Original Research Article

International Relations
1–24

DOI: 10.1177/00471178231157148
journals.sagepub.com/home/ire
SAGE

Strength born of weakness: the advantages of open maritime polities in multipolar international systems

Mihai Murariu
West University of Timisoara

George Anglitoiu
National School of Political Science and Public Administration

Abstract

This paper focuses on open maritime polities and their competitive advantages in multipolar international systems. Firstly, the paper explores the various understandings of seapower and its possible impact in international relations, while also drawing attention to its non-military dimensions. Secondly, the paper considers the factors which affect the emergence of open maritime polities and the sustainability of their seapower. It argues that the origins of such polities can be found in their overall weakness and the opportunities provided by the sea in a multipolar international system, which, in turn, strengthens the autonomous groups that can make sustainable seapower possible to begin with. Thirdly, the dynamism and advantages of such polities in multipolar international systems are portrayed. The text focuses on medieval and early modern Venice and Genoa, including their varied strategies in using seapower in order to survive and add competitive advantages to their participation in Mediterranean-centric, multipolar international systems. The weakness which made possible the emergence of these polities fundamentally encouraged or enabled their open nature, adaptability and their agency within multipolarity. This represents a step in future research on what is arguably a mutually reinforcing connection between seapower, open societies and competitive advantages in multipolar systems.

Keywords

seapower, open maritime polities, Genoa, Venice, multipolarity, competitive advantage

Corresponding author:
Mihai Murariu, West University of Timisoara, Bld. Vasile Pârvan 4, Timisoara 300223, Romania.
Email: mihai.murariu@e-uvt.ro

Introduction

The sea has shaped global destinies, contributing to the rise of the successive world systems and the phases of globalisation which have marked human history up to the present. Yet the sea and seapower is rarely considered in IR theory and security studies[1] and even in history as a whole. Recently, maritime dimensions have been approached regarding great power competition,[2] and the impact of seapower on politics,[3] while the underresearched field of maritime security shows at least some signs of expanding.[4] Nonetheless, despite discussions going back to Thucydides, seapower itself and its possible ties to the institutional strengths of open maritime polities are arguably even less discussed. This is a major problem, for its multidimensional nature is increasingly relevant, even in a nuclear, digital age. Thus, most global trade and – through underwater cables – a great part of global communications, rely on the sea and the seapower which makes them secure as well as possible. Moreover, an increasing part of the world population will live in megacities[5] marked by littoralisation and connectedness to global maritime trade and information networks, a fact which will have significant security, and socio-political implications.[6] Accordingly, this analysis speaks to a lacuna in IR and security studies – which tend to focus on military-geopolitical aspects – by introducing the term 'open maritime polity' as an analytical tool, and by looking at seapower, multipolarity and weakness together.

The term 'open maritime polity' is used broadly in order to refer to various types of maritime republics, democracies and mercantile oligarchies which can be contrasted to the typically more autocratic continental states of their times. 'Open' means here a society which, at least temporarily, enabled more social mobility and innovative economic and political practices when compared to other contemporary polities. This is important because open maritime polities – although typically weaker militarily than continental states – possess advantages which are most obvious in multipolar systems, including political, economic, cultural and ideological dimensions, especially through their use of seapower.

By seapower we should understand here the versatile ability of a polity to influence the behaviour of other international actors by coercive or non-coercive means through its political, economic, military and cultural use of the sea. Thus, we differentiate between the military-strategic dimension and the non-military, cultural-ideological dimension of seapower, pointing to the fundamental importance of the latter in helping open maritime polities increase their competitive advantage and withstand systemic shocks. Furthermore, it is argued that the multidimensional nature of seapower has influenced institutional evolution on a state level, typically making such societies comparatively open for their times, with a number of competitive advantages resulting from this complex interaction. While competing realist and liberal interpretations of seapower have loomed large in discussions, perhaps insufficient connections have been made between this concept and the expansion – or globalisation – of international society, as depicted in English School vanguardist and, respectively, in rival syncretist approaches.[7] Significantly, although vanguardism has been challenged by syncretism, both accept the key European role in the ultimate globalisation of international society. While a more detailed examination of this aspect is beyond the scope of this article, it suffices here that the expansion-globalisation

thesis cannot stand without considering open maritime polities and their dynamic nature in multipolarity.

Compared to bipolar alternatives, multipolarity has been in turn defined as more stable,[8] less stable[9] or simply different.[10] Yet multipolarity itself has had a long evolution, from the earliest complex polities to the – at least partial – European systemic impact and the successive globalisation processes. While Europe began as just one of the urbanised, interconnected, agro-literate societies of the great 'Afro-Eurasian ecumene',[11] a combination of fragmentation, political culture and a distinctive, ambitious maritime approach, ultimately led to the European divergence, even though systemic cross-influencing continued. Thus, premodern multipolarity represented partially interacting and overlapping systems and rivalries, which would later turn global under European pressure. Significantly, although partially similar to predecessors, modern, contemporary multipolarity still manifests as a single system, in a truly global, albeit arguably heterarchic order. Its historical resilience marks multipolarity and its political-cultural divisions as a defining feature of international systems.

At the same time, the complexity and flexibility of multipolarity should not be linked only to typically continental great powers, but also to historically weaker, yet dynamic open maritime polities. Therefore, a less explored concept in IR is relevant here – weakness, and the agency it ultimately provided to such states in multipolarity.

The cases of Genoa and Venice were chosen in order to demonstrate the commonalities of open maritime polities even when discussing different institutional cultures with respect to the role and power of the state. Secondly, their societies remained remarkably open for their time, until their later history, when a complex process of oligarchisation transformed them into more closed aristocratic republics, accompanying the gradual diminishing of their open culture and abandonment of seapower. Still, the states maintained some of their systemic strengths by clever coalition-building and neutrality policies in the European multipolar system.

Indeed, through their actions, institutions and complex, dynamic use of capital-intensive fleets, as well as what has been called seapower as 'output'[12] or 'seapower culture',[13] such polities influenced international relations, the early world system, and, it could be argued, modernity itself. In restricting the present study to the Mediterranean, these polities present examples of actors which had to adapt not only to the changing international circumstances of a complicated region with a long history of cooperation and conflict, but also to the momentous opening of the Atlantic and Pacific to European explorers, company-states[14] and state-run imperial projects. The particular timeline involving Genoa and Venice is crucial. Thus, it illuminates a number of enduring constants found in maritime polities, whether imperial or hybrid in nature, and it also represents a time of great transition from early medieval to quintessentially modern realities – such as the interaction between capital, maritime policies and state power.

The method used here is an attempt at an interdisciplinary, interpretative synthesis, taking account of various debates in specialist literature, while acknowledging its limitations in not being able to fully explore them here. The focus was thus on developments in historiographical approaches dealing with Genoese and Venetian polities, their institutions and maritime cultures, while also including works from the political science sphere. A broader look was preferred instead of a more detailed focus on specific events during

the long histories of Genoa and Venice, such as their strategic rivalry. The advantage of this approach provides an image which is closer to the complexity and difficulty in locking seapower, the fluidity of the 'open' nature of societies when confronted with existential security threats and the often-unpredictable impact of power itself in a shifting multipolar international environment. Consequently, Genoa and Venice were singled out from other states – such as the maritime republics of Amalfi, Ancona, Pisa or Ragusa, or continental states with strong fleets, such as the Byzantine, Spanish and Ottoman empires – because they included a number of important features. These were: (1) a maritime culture making use of the manifold aspects of seapower; (2) a comparatively open society which enabled higher social mobility; (3) a significant impact on the international relations system of their day; (4) political longevity and strategic resilience.

The first section will consider theoretical approaches on open maritime polities, seapower and international relations. The origins of open maritime polities are discussed in the second section, showing how these were determined by their vulnerability within international systems and influenced by geography, climate, geopolitical pressure and the influence of autonomous groups and mercantile networks. The third section looks at the competitive advantages of open maritime polities in multipolar international systems. It shows how their very dynamism and open nature contributed to their competitive advantage, which translated into maritime empires and – with a notable exception – into a territorialisation which brought about the reaction of neighbouring states and rising continental hegemons. The second and third sections will discuss the cases of Genoa and Venice, and their use of the multidimensional nature of seapower in order to gain a competitive advantage in what were still partially-interacting, rival multipolar systems. Although the stability of their political institutions differed, Venice and Genoa will be shown to have maintained a comparatively open form of society which was influenced by, and in turn influenced their maritime culture. Other states had powerful fleets at certain points in time, but it was only the open maritime polities which could sustain and use them to their full potential in influencing international relations. While continental states could have fleets, open maritime polities could have what one may call sustainable fleet-societies.

