

Metropolitan comparisons: London as a city-state*

Derek Keene

Centre for Metropolitan History, Institute of Historical Research

Abstract

This article explores ideas associated with the term ‘metropolis’, especially when used concerning London, and then takes the notion of the city-state as a heuristic device to identify recurrent and fundamental characteristics of this particular metropolis. The comparisons are between successive phases in London’s history, including the present; between London and other metropolises; and between London and that elusive ideal type, the ‘city-state’.

Now þat London is neuenyd – hatte þe New Troie –
þe metropol and þe mayster-town hit euermore has bene
St. Erkenwald, ll. 25–6.¹

In this neat but presumably unconscious exercise in comparative metropolitan history the late fourteenth-century poet identifies London by reference to a historic and supposedly ancestral ideal – Troy – and to enduring features of the city itself. His (the poet is likely to have been a man) approach offers a model for that adopted in this article. Rather than compare London to other metropolises according to a defined set of criteria (one of the most frequently-adopted methods in comparative history), I have chosen to highlight some of the city’s essential qualities by setting it against an ideal type and by comparing London with itself over successive phases of its long history. As an ideal type the city-state is both suitably provocative in relation to London and sufficiently fuzzy for the comparison to be profitable. The poet illuminated the state of the city by dramatizing a confrontation between its distant past and its immediate present. Long-run comparison is especially useful when thinking about cities, for they are deeply-rooted institutions, shaped by durable accumulations of behaviour and belief, and sustained by interactions with their hinterlands and cities elsewhere. City systems – the sets of relations between cities – have a similar value as social capital. London, of course,

* This article is a revised version of the inaugural lecture given by Professor Derek Keene on 6 March 2002, as Leverhulme Professor of Comparative Metropolitan History at the Institute of Historical Research, School of Advanced Study, University of London.

¹ *Saint Erkenwald*, ed. C. Peterson (Philadelphia, Pa., 1977), p. 73.

is 2,000 years old as a city and perhaps twice that age as a place with a distinctive identity and name.² Characteristics apparent from its earliest years recur throughout the history of the city. Moreover, London has always played a part within larger city systems, some of a much earlier origin than the city of London itself.

A metropolitan historian should offer a view on what a metropolis is. There are some formal definitions, but informal ones increasingly prevail. A favourite is from the great *New English Dictionary* of a century ago: 'a capital city . . . *the metropolis* – often somewhat pompously used of London'.³ That is a phrase bearing many meanings. In its Greek origin the word metropolis denoted a mother-city from which another city or colony had been founded. This hierarchical notion shaped Diocletian's administrative reform of the Roman empire, so that in each province a metropolis presided over a number of lesser cities. As the likely seat of the government (and hence the capital) of the Roman diocese of Britain, in which there were four provinces, London was presumably a metropolis.⁴ The Christian church adopted this model, so that in the west a metropolis came to be recognized as the seat of an archbishop and a city as that of a bishop. With the reintroduction of Roman Christianity to Britain London missed out on metropolitan status – a fault that some later Londoners were keen to remedy.⁵ Yet Bede in his account of the conversion described London as the metropolis of the province of the East Saxons, who were subject to the king of Kent, and also used the term to characterize Canterbury as the seat both of the Christian mission and of the secular overlordship that the king exercised over much of Britain. For Bede the word could have something like its modern meaning of 'capital city'.⁶

Twelfth-century writers occasionally dignified London as a metropolis, especially when describing those moments of crisis when a new monarch entered the city in the process of seizing control of the kingdom, of which London was certainly the chief city and in some sense the capital. Thus, William the Conqueror was said to arrive in 1066 'at the metropolis of the realm (*regnum*)', and Stephen at the beginning of his reign hastened to the 'queen metropolis of the whole kingdom (*regio*)'.⁷

² R. Coates, 'A new explanation of the name London', *Trans. Philological Society*, xcii (1998), 203–29.

³ *A New English Dictionary: on Historical Principles*, vi, pt. ii (Oxford, 1908), p. 400.

⁴ P. Salway, *Roman Britain* (Oxford, 1981; corr. repr., 1982), pp. 315–17.

⁵ A. Morey and C. N. L. Brooke, *Gilbert Foliot and his Letters* (Cambridge, 1965), pp. 151–62; *St. Paul's: the Cathedral Church of London, 604–2004*, ed. D. Keene, A. Burns and A. Saint (2004), pp. 4, 17.

⁶ *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969; rev. edn., 1991), pp. 74–5, 78–9, 142–3, 148–9; cf. J. Campbell, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (1986), pp. 103, 108.

⁷ *The Chronicle of Battle Abbey*, ed. and trans. E. Searle (Oxford, 1980), p. 40; *Gesta Stephani*, ed. and trans. K. R. Potter, with new intro. and notes by R. H. C. Davis (Oxford, 1976) (hereafter *Gesta Stephani*), pp. 4, 5.

More commonly, however, London was characterized for its great wealth and commerce⁸ or, by those with a patriotic concern for the reputation of the place, as ‘seat of the kingdom’⁹ or ‘head of the realm’.¹⁰ It was not until the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that the term metropolis came routinely to be employed to denote London and other European cities as the capitals of states or other territories. Thus, a mid fifteenth-century semi-fictional account of King Alfred’s assembly of bishops in London described the city as ‘metropolis of the whole island’, thereby reflecting the imperial claims of later English kings, while on the plans of European and other cities that were published in a great collection from 1572 onwards capitals were often described as metropolises.¹¹

But the *New English Dictionary* was already out of date,¹² for by 1900 the word metropolis had acquired an extra layer of meaning, prompted by the recent rapid growth of essentially new cities such as New York, Chicago and Berlin. This meaning indicated a place which dominated through its power, money, size, cultural range, nervous intensity and generation of ideas, and which simultaneously offered both unlimited freedom and extreme servitude, but which was not necessarily a capital or formal seat of state government. This was the ‘Metropolis’ of the Fritz Lang film and, in many ways, that of Lewis Mumford, as well as the natural habitat of Simmel’s *Philosophy of Money*.¹³ Chicago, the metropolis that mobilized the resources of a vast extent of hitherto ‘untamed’ nature,¹⁴ has never been a capital (but who has heard of Springfield, Illinois?), and the greatest of the North American metropolises, New York, has had no more than a fleeting experience of capital status.¹⁵

Nineteenth-century London prompted yet another meaning of the term as a conceptual identity for the whole collection of places and administrative units that made up London, with the ancient city at its core. The idea of defining an area larger than the city for the purposes

⁸ *Willelmi Malmesbiriensis Monachi de Gestis Pontificum Anglorum*, ed. N. E. S. A. Hamilton (Rolls Ser., lii, 1870), p. 140; *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I*, ed. R. Howlett (4 vols., Rolls Ser., lxxxii, 1884–9), i. 406.

⁹ William fitz Stephen, ‘Descriptio nobilissimae ciuitatis Londoniae’, p. 219 (cited from the most useful edition, John Stow, *A Survey of London*, ed. C. L. Kingsford (3 vols., Oxford, 1908–27; rev. edn., 1971), ii. 219–29); see also *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket: Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. J. C. Robertson (7 vols., Rolls Ser., lxxvii, 1875–85), iii. 2–13.

¹⁰ In a London collection of about 1200 (*Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, ed. F. Liebermann (3 vols., Halle, 1903–16), i. 657).

