A King is as one set on a scaffold, whose smallest actions and gestures, all the people gazingly doe behold.

—KING JAMES I, BASILIKON DORON, 1599

A King is as one set on a stage, whose smallest actions and gestures, all the people gazingly doe behold.

—KING JAMES I, BASILIKON DORON, 1616
Contents

Foreword
DICK HOWARD XV

Editors’ Introduction
ZVI BEN-DOR BENITE, STEFANOS GEROULANOS, AND NICOLE JERR 1

I. STAGES 51

Preface 51

ONE Sad Stories of the Death of Kings: Sovereignty and Its Constraints in Greek Tragedy and Elsewhere
GLENN W. MOST 57

TWO Contested Sovereignty: Heaven, the Monarch, the People, and the Intellectuals in Traditional China
YURI PINES 80

THREE Nurhaci’s Gambit: Sovereignty as Concept and Praxis in the Rise of the Manchus
NICOLA DI COSMO 102

FOUR The Living Image of the People
JASON FRANK 124
CONTENTS

THIRTEEN  Exit the King? Modern Theater and the Revolution  
NICOLE JERR  340

IV. SHIFTS  365

Preface  365

FOURTEEN  Revolution in Permanence and the Fall of Popular Sovereignty  
DAN EDELSTEIN  371

FIFTEEN  Exile Within Sovereignty: Critique of “The Negation of Exile” in Israeli Culture  
AMNON RAZ-KRAKOTZKIN  393

SIXTEEN  Affective Sovereignty, International Law, and China’s Legal Status in the Nineteenth Century  
LI CHEN  421

SEVENTEEN  The Sovereignty of the New Man After Wagner: Artist and Hero, Symbolic History, and the Staging of Origins  
STEFANOS GEROULANOS  440

List of Contributors  469
Index  473
Editors’ Introduction

ZVI BEN-DOR BENITE, STEFANOS GEROULANOS, AND NICOLE JERR

ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIAN SOVEREIGNS, beginning with the Assyrians, rulers of “the first intercontinental empire,” were painfully conscious of the fragility of their rulership.¹ Their acute awareness of the tenuousness of sovereign power was arguably a condition intimately connected to the “normality of collapse” in Mesopotamian mentalité: since the common construction material in the region was mud brick, buildings and other structures made of it would eventually fall down, at times quickly and dramatically. Neglect, natural disasters, fires, and, of course, wars could easily bring down walls and buildings, and ancient Mesopotamian culture is full of records and stories around “successive falls and restorations” and about “restorer-kings” working hard to repair and maintain buildings and walls.² Royal palaces and temples were therefore probably often surrounded by scaffolding. The imagery of scaffolds surrounding a fragile structure can be applied to the realm of Assyrian politics as well: the shoring up of rulership involved immensely elaborate rhetoric, as Assyrian kings “bluntly proclaimed themselves masters of the entire globe, possessors of world ‘from the great sea in the East to the great sea in the West.’”³ They wielded power and control in varying degrees over vast territories—provinces, vassal states, buffer states, and enemies.⁴ As they keep telling us in their stelae and inscriptions, the size and shape of their empire required Assyrian kings to contend with numerous and diverse situations in which their power was challenged in a concrete or
imagined way. Each Assyrian ruler “had to communicate meaningfully in two directions: with his own subjects and with the outside world.”

To handle their power and its vulnerability, the creators of the first great polity in the world—who made the eighth century BCE a contender for the first “great century” in world history—developed an elaborate repertoire designed to build, project, and maintain their rulership and define the territories to which it related. Words denoting the boundary (missru) or territory/domain (tahiimu) of Assyria appear more than three hundred times in Assyrian sources. The Assyrian king was “King of the Universe” (šar kiššati), but also “King of the four regions/quarters of the world” (šar kibrät arba'ī/erbetti), “Shepherd of the four quarters” (rēā kibrāt erbetta), in charge of the “protection of the [four] quarters” (sa'ūl kibrāt), even “King of all the four quarters” (šar kullat kibrat araba'ī). Assyria, we are reminded repeatedly, occupied the whole world and was also ever-expanding. The tandem use of “universe” and “four corners/regions/quarters” is replicated in the Assyrian deployment of two distinct terms that referred to their power: one (kiššitu), authority, denoted direct hegemony; the other (bēlūtu), rule or lordship, was often associated with the claim to global rule. In­deed, “lordship” or “rulership” was synonymous with “Assyria.” The phrase bēlūtu Aššur meant both “the Lordship of Assyria” and “the lordship, viz. Assyria.” This was already then an old history. Assyrian sovereignty—relating to multiple forms of dominion and diverse territories and cultures—rested on the long tradition of Mesopotamian kingships it claimed to inherit, and was made of a powerful political and military machine, as well as of religious, artistic, literary, and architectural tools, all designed to erect and maintain rulership and to project a mighty image of sovereignty well beyond its actual domains.

In some respects, Assyrian images and projections of sovereignty—its scaffolding—were stronger than real Assyrian power. But in any event, they were inseparable from it. So strong was the projected image of Assyrian power that many of its elements still resonate with us today through the powerful biblical prophecies of Isaiah, who observed, and consumed, Assyrian propaganda avidly. Isaiah’s words reveal the “terrifying mask [that Assyria] deliberately turned towards the outside world and was undeniably effective.” When Isaiah had God declare, “O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation,” that Assyrian mask became part of Judeo-Christian theology as well.
EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Not only do we find in the Assyrian conception of sovereignty a first claim to omnipotence that also masks the anguish associated with political negotiations, frailty, and even collapse; not only do we retrieve a model for sovereignty that would be based on physical structures and threats imposed by the natural world; but we also recover in this first great empire a set of priorities that shape our approach as we revisit, with historical, literary, and anthropological tools in hand, the scaffolding of sovereignty. By “the scaffolding of sovereignty” we mean that sovereignty is established and maintained as much by aesthetic, artistic, theatrical, and symbolic structures as by political claims over everyday life, war and peace, and life and death; sovereignty is mutable and fragile, requiring continual care and support; sovereignty is overpowering in the instant, yet never once and for all; sovereignty is defined by the rulers yet also by the ruled, the producers and the consumers of propaganda; sovereignty is a practice that not only colors but carves, defining the experience of space and time; sovereignty is at once inflected by theological problems and influential on religious belief; sovereignty is a subject of—and also a tool for—genealogical investigation; and insofar as sovereignty is a promise, it is, for the future of polities, a poisoned promise. Such, at any rate, is our claim in this volume.

The Dimensions of Sovereignty

Over the past two decades, sovereignty has emerged as a core concept across the humanities and social sciences. From history through anthropology, political science through comparative literature, scholars have pursued new perspectives on sovereignty, interweaving questions of authority, power, rights, law, and religious and popular foundations of leadership, not to mention self-sovereignty and human subjectivity. The theme has been no less significant in more popular discussions since 1989 on the rise of the new Central and Eastern European states, the expansion and crisis of the European Union, terrorism and the war on terror, the rise of China and India, the status of Daesh or Islamic State, the claims for an end to history, globalization (including the globalization of finance), human rights discourse, and the Internet.

Several trends are central to the recent academic return of sovereignty: the biopolitical approach to power, the concentration on empire and decolonization, the new history of international law and human rights, and the
renewal of political theology. A general backdrop for such trends could be delineated in the pressures resulting at different times since the 1970s, from the weakening of the sovereign state initiated with the post-oil shock and continuing through the end of the Cold War, the ideological transformation resulting from it, and the transformation of the international order through globalization and the internationalization of finance. But too often in recent accounts sovereignty means little more than top-down secular political power, subjection, and scope of action: the modalities and styles of its exercise are reduced to vectors of the force with which it dominates, without much clear appreciation of the strange and complex theatricality involved, the rhetoric of its articulation as well as of claims or appeals to it, the dense interwovenness of its representations with other theological and aesthetic concepts, the fragility of its masks and the masks of its fragility. Much as current trends have rendered sovereignty a highly promising subject, they have rooted it in the narrower prospects of political science, often remaining blind to sovereignty's comparative, aesthetic, theatrical, and genealogical dimensions.

The present volume proposes to recalibrate this discussion. Aiming at a comparative and theoretically rich understanding of sovereignty, we apply pressure on the concept by paying attention to those components of the scaffolding thanks to which sovereignty is both built into and sustained by social, aesthetic, and political practices. This introduction establishes the broader framework, as well as the stakes involved in understanding sovereignty in these terms, while the subsequent essays locate particular elements of this scaffolding in specific periods and areas, often foregrounding the tensions between its different constituents.

First, sovereignty needs to be understood as a global concept, a historical a priori that exceeds any single language, tradition, political regime, and inter-regime order. Not only does a sovereign force participate in the partitioning of a globe, tracing the framework for rule and the styles of subjection within a territory, but each particular form of sovereignty constructs a globe for its inhabitants, maps it, makes it sensible. Clashes between different regimes and powers are also clashes between different concepts, apparatuses, cartographies, and styles of sovereignty.

Second, for all its common characterization as a κυριαρχία that is ostensibly inflicted by a unilaterally operating and reigning power—a single indivisible hegemonic force that is subtended by one or other kind of law and rule—sovereignty has always been supported, complemented, and enforced
by a complex aesthetic scaffold. This structure includes the ways that sovereignty participates in the establishment of particular forms of representation, aesthetic and political; the political theology asserted by, or implicated in, its establishment and maintenance; the genealogies and citations, the legal, linguistic, and scholarly apparatuses through which it is legitimized; its complex interplays with forms of authority, legitimacy, and power; and the aesthetic and theatrical devices, the images, courts, styles, and media involved in its institution, persistence, transformation, and destruction. This complex scaffold includes even the devices used to mask it, to assert the supposedly unstaged univocity and force of sovereignty. Finally, the same term “scaffold” helps remind us of the destruction of sovereigns and sovereignties, each such sovereign anticipating and aiming to preclude (with varying degrees of success) his own undoing. Because of the similarities and differences of each architectonics that defines a particular sovereign regime, such regimes can be compared on the basis of these structures, in a manner not possible on the basis of “sovereignty’s” direct application of power.