Seapower, open maritime polities and international relations

It is altogether unsurprising that the social sciences have often been dominated in the last decades by a focus on presentism. Nonetheless, the importance of history for the study of societies has been acknowledged in recent works on transnational religious networks and composite polities,[15] democratisation studies,[16] geopolitical pressure, state formation and the rise of representative institutions[17] and, despite some inherent tensions, international relations.[18]

Consider the case of ancient Athens, one of the very first documented thalassocracies. Its competitive advantage was provided, among other things, by its open, maritime culture and its ultimately aggressive use of seapower which contributed to existing unbalances in a multipolar international system, leading both to its spectacular prosperity and its later defeat by the newfound naval power of its enemies. In discussing Thucydides and political order, Kopp acknowledges the 'crisis of ontology' engulfing IR studies,

stemming from a difficulty to reconceptualise world order in a complex, multidimensional and layered post-Westphalian world.[19] In his view, Thucydides wrote in a highly complex, multilayered international system that was different from the current one, yet 'in juxtaposition to the Westphalian conceptualisation of the world, with regard to these features not unlike the post-Westphalian world'.[20]

While the concept of power itself has been consistently approached by a vast literature, from metatheoretical explorations[21] to global governance,[22] seapower has always remained somewhat more limited in scope. Seapower has traditionally been linked to strategic studies, security and geopolitics, yet its multidimensional nature, going beyond naval capabilities, is all too clear. Indeed, the ability to use seapower in order to influence other actors lies at the heart of survival and expansion strategies in open maritime polities, and perhaps even more so when it comes to preventing the formation of regional continental hegemons. This perspective was of particular use to premodern maritime polities, but some of its fundamental points remain relevant in the contemporary period of a contracting, reshaping globalisation. Thus, Luttwak writes of seapower and latent suasion that 'one should not speak of a presence so much as of a shadow' impinging on 'the freedom of action of adversaries'.[23] Till shows how seapower 'is not simply about what it takes to use the sea', but also 'the capacity to influence the behaviour of other people or things by what one does at or from the sea', defining seapower 'in terms of its consequences, its outputs not the inputs, the ends not the means'.[24]

Grygiel differentiates between naval power and seapower, with the first referring to 'the technical capabilities of the navy', a 'component of state power'.[25] Seapower, however, while 'contingent on the possession of a fleet [. . .] does not automatically stem from it', as it 'denotes the ability to bring naval capabilities to bear on the interests and security of another state, thereby altering its behaviour'.[26] As Germond points out – following Till's vision of seapower as an output –, a liberal view of seapower should understand it as the collective promotion of liberal norms, and not only through its association with security.[27] Open maritime polities are able to use seapower in order to both influence the behaviours of other actors and in shaping the international system, enabling Western democracies in particular to maintain their control over the seas.[28] Acknowledging one may identify features of the 'liberal understanding' of seapower going all the way to antiquity, Germond argues that this liberal vision was developed the most after the Cold War 'as a consequence of the strengthening of the Western liberal (and globalised) world order', and, at the same time, being interpreted as a sign of American aspirations towards maritime hegemony, and leading to the Chinese maritime challenge and a partial return to 'naval realism'.[29] The sea is not a territory which can be conquered or occupied, legally understood as a 'zone of liberty', a compromise between costal territorialisation and high-sea freedom, which, along with its porous borders, benefits non-state actors.[30]

Also taking into account the influence of seapower on socioeconomic change, Kyriazis argues that those states which turn to the sea 'evolve towards more representative political institutions that go hand-in-hand with the evolution of more market oriented and growth promoting economic institutions'.[31] Maritime trade, while profitable, is vulnerable to rival state and non-state actors, which led to the creation of fleets that would safeguard this trade rather than seek decisive battle with the enemy. As ships need a high degree of planning, autonomy and self-sufficiency along with running operation

costs for their decades of use, this was arguably made possible by a so-called 'wide alliance of interests' born of the support and acceptance of these policies by a great – or at least sufficient – part of the population.[32]

Having said this, one should not underestimate the possible rivalries between land-oriented and maritime-oriented factions within a state. Furthermore, the use of seapower can have a destabilising effect on international relations due to an increase in dispute propensity and brinksmanship, even as navies lead to more influence in times of peace as well as during conflicts.[33] In effect, the great strengths of seapower – concentration, autonomy and mobility – may end up contributing to escalation policies. Even Thucydides' work – typically seen as the main proponent of seapower strategy – has also been interpreted as a warning about the dangers of seapower ambitions, and how it precipitated the heightened imbalances of a complex international system, leading to the collapse of its foremost maritime polity.[34]

At the same time, maritime polities and seapower are associated with a complex potential impact in an international system as promoters of innovative, and at times fundamentally disruptive networks and ideas of open government, liberty and trade. Thus, Lambert links open, inclusive government, economic superiority, as well as socio-cultural dynamism with those polities which adopted seapower culture. Lambert differentiates between 'seapower' – an identity shaped by the sea – and 'sea power' – the possession of large naval forces – while arguing for the continued relevance and inherent fragility of 'seapower identity' in the Western liberal world.[35] In turn, Kroenig links democratic advantage to institutions, radical innovation potential, the greater flow of money, people and ideas, diplomatic reliability, soft power and superior decision-making and self-corrective potential in foreign policy as a result of open debates and access to information.[36] As it will be seen, such aspects would assist open maritime polities in exploiting or influencing multipolar systems, transforming their weakness into agency and their agency into strength.

Weakness and the sea: the origins of open maritime polities

Both literally and figuratively, the open polity was born at sea. That is, ancient maritime polities from Ugarit, to Tyre, Athens and Carthage, were among the earliest known examples of comparatively more open, inclusive governments and societies, while the way they gradually influenced each other means that – the importance of the Greek model notwithstanding – the open polity has no single point of origin. There were other open polities, but they were frequently annihilated or integrated into an imperial or regional hegemonic structure. With remarkable regularity, geopolitical pressures caused by wars along with cases of empire by invitation ensured that a few state actors emerged as the strongest, dominating most of the rest through sheer military and resource mobilisation potential. Those polities which could not overcome their adversaries by war or treaty were destroyed, subjugated, or, if they were lucky, found safe havens on the sea through promontories or islands. Acquiring strength in an anarchic, multipolar international environment did not favour more inclusive, democratic tendencies. Weakness, however, along with geography, dynamism and a willingness to embrace new ideas, did.

The origins of early polities aside, their nature was not fixed. Instead, it changed depending on a number of factors, from climate to geopolitical pressure, to internal

dynamics, making the nature of the state a constantly evolving reality.[37] Early polity formation also seems to be marked by a convergent development of state structures and authority, a convergence which – as authority structures expand and permanentise – essentially overrides its specific emergence circumstances and accompanies the remarkable success of states in containing most of the world's population throughout time.[38] Moreover, geographical and geopolitical challenges brought about a number of significant differences between continental and maritime polities, from the way they managed overlapping networks to how they understood prestige, authority and expansion.

Identifying this division as early as the Bronze Age, Lambert compares maritime polities with stronger continental polities, which, he argues, tended towards world monarchy, military solutions and planned economies instead of compromise, alliances and inclusive politics.[39] Thus, 'seapower states' could only survive by mobilising their full range of human and economic resources and by the use of more adaptive, inclusive or even representative institutions, competing with autocratic states and more 'socially elite oligarchies'.[40] According to Lambert, continental polities such as Egypt and Mesopotamia, with political heartlands distant from the ocean, defined political success according to domestic stability and territorial conquest, with their geography adding to a sense of exceptionalism and superiority.[41]

This comparison is somewhat unfair. Whilst geographic features could somewhat isolate certain continental polities, making them rely on maritime polities, rivers and caravans nonetheless connected even the supposedly always 'rigid' and 'monochrome' continental hegemons to a vast network of ideas and goods. At the same time, this does not mean that open maritime polities did not possess authoritarian features – they frequently did or came to possess them, particularly as they expanded landward –, nor that continental powers with cosmocratic ambitions never made room for limited pluralism. During the Punic Wars, even the 'continental' martial-agricultural values of the Romans were profoundly influenced by the encounter with the sea, with maritime polities such as Carthage and Greek city-states, and new ideas, transforming their society and economy[42] and giving way to new imbalances and contradictions or heightening existing ones. While the empire did not have maritime policies[43] and martial-agricultural values remained supreme – particularly for political advancement –, the Roman imperial project contributed to the first world system through its control of the sea. Even the cosmocratic claims of the Bronze Age monarchies must be nuanced, with the centralising ideology of the monarchs faced with a de facto multipolar international arena leading to multicentred perspectives.[44] Still, the Tyrian or Athenian self-portrayals of uniqueness and superiority are arguably of a somewhat different nature – and on a different scale – from that of Assyrians, Hittites and Egyptians, much like those of the Genoese, Venetians and the Dutch could differ from the Chinese, Russian and Ottoman Empires of their day, even though such continental powers had their maritime openings as well.