¹¹ *Liber Monasterii de Hyda*, ed. E. Edwards (Rolls Ser., xlv, 1866), p. 36. See G. Braun, *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* (6 vols., Cologne, 1572–1618), where cities described as metropolises include Edinburgh, London, Milan, Moscow, Odense, Prague, Rouen, Riga, Vilnius and Visby.

¹² The old definition, however, was repeated in the 1989 edition (*The Oxford English Dictionary: Second Edition*, ix (Oxford, 1989)).

¹³ L. Mumford, *The City in History* (Harmondsworth, 1966), p. 638; G. Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, ed. and trans. T. Buttermore and D. Frisby (1978; 2nd edn., 1990) (first published in Berlin, 1907).

¹⁴ W. Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (1991).

¹⁵ *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, ed. K. T. Jackson (1995), pp. 275–6, s.n. ‘Congress’.

of understanding or managing London as a whole originated with the Bills of Mortality in the late sixteenth century and was reinforced by the short-lived New Corporation of the Suburbs set up by King Charles I in 1636, but in neither case was the word metropolis employed. Ambition and competition explain the ‘Metropolis [later Imperial] Gas Light and Coke Company’ of 1820, but soon afterwards, and especially under the stimulus of the proposal in the Reform Bill of 1832 to establish metropolitan boroughs, ‘Metropolis’ rapidly came to the fore as the term for London as a whole, above all when addressing moral, environmental, health and statistical concerns. Thus, we acquired a Metropolitan Police Force (1829), a Buildings Office (1844), a Commission for Sewers (1848), a Board of Works (1855), a Railway (1860) and other metropolitan pomposities too numerous to name.¹⁶

In the United States the notion of metropolitanization – the process by which a town expands its size and influence so as to incorporate and organize settlements and landscapes in an ever-expanding hinterland – came during the later nineteenth century to play an increasing part in popular visions of the cities of the future¹⁷ and has in recent decades become a focus of interest in urban studies, not least because of the industrial, political, cultural and fiscal issues involved.¹⁸ One pioneering North American economic historian developed his idea of the metropolitan economy initially by reference to London.¹⁹ Most recently, the notion of the postmetropolis – the hollowed out, increasingly disaggregated and fractured, but nevertheless continuously spreading, former metropolis – has emerged, above all as a descriptor for Los Angeles.²⁰ In thinking about London’s character and development, all four senses of the term metropolis – ecclesiastical rank, state capital, shock city and agglomeration – are useful, although it is some 800 years since Londoners were seriously concerned about ecclesiastical rank. Even the fearful vision of the postmetropolis can help us to understand key aspects of London’s development since the sixteenth century, as well as the current state of the agglomeration, despite a recent modest trend towards recolonizing the centre.

In a few programmatic paragraphs, a historian of Venice recently commented on the variety of forms of the city-state and on the difficulty

¹⁶ R. L. B. Pinkus, ‘The conceptual development of metropolitan London, 1800–55’ (unpublished State University of New York at Buffalo Ph.D. thesis, 1975; available as print from microfilm, Ann Arbor, 1976) addresses this theme in an interesting, although partial, fashion; J. P. Ward, *Metropolitan Communities: Trade Guilds, Identity, and Change in Early Modern London* (Stanford, Calif., 1997), pp. 20–1; J. L. Howgego, *Printed Maps of London circa 1553–1850* (2nd edn., Folkestone, 1978), pp. 2, 3, 241–84; S. Everard, *The History of the Gas Light and Coke Company, 1812–1949* (1949), pp. 93–4.

¹⁷ S. K. Schultz, *Constructing Urban Culture: American Cities and City Planning, 1800–1920* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1989), esp. pp. 26–7.

¹⁸ E.g., A. J. Scott, *Metropolis: from the Division of Labour to Urban Form* (1988).

¹⁹ N. S. B. Gras, *An Introduction to Economic History* (New York, 1922), pp. 181–340.

²⁰ In E. W. Soja, *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions* (Oxford, 2000).

of definition: 'the concept of the city-state does not have a single meaning, nor is it especially clear.' For his purpose, the city-state is the political creation of a commercial metropolis which through war, diplomacy or purchase enlarged its territorial framework. The driving force in the creation of that framework is the city, not the prince. Many cities may have aimed to be city-states, he wrote, but others, notably London and Paris, did not.²¹ That bold statement can be challenged on several counts. Can any city be said to have aimed to be a city-state since the concept itself is so unclear? Is the term itself better regarded as a useful description of outcomes rather than of aims, which seem most often to have been shaped by the pragmatic search for the most effective means of survival and of the creation of wealth. Perhaps Paris, a royal creation if ever there was one, has had no city-state tendencies, but there is a good case that London has been different. Despite the similarities that emerged between London and Paris as capital cities in medieval and later periods, the two cities experienced very different metropolitan trajectories. A recent comparative survey of city-state cultures concluded that 'there have never been city-states in Scandinavia or in England', but also that city-states, although self-governing, are not necessarily autonomous and need not be undermined by subordination to, interference from or collaboration with external authority. Moreover, 'city-state' is a purely heuristic concept, not used by those who lived in them.²²

In the light of such conclusions and of recent thinking about London, comparison with city-state models offers a potentially valuable way of teasing out some of London's fundamental characteristics as a metropolis. City-states, or political entities resembling the ideal type, seem usually to have arisen in one of two contexts. One was in the absence of a territorial power, when people came together to establish order in a particular place and over the surrounding country. The earliest cities in the Near East, antedating the full emergence of agriculture but nevertheless concerned to stockpile supplies, are perhaps a case in point,²³ while the cities or 'microstates' of archaic Greece, emerging from the darkness that followed the decline of palace centres, provide a more clear-cut example.²⁴ The other was when an overarching territorial authority was weakening

²¹ J.-C. Hocquet, 'City-state and market economy', in *Economic Systems and State Finance*, ed. R. Bonney (Oxford, 1995), pp. 81–100.

²² M. H. Hansen, 'Conclusion', in *A Comparative Study of Thirty City-State Cultures: an Investigation Conducted by the Copenhagen Polis Centre*, ed. M. H. Hansen (Copenhagen, 2000), pp. 597–623; see also his introduction to the same volume.

²³ S. N. Ree, 'Sumerian city-states', in *The City-State in Five Cultures*, ed. R. Griffith and C. G. Thomas (Santa Barbara, Calif. and Oxford, 1981), pp. 1–30.