Third, and concomitantly, sovereignty needs to be examined on the basis of how it figures in literary and aesthetic works: to see sovereignty as an aesthetics is to attend to its operating and its grounding in aesthetic claims and practices from literature, theater, and art; if aesthetic practices of sovereignty are essential to its theater—its court element—such practices are also recounted, invented, experienced, or replicated in aesthetics and literature. “Aesthetics” here captures both senses of the word: aesthetics understood in terms of sensation and aesthetics as a pursuit of the beautiful. Sovereignty, we argue, is fundamentally involved in both; aesthetics, representation, and theatricality do not merely replay but contribute to staging, introjecting, reproducing, identifying with sovereignty and its experience. Aesthetics, literature, and especially the theater are no less sciences of sovereignty than law, economics, and the life and mind sciences.

**Sovereignty as a Global Concept**

This book is, in part, a response to the emerging need to offer a comparative theory of sovereignty in different places at different times. Sovereignty is not merely a Latin-derived, European, or Western imperial concept; it is a global one. Similar forms and styles of monarchical and hegemonic
rule—not to mention of organized, legal, quasi-legal, and popular rule—can be charted across the globe. Even within Europe, as is often acknowledged, “there is no single agreed-upon concept of sovereignty for which one could offer a clear definition.” This demurral, however, is not sufficient; sovereignty is a different kind of concept, not one that might be reduced to a single definition but one that is attached to a mutable system of concepts, practices, and aesthetics. We understand sovereignty as a vector of power or force that is articulated, staged, negotiated, imagined, projected, refused, and even assaulted in and for its assertion as a unified, actually or figuratively embodied, absolute force that guarantees submission, carves space and time, organizes a society or community and its relations to other societies or communities, binds, commands, and demands. Sovereignty exceeds its particular cultural formations and by definition engages their interactions: it has done so across history without being itself ahistorical. That is, even if its particular forms and theories are untranslatable and non-globalizable—and precisely because it is not defined in the same terms in every culture—it has entwined populations and leaders in relationships that define the very concepts of society, power, and even sensation and beauty. Following this model (which is intended as a heuristic and adaptable one, not as a criterion), we think of sovereignty as integrating a spectrum of meanings and operations that ranges from the control of a geographic space or population to the representation and imposition of majesty or popular force; to the means and performance of political legitimacy; to the attempt to control natural, human, and material forces; to the citation of theologico-political and aesthetic themes.

One major aim of this project is to expand the geographical dimension and “de-Europeanize” the existing discussion of sovereignty by attending to problems and conceptions of sovereignty that integrate Islamic, Atlantic, Chinese, even nomadic and exilic approaches to the problem. To “de-Europeanize” is not meant in the harder sense of calling for a “provincializing” of Europe, insofar as many crucial developments—especially modern developments concerning democracy, balance of power, law, and popular sovereignty—are (or derive from) fundamentally European practices. Rather, we use the phrase to argue that current discussions of sovereignty are usually based on schemata of a fundamentally European genealogy but nevertheless miss some of the importance and originality of even the European (and European imperial) case. In that Eurocentric schema, sovereignty properly
understood dates to Roman law and arises in the early modern period together with the modern Western state; we ostensibly owe its “doctrine” to Bodin, Hobbes, Grotius, Pufendorf, and others. This post-Westphalian order is too often treated as the “source” of the notion because it assumes the existence of multiple sovereign states and a power balance between them. Its subsequent history is then described in terms of an attendant movement of secularization and liberalization, punctuated by the emergence of constitutions, the decline of royal and Catholic power, the later spread of popular sovereignty and revolutions, the nation-state, positive law, and the democratic division of powers. Now, insofar as sovereignty is embedded in different ways in particular cases, times, and places, comparative attention can avoid the narrow temporal and spatial horizons that this doctrine generally assumes and offer a richer sense of both the status of power, subjectivity, and aesthetics within these cultures and the consequences of geopolitical and intercultural engagement.

Pursuing the “global” in “global concept” means showing and contrasting, implicitly or explicitly, the interstices—political, aesthetic, theologico-political, genealogical, legal—of sovereignty in, between, and across particular cultures. Comparisons have become imperative thanks to the advance of the historiography of empire, including major studies of sovereignty in the European Atlantic empires since the early modern period that have been influential in the rise of the Atlantic history field. In *A Search for Sovereignty*, Lauren Benton demonstrates that sovereignty in imperial contexts was a legally complex affair, a desideratum and not a given; she provides the ground for a serious international and comparative reconsideration of the theme and of its historical instability. No less significantly, shifts in Asian historiography during the past decade signal forcefully that it is time for a much more informed and refined discussion about non-European sovereignties. The “New Qing History” has contributed greatly to a different polarization of the world that brings China front and center. Looking at another set of problems, Aziz al-Azmeh, in *Muslim Kingship*, examined “parallels, analogues and continuities, conceived not as effects of abiding and continuing origins, but as ever-renewed redactions and forms of traditions which change signature and ostensible genealogy when transferred from one historical sense of continuity to another.” Seeking to show that Muslim kingship did not come out of thin air, al-Azmeh demonstrated his alternative by drawing on many locations in Asia and the Mediterranean, from the Pharaohs to
EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Pahlavi Iran, from Java to early modern Italy; such continuities, parallels, and analogues, he emphasized, were observed by people already in the distant past. More recently, A. Azfar Moin’s study of the “theater of sovereignty” in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century India—invoking mystical attempts to “conquer time”—has opened the door to discussions about experiments in sovereignty in early modern Asian Islamic empires—Mughal, Safavid, and Ottoman. From a different vantage point, scholars have exposed fascinating parallels between the Mongol Great Code of 1640 and the Treaty of Westphalia; Inner Asia, a lesser-known region in world history, now appears as a crucial link between empires and polities in Eurasia in general. The boom in studies of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century advent of international law should engage the historical complexity of shifts in legality and authority, not only in the contexts of European imperial and international law but ultimately with a careful awareness of forms of globality and internationalism that long precede or geographically supersede the “rise of the West” scenario.

To reconsider Westphalia’s ordering of sovereignty as one particular partition negotiated high up to organize rule over one particular globe is also to recognize that like other arrangements it divided up or parcelled out sovereignty so that the order itself could “own” sovereignty across that globe and at the same time sanction it within the demarcated territories. The “global” needs to be pursued in a second sense as well: “globality” is a concern because sovereignty—whether in the sense of the order imposed by the sovereign or in the sense of the order shared by sovereigns or states—has involved an ecumenism, an expansiveness to the corners of the known world. Within the very concept of sovereignty, there is a tendency to announce or promote every king as, in a sense, universal, in his understanding of his world or of his competition with other regimes. Often the king or sovereign order’s power is described as extending not just to the borders of his terrain but (at least in potentiality) to much of, if not the entire, known world: the regalia of sovereignty require this possibility, which is essential to Christianity and Islam, European balance-of-power and colonial schemes, Soviet and Chinese communism, American democracy and empire since the Monroe Doctrine, and, more recently, international law. In this vein, Sheldon Pollock has argued that the spread of Sanskrit, like that of Latin, was shadowed by a “form of power for which this quasi-universal Sanskrit spoke,” a diction for power that “was also meant to extend quasi-universally, ‘to the ends of the horizons,’ although such imperial polity existed more often as
ideal than as actuality.” Such expansive claims to global control required complex theologico-political pursuits and sophisticated practices of rule: in China during Qing rulership, between 1644 and 1911, Manchu emperors pursued an alternative universality that made use of political, theological, and ritualistic ties and affinities in order to build, maintain, and represent their sovereignty to multiple ethnic and religious collectivities within the empire: Han Chinese, Manchus, Mongols, Tibetans, Buddhists, Daoists, and numerous other groups. The Qianlong emperor (r. 1736-1796) boasted this in the last years of his reign:

In 1743 I first practiced Mongolian. In 1760, after I pacified the Muslims, I acquitted myself with Uighur (Huiyu). In 1776 after the two pacifications of the Jinquan [rebels] I became roughly conversant in Tibetan (Fanyu). In 1780, because the Panchen Lama was coming to visit I also studied Tangut (Tangulayu). Thus when the rota of Mongols, Muslims and Tibetans come every year to the capital for audience I use their own languages and do not rely on an interpreter ... to express the idea of conquering by kindness.

It would be hard to miss the parallel to a well-known contemporary passage by Napoleon: “My politics is to govern men as the greatest number among them wishes to be governed. Therein lies, I believe, the right way to recognize the sovereignty of the people. It is in fashioning myself a Catholic that I ended the war in the Vendée, in fashioning myself Muslim that I established myself in Egypt, in fashioning myself ultramontane that I won over minds in Italy. Were I to govern a Jewish people, I would reconstruct Solomon’s temple.”

Comparing these passages forces a rethinking of categories (e.g., “Bonapartism”) and, more importantly, a parallel recognition of both the globe as these emperors defined it and the scaffolds they built in their efforts to invade, inhabit, and refashion their worlds. What moreover should not be forgotten in these kinds of phrasing is that the Qianlong emperor’s conquest (“pacification”) means also the supersession of local competitors’ sovereignty, a scaffold for their elimination and the elimination of their own scaffoldings. As first consul and then as emperor, Napoleon similarly proclaimed respect for “popular sovereignty” while precisely refiguring it as a desire for his dominion, and also indirectly to point out his disregard for the monarchies that battled this dominion—the Westphalian terms that had
“European” model, of the model that starts and stops with the state; and
(3) the study of sovereignty as involving the exploration, with anthropo­
logical density, of mutable, troubled, composite situations.

First, we regard sovereignty as a concept embedded within particular
constellations of ideas, aesthetics, and practices. In our view, Kalmo and
Skinner misjudge this embeddedness when they insist on a “need to disen­
tangle . . . the complex links between concepts, institutions, practices, and
doctrines—all of which have been seen as the true nature of sovereignty.”
This is exactly what is not possible with sovereignty: rather than disentan­
gle, the historian’s purpose is to display at a minute level these entanglements
and their consequences. Whereas sovereignty is conventionally discussed
by reference to models in which it is characterized by the indivisibility and
omnipotence of (sovereign) power, to us this is a particular version of the
image and stage essential for power to work at all, a self-definition that
intentionally hides its own staging. Rather than abstract a foundational and
universal definition, we propose that close comparisons with other forms
of claims to horizonless power would not “disentangle” the concept but in­
stead stage the particular frames and fictions involved in each formulation,
retaining the embeddedness of each in its world.

