed between the European rulers and papal authority (See e.g., Crone and Hinds 2003; Zarakol 2017b).

Nevertheless, it was still a radical "innovation" for a Muslim ruler of a later period—whether he be Ottoman, Safavid, or Mughal—to claim supreme authority over the *ulama* and especially the power to make (temporal-secular) law that could supersede *sharia* (spiritual-religious law). We do not see any such claims by Muslim rulers until at least the fourteenth and (more clearly) fifteenth centuries. Yet, in this period, rulers all over Eurasia, including Muslim rulers, started usurping law-making powers from (usually religious) competitors, in rather radical moves toward centralization of authority. Interestingly, a growing body of scholarship links the development of this phenomenon to Mongolian invasions from the East, and the notions of *yasa* and the supreme lawgiver (as in Chinggis Khan) that the Mongolians spread on their path, which radically transformed Muslim Empires (see e.g.,

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[4] See, for example, Çırakman 2001; also Hobson and Sharman 2005.

[5] The argument is usually associated with Anderson 1974, but the literature building on Anderson, especially in IR, is not particularly nuanced. See Hobson and Sharman 2005 for an overview.

[6] This is because, from the eighteenth century onward, caricatures of non-European polities (as exemplified by Nicolas Boulanger's verdict that in Asia monarchs are treated as visible gods) have been read back into history.

Burak 2013). It's also worth recalling here that a similar argument had been made about Russia and the influence of the Golden Horde on the Russian understanding of sovereignty (see e.g., Halperin 1983).

Turning back to Western Europe, we know that most scholars of sovereignty see the sixteenth or even seventeenth century as a pivot point for when political authority got the upper hand vis-à-vis religious authority. This is about a century behind Muslim empires (and Russia), who themselves were considerably influenced by the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. Given that the chronological order of the innovation of "supreme authority" also follows the geographical spread from East to West within a time frame that is appropriate for the historical period, we must then at least ask, however gently, whether exclusive "supreme authority" was in fact a *norm* of that particular "international system," spreading from East to West.[7]

It is impossible for me to answer such a big question here, but in lieu of an answer, let me make a provocative observation about the existing sovereignty literature. Within the sovereignty literature, as we all know, certain authors—Bodin, Hobbes, Filmer, etc.—are credited for developing the arguments for supreme political authority. However, even those accounts that are sensitive to historical context, for example, of Skinner's, cannot but avoid contextualizing these authors in mostly "national" or regional bounds anachronistically projected onto a time with geographical imaginings rather different from our own. Moreover, very few works ask where these authors got their inspiration for such innovations in "sovereignty," beyond Roman law. Yet even a cursory glance shows that these authors were not unaware of the polities to the East and even referred to them as demonstrative examples.[8] Awareness by itself does not indicate copying but, at the very least, suggests an influence usually overlooked, the magnitude of which could range from inconsequential to substantive. Who knows? Unfortunately, this question of an Eastern influence on sovereignty will have to remain a provocation until the primary literature can be studied with fresher eyes.

Precursors to Territoriality: A Parallel Development?

It is not only our understanding of European political development that has suffered from methodological internalism. Similar blinders had also distorted our understanding of non-European polities, until quite recently. Thankfully, revisionist histories have been rapidly expanding our understanding of these, from the Ottomans to the Mughals to Russia and China. In this section, I briefly review some of these arguments to show that, even if we dismiss the provocation of the previous section, there is also an equally plausible argument for the parallel development of sovereignty outside of Europe in the "Early Modern" period.

What research shows is that in addition to the aforementioned experiments with notions of "supreme political authority," many of these non-European polities were also moving in territorial directions. To give just a few examples from the Ottoman trajectory: during the reign of Mehmed II (1446–48, 1451–81), there was the institution of "the *akçe* zone between the Danube and the Euphrates, an area in which many different currencies had been in place" (Tezcan 2010, 89). While the development of a common currency *zone* is not by itself enough for a finding of *territorialization*, it is undeniably a step in this direction. More significantly, in the sixteenth century, the Ottoman polity simultaneously pursued confessionalization (with

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[7] To their credit, Anievas and Nişancıoğlu (2015) spend considerable time on ways the Mongols influenced Europe, but they do not consider that the influence may have extended to the ideational realm.