Nonetheless, the fact stands that maritime polities were often forced towards or even into the sea by their military and political weakness in the face of stronger continental actors. At the same time, this often meant new economic opportunities linking continental and maritime actors – such as the indirect control of the Phoenicians by the Near Eastern empires. Despite their economic importance, such trading communities were likely left autonomous because private initiative may have been better suited to manage

transnational commercial enterprises, along with social issues such as the frequently encountered separation of state administration and trading communities, leading to the formation of trading quarters which were physically apart from the city, with their own institutions and legislation.[45] It is important to remember that mercantile city-states – especially those with ports – had an interstitial position between larger territorial states. Therefore, while the emergence and success of open maritime polities and their empires cannot be linked solely to this interstitial position played by mercantile city-states, it was certainly a decisive factor, in turn influencing pre-existing mercantile networks or creating new ones.

The distant trade expeditions organised by actors within maritime polities implied the necessary autonomy of fleets and ships, thus leading to a strengthening of local autonomous groups involved in this process, such as merchants, financiers, shipowners and sea pilots – whose expertise was often vital for the success of naval undertakings. The wealth they provided was essential for the survival and prosperity of the maritime polity, while threats from territorialised states prompted coastal maritime polities to physically or symbolically 'become' islands for their own safety, as were the cases of Tyre, Athens and Venice. Sheltered by their fleets – and sometimes by their landscape –, maritime polities used the sea for taking dynamic actions in pursuit of a balance of power between continental states, as well as making use of the full range of seapower dimensions, projecting power, economic interests and ideas. Sometimes, such ideas carried political undertones.

Considering the Phoenicians, Romans and Greeks, Mann suggests that galleys only reinforced a democratic ethos in maritime polities with citizenship, doing so through the newfound influence of the typically poor, yet free citizens.[46] At the same time, the use of free rowers for the city-state soon put the most successful polities before a dilemma. Maritime expansion often meant a need for more rowers than there were citizens in a small polis.[47] Significantly, autonomous groups would find it easier to survive in such polities, where the office of monarchy – if it existed – was weaker or was even transformed altogether into wealth-based republican oligarchies.

In other words, a distinctive identity was adopted as a conscious choice by maritime polities, ultimately contributing to the survival of autonomous groups which could demand and safeguard the creation of more inclusive, representative institutions.

Plunder and profit: the early Venetian and Genoese polities. Unsurprisingly, the roots of the Venetian and Genoese polities show a number of similarities, firstly in the important – though not completely dominant – role of limited hinterlands. The first Venetian communities were those of boatmen whose livelihood depended on salt and fish, while political myths later described them as abandoning land and property for insular liberty.[48] Yet the Venetian polity was born out of a complex interaction between Lombard pressure in the seventh century and the defensive strategy of the Byzantine Exarchate in the region,[49] which left the locals as somewhat autonomous subjects of Byzantium. Venetians were sufficiently militarised to survive the pressure from neighbouring territorial states and used their fleet as early as the eighth century to reconquer Ravenna for the Exarch – even though it would take until the end of the ninth century for Venetian maritime power to withstand Slavic and Muslim attacks.[50] With Venetian trade 'almost undocumented' during the eighth century, the early Venetian polity likely had its first

successes in the military rather than commercial endeavours, although the latter would quickly see a significant increase.[51] In effect, this was a hybrid polity, walking a careful path between the *Terraferma*, Byzantine power and the Adriatic.[52]

Thus, between the 10th and 11th centuries, the Venetian turn from river trade to maritime trade was accompanied by the coalescence of existing lagoon communities and the building of new parishes which never truly separated the underclasses from the elites.[53] For a long time to come, the quite numerous Venetian aristocracy would focus on wealth rather than lineage.[54] Unlike most other maritime powers, Venice developed in the shadow of the Byzantine maritime hegemon in the Adriatic and eastern Mediterranean, so its first maritime exploits were not oriented primarily towards plunder but rather towards the defence of trade already occurring under Byzantine protection, although it was ready to employ violence for its survival or expansion.[55] In essence, the nature and power of Venetian society gradually arose from the mudflats of the lagoon and the constant battle with the waters, which ultimately contributed both to communal efforts, solidarity and the centralised nature of the polity.[56] To this limited hinterland, one should add the overall lack of Venetian territorial interest in the Italian *Terraferma* – with its anarchy, invasions and temporary regional hegemons – up until the late 14th and early 15th centuries. Instead, Venice tied its fortunes to the sea as an intermediary between West and East.

By contrast, Genoa's harbour was used by Etruscans and Greeks already from the sixth to fourth centuries BC – although Greeks and Phoenicians avoided settling it –, developing in a harsh coastal region dominated by mountainous terrain, poorly suited for agriculture and with few natural resources. Nevertheless, its harbour had the advantages of good winds[57] and was important enough that Diodorus Siculus writes of their adventurous spirit in war as well as in maritime trade, braving the storms of the Mediterranean in unsophisticated ships,[58] whilst Strabo's *Geography* calls it the 'emporium of the Ligures'.[59] The end of the Roman period and those of Ostrogothic and Byzantine dominance were followed by Lombard, and, lastly, Carolingian rule. Thus, trapped between a mountainous hinterland and the 'divided and composite'[60] Tyrrhenian sea, the Genoese were already trading beyond neighbouring areas two centuries before the state's sudden rise on the international scene in the 11th century.

It was the sack of the city in 934–935 by a fleet of the Muslim Fatimid Empire which pushed it towards the wider Mediterranean horizons and – together with Pisa – maritime raids on Sardinia (1016) and the former Fatimid capital of Mahdia (1087), with economic aims blending with religious rationale.[61] Significantly, Genoa was the first of the Italian maritime polities to support the First Crusade, with a fleet operating near Antioch in 1097.[62] On the formation of the Genoese maritime polity, Epstein argues that land scarcity, the lack of a tax base and the dearth of local resources meant that the rural aristocracy did not fight internal wars – though would famously make up for it in later centuries –, and with no common enemy or master in Liguria other than the threat of Muslim raiders, this could only be combatted by using the sea.[63] In turn, building war galleys was only possible by using modest local agricultural and labour surpluses, which transformed rural aristocrats into traders and corsairs, with Genoa's geography also helping it play the part of 'intermediary and pirate'.[64] It was these combined factors that lay the foundations of the Genoese maritime polity, while its dynamic military and trade policies in the Mediterranean would later provide its strength as it grew into a powerful economic nodal point.