Second, we decline to see the vesting of sovereignty in states as a given
and therefore decline to reduce its study to that of state sovereignty, as po­
itical theory and international history too often have done. The concept of
the state is itself too frequently taken for granted on the basis of an implicit
or defined European model that does not easily satisfy the fact or form of
power, control, or pressure elsewhere. As Clifford Geertz remarked,

“The state,” particularly the postcolonial state—Kinshasa, Abuja, Rabat, New
Delhi, Islamabad, Yangon, Jakarta, Manila (some of them seem, indeed, hardly
to reach beyond their sprawling capitals, and their names have a habit
of changing)—has . . . been the subject of a great deal of rather uncertain
discussion as the enormous variety of its forms and expressions, the multi­
plicity of the regimes it houses, and the politics it supports have become
apparent. There is talk of “failed states,” “rogue states,” “super-states,” “quasi­
states,” “contest states,” and “micro-states,” of “tribes with flags,” “imagined
communities,” and “regimes of unreality.” China is a civilization trying to be
a state, Saudi Arabia is a family business disguised as a state, Israel is a faith
inscribed in a state—and who knows what Moldova is?”

[ 12 ]
EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Put differently, the Westphalian or statist model for sovereignty simply does not fit the state of the world today; we contend that it never did and that, nevertheless, the concept of sovereignty need not be abandoned together with this classic model in that the historical congealment of this model involves but one kind of setting of unitary power. Moreover, forms of interdependency, which involve transgressions of state boundaries so dear to the Westphalian model, bring up the question of how best they can be integrated into a thinking and representation of sovereignty (rather than being treated as frustrations or disruptions), given the history and international dimension of a system made up of nonequals, ever-permeable borders, invasions, internationalisms old and new, and—truth be told—mostly quasi-sovereigns. As Benton has argued, even within the major European empires, partial or divided sovereignty was far more often the case than the theory has let on, and this point could be further extended to an examination of the structures of composite monarchies, such as the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the English crown since James I, or the Habsburg dual monarchy. Further inequalities and complications emerge with the way state officials in each case imagined other peoples, the place of court society in cultural as well as diplomatic confrontations, and the interstate mirroring of sovereign figures, government, civilizing missions, or security, not to mention the warding off of both despotism and the index of backwardness. Practices ranging from negotiation, diplomacy, and intelligence gathering to exchange, gift giving, and law, and still further to forms that permeate the necessary boundaries from trade to the Internet, expose the ambiguities and hierarchies involved in state building and quasi-sovereignty.

More recently, the globalization of finance and the transformation of the economic order have further embarrassed any claim that treating sovereignty at the state level alone is possible, and the problems associated with the economy that have emerged remain in this regard understudied. The need for thicker descriptions of interstate systems is only part of the problem: domestically, sovereignty is just as much distended, unequally apportioned, negotiated, fought over, claimed, and pursued between different political forms. To quote James Sheehan, "The problem of sovereignty is the enduring tension between the order and unity promised by sovereign theory and the compromises and negotiations imposed by political practice." Here too, sovereignty as absolute sovereignty is an image, never an uncontested, nonnegotiable reality beyond representation. To push the
EDITORS’ INTRODUCTION

point further, under the illusory umbrella of continuity and stasis, sovereignty slides back and forth between states and leaders—a problem extending from traditional China and ancient Greece through the opening chapter of Machiavelli’s *Prince* and Louis XIV’s “J’État, c’est moi” to Hitler and Qaddafi, and one engaged by Stanca Scholz-Cionca’s and Yuri Pines’s studies in this volume. Sovereignty is similarly shared between states and political parties (Nazi Germany, the USSR and Eastern Europe in the 1945–1989 period, the People’s Republic of China), regimes and the revolutions whose dynamism these incarnate, states and nations (especially with irredentist claims), not to mention nongovernmental and international units, including corporate and financial structures dating back to the East India companies.

Law, which since the early modern period, and especially since the rise of constitutionalism, has been so instrumental to the domestic and interstate establishment of figures of power and their limitations, has both settled on the sense of a constrained modern sovereignty and stretched the cat’s cradle that ties together agents, parties, and movements, setting up claims to even limited authority. Here, too, the statist model offers little consolation or help.

Third, sovereignty should not be taken for a well-established concept—much less a given practice, a particular system for ordering populations or ethnic groups, or a set relationship between power and those who submit to it. It needs to be understood as far more mutable, context-specific, at times vibrant, at others precarious, almost always negotiated even for the maintenance of stability. That sovereignty is mostly—perhaps always—partial and elusive is no excuse for claiming that we might do away with the concept: the image of omnipotence and regulated order belies such a direction and demands attention to different forms of its construction. Especially when we look at nomadic cases, at contested or changing situations, or at sovereignty “from below,” we find sovereignty first as practiced and only in consequence as theorized. This allows the historian to reconstruct conceptions out of dynamics of power that let us glean how different populations have constructed sovereignty itself. We have argued that the lack of a fully established concept of sovereignty can also be studied at the international or interstate level, where the signified of “sovereignty” is itself moldable, if not altogether amorphous. Domestically, too, as opposed to a univectoral force going from the head of the state to its subjects, we instead propose that even this univectoral force relies on the way it is perceived by these
subjects and reflected back to that leader or political system, with the result that it is quietly reinstated or, at times, challenged with almost every act, event, or institutional change that affects major political matters. Sovereignty of the people similarly requires both the image of this "people" and an actual citizenry that exercises it, refracting it through the head of the state and back again to the population, such that this regime relies on contestation and self-transformation. Because of the embeddedness of sovereignty within the changing particularities (linguistic, legal, familial, religious) of given cultural landscapes, these mirroring effects contribute to the production of different and changing regimes and styles of power—even ostensible "transnational" or "transcultural" similarities quickly betray different devices and deployments.\footnote{53}

To those, then, who would warn (often correctly) that a history that aims globally tends to forget "the local," the current project uses these three methodological priorities to take up the challenge.\footnote{54} We obviously do not pretend to cover everything geographically and temporally; we hope that our approach can function as an initial template that others can work with. In the essays that follow, the "global," as a scale, points not to the particular formations of states but instead to the examination of local forms and assertions of sovereignty; to links, conflicts, and pressures that occur locally but hold broader political, theological, intellectual, and at times colonial resonance; and to engagements with particular conceptions of the globe, the world, the universe.\footnote{55} Li Chen's engagement with the affective basis of responses to the British Empire in nineteenth-century colonial China and A. Azfar Moin's discussion of the portrayal of the Mughal king as a mystical savior during the "Great Indian Mutiny" attend to the co-implication of real and phantasmal forms of power in colonial struggles. Nicola Di Cosmo's study of Nurhaci's rise from local Tungusic seminomadic chieftain to the founder of the Jurchen state allows us to engage with a rare moment when practices of power become negotiated as foundations of sovereignty—in this case in Qing China, one of the largest empires in history. Justin Stearns's discussion of Idris al-Bidlisi's treatise on the plague, in the face of Qur'anic, scholarly, and political opposition, and Cathy Gere's examination of neurological studies of guillotined bodies during the Napoleonic wars show how the understanding of the body and power over it influenced early modern public health and the interstice of politics and neurology. Other contributors pursue comparisons and citations across considerable spatial and temporal periods:
EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Glenn Most, in his consideration of tragedy's ties to kingship, or Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, in his study of the ways that Muslims represented Manchu rulership over Islam by creatively rereading episodes from the biography of the Prophet Muhammad and writing them into their present time. Our aim throughout is to highlight the value of local work carried out with a more global conceptual, comparative, and theoretical horizon by offering thicker anthropological descriptions and close literary and philosophical readings, and by looking for their interdisciplinary utility in the establishment of political themes that are only in a weak manner divided by barriers of nation, region, language, and so on.

Aesthetics: Stage and Scaffold

The link between sovereignty and aesthetics has long been acknowledged, perhaps nowhere so nakedly as in the second edition of the Basilikon Doron, where King James I of England informs his son of the theater of power: "A King is as one set on a stage, whose smallest actions and gestures, all the people gazingly doe behold." A king is an actor, one who plays a role; the king is watched, observed by an audience of subjects who will judge and acknowledge his performance. Even more shrewdly, in the first edition of the treatise, this line reads the same but for one word: "A King is as one set on a scaffold." Stage and scaffold are both terms of theater; scaffold contains the additional implications of being a structure erected to facilitate the maintenance and repair of a building, as well as of being a site of deposition and execution. In this way, the role of sovereign is both a performative and a precarious one, and the staging and scaffolding of sovereignty an ongoing project of attending to an edifice. What is this stage? How is it calibrated "from above" but also "from below" by all those people that "gazingly doe behold"? To what expected effects is it adjusted? How do different regimes rely on material and symbolic regalia, legal and cultural mechanisms, and citations of myth, theology, and their respective "classics"? And how does such reliance affect the use of power?

Our second broad claim in this book is that sovereignty—or, if one maintains the separation, its scaffold—should be studied in aesthetic terms. Particularly because it is a global and mutable concept with comparative
value, "sovereignty" is the name not only for operations of unilateral or hegemonic power but also for the aesthetic conditioning of these operations. It needs to be theorized and researched across modes of theatricality and ritual, the lived experience of law and norms, art and aesthetic representations, economic foundations, and scholarship. To repeat: by "aesthetic" we do not only mean a matter of beauty—sovereign power is (also) beautiful or ugly depending on where one stands. We mean a broader anthropological domain that ranges from sensation and the experience of power to the legitimacy offered to political and international systems by ritual, symbolism, custom, religious negotiation and conviction, and exchange—all of which contribute to the scaffolding—to the ways that the exercise of sovereignty relies on a theatrical, representational, and artistic dimension and plays a normative role in the social and cultural establishment of the beautiful.

In Western thought from Plato to Rancière, this much has been claimed as frequently as it has been disavowed: "politics is a question of aesthetics, a matter of appearances." Whether one speaks of the fiction of sovereignty, the make-believe that some one or some force is indeed all-powerful; of biopolitics, for which sovereign power imposes itself on life itself; or even of political representation, questions of aesthetics, symbolism, and language arise.

Thus, to understand the operations and consequences of sovereignty, it is imperative to study its shape, the theater and garb that grant it legitimacy, appeal, believability, and normativity. It is also necessary to speak of those who endorse, accept, tolerate, or suffer particular logics or effects of power thanks to this image and its legitimacy—even its varying characters as consuming, participative, or invincible—and to think about the local ways such a staged imagistic quality meets or folds into the experience of it. The semiotic, material, ceremonial, and spectacular dimensions structuring sovereignty myths (from coins to temples of worship) are part and parcel of this aesthetic scaffolding.