²⁴ L. H. Jeffery, *Archaic Greece: the City-States, c.700–500 B.C.* (1976), pp. 39–49; C. G. Thomas and C. Conant, *Citadel to City-State: the Transformation of Greece, 1200–700 B.C.E.* (Bloomington, Ind., 1999). For a very valuable overview of conceptual issues, see J. K. Davies, 'The "origins of the Greek polis": where should we be looking?', in *The Development of the Polis in Archaic Greece*, ed. L. G. Mitchell and P. J. Rhodes (1997), pp. 24–38.

and the cities formally subordinate to it chose, or found themselves unavoidably compelled, to develop their individual systems of control. The classic case is northern Italy from the eleventh century onwards, as the power of imperial and other forms of territorial authority diminished in relation to that of cities and communes.²⁵ Imperial authority was stronger in Germany, and the network of cities less dense, but there too similar developments took place,²⁶ while in the Low Countries, at the margins of major principalities, individual commercial cities worked hard to gain territorial and commercial advantage and acted as ‘bargaining metropolises’ within systems of princely rule.²⁷

Current attempts to understand city-states, in both ancient and more recent forms, take account of a far wider range of political and material issues than traditional concerns such as the idealized *polis* or the quasi-autonomous city territory. The emphasis is on process rather than stability, on negotiation between different sources of power or legitimacy, and on distinguishing more clearly than previously was the case between, on the one hand, the city as a material, social and political construct and, on the other, the state in all its various manifestations. Some of the most valuable contributions on the topic have come from Italy, because the subject matter is local and remains an important current political issue after centuries of debate. A historian of the evolution of Italian city-states into regional states wrote, for example, of the need to ‘pay attention to the political in its most capillary and scattered forms and manifestations’.²⁸ Others emphasize the ‘non-linearity’ of change and plurality in the roots of power, so that even city-state structures can resemble the ‘composite states’ associated with the great European monarchies of the present or of the recent past. Moreover, even when subordinated to higher authority, city-states could survive as ‘republics by contract’. This was clearly the case with Bologna, which for long after it became a province in the papal territories retained an almost exclusive control over the hinterland – its

²⁵ D. Waley, *The Italian City Republics* (3rd edn., 1988); G. Tabacco, *The Struggle for Power in Medieval Italy: Structures of Political Rule*, trans. R. B. Jensen (Cambridge, 1989); P. Jones, *The Italian City-State: from Commune to Signoria* (Oxford, 1997); cf. G. Chittolini, ‘Cities, “city-states” and regional states in north-central Italy’, in *Cities and the Rise of States in Europe, A.D. 1000 to 1800*, ed. C. Tilly and W. P. Blockmans (Boulder, Colo., 1994), pp. 28–43.

²⁶ C. R. Friedrichs, ‘The Swiss and German city-states’, in Griffith and Thomas, pp. 109–42; T. Scott, ‘Germany 1350–1600’, in *Town and Country in Europe, 1300–1800*, ed. S. R. Epstein (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 202–28.

²⁷ P. C. M. Hoppenbrouwers, ‘Town and country in Holland, 1300–1550’ and M. ‘t Hart, ‘Town and country in the Dutch Republic, 1550–1800’, in Epstein, pp. 54–79, 80–105; for ‘bargaining metropolises’, see W. P. Blockmans, ‘Voracious states and obstructing cities: an aspect of state formation in preindustrial Europe’, in Tilly and Blockmans, pp. 218–50; for earlier developments, see A. Verhulst, *The Rise of Cities in North-West Europe* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 142–8.

²⁸ G. Chittolini, ‘The “private”, the “public”, and the state’, in *The Origins of the State in Italy, 1300–1600*, ed. J. Kirshner (1996), pp. 34–61, esp. p. 59.

traditional territory, roughly equivalent to the diocese – from which it drew foodstuffs and industrial supplies.²⁹

Similar thinking is currently applied to the formative period when the northern Italian cities emerged as independent political entities.³⁰ Commercial opportunity and the needs of rapidly-expanding urban populations provided a driving force, but cities were not simply taken over by mercantile or bourgeois communes. Groups, including bishops and both rural and urban nobility, as well as merchants and craftsmen, negotiated internal accommodations to their collective advantage. Outside the cities, magnates sometimes opposed their attempts at extending territorial control and were sometimes compelled to submit, but many, both within and outside, increasingly found it advantageous to work with and through the frameworks of protection that cities provided (and still provide today). Communes embodying these interests strove to control the surrounding territory for physical security, to ensure reliable supplies of food and raw materials, and to gain access to trade routes. Even when adjoining small towns and communes had been suppressed or absorbed, the territories established were not necessarily very extensive. That around Bologna, which came hard up against those of neighbouring cities and lordships, not to mention the predatory Venetians at certain moments of crisis, has survived in one form or another to the present day. In the later thirteenth century, soon after it had been expanded to these limits, it supported a metropolis of some 50,000 inhabitants, with about the same number in the surrounding countryside.³¹ Extending up to about forty kilometres from the city, it was about the same size as the territory around modern London bounded by the M25.

The new regimes were unstable. Attempts were made to resolve internal conflicts by appointing podestàs, in some ways equivalent to our mayors, who might hold the ring. Commonly high-status outsiders, they were expert in the art of rule.³² Such provisions usually proved to be insufficient, and most city-states fell, or were offered, into the hands of princes – tyrants – who pursued their own territorial and dynastic policies. This was one of the ways in which regional states began to emerge. Their forms varied greatly. Tuscany was structured in a highly-centralized fashion around Florence, an already ossifying and isolated economy. Milan and Genoa performed essential metropolitan roles within states which were complex patchworks of local interests. Venice, the one regional state which remained a republic, established its mainland territory in response to extensions of

²⁹ E. F. Guarini, 'Centre and periphery', in Kirshner, pp. 74–96; C. M. Belfanti, 'Town and country in central and northern Italy, 1400–1800', in Epstein, pp. 292–315, esp. p. 313.

³⁰ See above, n. 25.

³¹ *Bologna*, ed. F. Bocchi and others (3 vols., *Atlante Storico delle Città Italiane*, Emilia-Romagna, ii, Bologna, 1995–6), i. 212–13, ii. 73, 212–13.

³² For a wide-ranging prosopographical study, see *I Podestà dell'Italia Comunale*, i: *Reclutamento e Circolazione degli Ufficiali Forestieri (fine XII sec. – metà XIV sec.)*, ed. J.-C. Maire Vigueur (2 vols., Collection de l'École française de Rome, cclxviii, Rome, 2000).

power by cities which threatened its trade routes and other resources. Milan, Genoa and Venice were notable for the degree to which they established accommodations with subordinate cities that retained their own institutions. Genoa's exercise of a loose but effective control over its Ligurian hinterland, while at the same time pursuing a financial strategy which was Europe-wide in scope, suggests points of comparison with London, as do elements of the Milanese and Venetian states. The way in which these three commercial metropolises occupied sites of contact between different networks of exchange, and so lay at the edge of the territories they controlled, is another point of similarity with London.

While the leading German cities freed themselves from subordination to territorial princes, maintained their own armies and pursued distinctive external policies, they did not attain the degree of autonomy enjoyed by their Italian counterparts. If any of them were city-states it was of that type where there was some external interference in their sovereignty. Perhaps the imperial cities, held directly of the emperor, conformed most closely to the model.³³ In Flanders the balance of power ultimately favoured the prince rather than the cities. The later-developing cities of the northern Netherlands pursued policies similar to those of their counterparts to the south; but here, too, although for different reasons, central authority was strong and in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the cities had a clear common interest in maintaining the internal distributive system and in protecting themselves against the threat from Spanish Hapsburg rule to the south. Thus, no town attained complete self-government and those with the smallest degree of independence lay towards the threatened frontier on the south. Nevertheless, the impact of towns on Dutch society was so great that overall it was marked by a strong sympathy for 'city-state culture', and Venice served as an important model for Dutch republican theory.³⁴

London is clearly not a city-state in any straightforward sense. The city's customs, constitution and citizenship have not been formal, foundational elements in the present-day English state of which it is part. London never acquired the extent of regalian rights that once distinguished the principal cities of Germany and northern Italy. It has never had the power directly to negotiate foreign policy. Yet, as we have seen, none of these factors is essential to a city-state identity. Moreover, there is much to be said for the view that London has informally or indirectly exercised such a high degree of wider influence that it might be characterized as a city-state by negotiation with the kingdoms of which it has formed part. There are several straightforward resemblances

³³ P. Johaneck, 'Imperial and free towns of the Holy Roman Empire: city-states in pre-modern Germany?', in Hansen, *Comparative Study*, pp. 295–319.