[8] For example, Bodin in *République* (1992 [1576]), II, 5): "If the prince is an absolute sovereign, as are the true kings of France, Spain, England, Scotland, *Ethiopia, Turkey, Persia* and *Muscovy*, whose authority is unquestionably their own, and not shared with any of their subjects, then it is in no circumstances permissible either by any of their subjects in particular, or in general, to attempt anything against the life and honor of their king, either by process of law or force of arms, even though he has committed all the evil, impious and cruel deeds imaginable" (Italics added).

regard to Muslim subjects) and the recognition of the "territorial aspect" of such arrangements via "international" treaties: "By 1555, at the same time that Charles recognized the territorial integrity of the Protestant princes, Süleyman came to recognize the sovereignty of the Safavid Shah within the latter's territories by signing the Treaty of Amasya. With this treaty the new religious divisions within Islamdom became increasingly territorialized, while Ottoman and Safavid rulers devoted themselves to the multipronged projects of state and confession building backed up by various measures of social disciplining" (Krstic 2011, 97). Just as the Treaty of Augsburg had to be reaffirmed in Westphalia, the Treaty of Amasya would have to be reaffirmed, almost a century later, in the Treaty of *Kasr-ı-Şirin* (1639), which established borders within the Ottoman and Safavid realms, borders which hold to this day between Turkey and Iran.

Contra the position of the previous section, I am not contending here—even as a provocation—that the Ottomans (or other non-Western polities) may have developed territoriality *before* Europe. I am in fact firmly convinced by arguments (as summarized by Bartelson in this forum) that the emergence of modern territoriality must be located in the nineteenth century and not earlier (see also Benton 2010; Buzan and Lawson 2015). What I am suggesting instead is that the *precursors* to modern notions of territoriality, which some authors (see e.g., Elden 2013) have located in medieval and early modern European practices, had their parallels elsewhere. It is only once this is realized that we can ask the truly interesting question as to why such precursors matured into a modern notion of territoriality in (Western) Europe and not in other regions. Once again, this is too grand a question to answer within a short essay, but for a start, I am intrigued by Natasha Wheatley's suggestion (forthcoming) that maritime empires required thinking spatially, whereas continental empires thought about sovereignty claims in more temporal terms. In any case, for our purposes here, the real exciting possibility is that "early modern" sovereignty (both in terms of development of supreme political authority and the gradual move toward territoriality) was most likely a Eurasian phenomenon. Even conceding as much would require a radical rethinking of the IR historical narrative.

"Modern Sovereignty": Straightjacket or Scapegoat?

I have argued above, provocatively, that the development of the two main components of modern sovereignty may not have been uniquely European, as is usually assumed. This may seem like a simple statement, but it has fundamental implications and not just for our understanding of the *European* trajectory. Thinking about sovereignty comparatively also inevitably raises questions about the narrative about the forced and wholesale exportation of the "Westphalian sovereignty" to the rest of the world. If aspects of "Westphalian sovereignty" had originated from or had developed independently also elsewhere in the world, "Westphalian sovereignty" cannot *just* be a violent alien imposition (even if it was often experienced as that), and we must therefore also question what about nineteenth century dynamics caused it to be seen as such.

Clearly much more comparative work on sovereignty is needed.

Dating Sovereignty

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When did a recognizably modern concept of sovereignty first emerge? This question has long haunted historians of political thought and students of international relations. To the former, answers to this question have wide-ranging implications for

the dating of political modernity. To the latter, answers to this question will determine the scope conditions of their theories and, thus, also profoundly affect their claims to validity. Without sovereign states being present in some guise, there can be no modern international system and, hence, no meaningful study of international relations, at least not in the limited sense in which this study has conventionally been understood.