Politically inconstant, yet versatile and innovative, the Genoese would repeatedly and successfully maximise their strengths, exploiting their international environment with a shrewdness which has been inaccurately seen as purely mercantile in nature. Almost from the onset, Genoa showed remarkable enterprise in maritime trade and warfare, with the extraordinary growth and seaward expansion of the city from the 11th century onwards owing partly to geography, but especially to its dynamic military approach.[65] In other words, while favourable geography and economic surplus played a role in the formation of the Genoese maritime polity, 'aristocratic bellicosity, opportunism, and fortuitous circumstances'[66] offered it the chance to exploit the international environment to its favour and to become a great Mediterranean seapower, linking Europe, Africa and Asia by the 1290s. Genoa thus underwent three major transformations throughout its history. Firstly, it was a dynamic, aggressive mercantile maritime polity from the 12th to the 15th century, after which it evolved into a financial empire focused on the Western Mediterranean and Western Europe in the 16th, ultimately focusing on financing the Spanish Empire in the New World until the 18th century.[67]

As mentioned, both Genoa and Venice initially engaged in piracy and maritime struggles against Muslim raiders – as well as Slavic raiders in the Venetian case – and only later came to be famed also as traders. In fact, plunder and profit often worked together for the fleets of medieval period, disproving the old myth of aggressive pirates and peaceful traders.[68] In both cases, the comparatively open nature of society stimulated the utilisation of public or private capital for the creation, maintenance or expansion of the fleets upon which most of the prosperity of the state depended. Moreover, the Genoese and the Venetians began to thrive in a time of increasing fragmentation of both European and Near-Eastern multipolar systems, marked by a weakening of regional hegemons throughout the Mediterranean. Therefore, by the end of the Carolingian-Byzantine conflicts in the early ninth century, the Venetian duchy already had a political assembly formed of 'all the people of Venice', with a solid ducal power, along with subordinate tribunes and ecclesiastical offices.[69]

Reflecting the weakness of central authority which had predated the emergence of Venice and Genoa's autonomous polities, the clan functioned as the main social structure unit, with both polities 'established by an agreement among the most economically and militarily strong clans in each city to cooperate politically for the advancement of their economic interests'.[70] Significantly, Genoa and Venice share a turbulent early political history, with most of the early Venetian rulers killed or blinded and deposed.[71] Yet this would often hide extraordinary dynamism, particularly in a world where ports were essential for gathering reliable intelligence quickly.

To be sure, infighting between various clans and great families brought political instability and even civil wars – especially in Genoa – yet both polities found ways to cope with this challenge and maintain their drive for economic prosperity in the long run. Venice did so through statist centralisation while Genoa through an unusual strategy which took it in an almost opposite direction. The clans were ultimately pacified in Venice after centuries of democratic experiments and instability by being integrated into the state, whilst Genoa became infamous for endemic factional struggles, including long-running conflicts between various *alberghi* – clientele networks with a political role. Furthermore, subsequent territorialisation invited reaction from neighbouring states or

rising hegemons, as was the case with Venetian expansion into Italy, ultimately leading to existential threat posed by the League of Cambrai between 1508 and 1510. By contrast, Genoa avoided extensive territorialisation, with its poor, mountainous hinterland acquired early on and remaining mostly unchanged throughout its existence. Thus, rightly called 'an immensely rich laboratory of unfinished experiments', Genoa managed early on to create a limited territorial polity yet struggled to provide it with a homogenous governing structure, with its capital faced with countless social and political conflicts 'involving every level of society', while its military and commercial aggression made it a pioneer in seapower use, both as input and output.[72]

In other words, Venice and Genoa ended up making a sustained, strategic decision to turn to the sea, capitalising on their interstitial position and early role as an economic nodal point, taking steps to improve upon that status. Both had very limited hinterlands for much of their history and both were typically reliant on their fleets to control what would become diverse maritime empires. Also, both polities turned to the sea due to their territorial weakness, and due to the opportunities presented to them by the international systems of their day – that is, pre-existent mercantile networks or the potential in forming such mercantile networks through dynamic seapower policies undertaken by a mixture of private and state initiative.

Thus, with some exceptions, the political culture of ancient and medieval city-states tended to be republics which allowed political participation. Taking into account the Weberian focus on European city autonomy as a distinctive Western feature, Scheidel argues that their interstitial position often led to an increased economic dynamism through commerce and capital formation.[73] Furthermore, following older literature, Møller shows how representative institutions which often represented 'privileged groups in historical regions rather than the entire realm', became 'ubiquitous' in Latin Christendom between 1200 and 1500 AD.[74] The emergence of these multiple political centres and, as a result, of 'composite state apparatuses' meant that it would take until the modern period for these European composite units to transform into territorial states which were politically uniform.[75]

Moreover, considering that all schools of thought accept the role of warfare in the advent of representative institutions, Møller has turned to the macro-historical comparisons attempted by Weber and Hintze, arguing that 'the onset of geopolitical competition interacted with state-society relations to produce either representative institutions or an intensification of absolutism'.[76] The appearance of representative institutions was made possible by the policies of the rulers, creating a forum for negotiations related to taxation and military service and for securing the commitment of the autonomous groups in question through political concessions.[77] By comparison, in Russian and Chinese autocracies, the absence of such groups meant that rulers had to mobilise their economies in a top-down fashion in order to face geopolitical pressures.[78]

Geopolitical pressure represented by war thus led to the creation and solidification of representative institutions in environments where multiple autonomous groups existed and were able to maintain a certain balance of power. Their survivability arguably increased in maritime states, which needed them for the careful planning and continuous functioning of distant, large scale maritime operations. At the same time, with a few exceptions – such as Carthage and the British Empire – most open maritime polities

would undergo a steady closure of their politics, typically during or after their peak. Indeed, even though the maritime turn influenced and was itself shaped by the openness of their institutions, it was arguably a mixture of success and great geopolitical pressures which would eventually contribute to a gradual closing of these societies.

Strength and the sea: the advantages of open maritime polities

The quintessential advantage found in maritime polities up to the modern period was arguably their open culture and institutions when compared to contemporary states. Furthermore, openness towards new sources of profit could also be directed towards new sources of knowledge and innovation, and, perhaps most importantly, towards autonomous groups and the representative institutions they would help bring about.

First and foremost, the path to an open society lies in the existence of autonomous groups and networks. In turn, the existence of such autonomous groups can be linked to the assemblies of the earliest complex polities. Whereas city-states permitted the flourishing of autonomous groups, monarchies would restrict their progress, even though they remained a common enough sight. These warrior and citizen assemblies likely grew in number and strength as early complex polities in the Near East expanded from their original city-state core.[79] Perhaps unsurprisingly, these imperial states were characterised by efficient centralisation and the prestige of what one may call divine, universal monarchies.[80] In such polities, merchants and mercantile polities were seen as problematic, since their complete control was not possible, particularly due to the usefulness of their services. This meant that their 'ideological derogation' was common, even in an environment where 'the state feared horizontal linkages in the general population and either fought or co-opted them'.[81]

Smith's classification differentiates between various premodern state types – weak states, city-states, territorialised states, empires – and their 'commercialised' nature. Thus, he differentiates between 'uncommercialised' territorial states (Egypt) and empires (Inca), 'low commercialisation' from weak states (Angkor) to empires (Teotihuacan), 'intermediate commercialisation' and the 'advanced precapitalist commercialisation' of Sumerian and Greek city-states and of the Roman Empire.[82] Also, the 'generally inverse' relationship between state power and commercial level is typified by the process through which powerful states with low commercialisation led to the emergence of smaller polities with commercialised economies, and, occasionally, 'the spatial expansion of the economy into an international system'.[83] Unsurprisingly, maritime polities would come to play an essential part in this expansion.

Thus, from very early on, maritime polities tended to transition towards comparatively more inclusive forms of government, offering some political power to those autonomous groups which enabled the existence and profitability of seapower – merchants, traders and shipowners.[84] Increased prosperity contributed to the power of various councils of elders and popular assemblies, as in the great city of Tyre after the Bronze Age Collapse. Taking to the sea was more than merely seeking profit, it was an act which tended to exclude traditional elites and offered autonomy or even freedom to those willing to share the risks of such an undertaking.[85] This contrasts with autocratic continental states which attempt to create successful, enduring navies without a pre-existing

community of interests.[86] Indeed, this fundamental dynamic has arguably remained more or less unchanged up to the present.

The dynamism of open maritime polities and the early global system. Roman, Arab, Chinese and Mongol polities were important regional hegemons which affected the early global system, yet none did so to the extent of later European maritime endeavours. Thus, between the middle of the 18th and 20th centuries, every major conflict between European states quickly became a global one. And while Europeans had traded in the Indian Ocean three centuries before the Portuguese arrival,[87] European maritime supremacy took its shape during the early 16th century, built on superior transport capabilities,[88] the tendency to militarise the seas, an individualist culture of exploration, plunder and adept use of mercantile networks. Yet these innovations, both financial and naval, as well as the drive for exploration and plunder, were chiefly pioneered by the open maritime polities of the medieval Mediterranean, with Genoa and Venice at the forefront.