³⁴ M. Prak, 'The Dutch Republic's city-state culture (17th–18th centuries)', in Hansen, *Comparative Study*, pp. 343–58.

between London and successful city-states. The most significant of these is the overwhelming scale of its size and wealth within Britain as a whole, a more or less constant factor from Roman times onwards. Over the last 1,000 years some measurement of that pre-eminence is possible (see Table 1). There have been three broad phases in London's rise over that period as a European and as a world city: up to 1500, with a peak of population in 1300; up to 1700; and from then to the present. Doubtless, a fourth phase, unlikely to witness a rise, is already underway.

In the first of the three phases London became prominent as a centre of population, but its share of national wealth and trade grew much more rapidly, especially towards the end of the period. Throughout this phase and later London's pre-eminence over other cities within the state has been exceptional within Europe, a characteristic which seems primarily to reflect the marginal character of the kingdom itself in a European context. London has been the only element in that kingdom which has consistently played a significant role within a wider world. Commerce was the key to this success, and London's financial and strategic significance was demonstrated as early as 1018 when its share of the silver tribute paid to the Danes probably amounted to thirteen per cent of the English total.³⁵ During the second phase London was the dominant site of English urban and commercial growth, achieving a degree of pre-eminence among the cities of Britain and Ireland that has not been equalled since. By 1700 it was probably the largest city in Europe and a century later it became the largest city in the world, a position which it did not cede until well into the twentieth century.

The third phase was marked by the growth of provincial ports and industrial centres, and by the continued expansion of London, especially during the nineteenth century. London's direct share of overseas trade and its size relative to the next rank of cities diminished, but in other ways the metropolis became more influential than ever. One outcome of the growth of business at the centre and the consequent increase in land values, as well as of technological developments in transport, has been a steady drift of residents outwards from central districts, reducing the population of London as formally defined. But even 'Greater London', the area now under the 'strategic guidance' of the mayor and Greater London Authority, and in effect the most coherent and comprehensive administrative expression of London for at least 400 years, no longer serves as an appropriate physical, economic or social definition of the metropolis. Thus, in 1991 a fifth of the people who worked within Greater London actually lived outside it.³⁶ The proportion has probably

³⁵ D. Keene, 'London from the post-Roman period to 1300', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, i: 600–1540, ed. D. M. Palliser (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 187–216, esp. p. 191.

³⁶ *Focus on London 2000*, ed. J. Matheson and G. Edwards (Office for National Statistics, 2000), sect. 10.9.

Table 1. London population and trade, 1100–2000

Period	Date	London's population			London's overseas trade as % of that of England (1200–1800) and of United Kingdom (2000)			
		as % of England & Wales	as % of second city of Britain and Ireland		all	imports	exports	re-exports
			mainland only	Britain and Ireland				
1	1100	1	200	200				
	1200	2	300	300	17			
	1300	2	300	300	30		30	
	1400	2	300	300				
	1500	2	500	500	60		70	
2	1600	5	1700	1700				
	1700	10	1900	1100		80	65	85
3	1770				68	72	62	64
	1800	12	1300	600				
	1850	15	730	650				
	1900	20	900	900				
	1950	19	600	600				
	2000	14	735	735		20	15	
Trade only	2000 (+ South-East)					44	32	
	2000 (+ South-East and East of England)					58	44	

Note on sources:

Population and trade to 1500: D. Keene, 'Medieval London and its region', *London Jour.*, xiv (1989), 99–111; C. Barron, 'London 1300–1540', in *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, i: 600–1540, ed. D. M. Palliser (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 395–440, esp. pp. 412–13 and Figure 17.

Population 1600–1950: J. de Vries, *European Urbanization, 1500–1800* (1984); *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, ii: 1540–1840, ed. P. Clark (Cambridge, 2000), Table 12.1; F. Sheppard, *London: a History* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 363–4; B. R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 27–9.

Trade 1700–1800: C. J. French, 'London's domination of English overseas trade, 1700–75', *London Jour.*, xvii (1992), 27–35, esp. Table 1.

Population and trade 2000: *Focus on London 2003*, ed. D. Virdee and T. Williams (Office for National Statistics, 2003), Tables 2.1, 2.2; relevant issues of *Region in Figures*, iv (Summer 2001), ed. T. Williams (Office for National Statistics, 2001), Table 3.6.

grown since then but, like those who dwell within Greater London itself, many such people work in outlying parts of London rather than at the centre. Consequently, of those whose working and domestic lives are directly shaped by the metropolis, many identify themselves more strongly with London neighbourhoods or with small towns or cities outside Greater London than with London overall, a pattern of daily life which raises important issues concerning metropolitan governance. In reality, 'London' may now contain no less a proportion of the national population than was the case in 1900, and its share of international trade, as measured by exports and imports, must include a substantial part of that attributed to the adjoining regions now defined as 'East of England' and 'South-East' (see Table 1).³⁷

London has always been outstandingly productive. In 2001 the workplace-based Gross Value Added of the Greater London Area amounted to nineteen per cent of the United Kingdom total. The Gross Value Added per head was more than one and a half times that for the country as a whole, and of the other English regions only the South-East exceeded the United Kingdom mean.³⁸ By this measure of productivity, Inner London ranks highest among European city regions.³⁹ London's contribution to the national revenue has always been impressive. On the eve of the Great Fire of 1666 London, with ten per cent of the population, was contributing half of the government's 'ordinary revenue'.⁴⁰ The proportion has fallen since then, but remains substantial – in 1812 London contributed almost forty per cent of the total raised by direct taxation in England and Wales.⁴¹ At present London contributes 17.5 per cent of national revenue, but receives a smaller proportion of public expenditure in return. The annual tax revenue thereby exported to the rest of the United Kingdom is likely to be up to £17.45 billion and may be significantly higher: this is a sum equivalent to the total annual public expenditure in the North-East or in Wales.⁴² In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries London's contribution to the national revenue supported an overseas policy and naval expenditure which was of direct benefit to the commercial business

³⁷ The recently-introduced governmental regions of England notoriously ignore factors of topographical, economic and social coherence, especially in the hinterland of Greater London.

³⁸ From the nine regional issues of *Region in Figures*, vii (Winter 2003), ed. D. Virdee and P. Cauer (Office for National Statistics, 2003).

³⁹ *Focus on London 2003*, ed. D. Virdee and T. Williams (Office for National Statistics, 2003), Table 5.3.

⁴⁰ Based on C. D. Chandaman, *The English Public Revenue, 1660–88* (Oxford, 1975), using values from the first half of the 1660s given on pp. 89n., 319, 332, 349 and in app. 2. London contributed about 18% of the Hearth Tax, 35% of the Excise (revenue from internal trade) and 70% of the Customs (revenue from external trade); these three sources of income together made up almost all the 'ordinary revenue' of the realm.