Yet, obviously, answers to the above question are contingent on the meaning we attribute to sovereignty, as well as what we imply by "recognizably modern." Since it is beyond the scope of this paper to bring these issues to any resolution, I will just say a few words about what has been at stake in attempts at dating sovereignty. But before this can be done, however, one prior issue must be sorted. In order to date the emergence of sovereignty with any precision, I think it is important to distinguish between the usage of the term "sovereignty"—and its many cognates—and the *concept* of sovereignty. Although such a distinction is itself fraught with philosophical difficulties, it helps us avoid some obvious mistakes, such as inferring the existence of the concept of sovereignty from the presence of the term or denying the existence of sovereignty on the basis of its absence (Margolis and Laurence 2007). The term "sovereignty" has a long pedigree in the English language—and an even longer one in French from whence it came with the Normans—but often without referring to any political arrangements. So if the use of the term "sovereignty" is not necessarily indicative of the presence of the corresponding concept, the reverse also holds true: sovereignty has been called many different things in different contexts, especially when we venture outside the West.

The difficulties we experience when dating sovereignty are not only compounded by its semantic ambiguities but also by the different ways in which conceptual meaning as such can be understood. Before the linguistic turn started to make its presence felt within the political and legal theory, it was common to project the established meaning of this concept backward in search of rough equivalents. True to the spirit of the linguistic turn, should we want to pinpoint the emergence of its modern meaning, however, I think a good place to start would be to unpack lexical definitions of the term "sovereignty," and then ask when and how its lexical meaning came into being and when and how it entered widespread usage.

Sovereignty, we are informed by *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, at a minimum, denotes "supreme authority within a territory." Dating sovereignty thus entails accounting for how its component terms—supreme authority and territory—took on meanings that allowed them to be forged together into a package deal to which additional requirements, such as independence and legal recognition, could then be added. In the rest of this note, I shall briefly discuss three hypotheses about the origin of this semantic amalgamation and then end with some remarks concerning the difficulties involved in assessing their veracity. In doing this, I will regard the relationship between the concept of sovereignty and its empirical referents as historically contingent: whether sovereign states actually antedated or ensued as a consequence of this usage will have to remain an open question for the moment. All of this is done with one important disclaimer. Attempts at dating sovereignty imply the possibility of dividing historical time into neat periods. Yet as Davis (2008, 18) has remarked, this is fraught with danger, since "periodization becomes its own logic, a self-identity that, through rupture rather than presence, supplies the necessary platform for a claim to sovereignty." Thus all attempts to locate the emergence of sovereignty in a distinct point in time will always imply a claim to sovereignty that legitimizes some ideological positions while delegitimizing others.

Contested Origins

Medieval

There is no shortage of accounts that either explicitly argue, or through their choice of terminology imply, that sovereignty was present already during the late Middle Ages. An influential proponent of this view was Walter Ullmann, who started his career by arguing that sovereignty—in the sense of supreme authority over a territory—had emerged already during the thirteenth century (Ullmann 1949) and then later boldly located the rise of the nation-state in the same period, when "the nation as a homogenous group had most decidedly emerged as a unit and as an influential factor . . . a perfectly natural union that was soon to acquire legal, corporate personality: Its autonomy that came to be expressed in territorial sovereignty" (Ullmann 1977, 76). Some of his disciples perpetuated this view. For example, even if his student Wilks mainly used sovereignty as a shorthand to convey the complexities of medieval thought, his book contains inferences to the effect that sovereign entities did exist during the Middle Ages. Thus we learn that "the idea of the 'state' as an immaterial essence expressing itself through the political community is common under one form or another to all ages. Since the State, the body politic, is in this case a Church, the idea is presented in an ecclesiastical guise" (Wilks 1963, 42). Similarly, Ullmanns' brightest student, Tierney, argued that the medieval doctrine according to which the prince is not bound by laws could be taken to signify the existence of sovereignty and thus also of the state during this period (Tierney 1963). Although not that common in academic international relations, some authors do actually argue that not only was sovereignty present during this period but so was an embryonic international system. As Fischer (1992, 440–43) has claimed, "developments associated with sovereignty and the modern state already took a first and somewhat precocious form toward the end of the feudal period . . . political authority was fragmented among feudal actors down to the level of the individual, behaving in ways similar to the power practices of modern states." And as Latham (2012, 29) has argued, while perhaps not exactly modern, "from the thirteenth century on, sovereignty—understood as the supreme authority to judge, command and legislate within a geographically defined political community—was both a powerful normative concept and a tangible political and institutional reality in Latin Christendom." What complicates this view is the fact that it presupposes that the concepts of authority and territory had already acquired meanings that allowed for the kind of congruence thought characteristic of the modern notion of sovereignty. Yet recent studies of the history of territoriality have called the existence of such a connection into question. As Elden (2013, 233–41) and Branch (2014, 23–30) both have argued, although many medieval writers implied that political and legal authority had a territorial dimension, territory signified a series of discrete *places* rather than the unified and homogenous *space* that we have come to associate with the modern state.