Company-states were later at the forefront in expanding European international society across the seas and oceans, blurring the distinction between public and private force, and – it is argued – shaping European politics by their interaction with non-European actors.[89] Moreover, the decline and disappearance of European company-states – which had been so important in the early modern globalisation and the creation of the first truly global international system – marks the true separation and specialisation of sovereign states and profit-oriented companies.[90] Yet, in many ways – from their use of the multidimensional nature of seapower to their financial innovations, as well as their alliance building strategies and adaptability – such actors and the very nature of global seapower born in the 16th century, were successors of the open maritime polities which had dominated parts of the Mediterranean.

Open maritime polities could take two very different paths to solving their lack of strategic depth and their position in anarchic international systems. States such as Rhodes or the Republic of Ragusa, focused on serving mainly as intermediaries between great powers, using seapower to ensure their prosperity and autonomy, adopting a more retrained, alliance-oriented, *Realpolitik*.[91] By contrast, when open maritime polities used seapower to pursue imperial territorialisation, it led them into costly or even annihilating conflicts with stronger continental states. Those that survived typically adapted to their international environment by adopting a more restrained policy, and by making themselves useful in the system – that is, by using similar strategies as the maritime polities which had not seriously attempted imperial projects to begin with.

Kirk sees the dynamics of relationships between large, militarily strong polities and small, economically powerful ones as typified by the wealthy, autonomous or independent open maritime polities, with dynamic city-states acting as economic nodal points often playing an important role in state systems which are both much larger and more rigid, even during a systemic crisis.[92] At the same time, such maritime polities can develop intense rivalries which, due to the importance of seapower and sea trade, can reverberate across the international system. Regardless of their ultimate strategy, Genoa and Venice played an important part within the early global system. For instance, Venetian and especially Genoese colonies in the Black Sea were exceptionally valuable in securing the benefits arising from the *Pax Mongolica* and its control over the Eurasian

trade routes. Until the late 14th century, the Black Sea was the meeting ground of Mediterranean maritime networks and Mongol continental connections,[93] while European interaction with Mongol political dominance in the region points to the potentially difficult symbiosis between mercantile, maritime polities and continental hegemons.

It has been claimed that global politics were fundamentally formed by five centuries worth of 'commercial-naval rivalries', which – while apparently initiated by maritime developments in Song China[94] – truly began with the rivalry between Genoa and Venice.[95] Thus, the international system has been interpreted as a 'web of rivalries that intersect at conflict nodes' with events at such nodes and the web's 'major anchor lines' having 'broad effects within the system as a whole'.[96] It was during the Genoese-Venetian Wars that 'secondary rivalries tended to move into parallel with the major conflict armatures', which, along with 'the linkage of a number of rivalries at conflict nodes' ultimately led to conflicts being diffused to other parts of the system.[97] Leading to four wars over almost a century and a half,[98] the Genoese-Venetian rivalry was born from overlapping trade interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea whilst also being fuelled by the Byzantine desire to reduce Venetian power.[99]

In their attempts to outmanoeuvre or eliminate each other – either from international trade or physically –, the two maritime polities played a complicated game of plot and counterplot, involving and manipulating various intra-systemic European polities and what were still external actors like the Ottomans. They combined short-term, opportunistic objectives with century-old policies, such as controlling or preventing access to the northern Black Sea or the eastern Mediterranean,[100] or even outright destroying their opponent – which the Genoese almost accomplished in the dramatic Fourth War.[101] The wars and their aftermath highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of both polities – the individualist, more innovative Genoese, who repeatedly fell prey to factional infighting, and the patient, more united Venetians, who would remain focused on the east even as greater opportunities were gradually opening in the west, and which were seized by the Genoese. In strategic terms, Venetian unity, and more prudent use of seapower ultimately defeated Genoese energy and more aggressive use of seapower. In effect, the Venetians triumphed by cohesion[102] – a cohesion and republicanism which would make them admired and feared throughout Italy. Yet even when faced with an existential threat – most famously after Agnadello –, Venice employed the same patient strategy of outlasting its rivals, securing its positions on the *Terraferma*.

Still, both polities would continue to exploit their interstitial position and the fragmented, multipolar nature of the international systems of their day with remarkable success, even as the great continental monarchies grew more powerful, and, finally, the Atlantic-oriented maritime polities would surpass them by adopting their innovations.

The Venetian 'immortal state' and the Genoese 'anti-State' in the international system. From the 13th to the late 15th century, with remarkable skill, tenacity, yet also due to chance, Venice annexed strategic maritime positions in the east from Istria to Cyprus, such as defensible islands and ports, rather than large and vulnerable swathes of territory – even though Crete took a century to subdue.[103] Such acquisitions were not only opportunistic actions in a shifting international system but could also represent preventive measures against Genoa or Genoese private fleets.[104] Venice established the first permanent fleet in

the Adriatic in 1301, and, by paying the fleet's wages, the state broke the direct bond between captains and their sailors, who had hitherto been dependent on looting.[105] At the same time, plague and the aftermath of the exhausting wars with Genoa saw the victorious polity rely increasingly on buying new possessions overseas rather than acquiring them by force of arms.

Nonetheless, the sea and seapower remained firmly in Venice's sights, rather than the Italian *Terraferma*, as the main objective was not territory but control of the sea-lanes.[106] In fact, Venetian statesmen repeatedly warned of the dangers of landward expansion in Italy as detrimental to the maritime identity of the state – as opposed to a fear of international reactions – even though political expansion possibly functioned as a natural consequence of previous operations to ensure control over trade routes and grain supplies and was, in any case, simultaneous with territorial acquisitions to the east.[107] Significantly, Venetian prosperity was long based on a mixture of state support and private ships when it came to their merchant marine – the *muda* convoy system. This system ended in the early 16th century by the intervention of the state, whose fleet was transformed in the defender of a colonial empire rather than playing a leading mercantile role, initiating its long decline.[108]

At the same time, the perception of Venice as an eternal republic which could not be turned away from its long-term goals – compared to the occasionally wild swings of policy common to monarchies on the death of their rulers[109] – contributed to the image of the state as a major power. The Venetian experience of using self-reinforcing dynamics[110] to build a mixed, stable government, centralising political power, the myth of their domination of the seas[111] and political tranquillity contributed to the wide adoption of the state-centric model in Europe. By contrast, the Genoese would take an opposite approach, born of typically medieval challenges and mindsets, as well as innovations, but which proved a unique and remarkable alternative.

Two expressions are well suited to describe this (quasi) anti-state, dominated by private interests and in constant danger from continental powers: *Januensis ergo Mercator* (Genoese thus merchant), and *Janua, janua Italiae* (Genoa, the gateway to Italy), the latter being a comment on its perilous international position.[112] In this sense, while the danger of annexation loomed just as it did for other city-states, Genoa differed by most other contemporary polities by limiting state power and safeguarding a specifically Genoese notion of *libertá* – the freedom to do business.[113] The accumulation of private capital interacted with socioeconomic mobility, all in the context of republicanism, cosmopolitanism,[114] scepticism of public fleets and the enduring self-image as a community of private citizens, thus contributing to Genoese longevity in the international system.[115] Adding to this, the comparatively open nature of Genoese meant a relatively lax citizenship and immigration policy for people of various religious or ethnic backgrounds.[116]

Genoese captains and admirals in foreign service amassed renown and the capital needed to build and maintain private fleets. Famously, a large part – often the majority – of the Genoese fleets were privately owned and financed, an awkward system from an administrative standpoint, yet one which possibly led to maritime technological innovation.[117] Instead of a state war fleet, the ships were typically owned and financed by joint-stock companies *(mahone)*[118] – until the end of the Fourth War[119] – and by various towns, feudatories and *alberghi*[120] – the latter being abolished in 1576 – with the fleets fighting

for Genoa in case of a conflict. Significantly, the first fleet operated by the State was set up in 1559.[121] And while the famed Casa di San Giorgio effectively became a state within the state, managing Genoese public debt and taking on ever greater responsibilities over territories from Crimea to Corsica,[122] this followed Genoese tradition of conflating private finance with public policy, involving associations of creditors in the success of the state.[123] Significantly, due to Machiavelli's well-known analysis of the bank's effectiveness and Genoese division of power, the Casa di San Giorgio possibly influenced the creation of English and Dutch company-states.[124] Nonetheless, even though repeatedly occupied by continental rivals, Genoese authority over its possessions remained intact and it was never destroyed as a city-state.[125] In contrast to the more rigid, militarised and state-controlled Venetian model which remained focused eastward, Salonia considers the Genoese decline in the Mediterranean after the 14th century as a strategy of business diversification and geographic dispersion, involving a retreat from the Levant, and moving capital and commerce towards rising west-Mediterranean and Atlantic markets.[126]