Court, Theater, Myth, Spectacle

That theatricality is intricately involved with kingship has long been a claim of democratic and revolutionary political thinkers who denounced in absolutism, in régimes they deemed anciens, a pomp and circumstance responsible
EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

for the perversion and insularization of power that was used to justify oppression. Since Max Weber, moreover, the administration of a territory or population has been regarded as largely distinct from the rituals of power, which for Weber served merely an ornamental purpose of legitimation. Yet as scholars have also established, theatricality—from dance, theater, and dress in court to the elaborate rituals for meetings of heads of state to legitimation concepts and aesthetic or narrative depictions—is almost never a mere accoutrement. It marks a court’s and a king’s separation from the rest of society; generates a religious, political, aesthetic, even psychological experience of unity; and provides a spectacle for domestic as well as international consumption. Geertz, in his account of the negara, goes so far as to identify the Balinese state with the spectacle of power and transpose each on the other:

The whole of the negara—court life, the traditions that organized it, the extractions that supported it, the privileges that accompanied it—was essentially directed toward defining what power was; and what power was was what kings were. Particular kings came and went, 'poor passing facts' anonymized in titles, immobilized in ritual, and annihilated in bonfires. But what they represented, the model-and-copy conception of order, remained unaltered, at least over the period we know much about. The driving aim of higher politics was to construct a state by constructing a king. The more consummate the king, the more exemplary the center. The more exemplary the center, the more actual the realm.60

Such consummate identification was not essential to most states and courts, where the production of rituals—for example, to maintain and stylize the king's divine right in European courts—does not permit a directly causal relationship to the effects of sovereign power. Yet between Weber and Geertz there is a gamut of possibilities and effects, and it matters methodologically in what way these are theorized.61 Styles and theaters of power condition the limits and forms for what can be claimed in particular regimes, not to mention how such claims are to be transmitted and interpreted. They also concede a theologico-political hierarchy tying a leader to the divine, to nature, and to the governed; they question what myths sustain political fictions, including ascent, glorified biography, the often quasi-autonomous
status of internal power centers like aristocracies or religious elites, and the anxiety of succession; and they offer insight into how national systems—and mechanisms of exchange, including financial exchange—are legitimized and even naturalized. Sanjay Subrahmanyam has also recently situated the world of the courts at the center of interstate and long-distance cultural circulation and confrontation. Nor are theater and scaffolding absent from the revolutionary chaos stamping out the dethroned sovereign's old theater: Jean Starobinski, for example, argued that the revolutionary speech or sermon in 1789 was "a punctual act, a brief event, inscribed in a passing minute, and the sermon engages a future and links energies that without it would disappear. The singular will of each is generalized in the instant where all pronounce the formula of the sermon... The revolutionary sermon creates sovereignty, where the monarch received it from the heavens." Historians and sociologists—particularly in an earlier generation—have pursued accounts of political theater with an eye to its consequences. In The Court Society, Norbert Elias focused on the intricate rituals played out in French absolutist court and their effects on the French upper class: for him, etiquette, ceremony, and spectacle were essential to the recognition of the king as a visible presence and ruler whose distance from those he governed was established by a series of architectural and cultural separations. In his analysis of czarist Scenarios of Power, Richard Wortman turned to "individual realizations of the myth [of governing, which] cast the new emperor as a mythical hero in a historically sensitive narrative that claimed to preserve the timeless verities underlying the myth." Frances Yates, in her study of the ballet comique as a fête of the sixteenth-century French court, established that court entertainment relied on "an academic team of poets, musicians, artists, and humanist experts in mythology, and... provided a field of action for the exercise of the dynamic power of poetry and music." Again, court entertainment was by no means embroidery: "The political aim of harmonizing the religious problems of the age through the use of court amusements is related to the philosophical aim of revealing the universal harmony through the power of 'ancient' poetry, music, and dancing." In these projects, as in research on China, India, and Japan (including the work by Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, A. Azfar Moin, and Stanca Scholz-Cionca here), the process of staging establishes a sovereign, marking him out, identifying him, even rendering him alien through signs like crown and scepter, physical
carriage and comportment, kingly manners, court rituals bridging the spiritual and the everyday, and representations. These signs expand outward from the court and its internal, even material, design, binding together a whole world. "Pageantry" and "pomp" entail not so much a particular style of leadership but a form, in each case different, for the regime of power and of the potentials of its force. Even the democratic pretense to an absence of theater and the rejection of ornate regalia enforce new kinds of revolutionary theatricality, oftentimes at the most basic levels—theatricality in new claims on sovereignty, in competitions over it, in appeals to it, in dreams played out through it. For this reason, the language of civil religion does not quite suffice, and Walter Benjamin's famous phrase on the "aestheticization of politics" in fascism should not be taken to redeem other political regimes or their "civil religions" of major aesthetic considerations. Aesthetics may be "more" constitutive of the political in certain circumstances, but political claims cannot be divorced from their aesthetic underpinnings, implications, or coefficients: the political is political in part because it is aesthetic, symbolic, and mythical, because it is experienced and subjected to hermeneutic work at both the everyday and abstract levels, not "merely" as political but within aesthetic frameworks, traditions, and hopes. (Much the same could be said today of economic sovereignty, though a history of the aesthetics of sovereignty in capitalism remains to be developed.) Nor is it adequate to follow Carl Schmitt's defense of the absoluteness of sovereign decision and treat such "decision" as escaping aesthetic frameworks; Schmitt's formalization would overlook the extent to which a "pure" decision is mostly identified retroactively, once the stage has been cleaned up, re-presented as fiat, and with only one decider standing on it. In the present volume, we thus pursue the question of theater as it extends beyond the traditional understanding of a "court": Dan Edelstein's examination of permanent revolution in 1789 and Marxist thought, Stefanos Geroulanos's discussion of the modern obsession with returning to an imagined origin to politically relaunch history itself, Alexei Yurchak's study of the still-continuing monumentalization and treatment of Lenin's corpse, and also his and Cathy Gere's studies of the co-identity between the body politic and the physiological body all argue that even if we start out in the court, we need to go far beyond it to find the traces and cascading effects of regalia in the persistent myths that weld together power, nature, and history, sometimes even time itself.
EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Representations

In a series of readings, beginning with his 1981 book *The Portrait of the King*, Louis Marin turned Hyacinthe Rigaud's 1701 portrait of Louis XIV into an image that did much more than simply depict the king; it defined the shape of power for Louis, his court, and his emissaries, becoming the image of what was proper to majesty. By exhibiting and substituting for him, it served as his first ambassador, as the "real presence" and body of the king (irrespective of the presence or absence of his physical body in the room), rendering the painting into the site of absolute, idealized, normative power. Representation in Rigaud's painting weaves together the political and the aesthetic—the political became political because it was aesthetic, and vice versa.

Despite the work of historians like Ernst Kantorowicz, Frances Yates, Peter Burke, David Howarth, Jonathan Spence, and Eric Michaud, contemporary scholars rarely treat the intertwining of rulership with the image of rule as a necessary component of the study of power. This is often for reasons having to do with the supposedly nonimagistic basis of modern democracy, whereas less compunction is shown in scholarship of the non-Western world or in the study of "illiberal" regimes. Nevertheless, questions of aesthetic representation are central to every conception of sovereignty, including popular sovereignty, and replayed in material or aesthetic artifacts, from coinage and seals to paperwork and weaponry.

Figuration, narrative, and drama establish a whole other order for representations essential to the operations and majesties of power: witness the persistent figures of the king or leader in Western history from Odysseus to Obama—as grace giver or He Who Can Pardon; as punisher; as abdicator, as deposed, as the one who surrenders; as lover (jealous, virginal, or manipulative); as moral center; as usurper; as judge of all and judged by none; as healer, or even as a patient who for the care of his body can only rely on foreigners—physicians alien to the body politic. In these cases, each with its own history, the experience of sovereignty "from below" as well as "from above" pleats it in decisively aesthetic terms: what makes the king a king is not merely what the monarch decides or says but how he appears when so doing. Further concepts (aura, divine right, etc.), and images (e.g., the famous frontispiece of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, examined here by Jason Frank, Cathy Gere, and Bernadette Meyler) similarly influence our sense of the imposition and adjudication of force. In each of these cases, as in Nicola Di
Cosmo's study of Nurhaci and Stanca Scholz-Cionca's examination of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, a hall of mirrors again enables the representational function (and its masking) such that a leader may imbue a polity or community with particular characteristics and styles that in turn enable a particular image of him, an image that, reflected back to the polity, colors that polity anew. We might then speak of a different “mirror of princes” from that of the *specula principum* tradition; just as the praise and advice offered to princes (including instances of self-presentation such as Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*) amounted to narratives of power and scenarios of sovereignty, other such narratives and scenarios became possible precisely because of the ways sovereignty (monarchic, legal, and/or popular) is represented and experienced by the population ruled. It is, to us, of paramount importance that once the matter of aesthetic representation has been broached, the issue of sovereignty is caught in a play of mirrors in such a manner that reigns, regimes (national, legal, democratic or not, etc.), and polities become entwined and self-represented in ways that construct the image of their agency and authority as one of sovereignty—monarchic, national, popular, or other. The resulting image of power has dynamic consequences for the political and aesthetic self-conception of a society and a regime.

Aesthetic representation matters, in other words, because it is essential for an understanding of the reach, requirements, and limits of power—for the ways that power and violence are legitimized and accepted by the population that is governed, by those who carry out particular acts or orders, and by “the sovereign.” Aesthetic representation matters just as much in administrative organization: cartography introduced a new aspect to the relationship between sovereignty and territory. After their conquest of China in the thirteenth century, Mongol rulers employed Muslim cartographers to map and teach them exactly what was and was not in their newly acquired domain. Cartography in early modern Europe also projected power—at times once again in relation to Central Asian rulers: Christopher Marlowe's play *Tamburlaine the Great* (c. 1588), has Tamerlane crying on his deathbed: “Give me a map; then let me see how much / Is left for me to conquer all the world.” As Jordan Branch writes, a “novel shift has occurred toward using maps to picture territorial authority as a spatial expanse,” and cartography subsequently would become a principal tool for the organization and depiction of nature and territory.
Aesthetic representation is no less essential for the purposes of comparing forms of self-understanding, influence, domination (including colonial domination), and violence. Bluntly put, any regime can kill, dominate, or exclude; to ask how and why it chooses targets, how it appears legitimate in doing so, is to engage the aesthetic question. How a naturalized aesthetics complements power differentials in hierarchic and oppressive cultures; how it enables subjection and maintains images of power and powerlessness; how terms such as resistance, liberation, continuity, and revolution participate in an aesthetic framework that would include their moral and theologico-political experience—such questions animate several of the essays included here. Cathy Gere examines how this ruler is also re-conceived on the basis of the corpse of the condemned, once "sciences of life" stand next to the guillotine. Jason Frank, A. Azfar Moin, and Stefanos Geroulanos each ask how an entire aesthetics (and its transformation) is essential to the claims and entitlements of power.