Early Modern

According to a second and more familiar hypothesis, widespread in the study of political thought and academic international relations, sovereignty evolved only in the seventeenth century. This was either thanks to the creative interventions of authors like Bodin and Hobbes (Skinner 2009) or, if we are to believe textbooks in international relations, thanks to the Peace of Westphalia. Whereas the latter view has been challenged by more nuanced (Croxton 1999; Osiander 2001; Philpott 2001) views, or has led to radically revised accounts of the genesis of sovereignty and territoriality (Ruggie 1993; Teschke 2003), the former view remains very much alive among students of political thought. Yet at closer inspection, it is hard to find any

strong evidence that those who famously defined sovereignty in terms of indivisible authority also took it to imply territorial jurisdiction or territorial control. As Elden has argued, while Bodin surely maintained that sovereignty was confined to a commonwealth composed of a multitude of households, he did not presuppose that this multitude had to be territorially bounded in order to be subject to sovereign authority (Elden 2013, 240). By the same token, since Hobbes recognized no formal limits to sovereign authority, the idea of its territorial extension is, at best, implicit in his account and carries little consequence for its interpretation (Elden 2013, 301). As Brett (2011, 212) has eloquently observed, "the drive to define the city as a unity possessed of sovereign power, and to show how that entity and that power can have been created by individual human agents, militates against the definition of the state in terms of place or even of territory."

Modern

This leaves us with the final hypothesis, familiar to historians but perhaps less so to students of international relations, namely that modern sovereignty and the international system evolved in tandem during the eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, political authority had taken on clear territorial connotations in European legal theory and practice, territory being understood in terms of a bounded and homogeneous space. To this Vattel added that the important requirement that states should enjoy independence from external interference in order to be considered fully sovereign (Beaulac 2003). Fueled by this view of sovereignty, declarations of independence in the Americas and elsewhere issued in an international system of bounded and mutually recognizing states that gradually superseded the fading aspirations of empire (Bayly 2004; Armitage 2007; Osterhammel 2014). With the rare exception of Hinsley (1973, 69–83), international relations scholars have only recently begun to appreciate the extent to which modern sovereignty and the modern international system resulted from the profound transformations that took place during the nineteenth century, as a result of the confluence of pleas for popular sovereignty, demands for self-determination, and the rise of nationalism in Europe and elsewhere, until the "territory of the state became identified with the history and location of the people rather than being determined by hereditary rights or dynastic nuptials" (Buzan and Lawson 2015, 116). From this point of view, a recognizably modern concept of sovereignty emerges when an abstract and impersonal state coincides with a sufficiently homogenous people or nation within the same demarcated and properly unified territory, something that happens toward the end of the nineteenth century.

Dating Unsettled?

Is there any correct dating of the emergence of sovereignty? The easiest way to settle this issue would be to say that it all depends on what we mean by the term "sovereignty." If we take sovereignty to entail little more than rather vague claims to supreme authority over peoples and places, it seems reasonable to suggest that sovereignty emerged during the Middle Ages, if not much earlier. If we take sovereignty to denote exclusive authority over a multitude of people or households, it is reasonable to locate its point of origin in seventeenth century legal and political theory. But should we take sovereignty to mean supreme authority within a bounded portion of space, we have to wait for its heydays during the early nineteenth century. Should we take sovereignty to further require that such claims to territorial control should be recognized by other similar entities, we will have to wait for a modern international system to emerge during the latter half of that century. Finally, should we require that this kind of entity coincide with a nation, we have to wait until its near end.