Even when faced with momentous systemic shocks, like the sudden loss or the decline of major trade routes, open maritime polities proved themselves remarkably adept at bouncing back. While the conquest of Constantinople and the decline of the Black Sea and Levantine trade for Christian maritime states led to the Atlantic maritime polities exploiting a gap, this was also part of larger trends which shifted the great centres of economic power from east and south of the Mediterranean to the north of Europe and the Atlantic coast.[127] Nevertheless, this did not exactly mean the creation of a vibrant, prosperous North versus an impoverished South, especially when one considers the Genoese case.[128] Throughout various crises, the two polities used the full range of seapower in order to achieve their aims, seeking to exploit all opportunities. Yet, most importantly, Venice would continue to focus on old mercantile routes, whilst Genoese were quick to exploit new potential in the western Mediterranean and the Atlantic. After all, the Genoese had already begun turning west during the 12th century, with expeditions against Islamic ports, and with established communities and Atlantic voyages during the 13th.[129]

When Genoa retreated – by circumstance and choice – from its successful medieval model, it exploited the international system yet again. It turned towards a complex economic and political symbiosis[130] with the Spanish Empire, with the latter becoming its overlord for over a century while opening up the Atlantic and the New World to Genoese mercantile, financial and political networks. Genoa's port was the engine of the city's growth until the 17th century, remaining important even as the economy changed.[131] Yet through its focus on private initiative and newfound political influence, tiny Genoa became a great European financial centre and arguably the economic nodal point of the Catholic world,[132] with an important role in the early modern world system. The Genoese understanding of freedom won in the struggle with Machiavellian republicanism, avoiding both the centralisation of power as well as real territorialisation.[133] In other words, while Genoese institutions never achieved the maturity of a state, they were arguably not meant to do so in the first place. In this respect, Genoa, with its innovative spirit, represented an alternative potential path in the development towards a form of modern, industrial capitalism that does not involve the state. And while continental alternatives focused on urban centres and overlapping vassalage networks such as the Duchy of Burgundy[134] were absorbed by continental rivals, open maritime polities such as Genoa survived for centuries more.

Genoese-Venetian decline occurred somewhat in parallel with their loss of their advantages in the international system – seapower and comparatively open politics. The ever-pragmatic Venetians focused on manufacturing and political stability, stubbornly defending their eastern trade in a world of shifting financial centres. In the mid-17th century, through great sacrifice and skill,[135] a weakened Venice fought for almost 25 years against the Ottomans, only abandoning warfare in the 18th century. Throughout her decline however, its influence persisted despite political ossification due to its very survival as a functioning republic.[136] Comparatively, by 1666, Genoese elites tried to punch above their weight as commercial intermediaries between Spanish, Portuguese and Ottoman empires during the Anglo-Dutch conflicts. Yet Genoese trade in the Levant after 1682 depended on its free port attracting eastern goods,[137] its survival reliant on states invested in the status quo. Although increasingly pressured by continental powers, both republics found strategies which mostly maintained their core lands intact until 1796, when the beginning of French continental hegemony finally ensured their demise.

Thus, Genoa and Venice functioned within partially interacting, and occasionally overlapping multipolar systems – including polities in Europe and the Near East –, with their agents reaching as far as India, China or the Atlantic world. As the shift from an inner-sea to a world-ocean strategic culture took effect, and as the European multipolar system came to gradually overcome others, these two maritime polities – whose lessons and innovations enabled this great transition – could no longer effectively compete with European continental hegemons by use of seapower alone, or by involving intra-systemic or external actors.

Conclusion

As seen above, the article discusses the formation, evolution and competitive advantages of open maritime polities and their use of seapower in multipolar systems. The cases used represent the beginning of what became a great transitional phase from a distinctly inner-sea, partially interacting multipolarities to a world-ocean, modern, global kind of multipolarity and international society. This occurred first in the Mediterranean, and later on the oceans, which have remained Western-dominated for five centuries, showing the continued relevance of seapower for both IR and security studies. From their earliest forms to modern times, open maritime polities could exist in an often perilous symbiosis with regional continental hegemons. However, they could also be disruptive to multipolar systems, which tended to be characterised by more or less limited contests of strength between land-based, independent polities, leagues or dynastic empires, whose power radiated outwardly from their political centres. Conversely, continental hegemons sought a reshaping of previously independent economic nodal points, removing their ability to act as naval balancers or to use seapower to undermine the new order economically, politically or culturally. The fortunes of open maritime polities fluctuated dramatically, both in terms of geopolitical pressure, and their institutional life. When the systems were thoroughly fragmented or divided into various, somewhat equal power blocks, such polities thrived, and could sometimes play a decisive role in the international system. Even when faced with regional continental hegemons, the open maritime polities could often hit above their weight unless they pursued territorialisation.

Born of their weakness, the surprising strength and resilience of open maritime polities portrays revealing insights for multipolar international systems. Firstly, it points to lessons from previous multipolar iterations, where militarily weaker but institutionally-culturally dynamic actors possessed a surprising degree of agency in reversing, checking or slowing the rise of regional continental hegemons. The role of weakness in preserving or at least affecting multipolarity via the full range of seapower methods is thus emphasised. Secondly, open maritime polities have historically been successful adapting to and surviving transitions, as well as integrating themselves in new security architectures, which also points to the role of institutions and the resilience of certain societies in peace and war.

This is particularly relevant today when comparing open Western societies and Eurasian autocracies, which need the sea to remain connected to the global trade supporting their industrial and technological development. In this respect, contemporary open maritime polities possess superior network potential which enables them to use multipolarity for dramatic shifts – such as the EU's pursuit of 'open' strategic autonomy, particularly as a consequence of the war in Ukraine. Moreover, the continued importance of seapower is clear in the increasingly problematic case of Taiwan, and the competing claims of China and the United States over the future state of the international system.

Future research could profit from expanding upon the impact of open maritime polities in the creation of a global international society, for instance by investigating a middle ground between the expansion-globalisation thesis. Furthermore, the role of deep historical analyses will be of use in assessing the possible evolution of the global international society, which was shaped by the postwar changes and the golden age of globalisation, but also by long-running processes beginning with rivalling multipolarities centred around essentially inner-sea strategic cultures. Whether contemporary multipolarity remains global – and preserved by the Western maritime, democratic normative order – or moves towards a partially deglobalised status involving parallel institutions, open maritime polities will likely be able to adapt to this through their focus on seapower, innovative potential and relative institutional stability.

Perhaps fittingly, the link between seapower and its possible advantages in multipolarity will ultimately transition from familiar grounds into the limitless sea of space, which will see the appearance of new explorers, emporia, colonists and, in time, even new kinds of open societies and polities.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors report no conflict of interests.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Mihai Murariu https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4728-9481

Notes

1. Christian Bueger and Timothy Edmunds, 'Beyond Seablindness: A New Agenda for Maritime Security Studies', *Foreign Affairs*, 93(6), 2017, pp. 1293–1311.
2. Jonathan D. Caverley and Peter Dombrowski, 'Too Important to Be Left to the Admirals: The Need to Study Maritime Great-Power Competition', *Security Studies*, 29(4), 2020, pp. 579–600.
3. Erik Gartzke and John R. Lindsay, 'The Influence of Sea Power on Politics: Domain- and Platform-Specific Attributes of Material Capabilities', *Security Studies*, 29(4), 2020, pp. 601–36.
4. Lisa Otto, 'Introducing Maritime Security: The Sea as a Geostrategic Space', in Lisa Otto (ed.), *Global Challenges in Maritime Security: An Introduction* (Cham: Springer, 2020), pp. 1–11.
5. Frauke Kraas, Surinder Aggarwal, Matin Coy and Günter Mertins (eds), *Megacities: Our Global Urban Future* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014).
6. David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
7. Andrew Phillips, 'International Systems', in Christian Reus-Smit and Tim Dunne (eds), *The Globalization of International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 44.
8. Karl W. Deutsch and J. David Singer, 'Multipolar Power Systems and International Stability', *World Politics*, 16(3), 1964, p. 406.
9. David Bladgen, 'Global Multipolarity, European Security and Implications for UK Grand Strategy: Back to the Future, Once Again', *International Affairs*, 91(2), 2015, pp. 333–50.
10. Barry R. Posen, 'Emerging Multipolarity: Why Should We Care?', *Current History*, 108(721), 2009, p. 352.
11. See Phillips, 'International Systems', p. 44; Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
12. Geoffrey Till, *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 21.
13. See Andrew Lambert, *Seapower States: Maritime Culture, Continental Empires, and the Conflict That Made the Modern World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018); Andrew Lambert, 'Sea Power', in Kassimeris G and Buckley J (eds), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Modern Warfare* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 73–87.
14. Andrew Phillips and J. C. Sharman, 'Company-States and the Creation of the Global International System', *European Journal of International Relations*, 26(4), 2020, pp. 1249–72.
15. See Daniel Nexon, *The Struggle for Power in Early Modern Europe: Religious Conflict, Dynastic Empires, and International Change* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009).
16. See Giovanni Capoccia and Daniel Ziblatt, 'The Historical Turn in Democratization: A New Research Agenda for Europe and Beyond', *Comparative Political Studies*, 43(8/9), 2010, pp. 931–68.
17. See Jørgen Møller, 'Why Europe Avoided Hegemony: A Historical Perspective on the Balance of Power', *International Studies Quarterly*, 58, 2014, pp. 660–70; Jørgen Møller, *State Formation, Regime Change, and Economic Development* (Milton Park and New York: Routledge, 2017).
18. See George Lawson, 'The Eternal Divide? History and International Relations', *European Journal of International Relations*, 18(2), 2012, pp. 203–26; Kevin Blachford, 'From