Even questions that at first sight seem irrelevant to aesthetics—such as executions and military equipment—are of no lesser concern here. The death penalty, as a legally administered form of killing and punishment and also the most basic of biopolitical acts, is generally recognized as shrouded in complex symbolics and aesthetics. Insofar as "sovereignty and the death penalty have been inextricably combined throughout history," the death penalty also has rich cultural lives springing from "capital punishment's embeddedness in discourses and symbolic practices," which range from the sentencing court to the ruler to the act itself. War has been attached to aesthetics ever since the establishment of modern historiography, when Jacob Burckhardt famously described Renaissance states as works of art forged by warfare and tyrants' barbarism. Burckhardt's crediting of Frederick II with destroying the feudal state and transforming "the people" into a "multitude destitute of will and means of resistance" and his depiction of Petrarch as elaborating "the modern fiction of the omnipotence of the state" both intertwine warfare and the aesthetics of statehood. The possession of an arsenal—especially of a particular or powerful arsenal—has long been attached to the establishment of sovereignty, such as Byzantine "Greek fire" or the British Dreadnought in the early twentieth century. During the period leading up to World War II, "fear of loss of sovereignty" was one of the main reasons why internationally coordinated disarmament efforts failed: this
was true particularly in the case of Western attempts to restrict the size of Japanese naval power, which Japan identified with its national and regional sovereignty. Nuclear weapons—from the early refusal, by nuclear powers, of proposals to treat nuclear science as a matter of "world sovereignty" through to the Iranian insistence that any attempt to limit its nuclear program is a "breach of its national sovereignty"—have similarly served as not only tools guaranteeing survivability (of countries and regimes) but also particularly powerful rhetorical ornaments, ultimate signs of state sovereignty, thanks to the invulnerability and (self) extermination they symbolize. As nuclear weapons are almost unusable, their function has become principally symbolic—aesthetic, rather than military; they have become the "hidden juncture where the juridico-institutional model of sovereignty and the biopolitical model of power" meet.

Further reverberations of aesthetic representation become clearer when one attends to the multiplicity, coefficiency, and co-implication of sources of sovereignty—the aforementioned tendency for sovereignty to be ambiguously vested between persons, political units, and states, and especially the role played by conceptual or imaginary mediators for this sovereignty, such as nation, "the people," class, God, human rights, and so on. Carl Schmitt's famous dismissal of the Rechtsstaat's claim to be the source of its own sovereignty involves precisely this question of the role of a mediation that would not be merely political. Harold Laski, identified with a different tradition of thinking about political and legal sovereignty in the early twentieth century, offered even harsher critiques of the idea that sovereignty is automatically vested, without negotiation or staging, in a personified or institutional vector, which it establishes its own realm that automatically underlies the sphere of law. In the present volume, several essays engage the ways aesthetic representation sculpts both the self-image and mediating practices involved in this fashioning of sovereignty. Dan Edelstein engages with the figure of "permanent revolution" as one that not only recoded the Terror of 1793 but also allows Marx to conflate multiple categories (e.g., sans-culottes and an army of workers) and to transpose institutions onto one another in the instauration of "permanence" as a particular figure of popular sovereignty. Nicole Jerr inquires as to the meaning of a theater of revolution in relation to fears of crowd-based sovereignty in the twentieth century. Alexei Yurchak considers the odd survival, even past the end of the Soviet era, of Lenin's
body as a living dead artifact with a history of both distortive and creative aesthetic and political effects on Soviet and now Russian sovereignty and history. Yuri Pines asks, with reference to traditional China: “Who is the supreme sovereign ‘within the seas’? Is it a monarch personally, or is there a superior entity to whom the monarch’s will should be subordinate?” For Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, the clash between exile Judaism and Zionism is central to the image of Jewish statehood and the recoding of the past. Stefanos Geroulanos examines how a rethinking of history as underwritten by ostensibly truer, deeper histories in the later nineteenth century anticipated the creation of “New Men” in twentieth-century Europe as new forms of aesthetico-political representation in theories of nation, power, and science.

Across these and other essays, the question of modernity and democracy also comes to the forefront: for all the shifts in sovereignty we usually associate with North Atlantic democracy, imperialism, and internationalism, the question of the role of aesthetics in structuring the force and image of sovereignty has to be raised anew. We propose that the effect of aesthetic representation in the establishment of the stage and scaffold of unitary or absolute rule—as well as in the contestations and reformulations of sovereignty—is a mirroring, a folding upon one another of different figures involved in casting the embodiments, organizations, and sources of sovereignty. Aesthetic mirroring and conflict nestle together reasons for historians to examine, even for the stakes of political history, the play of representation, from the understanding of kings and religious leaders in the European tradition as representatives of God on earth all the way to the democratic, nationalist, and even vanguardist revolutionary imaginaries. They are no less significant for the everyday experiences, contestations, or receptions of power, the images of sovereignty “from below.” Aesthetic representation casts a plethora of images associated with the rule, with “the people,” and with law in such a manner that these dynamically engage one another in order to generate the image of a structured source of power. Even in cases of “merely” political representation, a parliament, party, or dictatorial figure represents, say, “the people” (or “the will” of the people), speaks in “their” name, asserts “their” sovereignty. Often, this institution or figure is itself not only invested with sovereign or quasi-sovereign power to represent “the people,” so it can speak “in their name,” but also casts back, as its own representative principle, as the figure counterrepresenting its own political
EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

work, this same and no less imaginary "people," constructing it as sovereign in turn. Thus "people" elect the parliament, which speaks in their name, styles itself as speaking in their name, and establishes its own authority by inventing and styling this "people." To emphasize this mirror play of representation is not to stage a postmodern game of thrones; it is to ask how different regimes, claimants, appellants, and competitors articulate and depict forces and worldviews essential to the political schemes they play out; how these schemes clash with or reinforce one another; how sovereignties and sovereigns participate in the dynamic transformation of structures; how they present continuity, contingency, or rupture (and even continuous rupture, as Edelstein shows here); how they construct transcendentals and universes for their universalisms, often in the same gesture in which they designate those who speak for these universalisms; how they seek to displace existing schemes of power and representation for other ones, more efficient or more germane to their sense of rule.

Aesthetics and Political Theology

Canonical scholarly literature extends the problem of representation and aesthetics to engage political theology. In her influential study of the many mystical depictions of Elizabeth I as Astraea, Frances Yates examined both the figure of the Virgin Queen and the messianic implications inherent in the stylization of her rule.

The symbol of the Virgin Queen—in whatever way understood, and all the more intensely because of the conflicts inherent in it—touched tremendous spiritual and historical issues. The destiny of all mankind is at stake in the idea for which the virgin of the golden age stands, and above both papacy and empire is Christ, praying in the words of St. John's gospel "that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee." This is the sacred imperialism of the Prince of Peace, the Christian blend of Hebrew and Virgilian prophecy, uttered by the Messiah in the universal peace of the Roman Empire, that time of which Dante says that there will never be another like it for then "the Ship of the Human Family by a sweet pathway was hastening to its rightful haven." In the Elizabethan imperial theme, universal concepts are never far below the surface in the interpretation of history.
Pursued in astonishing detail, Yates’s claim concerns both the aesthetic representation of the sovereign discussed and the coextensiveness of that representation with religion and its experience. At least since Carl Schmitt’s dismissal of representational democracy’s claim to sovereignty in his 1922 book *Political Theology* and Ernst Kantorowicz’s reconstruction of the late medieval shift from Christ-centered to law-centered kingship in *The King’s Two Bodies*—and especially since the “rediscovery” of Schmitt in the 1980s—the problem of relations between religious, political, and state authority has motivated a scholarly pursuit of the very different functions involved in the concept of political theology. Kantorowicz established the theologico-political basis of late medieval and early modern kingship by detailing the juridical efforts to reconcile—with recourse to the christological divine incarnation—the representational problem posed by the king’s duality: his mystical body (the body politic which is inviolable) and his natural body (which is susceptible to the usual physical vulnerabilities). Crucially, he took this representational and theological problem as one that defined state formation. In a series of late essays, Kantorowicz also explored aspects of the aesthetic legitimation of royalty, from the motif of “mysteries” of state to the fashioning of emperors as rising suns. Using material artifacts (coinage), jurisprudence, and literature, Kantorowicz reestablished sovereignty as a subject of theological study constructed in decidedly aesthetic and symbolic terms.

The rise of political theology in recent scholarship has taken several forms, from a renewed study of Paul of Tarsus to revisions of the secularization thesis. These revisions have made clear that theopolitical problematization is hardly immune to questions of aesthetic representation and mirroring. As Jason Frank argues here, the effort to identify the “body of the people” so as to replace the religious and popular implications of the “body of the king” posed a crucial problem for the English and, later, French revolutionaries, who invested quite profoundly in the forms, rituals, and acts of power that could carry out this replacement. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin similarly engages the complex picture—bypassing secularization—instituted by the concurrently theological and political figure of exile, especially when this is seen in contrast to the Zionist conception of the state. And in his study of Nurhaci, Nicola Di Cosmo asks about political theology’s role in the transformation and legitimation of a nomadic empire into a contender for the Heavenly Throne of China against its Ming occupiers. In these discussions
we return to the problem of territorially and universality, as well as to the aesthetic and representational links that hold together the theologico-political chains in a meaningful experience of the everyday as this enfolds, dwells within, sutures with, or unleashes the divine. Quasi-secular aesthetic mythologization—including the quotidian representation of secular, religious, historical, and future-oriented political form—can be said to extend further, even to questions of the economy. One way to pursue this concern is to follow Hent de Vries when he argues that not only have “pillars of sovereign power” been “theologico-political, if not mythico-religious,” but that within that frame, “monetary flows,” which have affinities with “mental dispositions,” are no less historically and perhaps structurally theologico-political. Accounts like this allow us to begin to extend the aesthetic and experiential assemblage involved in accounts of religion and power to capital itself.