Much confusion about the dating of sovereignty has resulted from the inherent ambiguities of this concept, as well as from the temptation to expand the domain of international relations backward in time and outward in space. My own preference is clear. Even if it would amount to narrowing down the temporal scope of international relations to the long nineteenth century, I think that we should gracefully accept that we owe the modern concept of sovereignty to what transpired during that century, together with the bad habit of projecting its origin further backward in time. Should we wish to explore the intercourse between other kinds of human association in other times and other places, I think we should do this by means of concepts better suited to capture the historical specificities of those times and places—that is, by concepts more closely aligned with the self-understandings of actors—lest we should risk reproducing the nineteenth-century obsession with historical continuity that has made dating sovereignty complicit in the very same practices of periodization that long made this concept seem foundational to international political thought and inescapable in practice.

Conclusion: What, When, and Where, Then, is the Concept of Sovereignty?

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In the introduction to this forum, the authors have referred to Prudovsky's exchange with Quentin Skinner and whether concepts can be ascribed to historical actors without them having had the "linguistic means to express it." For Shakespeare's Juliet, the answer to Prudovsky's question would be yes: the attributes that a concept refers to are there irrespective of whether the term for it is in place (a rose would smell as sweet, regardless of its name). The question nods, more fundamentally, at an underlying methodological divide between sociological idealism and anti-idealism that also underpins this forum's contributions. What does this divide mean for our understanding of early sovereignty and, potentially as a consequence, the origins of international relations?

From the methodological perspective of a sociological anti-idealist (or, expressed positively, a materialist), the affirmative answer to Prudovsky's question is obvious, as there is an objective social reality existing "out there" independent of our concepts of it. Social practices can, in this line, exist prior to us encapsulating them semantically in a distinct term such as "sovereignty" (cf., Bugge 2007, Paolucci 2011). For the sociological idealists who do not acknowledge the possibility of a methodological divide between knowledge (including language, concepts) and a knowledge-independent reality (the social world), the answer to Prudovsky's question is negative. John Searle, a sociological idealist, makes this point in relation to social facts more generally: "Something can be a mountain even if no one believes it is a mountain; something can be a molecule even if no one thinks anything at all about it. But for social facts, the attitude that we take toward the phenomenon is partly constitutive of the phenomenon" (Searle 1995, 33; see also Bugge 2007, 11). A materialist will not disagree full-heartedly with the latter point about constitution but make the point that social practices or facts can indeed exist irrespective of what or whether we name them—that is, the constitutive element is an aspect but not a necessity for the phenomenon to exist in a specific form.

From the approach of Reinhart Koselleck and the German school of conceptual history, the answer is somewhere in between—neither the "radical priority of reality" that in IR is associated most prominently with Waltzian neorealists nor "language

all the way down," which in IR is associated with poststructuralists. "Language is the battlefield" was Koselleck's middle ground (Koselleck, Sebastián, and Fuentes 2006, 108), meaning that history (as social practices) plays out in part in relation to the social struggles happening within the confines of our semantically defined concepts. For Koselleck and those following in his line, the attention has typically been to the *longue durée*, or "the slower, long and medium-term history of the *chronos* time" (Palonen 1999, 55). In contrast, the Cambridge school of Quentin Skinner has been associated with the *kairos*, the shorter-term "ruptures" or moments, typically found in canonical texts or authors, such as Bodin and Hobbes in relation to sovereignty (Jordheim 2007).

There is obviously a distinct difference between a term that refers to an innate object—such as a rose—and a concept that refers to a political organizing mechanism. A social concept, in the most abstract sense, refers to a cluster of practices, which in their specific constellation constitute an identifiable phenomenon. One question that arises is whether these practices can have occurred in the same specific *constellation* before they received their collective conceptualization: that is, whether the phenomenological appearance of a collective set of practices can predate our conceptualization of them into a unified phenomenon. The contributions in this forum from Costa Lopez and Bartelson both make the point that resemblances to the concept of sovereignty might be found earlier in relation to certain practices but that the specific aligned *cluster* of practices—supreme authority, spatially delimited territoriality—underlying our modern usage of sovereignty were not present until much later. Yet, this does not mean that the modern concept of sovereignty has not evolved from earlier related manifestations (the *chronos*) but that there is a point to not using an identical *term* when referring to different constellations of practices that only in part resemble the modern usage. For Latham and de Carvalho, there is, in contrast, a distinct value to retaining the concept (and term) of sovereignty also when referring "backward" to the Middle Ages (Latham) and the early modern period (de Carvalho).