⁴¹ L. D. Schwarz, 'London, 1700–1840', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, ii: 1540–1840, ed. P. Clark (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 641–71, esp. p. 649.

⁴² London School of Economics, *London's Place in the U.K. Economy* (Corporation of London, 2003), pp. 65–75.

of the metropolis. Nowadays, comparable benefits are less apparent and the lack of investment in infrastructure may be putting London's prosperity at risk. There is an uncanny parallel here with conditions in Italy from the eleventh century onwards, as city-states emerged from within frameworks of public authority that proved increasingly inadequate to their needs.

Another point of comparison concerns the way in which London has owed its success to its position on the margins of political and economic systems. Its very foundation around A.D. 50 facilitated the extension of Roman networks of distribution and territorial rule. On the periphery of Europe, but with ready access to Continental routes of trade, London has over the last 1,000 years played an increasingly prominent role as the prime emporium connecting those routes to its English hinterland. As with Venice, Genoa and, to some degree, Milan in relation to their territories, London's distinctive location in one corner of that hinterland reveals much concerning its fundamental character. Moreover, London has gained a great deal of its strength from its situation on the margin of the region of intensive production and exchange that spans the southern part of the North Sea and includes the cities of the Low Countries. London's connection with the world outside its territorial hinterland, in many ways more than with the territory itself, is another resemblance to some of the more successful city-states. The city's rapid commercial and physical growth from the late fifteenth century onwards owed as much to the new commercial dynamism of the Low Countries as to any developments in England. With the subsequent emergence of the 'Atlantic economy', London could capitalize upon its newly-advantageous geographical position, which gave it the edge over its Dutch rivals. Then, with a growing position in far eastern and colonial trade, it acquired a new role as a node in world systems of exchange. That came to be undermined, but the city's late twentieth-century revival as a global financial centre fits into the earlier pattern in owing much to London's capacity to serve as a neutral market-place linking different economic zones, in this case those of North America and Europe.⁴³

London's autonomous role and its links outside Britain have contributed more than its function as a capital city to its essential strength. Unlike many capitals, it was not near the centre of the kingdom and was not initially a seat of dominant authority. Nevertheless, it was attractive to ambitious rulers whose bases of authority were far away. They were drawn to London because it could provide access to money, men, goods and information about the wider world. Roman London was a trading settlement before it became a military and governmental centre. London occupied the margin between several of the post-Roman kingdoms, but for the kings of Kent, Mercia and Wessex it was the most important city and they struggled to control it as an essential element in their rule.

⁴³ R. Roberts and D. Kynaston, *City State: how the Markets came to Rule our World* (2001).

London was central to King Alfred's programme for the recovery of territory against the Danes, and essential to the creation of a unified kingdom of England, but it did not thereby acquire capital status, which for a long time remained with Winchester as the principal site of royal authority.⁴⁴

London's development as a capital in something like the modern sense of the term was a long drawn out process and, despite the strategic significance of the city, was not accomplished until the late thirteenth century. At that time, having become the principal repository of state treasure and the main source of goods and credit for the crown, London rapidly became the main focus of the king's rule rather than a place of interest at the eastern limit of the traditional royal itinerary.⁴⁵ Thereafter, the association between the monarch and London, one of mutual dependence, became ever closer. The establishment of the key state institutions at Westminster, on the edge of London, points to their secondary function within a metropolis whose essential role within the state was as a source of wealth. This was in sharp contrast to Paris, which contained the heart of a very different form of state and which lacked the clear separation between city and state institutions and authorities that pertained in London. Thus, whoever wished to control the English state had to control London, not primarily because it was the seat of state institutions, which on occasion were removed elsewhere, but because it was the principal source of power and legitimacy. In this way London performed very like a city-state and shaped the asymmetrical political geography of the kingdom.

Performance was matched by city-state rhetoric, for during the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries there developed a striking series of characterizations of London not simply as the capital but as the lynchpin of the state and the foundation of public authority at a national level. In this writing London appears, especially to the eyes of foreigners and provincials, as a shock city full of commerce, trade, weapons, drink, fires, oaths and exotic behaviour. The city was the showpiece of the realm. When the succession to the crown was uncertain, Londoners claimed the right to elect the king. They were to be exempt from naval and military service since they owed those duties to their city, which was the 'refuge and fortress of the realm'. London was the 'queen metropolis' and head of the realm and the laws. It had been founded and built in the form of and in memory of ancient Troy, and embodied the rights, liberties and royal customs of Troy itself. Its institutions and assemblies were models of dignity for other cities, and should be the focus of sworn brotherhoods uniting the people, princes and earls of the whole kingdom of Britain to

⁴⁴ D. Keene, 'Alfred and London', in *Alfred the Great: Papers from the 11th-Centenary Conferences*, ed. T. Reuter (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 235–49.

⁴⁵ D. Keene, 'Medieval London and its region', *London Jour.*, xiv (1989), 99–111.

defend it against enemies.⁴⁶ One Londoner claimed that the citizens should have no king but their mayor, but his fellows thought that was going too far.⁴⁷

London was the pole of civility in the realm, whose barbarous fringes to the north and west were largely defined in terms of distance from the city.⁴⁸ Through Dublin in the thirteenth century, Londoners made a strong contribution to the English civilizing mission in Ireland.⁴⁹ In 1241 a Scotsman expressed astonishment that the Welsh, who were the descendants of the Britons, were now compelled to go to London to have their lawsuits determined by the English. As a challenge to this subordination, the Welsh themselves dreamed of their ancient empire, of which they supposed London to have been the seat.⁵⁰ In later periods, too, both Englishmen and visitors could envisage London as an institution which subsumed the state. About 1530 Thomas Starkey, in the spirit of civic humanism, reflected on the reform of an English body politic sick with 'frenzy'.⁵¹ With London in mind he emphasized the common interest of prince and merchant, and proposed to repress sedition and defend the liberty of the people against the king by establishing a permanent council based in London, consisting of four peers, two bishops (London and Canterbury), four judges and four of the wisest citizens of London. A late sixteenth-century visitor famously declared that 'London is not said to be in England but rather England is in London', while in 1617 a Venetian, familiar with notions of accommodation between powers and of the asymmetrical state, noted that in London there was to be found both the absolute power exercised by the king and a government for the city itself, 'which may rather be styled a republic of wholesale merchants than anything else'. Despite the presence of a court, public culture was predominantly civic in character, while matters such

⁴⁶ For these characterizations, see: above n. 8; Liebermann, i. 655–9, 678; fitz Stephen, p. 225; *Gesta Stephani*, pp. 4–7; *Jordan Fantosme's Chronicle*, ed. and trans. R. C. Johnston (Oxford, 1981), pp. 68–9, 120–1; *The Chronicle of Richard of Devizes*, ed. J. T. Appleby (1963), pp. 49, 65–6; M. Bateson, 'A London municipal collection of the reign of John', *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, xvii (1902), 480–511, 707–30, esp. p. 720. Cf. P. Wormald, 'Quadrupartitus', in *Law and Government in Medieval England and Normandy: Essays in Honour of Sir James Holt*, ed. G. Garnett and J. Hudson (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 111–47, esp. p. 111.

⁴⁷ *Rotuli Curiae Regis*, ed. F. Palgrave (2 vols., 1835), i. vii–xviii, 69–70.

⁴⁸ Cf. J. Gillingham, 'Civilizing the English? The English histories of William of Malmesbury and David Hume', *Hist. Research*, lxxiv (2001), 17–43.