Thucydides to 1648: The "Missing" Years in IR and the Missing Voices in World History', *International Studies Perspectives*, 22(4), 2021, pp. 495–508.

19. Hans Kopp, 'The "Rule of the Sea": Thucydidean Concept or Periclean Utopia', in Christian R. Thauer and Christian Wendt (eds), *Thucydides and Political Order: Concepts of Order and the History of the Peloponnesian War* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2015), p. 55.
20. Kopp, 'The "Rule of the Sea"', p. 55.
21. See Stefano Guzzini, 'Protean Power as a Plea for an Open Social Ontology, Non-Efficient Causal Explanations, and Cautious Political Practice", *International Theory*, 12(3), 2020, pp. 449–58.
22. See Michael Barnet and Raymond Duvall (eds), *Power in Global Governance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
23. Edward N. Luttwak, *Strategy and History: Collected Essays. Volume 2* (New Brunswick and Oxford: Transaction Books, 1985), p. 85.
24. Till, *Seapower*, p. 21.
25. Jakub Grygiel, 'Geography and Seapower', in Peter Dutton, Robert Ross and Øystein Tunsjø (eds), *Twenty-First Century Seapower: Cooperation and Conflict at Sea* (London and New York: Routledge 2012), p. 19.
26. Grygiel, 'Geography and Seapower', p. 19.
27. Basil Germond, *The Maritime Dimension of European Security, Seapower and the European Union* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2015).
28. Germond, *The Maritime Dimension of European Security*, p. 8.
29. Germond, *The Maritime Dimension of European Security*, pp. 9–10.
30. Germond, *The Maritime Dimension of European Security*, p. 14.
31. Nicholas Kyriazis, 'Seapower and Socioeconomic Change', *Theory and Society*, 35(1), 2006, p. 71.
32. Kyriazis, 'Seapower and Socioeconomic Change', p. 81.
33. Gartzke and Lindsay 'The Influence of Sea Power on Politics', p. 634.
34. Kopp, 'The "Rule of the Sea"', pp. 145–6; Hans Kopp, *Das Meer als Versprechen: Bedeutung und Funktion von Seeherrschaft bei Thukydides* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017).
35. See Lambert, *Seapower States*.
36. Matthew Kroenig, *The Return of Great Power Rivalry: Democracy Versus Autocracy From the Ancient World to the U.S. and China* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 20–8.
37. Walter Scheidel, 'Studying the State', in Peter Fibiger Bang and Walter Scheidel (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the State in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 9.
38. Scheidel, 'Studying the State', p. 14.
39. Lambert, *Seapower States*, p. 10.
40. Lambert, *Seapower States*, pp. 9–10.
41. Lambert, *Seapower States*, p. 18.
42. Michele Stefanile, 'The Development of Roman Maritime Trade After the Second Punic War', in Philip de Souza and Pascal Arnaud (eds), *The Sea in History: The Ancient World* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2018), pp. 259–60.
43. See Phyllis Culham, 'The Roman Empire and the Seas', in Souza and Arnaud (eds), *The Sea in History*, pp. 283–93.
44. Mario Liverani, *International Relations in the Ancient Near East, 1690-1100 BC* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 38.

45. Gojko Barjamovic, 'Mesopotamian Empires', in Bang and Scheidel (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the State in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean*, pp. 128–9.
46. Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power. Volume I. A History of Power From the Beginning to AD 1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 208–9.
47. See Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, p. 209.
48. See William James Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty: Renaissance Values in the Age of the Counter Reformation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 54–5.
49. Stefano Gasparri, 'The First Dukes and the Origins of Venice Through Renovation and Continuity', in Sauro Gelichi and Stefano Gasparri (eds), *Venice and Its Neighbors From the 8th to 11th Century* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017), pp. 5–26.
50. Gasparri, 'The First Dukes and the Origins of Venice Through Renovation and Continuity', p. 19.
51. Gasparri, 'The First Dukes and the Origins of Venice Through Renovation and Continuity', pp. 19–21.
52. Stefano Gasparri, 'The Origins of Venice: Between Italy, Byzantium and the Adriatic', in Magdalena Skoblar (ed.), *Byzantium, Venice and the Medieval Adriatic: Spheres of Maritime Power and Influence, c. 700-1453* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 98–110.
53. Frederic C. Lane, *Venice: A Maritime Republic* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1973), pp. 11–2.
54. Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty*, pp. 58–9.
55. Lane, *Venice*, pp. 23–4.
56. See Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavan, 'Towards an Ecological Understanding of the Myth of Venice', in John Jeffries Martin and Dennis Romano (eds), *Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilisation of an Italian City-State, 1297-1797* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), pp. 39–66; Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavan, 'Venice and Its Surroundings', in Eric R. Dursteler (ed.), *A Companion to Venetian History, 1400–1797* (Leiden and Bosten: Brill, 2013).
57. Steven Epstein, *Genoa and the Genoese* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), p. 10.
58. Siculus 5.1.39.
59. Strabo 4.6.1; 5.1.3.
60. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), p. 122.
61. David Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 278–9.
62. See Merav Mack, 'Genoa and the Crusades', in Carrie E. Beneš (ed.), *A Companion to Medieval Genoa* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018), pp. 471–95.
63. Epstein, *Genoa and the Genoese*, p. 26.
64. Epstein, *Genoa and the Genoese*, p. 27.
65. Jeffrey Miner and Stefan Stantchev, 'The Genoese Economy', in Beneš (ed.), *A Companion to Medieval Genoa*, p. 400.
66. Miner and Stantchev, 'The Genoese Economy', p. 401.
67. See Céline Dauverd, *Imperial Ambition in the Early Modern Mediterranean: Genoese Merchants and the Spanish Crown* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
68. N. A. M. Rodger, 'The New Atlantic: Naval Warfare in the Sixteenth Century', in John B. Hattendorf and Richard W. Unger (eds), *War at Sea in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003), p. 238.