A social concept that serves as a political regulative ideal, or a social organizing mechanism, can remain static in its name and/or ordering position in relation to a polity, but the cluster of practices that it refers to may change or, indeed, exist in parallel yet different forms, for example across regions (see Zarakol's contribution in this forum). There is thus both a temporal and semantic challenge in any approach to concepts but also a spatial one, which points to the inherent tension in concepts as "aggregate of experiences," potentially static in form but yet able to "absorb widely different historical experiences" (Jordheim and Neumann 2011, 157). For the grand padre of conceptual history, Reinhart Koselleck, this was what conceptual history was largely about: "we must . . . define this complex relationship between old structures and new meanings, but we cannot state that all is new" (Koselleck, Sebastián, and Fuentes 2006, 103). For Quentin Skinner, the heavy emphasis on semantics, instead of context, intent, and usage, is where Koselleck got it wrong: instead of a history of concepts, Skinner saw Koselleck as doing "the history of words"; "the properly historical task seems to me that of studying not the histories of words but the history of the uses to which these words were put at different times in argument . . . Many writers will be excluded simply because they did not use a particular vocabulary, and not because of any lack of interest in the concept concerned" (Skinner in Sebastián and Skinner 2007, 115, 114). The contributions in this forum are fortunately not reducible to only one position, being much closer to what Helge Jordheim (2007) calls for in combining an attention both to the long-term conceptual changes, the *chronos*, and the more *kairos*-centered attention on moments, ruptures, and rhetorics. By opening up this debate about the relationship between semantics and practices in relation to sovereignty back in time, our understanding of both the modern concept and the Middle Ages becomes much richer than what it has been in IR. The downside is that the story about sovereignty

in IR also becomes much messier than what benchmark dates, such as 1648, allude to.

Ambiguity is not an effect but an intrinsic *attribute* of any social concept. Although the forum makes no pretence of coming up with a unified answer to the question of *when* or *where* sovereignty developed as a concept in terms of the practices it denotes, the authors all contribute by spelling out temporal, spatial, and semantic ambiguities—no small feat, as sovereignty in IR has tended to be treated as a much more static phenomenon in all three senses. Although the contributors might be on different methodological sides and, indeed, approach conceptual history quite differently, they do at least agree that the answer to "when and where" sovereignty is infinitely more complex (and messy) than the IR textbook answer of linking sovereignty uniformly to Westphalia. Yet, they give no collective conclusive answer to whether the Middle Ages should be the new "when," when seeking to pinpoint either modern sovereignty or the social practices and regulative ideals.

For Latham, the practices that constitute sovereignty were in place during the Middle Ages, giving the theorists "the conceptual raw material" to coin the notion of sovereignty. Based on the coinage of the term, it became an explicit political organizing mechanism or a cultural script—what Jackson (2004) would call a regulative ideal—that states, in turn, acted upon to seek recognition and power as polities. From practices to coinage to the reproduction of the same concept that had been coined by theorists: Latham's perhaps main contribution in this forum is to demonstrate how a genealogical approach to sovereignty reveals that the terms coined by scholars such as Bodin and Vattel all stem from late medieval political theology but that the semantics also had their own reproductive effect. For Latham, the cluster of practices that come to make up a concept may indeed predate their semantic coinage.

Costa Lopez, on the other hand, argues that when we look at how the concept of *merum imperium* in the later Middle Ages, denoting supreme authority over a territory, relates to connected concepts, the meaning is different from "the modern IR imaginary of sovereignty." The lexical meaning of *merum imperium* resembles our modern notion of sovereignty, but the cluster of practices that *merum imperium* referred to, and the way in which it was used in relation to other concepts such as *iurisdictio*, was distinctly different and expressive of a different political imagination. Her main point in this forum is thus that our conceptual dependence on "sovereignty" might lead us astray when seeking to understand the functions of authority in the Middle Ages, and that despite similarities, it might still be a form of straightjacket. The lexical meaning of the term resembles our modern usage of sovereignty, but the practices do not.