⁴⁹ J. A. Watt, 'Dublin in the 13th century: the making of a colonial capital city', in *Thirteenth Century England I*, ed. P. R. Coss and S. D. Lloyd (Woodbridge, 1986), pp. 150–7. Note the many London names in *The Dublin Guild Merchant Roll, c.1190–1265*, ed. P. Connolly and G. Martin (Dublin, 1992).

⁵⁰ R. R. Davies, *Domination and Conquest: the Experience of Ireland, Scotland and Wales, 1100–1300* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 104–5; R. R. Davies, *The First English Empire: Power and Identity in the British Isles, 1093–1343* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 40, 44–5.

⁵¹ Thomas Starkey, *A Dialogue between Pole and Lupset*, ed. T. F. Mayer (Camden 4th ser., xxxvii, 1989), pp. 112–15, 121.

as poor relief were handled and developed as much by metropolitan experiment and initiative as by national policy.⁵²

The material predominance of London, as well as more abstract ideas about cities as a source of order in human affairs, continued to underlie political discourse. In this tradition, a pamphleteer on the eve of the 1713 election addressed the voters of London on the responsibility of their parliamentary representatives, who would speak not only for a great emporium but also for a city 'that has always been looked on as the bulwark of the liberty, as it is the main seat of the property, of the people of Great Britain'.⁵³ Much later, in 1901, the impressive scale on which British cities were providing services to their inhabitants provoked the remark that 'the modern city is reverting in importance to the position of the city-state in classical antiquity'.⁵⁴ It is probably significant, however, that the remark was made with reference to Glasgow rather than to London, where despite outstanding achievements in the provision of services, internal fragmentation and a role as imperial capital would have made the metropolis seem most unlike a city-state.

London's city-state characteristics have had more concrete and pragmatic manifestations. In the earlier middle ages London and its citizens had a variety of rights within a large region surrounding the city. In the tenth century, for example, a London-based peace association exercised powers in several counties north and south of the Thames, while in the twelfth century the citizens had, or claimed, hunting rights up to and beyond the line of the modern M25.⁵⁵ Had the authority of monarchical government not been consolidated and sustained to the exceptional degree that it was in England, London could well have developed external interests such as these into full control over an extensive dependent territory. In the event, the city's rights outside its immediate jurisdiction were limited to restrictions on trading within a small inner zone of three miles (five kilometres), eventually consolidated in 1327 as the right to prevent the establishment of markets within seven miles (eleven kilometres), well short of the M25. Nevertheless, London used its economic weight to further its interests elsewhere. Thus, it aggressively insisted on its citizens' right, confirmed by royal charter, to trade free of toll throughout the realm but resisted the equally legitimate

⁵² R. MacKenney, *The City State, 1500–1700: Republican Liberty in an Age of Princely Power* (Basingstoke, 1989), pp. 28–9. Cf. I. W. Archer, 'The livery companies and charity in the 16th and 17th centuries', in *Guilds, Society and Economy in London, 1450–1800*, ed. I. A. Gadd and P. Wallis (2002), pp. 15–28 (and the works cited in n. 1).

⁵³ Cited in P. Gauci, 'Informality and influence: the overseas merchant and the livery companies, 1660–1720', in Gadd and Wallis, pp. 127–39.

⁵⁴ Cited in M. Daunton, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, iii: 1840–1950, ed. M. Daunton (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 1–56, at p. 2.

⁵⁵ *English Historical Documents*, ii: c.500–1042, ed. D. Whitelock (2nd edn., 1979), pp. 423–7; *The Historical Charters and Constitutional Documents of the City of London*, ed. W. de G. Birch (1887), pp. 3–4; fitz Stephen, p. 228.

claims of merchants from other English cities to the same privilege in London, even to the extent of ignoring royal instructions on the matter.⁵⁶ Other communities were anxious that they might fall foul of regulations introduced in London. In the thirteen-fifties, for example, the men of Hastings wrote to enquire of the mayor whether new rules had been adopted concerning the size of the baskets to be used for sending fish to the London markets, and were informed that there had been no change over the previous seventy years.⁵⁷

London exercised a powerful, but for the most part informal, force that promoted integration and uniformity within the state. All ranks of people – monarch, churchmen, aristocrats, merchants and artisans – found increasingly that it was to their advantage to rule, to do business and to seek pleasure, status and charity through London, which offered a concentration of opportunities to be found nowhere else. This process continues up to the present and is as intensely political as it is economic, and cultural, and always highly capillary. The great magnate and mercantile houses of twelfth- and thirteenth-century London were the functional ancestors not only of the aristocratic houses of the West End but also of the commercial enterprises, exchanges, banks and business headquarters established in London from the sixteenth century onwards.⁵⁸ The trend towards concentration has not been straightforwardly continuous, for regional growth from about 1750 led to the setting up of comparable institutions in provincial cities. Since 1900, however, with the further enlargement of London's imperial and world role, and with the continuing concentration of financial resources and institutions in the metropolis, the earlier trend has been re-established, and more than ever business and politics are done in and through London.⁵⁹

London's growing impact was apparent in many other ways. Increasingly, from the twelfth century onwards, other towns modelled their institutions on London's, while the crown granted privileges to distant towns on condition that they did not infringe those of the city.⁶⁰ By 1300 London's demands for food and other supplies were structuring specialized agrarian and other production within a radius of seventy-five kilometres of the

⁵⁶ J. A. Galloway, 'Town and country in England, 1300–1570', in Epstein, pp. 106–31, esp. pp. 116–18; *Calendar of Letters from the Mayor and Corporation of the City of London, circa A.D. 1350–1370*, ed. R. R. Sharpe (1885) (hereafter *Calendar of Letters*), *passim*; *The Black Book of Winchester: British Museum, Additional MS. 6035*, ed. W. H. B. Bird (Winchester, 1925), pp. 10–14.

⁵⁷ *Calendar of Letters*, pp. 63–4.

⁵⁸ D. Keene, 'Wardrobes in the city: houses of consumption, finance and power', in *Thirteenth Century England VII*, ed. M. Prestwich, R. Britnell and R. Frame (Woodbridge, 1999), pp. 61–79.

⁵⁹ For recent surveys, see Daunton, 'Introduction' and L. H. Lees, 'Urban networks', in *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, iii. 59–94.