69. Gasparri, 'The First Dukes and the Origins of Venice Through Renovation and Continuity', pp. 25–6.
70. Avner Greif, 'Political Organizations, Social Structure, and Institutional Success: Reflections From Genoa and Venice During the Commercial Revolution', *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics*, 151(4), 1995, pp. 736–7.
71. Gasparri, 'The First Dukes and the Origins of Venice Through Renovation and Continuity', p. 21.
72. Thomas Kirk, 'The Republic of Genoa and Its Maritime Empire', in Rolf Strootman, Floris van den Eijnde and Roy van Wijk (eds), *Empires of the Sea: Maritime Networks in World History* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019), p. 153.
73. Scheidel, 'Studying the State', p. 32.
74. Møller, 'Why Europe Avoided Hegemony', p. 664.
75. Møller, 'Why Europe Avoided Hegemony', p. 664.
76. Møller, *State Formation, Regime Change, and Economic Development*, p. 211.
77. Møller, *State Formation, Regime Change, and Economic Development*, p. 247.
78. Møller, *State Formation, Regime Change, and Economic Development*, p. 247.
79. Steven J. Garfinkle, 'Ancient Near Eastern City-States', in Bang and Scheidel (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the State in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean*, p. 110.
80. Liverani, *International Relations in the Ancient Near East*, pp. 23–8.
81. Scheidel, 'Studying the State', p. 17.
82. Michael E. Smith, 'The Archaeology of Ancient State Economies', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 33, 2004, p. 79.
83. Smith, 'The Archaeology of Ancient State Economies', p. 93.
84. Lambert, *Seapower States*, p. 17.
85. Lambert, *Seapower States*, p. 21.
86. Kyriazis, 'Seapower and Socioeconomic Change', p. 81; Lambert, *Seapower States*, pp. 227–65.
87. See Anjana Singh, 'Early Modern European Mercantilism and Indian Ocean Trade', in Strootman et al. (eds), *Empires of the Sea*, pp. 245–62.
88. See George Raudzens, 'Military Revolution or Maritime Evolution? Military Superiorities or Transportation Advantages as Main Causes of European Colonial Conquests to 1788', *The Journal of Military History*, 63(3), 1999, pp. 631–41.
89. Jason C. Sharman, 'Myths of Military Revolution: European Expansion and Eurocentrism', *European Journal of International Relations*, 24(3), 2018, pp. 491–513; Kevin Blachford, 'Revisiting the Expansion Thesis: International Society and the Role of the Dutch East India Company as a Merchant Empire', *European Journal of International Relations*, 26(4), 2020, pp. 1230–48.
90. Phillips and Sharman, 'Company-States and the Creation of the Global International System', pp. 16–7.
91. Lambert, *Seapower States*, pp. 205–6.
92. Thomas Kirk, *Genoa and the Sea: Policy and Power in an Early Modern Maritime Republic, 1559-1684* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), p. 188.
93. Nicola di Cosmo, 'Black Sea Emporia and the Mongol Empire: A Reassessment of the Pax Mongolica', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 53, 2010, p. 93.
94. See George Modelski and William Thompson, *Leading Sectors and World Powers: The Coevolution of Global Politics and Economics* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996).
95. David S. Kelly, 'Genoa and Venice: An Early Commercial Rivalry', in William R. Thompson (ed.), *Great Power Rivalries* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), pp. 125–52.

96. Kelly, 'Genoa and Venice', p. 126.
97. Kelly, 'Genoa and Venice', p. 150.
98. See John E. Dotson, 'Venice, Genoa and Control of the Seas in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries', in Hattendorf and Unger (eds), *War at Sea in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, pp. 119–36.
99. Kelly, 'Genoa and Venice, pp. 127–8.
100. See Ruthy Gertwagen, 'Venice's Policy Towards the Ionian and Aegean Islands, c. 1204–1423', *International Journal of Maritime History*, 26(3), 2014, pp. 529–48; Ruthy Gertwagen, 'The Naval Power of Venice in the Eastern Mediterranean in the Middle Ages', in Michel Balard (ed.), *The Sea in History: The Medieval World* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer 2017), pp. 170–84.
101. Dotson, 'Venice, Genoa and Control of the Seas in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries', pp. 131–3.
102. Lane, *Venice*, p. 196.
103. See Gertwagen, 'Venice's Policy Towards the Ionian and Aegean Islands'.
104. Lane, *Venice*, p. 198.
105. Gertwagen, 'The Naval Power of Venice in the Eastern Mediterranean in the Middle Ages', p. 174.
106. Gertwagen, 'The Naval Power of Venice in the Eastern Mediterranean in the Middle Ages', p. 178.
107. Tom Scott, *The City-State in Europe, 1000-1600: Hinterland, Territory, Region* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 79.
108. Bernard Doumerc, 'An Exemplary Maritime Republic: Venice at the End of the Middle Ages', in Hattendorf and Unger (eds), *War at Sea in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, p. 162.
109. See Robert Finlay, 'The Immortal Republic: The Myth of Venice During the Italian Wars (1494-1530)', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 30(4), 1999, pp. 931–44.
110. See Avner Greif, *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy: Lessons From Medieval Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
111. Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavan, *Venice Triumphant: The Horizons of a Myth*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), pp. 46–51.
112. See Antonia Borlandi '<<Janua, janua Italiae>>: uno sguardo al Quattrocento genovese', *Archivio Storico Italiano*, 143(1), 1985, pp. 15–38.
113. See Matteo Salonia, *Genoa's Freedom: Entrepreneurship, Republicanism, and the Spanish Atlantic* (Lanham, Boulder, New York and London: Lexington Books, 2017).
114. Luisa Piccino, 'Genoa: A City With a Port or a Port City?', in Wim Blockmans, Mikhail Krom and Justyna Wubs-Mrozewicz (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Maritime Trade Around Europe 1300-1600* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 168–70.
115. See Salonia, *Genoa's Freedom*.
116. Robert Sabatino Lopez, 'Market Expansion: The Case of Genoa', *The Journal of Economic History*, 24(4), 1964, p. 447.
117. Dotson, 'Venice, Genoa and Control of the Seas in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries', pp. 123–4.
118. See Giovanna Petti-Balbi, 'Flottes publiques et flottes privées à Gênes au XIVe siècle', in Balard (ed.), *The Sea in History*, pp. 215–24.
119. See Pierangelo Campodonico, 'Les génois. Une flotte militaire privée?', in Balard (ed.), *The Sea in History*, pp. 203–14.
120. Thomas Kirk, 'Mediterranean Rivalries', in Carrie E. Beneš (ed.), *A Companion to Medieval Genoa* (Leiden and Boston: Brill 2018), p. 462.

121. See Campodonico, ‘Les génois’.
122. See Campodonico, ‘Les génois’; Carlo Taviani, ‘The Genoese Casa di San Giorgio as a Micro-Economic and Territorial Nodal System’, in Blockmans et al. (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Maritime Trade Around Europe 1300-1600* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 177–91.
123. Scott, *The City-State in Europe*, p. 78.
124. See Carlo Taviani, ‘An Ancient Scheme: The Mississippi Company, Machiavelli, and the Casa di San Giorgio (1407-1720)’, in Erikson Emily (ed.), *Chartering Capitalism: Organizing Markets, States, and Publics* (Bingley: Emerald Books, 2015), pp. 239–56.
125. Scott, *The City-State in Europe*, p. 78.
126. Salonia, *Genoa’s Freedom*, pp. 40–3.
127. See Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*; Bartolomé Yun-Casalilla, *Iberian World Empires and the Globalization of Europe 1415-1668* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 299–322.
128. Yun-Casalilla, *Iberian World Empires and the Globalization of Europe 1415-1668*, p. 82.
129. Enrico Basso, ‘Les flottes génoises dans l’Atlantique (Angleterre – Flandre), XIIe–XVe siècles’, in Balard (ed.), *The Sea in History*, pp. 225–34.
130. Yun-Casalilla, *Iberian World Empires and the Globalization of Europe 1415-1668*, p. 167.
131. See Piccino, ‘Genoa: A City With a Port or a Port City?’.
132. See Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II*, pp. 500–8.
133. See Salonia, *Genoa’s Freedom*, pp. 103–38.
134. Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, pp. 437–8.
135. Gregory Hanlon, *The Twilight of a Military Tradition: Italian Aristocrats and European Conflicts, 1560-1800* (Halifax: UCL Press, 1998), pp. 151–3.
136. Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty*, p. 625
137. Kirk, *Genoa and the Sea*, p. 199.

Author biographies

Mihai Murariu is a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Political Science, Philosophy and Communication Sciences, at the West University of Timișoara, Romania, with a PhD in political science at the University of Münster, Germany. He has published a book with Springer VS, entitled *Totality, Charisma, Authority. The Origins and Transformations of Totalist Movements* (2017), and one with Eikon, entitled *Radical Peripheries: Heterodoxy, Modernity, and Totality in Japan and Romania* (2019). His research interests include ideology, totalism, security, globalisation, terrorism, international relations, and modernity.

George Anglitoiu is professor of security studies at the National School for Political Studies and Public Administration in Bucharest, Romania, and visiting professor at the University of Münster. He is also the acting Director of the Centre for European Studies under the aegis of the same Romanian university. He has authored one book, *The EU Security Dimensions in the post-Cold War Era* (2011) and has edited a collective volume on *Europeanisation. Governance and Security Studies* (2015).