With historical examples from the Henrician Reformation in England and the Holy Roman Empire, de Carvalho makes the argument that the concept of sovereignty existed even before there was a term for it—meaning that the practices that the coinage of the term referred to existed prior to the semantic definition of it in canonical texts such as Bodin's *Les six lives de la republique* from 1576. Looking at the practices of political actors, de Carvalho makes the case that they seem to have had an *idea* of a specific constellation of political authority, which we today (just as Bodin did in 1576) can transcribe into the concept of sovereignty. De Carvalho then makes the wider point of stretching the discipline's temporal horizon back to the early sixteenth century, predating the modern use of sovereignty. De Carvalho thus concludes that the idea of sovereignty, which transpires from the (practical) political discourse of the early sixteenth century—rather than the explicit statement of what sovereignty entails—is what drove the transformation of Europe into a mosaic of sovereign states. Thus, he argues, the modern conceptualization of sovereignty was tied to practical political challenges, especially the reformations, and preceded the "semantic amalgamation" that Bartelson refers to.

In contrast to de Carvalho's explicit European outlook, Zarakol challenges us to think about the non-European origins of sovereignty. Although herself seeing the modern notion of territoriality as developed in the nineteenth century, in line with Bartelson (this forum) and Buzan and Lawson's (2015) work on "the global transformation," Zarakol points to the parallel development of notions of supreme political authority and territoriality in non-European polities of the early modern period. Although the practices she refers to are not identical to the modern concept of sovereignty, the influences from non-European sources were distinct—yet, they are more often than not overlooked. The evolution of sovereignty as a concept thus also contains a marked spatial ambiguity in it, which needs to be further explored.

In the forum's final contribution, Bartelson looks at what lead to what he terms the "semantic amalgamation" of the practices that we have come to associate with modern notions of sovereignty. His critique of those, such as Latham, who seek to apply the term to before its modern conceptualization, is that supreme and indivisible authority did not seem to be connected by definition to territorial jurisdiction or control. Bartelson thus sees the concept of sovereignty as evolving in parallel with the international system from the eighteenth century and onward. Bartelson's main point is that the dating of "sovereignty" depends on what practices we associate with the concept. As such, he is closer to Costa Lopez' argument that the cluster of practices that were referred to during the Middle Ages were distinctly different from that of the modern usage, where sovereignty from the nineteenth century and onward has come to mean "supreme authority within a bounded portion of space" (Bartelson, this forum).

Bartelson concludes this forum by pointing to the inherent ambiguity of the concept of sovereignty. Though disagreeing on whether we can stretch the modern concept of sovereignty backward in time, the authors are at least in agreement on this point. As stated earlier, the ambiguity of a concept is in essence an ontological point: no concept can fully contain within it the temporal, spatial, and semantic fluidity of social practices. But, what this forum does is to bring us much closer to an understanding of what all that ambiguity actually entails in terms of, at times, highly divergent practices, strengthening both knowledge production regarding early sovereignty and our understanding of the discipline itself. The practical relevance of such ambiguity—which one reviewer inquired about—is thus that it opens up an ahistorical and essentialized understanding of a concept. Given that history is social processes, and that no concept can contain within it all innerrelated processes, ambiguity—*understood as conflictual accounts of which practices we should ascribe to a concept*—is a necessary and welcome aspect of any historicizing approach to sovereignty. The "ambiguity" or messiness of a concept is also, in part, related to its constitutive innerrelations with other phenomena: given that sovereignty is an "entity" only inasmuch as it is an abstraction of multiple innerrelated practices, it also means that it is, in part, always constituted throughout time and space in configuration with practices left outside of its conceptual borders. As authors in this forum highlight different interrelated practices—*iurisdictio*, territorial jurisdiction, collection of taxes, and so on—it is no wonder that the story told is more ambigious, and thus much richer, than an essentialized notion of sovereignty.

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