Claude Lefort and Jacques Derrida have offered similar claims on the aesthetic, even theatrical, basis of political theology. In Lefort’s account, “The Permanence of the Theologico-Political?,” the obdurate, perhaps ineradicable, persistence of sovereignty in modern democratic society carries a mark of the tragic condition of modern democracy and the aesthetic establishment, through theology and politics, of an authority that still relies on the shadow cast over the “empty place of power” by religious and kingly power even after their fall. For his part, Jacques Derrida in his late book Rogues used theologico-political motifs in order to identify, as operating a single violent movement, the gestures that create the self and the sovereign. For Derrida, who was interested in proposing approaches to democratic authority, the self not only includes a propensity toward mastery but also creates myths that establish, on the scaffold of the executioner, this same self as both the foundation and the target of a theologico-politically derived sovereign power.

Besides finding in Lefort and Derrida reason for studying ostensibly hard-political circumstances in terms of theater and myth, there is reason to ask about how political theology is not restricted to matters of regime construction and maintenance but involves occasions of theological conflict or negotiation as much as social policy. As Justin Stearns asks here, in addressing Islamic responses to the plague, “What theological, spiritual, legal, and medical concerns influenced rulers in responding to a challenge to the political
EDITORS’ INTRODUCTION

and economic well-being of their realms?” Raz-Krakotzkin and Ben-Dor Benite pose similar questions relating to the theologico-political depictions and performances of territory and religious categories.

*Linguistics, Law, and Scholarship*

It is all but commonplace to note that claims to sovereignty, acts of sovereignty, and assertions made by different agents are aesthetic products of linguistic operations, that they are routinely founded on literary forms, religious as well as secular traditions of stylization, language games, and expressions aimed to convince rulers and ruled of a particular regime’s (or claimant’s) legitimacy, its capacity to institute and exceed norms, not to mention its ability to control and administer representative functions and formulas, their meaningfulness, and the overall narrative of power. These arguments and claims are not covered by a framework that would simply designate them as performative acts, and the aesthetic problem is entirely concomitant, if not coextensive, with the plastic and formative processes they involve or invoke. Sovereign speech acts, institutional choices or establishments, legal orders, and claims matter well beyond their immediate consequences, marking the king, dictator, parliament, legal system, or people, and just as easily pleating or even forming hermeneutic practices: they are, we might say, wired with the images of rule as much as with the tokens and regalia involved in rule that we discussed earlier. Like the long-term influence of Confucianism in Chinese state institutions and practices, the tradition of *specula principum* in Europe—including Machiavelli and James I of England—contributed to the sense of a regulated form of ruling language, encompassing both aesthetics and morality. Discourse and literary tradition remained, in this regard, constitutive of how a prince must appear to act, partly through speech, while, conversely, a prince’s actions affected the languages of rule. The same could be said in the modern arguments regarding national unification and language. As David Bell has argued, central to the nationalist efforts of the French Revolution was the standardization of French as a national language at the expense of vernaculars and dialects that had suddenly become politicized and deemed inaesthetic, insufficiently French. Sheldon Pollock pursues a still broader argument in his chronicle
EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

of Sanskrit: for him, language in India was deeply implicated in the establishment of power insofar as forms of power were rendered acceptable by the inflections of a narrow group of languages and rhetorical styles attached to specific classes. Sovereignty would thus be at times defined by linguistic opportunities and limits, at times by their violent transformation.

Deeply implicated with questions of language is the cultural and symbolic dimension of law in modern societies. A proper study of law, language, and sovereignty exceeds our space here, particularly given the growth of the field of critical legal studies. Suffice it to recall Paul W. Kahn's account of the value for legal scholarship of "cultural study (the practices and beliefs constitutive of law's rule)" and "the substantive form of the inquiry (genealogy and architecture)." His is a problematization that points toward an anthropologically richer discussion of law's linguistically based ordering and harmonizing of political and aesthetic representation, and through them, of everyday life in particular regimes. Throughout the twentieth century, legal thinkers in Europe too, especially conservative ones—from Schmitt through Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde and his famous "dictum" on the limitations of the West German liberal state, and on to Pierre Legendre in France—have articulated the relationship of law to statehood and sovereignty. Legendre, insisting on law's lineage, textual quality, psychic reach, and continuing dogmatic force ever since medieval canon law, has apostrophized the "anthropological function of the law" by emphasizing its extra-juridical origin and the way it codifies and reworks that origin:

Fundamental juridical categories ... do not conceal within themselves their own justification; they are juridical categories only because they are founded in, that is to say they refer to, the principle of division from which they spring. ... In every society, the basic founding discourse is a celebration, a ritualization, because it is a matter of bringing alive, on a social scale, the representation of the foundations; the representation of what renders the functioning of the categories conceivable. 105

Law as an oppressive and colonial form has also received considerable attention, and responses to this approach now formulate a broad, consequential study of international and national practices of legal authority, not least in a symbolic framework. 106 On this subject, too, sovereignty resides not only in the possession and assignation of power but also in the drawing of juris-
dictional frontiers; the exercise of normative control; the language, metaphors, and images; the invocations of tradition and religion, innovation and decision, rights and duties, contracts and cases; not to mention the aesthetic, technological, and formal establishment of who may and who may not wield legal power, under what conditions and with what rationale, following what procedures, and permitting and underlying what further acts, norms, and spheres of action. In the debates over particular legal formulations, language becomes central as a form, formation, and regulation of life. Several essays in this volume address the overlap and conflict of law with other realms. Ber­nadette Meyler examines the exception that is involved in a sovereign’s act of pardoning, from Kant and Schmitt back to early modern theater and up to the present; Justin Stearns addresses conflicts of religious law and public policy, and Miranda Spieler pursues French law and the absolutist practice of prison banishment through lettres de cachet in an at once colonial and urban context touching on slavery, regionalism, and legal identity.

One more point concerning the linguistic element of the scaffold should be emphasized—namely, scholarship. We have already cited Yates on the value of that scholarship for court entertainment in the French monarchy. Scholarship in the legal and classics realms—perhaps especially in Britain—was of course constitutive for domestic and colonial rule.¹⁰⁷ Unsurprisingly perhaps, the dominant discussion of scholarship and aesthetics in recent years has concerned the role of the sciences of life and mind, especially regarding biopolitical decisions over life and death. The role of these sciences—in particular, racial, evolutionary, or eugenic biology, psychology, and anthropology—in effecting or furthering social policies, biopolitical claims or paradigms, particular concepts of the self, and specific regimes of power is well documented and sometimes convincingly argued, especially when the question of the normative and normalizing capacities of these sciences is at stake.¹⁰⁸ Once again, though, “scholarship” need not be restricted to these sciences, nor does it need to imply aesthetic disengagement: scholarship in the classical and literary sciences has been of just as much service, and is just as citable.¹⁰⁹ That political regimes are usually “regimes of citation” binds scholarship and its culture once again to the political forms and their symbolism.¹¹⁰ Historiography on sovereignty needs to take the value of citation and genealogy into account in its models of how sovereigns look to the past and present. The significance of genealogy is evident, for example, in the difference of the Skinnerian from the biopolitical approach—to pick
EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

on two of the more influential recent approaches. Scholarship as critique has made similar claims. Agamben's biopolitics, from *Homo Sacer* until at least *State of Exception*, overlaps two genealogical efforts: one concerns the object of its study—a straight line from the *homo sacer* in Roman law to the extermination camps—the other establishes a tradition of precursors for the political claims of biopolitics (Schmitt, Benjamin, Foucault, Arendt). Each tradition is inscribed within the other in order to generate a sense that the overall project conducts an antiestablishment resistance on behalf of *homo sacer*. If this allows for political claims on behalf of the least of human beings, it also answers the question of sovereignty before it has been properly posed because it determines sovereign power as much through an identification with those at the limit of humanity as through a convenient genealogy of resistance. The complexity of modern legal and political norms is now treated as coefficient, contingent when compared to logics of "bios"; global and aesthetic problems also become lacunae clamoring for reengagement. It is worth emphasizing his schema's great difference from Kalmo and Skinner's emphasis on Westphalia, Hobbes, and liberalism. The language and genealogy generated in these scholarly claims remains structurally significant for their interpretations of linguistic and symbolic forms and effects. As scholarship is itself one of the sculptors of the aesthetics of sovereignty, the politics and aesthetics of scholarship on sovereignty instigate one of the central problems for several essays here, including Jason Frank's critique of political theory and Cathy Gere's link between depictions of sovereignty and neurological conceptions of the body during the English and French Revolutions.

Sovereignty and the Arts

Representations—whether a ceremonial appearance, a likeness reproduced on coins, symbolic reference in architecture and monuments, or characterization in poetry and narrative—work to tell a story of the sovereign and maintain the idea or fiction of his power. Crafting these stories and images are artists working across the visual, literary, and musical arts, and these arts, especially in the contexts of humanistic, Confucian, and Islamic traditions of learning, themselves came to profoundly shape the establishment, negotiation, and contestation of sovereignty.
Take, for example, a variety of portraits commissioned by the Qianlong emperor, depicting him as a Manchu warrior, a Confucian, a Mandarin, and a Daoist in an effort to identify him as ruler of each culture and all of them together. The paintings testify to far more than mere propaganda, not least because the artist responsible for them was the Italian Jesuit Giuseppe Castiglione, whose long tenure in the Chinese imperial court marks a significant art-historical moment of combined Eastern and Western techniques and conventions and demonstrates one significant way in which the relationship between sovereignty and the arts has held extensive influence. The globality pursued by the Qianlong emperor comes to be entwined with a different, Catholic, globe and different implications of representation.

Another inscription of sovereignty into art emerges through the classic study *The Age of the Cathedrals*, in which Georges Duby notes that the birth of the very concept of a 'work of art' “depended particularly closely on royalty, its functions and resources.” Interwoven as it was with religious authority, royal authority in medieval Europe as elsewhere resulted in kings and emperors “comporting themselves as godly heroes,” which prioritized making dedicatory gifts. “The sovereign was he-who-gives—who gives to God and who gives to men—and it was fitting that beautiful works should flow from his open hands.” The late medieval pinnacle of such works was the construction and maintenance of cathedrals, which were as much about sovereignty as about God: “The churches were in fact royal buildings par excellence, for God revealed himself to mankind as sovereign of the world, crowned and seated on a throne, there to judge the living and the dead. Moreover, every place of worship was supposed to enjoy the protection of the king himself, Christ’s lieutenant on earth, and the king’s offerings had helped to build it.”