⁶⁰ D. Keene, 'The south-east of England', in *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, i. 545–82, esp. pp. 565–6; Galloway, p. 117.

city and its demand for coal had a longstanding and substantial influence on production in the North-East, 450 kilometres away.⁶¹ In later centuries, as London's share of wealth and population grew, so its impact correspondingly increased. Migrants from all over the country were drawn there. By the late fourteenth century, despite the fall in population, London was the focus of an increasingly integrated national economy articulated by the city's demand for supplies, by its exports and imports, and by its distributive trade extending to the limits of the kingdom. At the same time London was increasingly influential as a centre of innovation in production and in supplying materials, capital and markets for provincial manufactures, a process that came to fruition in the industrial revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in which London played a central role.⁶² In this way London both promoted regional growth, specialization and identity and acted as a unifying force. The development of the banking system provides an important insight into this process. Provincial banks played a valuable part both in financing local enterprise and in the inter-regional movement of capital, but this network was held together not by correspondence which crossed the country from one provincial bank to another but by letters to and from London, the only place capable of operating a clearing system.⁶³

At the same time London promoted 'national standards' and uniformity. The levelling and standardization of the English language, largely accomplished between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries, provides an excellent example of this role. Levelling seems to have been the outcome of country-wide movement and social interchange at a popular level, of which London was a prime generator, while standardization was associated with the norms of a London-based elite and the dominance of the metropolis in print culture. London practices, vocabulary and names spread in an extraordinary fashion.⁶⁴ In the fifteenth century parts of Stourbridge Fair, just outside Cambridge, were known by London street-names such as 'Chepe' (Cheapside) and Soper's Lane, while a Welsh poet characterized Oswestry as the 'London of

⁶¹ B. M. S. Campbell, J. A. Galloway, D. Keene and M. Murphy, *A Medieval Capital and its Grain Supply: Agrarian Production and Distribution in the London Region c.1300* (Historical Geography Research Group, Research Paper Ser., xxx, 1993); J. A. Galloway, D. Keene and M. Murphy, 'Fuelling the city: production and distribution of firewood and fuel in London's region, 1290–1400', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., xlix (1996), 447–72.

⁶² D. Keene, 'Small towns and the metropolis: the experience of medieval England', in *Peasants and Townsmen in Medieval Europe: Studia in Honorem Adriaan Verhulst*, ed. J.-M. Duvosquel and E. Thoen (Ghent, 1995), pp. 223–38; R. C. Michie, 'London and the process of economic growth since 1750', *London Jour.*, xxii (1997), 63–90.

⁶³ I. S. Black, 'The London agency system in English banking, 1780–1825', *London Jour.*, xxi (1996), 112–30.

⁶⁴ L. Wright, 'Introduction' and D. Keene, 'Metropolitan values: migration, mobility and cultural norms, 1300–1700', in *The Development of Standard English, 1300–1800*, ed. L. Wright (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 1–8, 93–114, plus other essays in this volume.

Wales' on account of its quality shopping.⁶⁵ In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the new commercial cities of the north likewise adopted the street-names of business and other districts of London. By 1800, for example, Manchester had acquired a Cheapside, a Cannon Street, a Chancery Lane, a Birchin Lane, a Bow Lane, a Cateaton Street, a Fetter Lane, a Fleet Street, a Friday Street, a King Street, a Milk Street, a Queen Street, a Thames Street and a Watling Street, plus several street-names from London's West End.⁶⁶

Such names were the recognizable signs of London's informal supremacy in the culture of commerce. Other processes were more formal. From before the Norman Conquest the dies from which the coinage was struck were made in London,⁶⁷ in part because it was an important seat of royal authority but perhaps more because it was the capital of money. From about 1300 onwards the formal links between city institutions and the state were strengthened. To take one example, the city's guilds acquired powers of regulation over the practice of their trades which extended beyond the immediate environs of the city. In 1300, for instance, the standard of London was imposed on all provincial goldsmiths, while in 1327 the nationwide powers of the London goldsmiths were more precisely defined and similar privileges and responsibilities were extended to the London girdlers, skimmers and tailors, although these were often challenged.⁶⁸ As recipients of royal charters the principal London guilds became national institutions and they developed a further integrative role in their management of charities in almost all parts of the country.⁶⁹

National politics have often been worked out through London, not simply because court, councils and parliament meet there – nor because it has been the dominant site for legitimating power by publicity and acclamation – but because metropolitan society, with its internal complexity and multiple external connections, has served to articulate general political causes. In the mid thirteenth century, for example, we can dimly perceive the way in which the king and his baronial allies and opponents had interests in the city which linked up with conflicting groups among the Londoners and in that way shaped both wider political

⁶⁵ C. H. Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge* (5 vols., Cambridge, 1842–1908), i. 222, 246; L. B. Smith, 'Oswestry', in *Boroughs of Medieval Wales*, ed. R. A. Griffiths (Cardiff, 1978), pp. 218–42, esp. p. 228.

⁶⁶ *Scholes's Manchester and Salford Directory* (Manchester, 1797).

⁶⁷ *New History of the Royal Mint*, ed. C. E. Challis (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 78–9, 111–12, 226.

⁶⁸ T. F. Reddaway, *The Early History of the Goldsmiths' Company, 1327–1509* (1975), pp. 1–4. For examples of the later operation of this system, see P. Wallis, 'Controlling commodities: search and reconciliation in the early modern livery companies', in Gadd and Wallis, pp. 85–100; R. F. Homer, 'The Pewterers' Company's country searches and the company's regulation of prices', in Gadd and Wallis, pp. 101–13; and J. Forbes, 'Search immigration and the Goldsmiths' Company: a study in the decline of its powers', in Gadd and Wallis, pp. 115–26.

⁶⁹ Archer, 'Livery companies'.

confrontations and campaigns during the civil war of the twelve-sixties,⁷⁰ a state of affairs that would have been familiar to contemporary residents of an Italian city-state.

This manifestation of the relationship between London and external authority, including the occasional intervention of the citizen army, has been a recurrent feature of crises in the history of both London and the kingdom, being apparent in 1141, the eleven-nineties, the last years of John's reign, and above all in the sixteen-forties.⁷¹ Subsequent episodes have been less violent, but still a part of the metropolitan political matrix. The Exclusion Crisis of 1678–81, focusing on the succession to the kingdom, was largely worked out in London, while in the next generation the issues that divided newly-emerging political parties were nowhere more hotly contested than in London's multi-celled associative structure, in which moneyed and other interests developed new attachments to the state.⁷² At that time country concerns that metropolitan wealth would corrupt and subvert the nation came to be expressed with a new clarity, and have been periodically revived as a political issue up to the present day. In a more straightforward fashion, London mobs and other groups have routinely mounted serious challenges to government, as in 1326 or during the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, while as late as 1780 the Gordon Riots in London were treated as a major threat to the state; such interventions emerged from London's long-established tradition of street-fighting and riotous assembly for more localized political or family objectives.⁷³ The eighteenth-century city, as the 'embodiment of the independent political community', was also a breeding ground for more ordered opposition. Strange as it may seem today, the Livery in Common Hall shaped radical opinion and included such a body of sympathy for the American rebels in 1776 that a minister in the government wrote 'I need not say how little the magistracy of the city was to be trusted, or how much to be feared'.⁷⁴

Since the early nineteenth century London has not, on the whole, been such an effective source of opposition. Its enormous physical growth, fragmented administrative and political structures, and an intense subdivision of local identities and interests have prevented the metropolis

⁷⁰ Keene, 'London from the post-Roman period', pp. 203–10; G. A. Williams, *Medieval London: from Commune to Capital* (1963), pp. 207–42 offers a lively but sometimes misleading account.

⁷¹ *Ungedruckte anglo-normannische Geschichtsquellen*, ed. F. Liebermann (Strasburg, 1879), p. 28; C. N. L. Brooke and G. Keir, *London 800–1216: the Shaping of a City* (1975), pp. 36–56; J. Boulton, 'London 1540–1700', in *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, ii, 315–46, esp. p. 342.

⁷² Boulton, p. 343; T. Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II: Propaganda and Politics from the Restoration until the Exclusion Crisis* (Cambridge, 1987); G. S. de Krey, *A Fractured Society: the Politics of London in the First Age of Party, 1688–1715* (Oxford, 1985); P. Gauci, *The Politics of Trade: the Overseas Merchant in State and Society, 1660–1720* (Oxford, 2001).