Aesthetic representation thus generated a tradition in which kingship and its theological and aesthetic duties (from patronage to community building to establishing cultures of artistic power) became part of the setting of religious and aesthetic experience: they inscribed sovereignty into architecture, as elsewhere onto court culture and other arts. In Louis Marin’s argument, aesthetic representation went a step further: it involved the direct inscription of sovereignty into aesthetics itself, into the unfolding of a visual semiotics that begins and ends with power. As Eva Giloi has argued, the rise of bourgeois material culture in nineteenth-century Germany had a similar effect in that it entailed intellectual clashes and a recalibration of logics.
of support for the Hohenzollern monarchy. In this volume, Stanca Scholz-Cionca reviews the preeminent value of the theater in the court of the sixteenth-century Japanese warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi, where No drama was supported on the level of institution, practiced on the level of personal obsession, and patronized on the level of a highly sophisticated sovereign scaffolding, telling even of future sovereign acts. Zvi Ben-Dor Benite similarly examines the Manchu Qing establishment of a mosque in Beijing, with its unexpected consequences, which led to an evocation of different Islamic laws and a meditation on Muslim perceptions of Chinese sovereignty.

At stake is not only the issue of sovereigns inscribing their sovereignty into art. Patronage aside, sovereigns have featured as figures hovering between divinity and humanity, not least in many of the foundational epics of world literature. The Epic of Gilgamesh, the Iliad and the Odyssey, the Ramayana, and the Mwindo epic—each follows the stories of hero-kings as they navigate these parameters—sometimes permitted to enter divine realms but then forced to confront their intractable mortality. What is more, these narratives provide key sites where the priorities and tensions of sovereignty have been worked out. Gilgamesh, for example, stops being an overbearing ruler when, after a long fight with Enkidu, his physical equal, a friendship ensues that changes his goals and values. Similarly, the tests that Rama endures when he is sent into a fourteen-year exile on the eve of his coronation ultimately show him to be a worthy king who knows to act in accordance with his dharma as well as that of others.

It is not our purpose to examine here the immense literature on sovereignty in the arts: these remarks are intended instead to indicate the often-osmotic solvency of blood and paint—sovereignty as a phenomenon of power and sovereignty in the realm of aesthetics. One might do well to consider art, theater, literature, and architecture as sciences of sovereignty. It is not just, for example, that Schiller's Wallenstein stages anxieties of power and tragedy during the Napoleonic reorganization of Europe. In guarding, often jealously, its own rules and manner of thinking, literature (like the other arts) seeks to control the latticework that joins the realms of the known and of tradition with those of the possible and the sublime. The scaffold of sovereignty—whether thought in terms of construction or of execution—is consolidated out of exactly this latticework.
In closing, it should come as no surprise that the specific art of drama has maintained a vested interest in the subject of sovereignty. Since antiquity, the rise and fall of kings has provided drama with its principal tragic form. An implicit association of sovereigns with tragedy dates to the Poetics, where Aristotle specifies that a fine tragedy is about “one belonging to the class of those who enjoy great renown and prosperity, such as Oedipus, Thyestes, and eminent men from such lineages.” Glenn W. Most’s essay “Sad Stories of the Deaths of Kings” considers the history of the relationship between sovereign figures and the genre of tragedy, suspended between political values of monarchy and those of democracy. Early modern drama unquestionably strengthened the relationship between sovereignty and theater as a result of the themes and structures it adopted. It is for no small reason that Shakespeare’s plays feature regularly in political-theoretical discussions of sovereignty as demonstrated by the work of standard-bearers such as Kantorowicz, Schmitt, and Benjamin. But Shakespeare is not alone in his dramatic relevance. The age of absolutism produced a vast body of drama with sovereignty at the center of its concerns, manifestly obvious in any survey of the major works of Spanish Golden Age drama, Japanese Nō, French neoclassicism, and the German baroque. Nor is this an old-regime concern: as Lefort’s reading of Jules Michelet indicates—where Lefort, in pursuing his interest on the empty place of power, inquires on the survival and afterlife of royalty—James I’s concern with the scaffold/stage of sovereignty survives the destruction of absolutism. For Lefort’s Michelet, theatricality plays a critical part in both supporting and dismantling the sovereign. Recent critical and philosophical explorations of sovereignty as it is related to these dramatic traditions abound, yet they are not given the seriousness they deserve in political theories of sovereignty, as if literary and aesthetic engagement simply occupied a discrete realm. Several essays in this volume explore the unique relationship between sovereignty and the theater. Indeed, so strong is the association between sovereign figures and tragedy that the very possibility of modern tragedy has been called into question as a result of its shift toward using common individuals as protagonists: in her essay, Nicole Jerr considers precisely this question—of the strange persistence of the relationship between sovereignty and drama even after political and aesthetic revolutions have ostensibly rendered “kings on stage” an obsolete trope. Bernadette Meyler follows threads within the writings of
Kant and Schmitt on the sovereign pardon that leads not only to theatrical metaphor but also to the consideration of theatrical text as a viable source of political theory.

Like this introduction, the current volume as a whole attempts to give a sense of the multiple sites for the examination of sovereignty and its scaffold. It does not pursue a wide-ranging comparison of concepts of sovereignty, nor does it sculpt a single model in deference to a false idol of coherence. The shift we advocate in the study of sovereignty by no means suggests a disciplinary priority, nor does it demand that all elements discussed here be addressed in each engagement with the subject. In putting forward the scaffolding of sovereignty, we are above all calling for strategies that do not decide in advance what sovereignty is but pursue, with varying degrees of interdisciplinary latitude, the interconnections of political theory, history, anthropology, and literature. In using conceptual and anthropologically attuned history to open the space where global intellectual history can handle at once comparative and aesthetic concerns involved in sovereignty's scaffolding, the essays we have brought together seek to give back to sovereignty both some of its elusiveness and some of its force. Our emphasis on the figure of the scaffold, with its inherent polysemy covering both scaffolding and site of execution, and our focus on the aesthetic dimensions of this scaffold do not aim to cross every meridian that traverses the problem, but they do mean to provide a capacious and amendable theoretical framework for further work.

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Editors’ Introduction

Preciation to Wendy Lochner and Christine Dunbar for their enthusiasm and commitment and to Kathryn Jorge, who shepherded the book through production. Thanks also to Glenn Perkins for his superb copyediting.

Notes


5. Oded, War, Peace and Empire, 163.


10. The term “four quarters of the earth” was also included in one of the titles of the Mesopotamian god Enlil (Jean-Jacques Glassner, Mesopotamian Chronicles [Leiden: Brill, 2005], 129).


16. Isaiah 10:5. In 11:11–12, Isaiah speaks of the powers of God in assembling "the outcasts of Israel and gather[ing] together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth." Here is a clear case in which the ruled take an element from the ruler's scaffold of sovereignty and creatively use it in their own construction.

17. They have even renewed a measure of fatigue with the theme, which some characterize as both overbearing and reductive. See, e.g., Brian Goldstone, "Life After Sovereignty," *History of the Present* 4, no. 1 (2014): 97–118.

18. Compare, e.g., the discussion of the indivisibility of sovereignty in Jens Bartelson, "On the Indivisibility of Sovereignty," *Republics of Letters* 2, no. 2 (2011): 86. At pains both to confirm the priority of this indivisibility and to emphasize its troubled (because idealized) status, Bartelson calls sovereignty a symbolic form (in Ernst Cassirer's sense), "by means of which we have come to perceive the political world, but as such it does not stand in any determinate relationship to the world thus perceived." Bartelson later explains the eminence of the "indivisibility" approach as due to the "violent imposition of that [symbolic] form upon the world" (94). Useful as the notion of symbolic form is, this introduction takes issue with Bartelson's use of it in support of a conception of sovereignty that would supersede "facts on the ground."


25. Ibid., 140.

27. The Inner Asian Great Code recognized, and in effect established, the sovereignties of the greater and lesser principalities in the region. The Great Code played a similar role to that of the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia in the context of Europe and the Holy Roman Empire. Lkhamsuren Munkh-Erdene has discussed this issue in comparison to premodern Mongol conceptualizations of sovereignty in "The 1640 Great Code: An Inner Asian Parallel to the Treaty of Westphalia," *Central Asian Survey* 29, no. 3 (2010): 269–88.


31. Napoleon Bonaparte to the Conseil d'État (August 16, 1800), in *Oeuvres du comte P. L. Roederer* (Paris: Didot, 1854), 3:334. In the years following this statement, Napoleon did pursue a specific policy toward Jews to include them as “full citizens” in the empire he was creating, and he tried to revive the Jewish Sanhedrin (assembly), dissolved by Roman imperial order in 358 CE (Simon Schwarzfuchs, *Napoleon, the Jews, and the Sanhedrin* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979]; Franz Kobler, *Napoleon and the Jews* [New York: Schocken, 1976]).


35. In the Western tradition, knowledge as sovereignty over nature can be traced most clearly to Bacon's "In Praise of Knowledge": "Therefore, no doubt the sovereignty of man lieth hid in knowledge; wherein many things are reserved, which kings with their treasure cannot buy, nor with their force command. . . . Now we govern nature in opinions, but we are thrall unto her in necessity; but
if we would be led by her in invention, we should command her in action" (The Works of Francis Bacon, ed. J. Spedding [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011], 8:125–26). As a concern in the philosophy of history, the problem of sovereignty over nature is of course a major subject of the Hegelian tradition; Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer cite Bacon in Dialectic of Enlightenment (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 1–2. The same problem is also a crucial consideration in the history of anthropology (with all its implications for European colonialism), not least insofar as questions of “animism,” magic, and religion were concerned in the nineteenth and early twentieth century; see, e.g., James G. Frazer, The Golden Bough: The Magic Art and the Evolution of Kings (1896; London: Macmillan, 1920), 1:221: “if [the magician] claims a sovereignty over nature, it is a constitutional sovereignty rigorously limited in its scope and exercised in exact conformity with ancient usage.” That this usage is clearly metaphorical should not blind us to the fact that it was also meant to identify the force of scientific and of magical work, and the designation of laws of nature (and obedience to them), as Frazer goes on to argue. The recent advent of environmental history has raised the stakes on the relation of the production of knowledge over nature.

37. Ibid., 24–25.
38. Both Thomas Ertman’s Birth of the Leviathan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) and Elden’s conceptual history of territory, The Birth of Territory, fall within this category, even as they date the births mentioned in their titles to different periods.
39. Antje Flüchter and Susan Richter, eds., Structures on the Move: Technologies of Governance in Transcultural Encounter (Heidelberg: Springer, 2012); Douglas Howland and Luise S. White, eds., The State of Sovereignty: Territories, Laws, Populations (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008). Flüchter and Richter’s volume compares (and discusses encounters between) Germany and China, with useful chapters also on Mughal and colonial India. Howland and White’s volume looks toward non-Western traditions, with essays that examine “extraterritoriality in East Asia” and “colonial sovereignty in Manchukuo,” but the statist priority is in fact expanded, insofar as the system of colonial power and the emergence of international law as discussed in the book remain within the domain of states and international political effects alone.
41. David Armitage, Foundations of Modern International Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Though thus far centered on the history of international law and political economy, we argue that this approach need not and perhaps cannot be sustained solely at those levels, and that a multifaceted anthropological and conceptual history, at once precise and suggestive, may offer a boon for further research. Because sovereignty engages at once the history of states, myths of legitimation, forms of power, and aesthetic practices, it offers a way to further this new paradigm in unexpected directions.
EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

42. Kalmo and Skinner, “Concept in Fragments,” 7. This claim is all the more misguided as a reading of the passage quoted from Wouter G. Werner and Jaap H. de Wilde, “The Endurance of Sovereignty,” European Journal for International Relations 7, no. 3 (1986): 286. Werner and de Wilde had specifically foregrounded the conceptual embeddedness of sovereignty, not the possibility of “disentangling” it, when they asked: “To whom is a sovereignty claim addressed? What normative structures are used to determine the legitimacy of a claim to sovereignty?” Werner and de Wilde indicate that “disentangling” in the name of clarity and history may well undermine its own purpose. Biersteker and Weber also attempt to “disentangle” the components of “state sovereignty” (“Social Construction of State Sovereignty,” 11).


50. Lucien Bély, *La société des princes* (Paris: Fayard, 1999). With regard to this particular issue, it is interesting to bring in the history of Arabic word *dawla*, which in modern Arabic means “state.” *Dawla* was originally used during early Abbasid times (ninth–tenth centuries) to denote the “reign era” (of a specific ruler). Later on it came to denote the dynasty itself. During the late nineteenth century it emerged as the Arabic choice for the secular state modeled after Western examples. In the ancient Near East, kingdoms were often named after the dynasty. For instance, the ancient Kingdom of Israel is mentioned in contemporary steles as “House of Omri” (Beit Omri); Ancient Judah, as the “House of David” (Beit David). Premodern China identified as the names of the dynasty (e.g., Tang, Ming, Qing) and only during the twentieth century did the name of the state come to be separated from the name of the ruler or ruling dynasty.

51. Alexei Yurchak, “Bodies of Lenin: The Hidden Science of Communist Sovereignty,” *Representations* 129 (2015): 116-57, claims: “The uniqueness of the Leninist polity lay in the novel way in which the sovereignty of that regime was organized. Sovereignty here was vested neither in the figure of the ruler (as in the premodern absolutist monarchy or Nazi state) nor in the abstract populace (as in the modern liberal democracy), but in the party. This model was not simply different from the other two but also functioned as their peculiar combination” (146).


53. In this, we agree with Geertz’s objection to Michael Walzer’s *Regicide and Revolution*:

Though both the structure and the expressions of social life change, the inner necessities that animate it do not. Thrones may be out of fashion, and pageantry too; but political authority still requires a cultural frame in which to define itself and advance its claims, and so does opposition to it. A world wholly demystified is a world wholly depoliticized; and though Weber promised us both of these—specialists without spirit in a bureaucratic iron cage—the course of events since, with its Sukarnos, Churchills, Nkrumahs, Hitlers, Maos, Roosevelts, Stalins, Nassers, and de Gaulles, suggests that what died in 1793 (to the degree that it did) was a certain view of the affinity between the sort of power that moves men and the sort that moves mountains, not the sense that there is one. (Geertz, *Local Knowledge* [New York: Basic Books, 1983], 143)

54. See the critique of global history in David A. Bell, “This Is What Happens When Historians Overuse the Idea of the Network,” *New Republic*, October 25, 2013.


59. As it is in so much legal thought, the argument on normativity is central to Schmitt’s *Political Theology*. In a perhaps different register, for the co-implication of scientific knowledge and modern European norms, pursued with an evident if underacknowledged political purpose regarding knowledge and power, see also Georges Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological* (New York: Zone, 1989).


64. “Which development in a structure composed of interdependent people, which figuration of human beings, allows the formation of a central position with the particularly great freedom of decision that we call ‘absolutism’ or ‘autocratic rule’?” Norbert Elias, *The Court Society* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), 24.

66. Frances Yates, *The French Academies in the Sixteenth Century* (1947; reprint, London: Routledge, 1988), 270. In the Chinese case, the connections between the court, religious ceremonies, and theater and music are very strong throughout. In the ancient period, we learn from the *Zhouli*—composed before Confucius’s time—about dances preformed at court in order to “promote harmony.” Many ancient texts describe the ruler as personally intervening in drama and theater. From the Han dynasty on, imperial involvement in theater only increased, peaking during Yuan times (1267–1368) when China’s Mongol rulers heavily supported Chinese drama. Of this long history we allow ourselves but one example: Emperor Zhuangzong (r. 923–26), known for his military capabilities, used to disguise himself and play on stage with his comedians. His love of theater cost him his life when one of his favorite actors stabbed him to death. See Chu Chia-Chien, James A. Graham, and Alexandre Iacovleff, *The Chinese Theatre* (London: John Lane, 1922), and Émile Guimet, *Le théâtre en Chine* (Paris: Musée Guimet, 1905).

67. Conversely, one might also ask the question of when the aesthetics of the court deteriorates to the point of amounting to mere aesthetics deprived of power, or to a theater where the sovereign plays at sovereignty. Alfred de Vigny’s *Servitude et gloire militaires* (1835) stages the problem in an encounter between Napoleon and Pope Pius VII, in which the pope insults Napoleon as being merely a comic or tragic actor.


70. Marin, *Portrait of the King*, 5, 6, 7–8. “The king is only truly king, that is, monarch, in images. They are his real presence” (8, emphasis in original). See also Michel Foucault’s contested argument about subjectivity, sovereignty, and representation in Velasquez’s *Las Meninas* in *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 16.


72. This is very evident particularly in the context of Cold War-era Western/anticommunist attempts to explain the nature of “illiberal” or “despotic” regimes in Asia. Karl Wittfogel’s theory of “hydraulic empires” in *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957) famously argued that societies, mostly Asian, that had to rely heavily on large-
scale irrigation systems and therefore on massive coercive labor, gave rise to strong states which in turn became "despotic." We do not enter into a critique of this, now debunked, theory, but we do wish to point out that its heavy emphasis on the role of the state dwarfed and pushed aside issues of sovereignty and completely ignored questions related its trappings. Wittfogel saw the ruler simply as a despot produced by the state's bureaucracy, brushing aside his person and image as, at best, derivatives of the "strong state."


74. See Natalie Zemon Davis’s study of sovereignty instituted "from below" in Fiction in the Archives (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), which examines letters appealing for pardon; see also the discussion of pardon by Bernadette Meyler in this volume.

75. Crucial to this form is of course Michel Foucault’s work, though Foucault treated sovereignty as surpassed by the disciplinary state beginning around 1800. But see also Arlette Farge and Foucault’s study of lettres de cachet in Le désordre des familles: Lettres de cachet des Archives de la Bastille (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), where, thanks to the form of the lettres de cachet, “political sovereignty comes to be inscribed at the most elementary level of social relations; from subject to subject, between the members of the same family, in relations of proximity, interest, vocation, in the relations of hate or love or rivalry we discern besides the traditional weapons of authority and obedience, the resources of ‘absolute power.’ . . . An entire political chain interlaces the weft of the everyday” (346–47).


77. "Jealous": Rama and Sita in parts 6 and 7 of the Ramayana; “virginal”: Elizabeth I of England; “manipulative”: see Wendy Doniger, The Bedtrick: Tales of Sex and Masquerade (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), chap. 6. One could also point to other varieties of the reputation, especially but not solely among literary king lovers, such as stupid and pimpish (Caundailes), cuckolded (Arthur), and lustful (David, Herod).

78. See Marin’s discussion of the usurper in the “Finale” of Portrait of the King.

79. On the royal adoption of 1 Corinthians 2:15, see Ernst Kantorowicz, “The Sovereignty of the Artist,” in De Artibus Opuscula XL: Essays in Honor of Erwin
EDITORS’ INTRODUCTION


81. See Anne Marie Moulin’s study of physicians practicing outside their native countries and kings relying on foreign doctors for their own health and, by extension, the stability of the state, Le médecin du prince: Voyage à travers les cultures (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2010).

82. For a reading of Hobbes and the stakes of terror and state violence today that is attuned to the spectacular dimension, see Carlo Ginzburg, “Fear Reverence Terror: Reading Hobbes Today” (European University Institute, Max Weber Lecture series, May 2008).


EDITORS' INTRODUCTION


96. Rent de Vries and Lawrence Sullivan, preface to Political Theologies (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), ix. De Vries's introduction can and should be read as a meditation on sovereignty as a concept suspended between religious thought and conviction, on one hand, and political phenomena, on the other.


111. In the Chinese case, portraiture of the ruler was an immensely important feature of the trappings of sovereignty and reached its moment of perfection during the Qing dynasty, particularly during the career of the Jesuit painter


112. Duby, Age of the Cathedrals, 10.
113. Ibid., 12.
114. Ibid., 23.
118. Kantorowicz, The King’s Two Bodies, chap. 2; Schmitt, Hamlet or Hecuba (Candor, NY: Telos, 2009); Walter Benjamin, The Origin of German Tragic Drama (London: Verso, 1998).
119. See, e.g., work by Alban K. Forcione, Christopher Pye, Stephen Orgel, Stephen Greenblatt, Franco Moretti, Paul Kottman, Julia Lupton, Anselm Haverkamp, and Philip Lorenz.