⁷³ Keene, 'London from the post-Roman period', pp. 210–12; Williams, pp. 295–8; Boulton, pp. 335–6; Schwarz, p. 643.

⁷⁴ See the essays in *London in the Age of Reform*, ed. J. Stevenson (Oxford, 1977), esp. pp. 1, 74.

from developing a substitute for the role once served by the city as a representative of opinion. The growth in the relative power of provincial cities and the huge increase in the wealth and regulatory powers of the state have also contributed to this scenario.⁷⁵ As finance and communications have become ever more centred on London, and associated with a national or imperial rather than a metropolitan identity, so the interests of London and the state seem to have ever more in common. Yet present day commentators routinely identify ‘fear of London’ as an important driving force in central government policy, as it has been for centuries. Today that fear seems to focus on the uncertain intentions and capacities of the London electorate, on the leaders that electorate might choose, on the financial and political implications of the long-neglected investment required for a metropolis that will continue to work with any degree of efficiency, and on the powerful aggregations of capital at the heart of the city itself.

London and the English state have long had key interests in common. In foreign policy, warfare and imperial ventures London’s commercial interests have often been to the fore. The metropolis has also played a vital role in providing finance, material and manpower for war and other enterprises at home and overseas, and consequently acquired great power to bargain with the state. Yet that state has been remarkable for the continuing strength of its internal bonds, for the degree of consent to central authority, and for the difficulty of building up territorial bases of power of either urban or aristocratic origin. London has often stood up to the king, but often at a heavy cost. On several occasions during the thirteenth century the king simply seized the city and put his own officials in charge. Such interventions were rarer thereafter, but those of the late fourteenth and the late seventeenth centuries were no less dramatic.⁷⁶ Some of these interventions could be interpreted as political expressions on the lines of those found within city-states, for certain parties among the citizens seem to have favoured and benefited from the action of the prince. The circumscribed republic of merchants in the city eventually achieved a more or less enduring accommodation with central power – and at present is working out another stage in the arrangement – but government has usually been cautious of conferring too much unity on the bodies responsible for managing the wider metropolis or of allowing them too much autonomy or revenue-raising power. Thus, the abolition of the Greater London Council in 1986 and the erection in 2000 of a Greater London Authority with remarkably limited powers have continued a long tradition.

In many ways the city’s accommodation with, and occasional submission to, a strong state structure has suited London well. Situated on an island,

⁷⁵ Lees; J. Davis, ‘Central government and the towns’, in *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, iii. 261–86.

⁷⁶ Keene, ‘London from the post-Roman period’, pp. 210, 212–15; C. Barron, ‘London 1300–1540’, in *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, i. 395–440, esp. pp. 406, 409–10; I. W. Archer, ‘Politics and government 1540–1700’, in *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, iii. 235–62.

but with ready access to its main business overseas, it has been reasonably secure from attack by neighbouring cities or states – the fate of many a city in Italy or the Low Countries and one of the factors which has promoted the formation of city-states. Inland, London has had little to fear from other British cities, which, even during the last two centuries, have been distant and weak. London has had little need formally to extend its territorial control so as to secure its supply lines or other interests: its informal influence has been sufficient. The descendant of the Anglo-Saxon state, bolstered and to a large extent shaped by London itself, has provided a territory under a single imperial polity with the capacity to provide the conditions of peace and security which suit a commercial metropolis. London thereby gained, at a reasonable cost, protected access to widespread internal resources, including other ports and centres of industry, and comparable resources overseas. Since at least as early as the twelfth century, the idea of control of the seas has been deployed as part of the rhetorical linkage between London and the nation, which perhaps reached its peak around 1800 in the bipartite Valhalla at Guildhall and St. Paul's.⁷⁷ London has certainly been a 'bargaining metropole' and has dealt and come to terms with tyrants whose interests resembled its own and who were in part its own creation. The metropolis itself may not be a city-state, and may be further from that model now than in past centuries, yet for at least 1,000 years it has continuously displayed some key city-state characteristics, not least in its informal, capillary and essentially political exercise of influence within a territory coterminous with the realm and in an empire beyond. The closest approximation to a city-state in the vicinity of London may thus be the English state itself.

It is tempting to hold up the past as a mirror to the future. In 1272 one of the two great parties among the people of Bologna caused to be inscribed on a stone tablet, which they set up in the *Palazzo Comunale*, a reminder to their podesta of the need to invade the territory of neighbouring Modena. For them this was a matter of everyday business and survival, for the two cities were competing to control the productive land which lay between them, and Bologna, with its great population and many students at its university, was in desperate need of reliable sources of food supply. In due course the opposing party, which could draw on a more powerful set of allies outside the city as well as on a substantial body of opinion within it, caused the policy to be dropped and Bologna turned on cities which lay in the other direction.⁷⁸ If the people of

⁷⁷ Wormald, p. 111; F. Liebermann, 'A contemporary manuscript of the *Leges Anglorum Londiniis collectae*', *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, xxviii (1913), 732–45; Keene, 'The south-east of England', pp. 548–50; S. Bradley and N. Pevsner, *London*, i: *the City of London* (1997), p. 302; Keene, Burns and Saint, pp. 275–81.

⁷⁸ *The Chronicle of Salimbene de Adam*, ed. and trans. J. L. Baird, G. Baglivi and J. R. Kane (Binghamton, N.Y., 1986), pp. 490–1, 496–7.

London today could find a large enough sheet of plate glass to set up in 'London City Hall' opposite the Tower of London (it can hardly have been more meaningfully, yet unconsciously, positioned in relation to a former seat of tyranny), it is likely that they would inscribe on it a long list of requirements, perfectly well-known to our mayor, concerning the everyday matter of getting about safely and quickly in pursuit of business and pleasure in London. These are as vital to the survival of the modern metropolis as food supplies had been to Bologna. Londoners' preference is probably not for separatism or any form of city-state as commonly conceived, but rather for a form of government more capable of responding directly to their needs and thus with effective revenue-raising powers. Eventually, the continuing fiscal drain from the metropolis may increase suspicion of a free-riding country interest and so strengthen demands for radical changes in the control of revenue. In the meantime, the focus is on more immediate material and environmental issues.

What of the Corporation, the city itself? In pursuit of its continuing accommodation with central government its franchise has been reformed by the City of London (Ward Elections) Act 2002, which substantially increased the power of the business vote. Business in the city is now largely driven by foreign capital and by global concerns. What might those interests inscribe on the sheet of glass? One guesses that better public services for the metropolis as a whole, and perhaps more powers of self-determination, would be at the top of the list. The last occasion when overseas interests were deliberately accorded so reasonable a role in the affairs of London was in the late thirteenth century, when King Edward I kept the city under direct rule for a dozen years, in part so as to ensure that the foreigners could pursue their business to his advantage. Would any present-day tyrant in Downing Street be able to resist suggestions, from inside or outside the realm, that the city become a state-free republic of global trade, leaving the Government of London to remain as a revived Corporation of the Suburbs? Or will these two great interests in the affairs of London build on shared concerns and develop a more effective advocacy for the metropolis as a whole, above all in relation to external powers? In attempting to understand the past, present and future of London, city-state comparisons and analogies are likely to continue as a valuable heuristic device.