

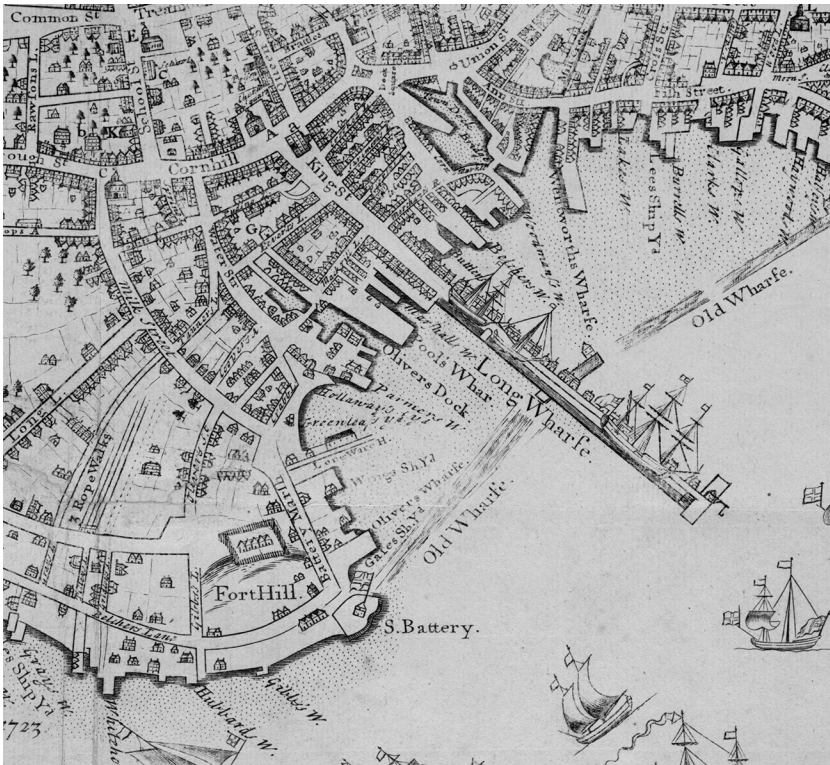
INTRODUCTION

In 1629, Boston's puritan founders acquired a charter from King Charles I. Unlike most royal charters, the governing document for the Massachusetts Bay Company—the joint-stock corporation that would govern the new colony—failed to specify a location for the quarterly meetings of its directors. The Crown must have assumed that like most English chartered corporations, its governing board would meet in London. But John Winthrop and company had no such intentions. Loophole in hand, the colonists brought their charter with them the next year on their three-thousand-mile journey to New England. There, far from royal oversight, they built their colony as they pleased. They erected a commonwealth remarkable for its autonomy, including an independent religious order free from the Church of England's scrutiny, and a self-governing republic centered in Boston, where the people chose their representatives and governors in annual elections.

Sixty years later, on April 18, 1689, Boston's leaders in church and state, supported by crowds from the surrounding countryside, many of them soldiers experienced in colonial wars, confronted the king's troops stationed at Fort Hill and a Royal Navy warship in the harbor. They disarmed the royal governor, Sir Edmund Andros, marched him to the town house at the head of King Street, the center of government in the heart of the city, and placed him under arrest.

Andros had been appointed by Charles's son, King James II, in an attempt to destroy Boston's autonomy and fold it into an authoritarian mega-colony, the Dominion of New England, stretching from New Jersey to Maine. The king assigned Andros, a veteran military officer, the task of stripping New Englanders of their rights, properties, and liberties. But the colonists' bold rebellion succeeded, in part because of the simultaneous overthrow of James II in England's Glorious Revolution. Boston's autonomy persisted.

Eighty years later, on March 5, 1770, crowds again gathered on King Street in Boston to stand up to British soldiers, who were



MAP I.1. *The Town of Boston in New England*, by John Bonner, 1722. Detail. The crowd of soldiers seized Andros at Fort Hill, marched him up Battery March and along the wharves toward King Street and the town house, marked “a” on Bonner’s map.

occupying their city to enforce Parliament’s hated Townshend Acts. Five Bostonians paid with their lives that night. (See plate 1.)

The bloodshed of this “massacre” presaged more violence to come. Five years later the New England countryside, again encouraged to resist by Boston’s leaders in church and state, erupted to repel the expeditionary force sent out from Boston on April 18, 1775, to seize arms and rebels believed to be in the nearby towns of Lexington and Concord. (See plate 2.)

By sundown the following day, militia volunteers numbering in the tens of thousands surrounded New England’s metropolis, laying siege to the city for the next eleven months. King George’s soldiers finally boarded Royal Navy transports to evacuate the city on March 17, 1776. Boston’s autonomy was again preserved.

Another eighty years on, King Street, now renamed State Street after independence, was once more occupied by soldiers from beyond the commonwealth. The US government had dispatched the Marine Corps to ensure the successful rendition of Anthony Burns, an enslaved African American who escaped from his Virginia master and fled to Boston, where it was illegal to buy and sell human beings or hold them in bondage. Local laws against slavery were futile, however, in the face of national power. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 demanded the active cooperation of every US citizen, on pain of severe punishment, in the arrest of any person claimed by a slave owner to be a fugitive. Despite the encouragement of some (though not all) of the divided city's leaders in church and state to resist the tyranny of distant powers, Boston succumbed. From the foot of the Old State House down to Long Wharf, State Street was lined with marines armed with bayonets to control the crowds that thronged the streets after several days of rioting between opposing factions. Burns, surrounded by armed local ruffians, led by mounted marine cavalrymen, and trailed by horse-drawn artillery, was marched down to a US Revenue Service cutter waiting in the harbor to carry him back to slavery. (See plate 3.)

In the midst of this humiliation, Theodore Parker, a radical Boston clergyman, leader of the Transcendentalist movement and committed abolitionist, despaired over what had been lost: "There is no Boston to-day. There was a Boston once. Now, there is a north suburb to the city of Alexandria; that is what Boston is. And you and I, fellow-subjects of the State of Virginia."¹

The first three of these episodes from Boston's vaunted history—the puritan founding in 1630, the rebellion against Andros in 1689, and the beginning of the Revolutionary War in 1775—ring like notes in a major chord from the familiar song that Boston sings about its past. This is a national song, as patriotic as "Yankee Doodle," in which Boston's colonial and revolutionary histories are understood as precursors to and central elements in the making of the United States. Boston's commemorative industry today is deeply committed to presenting the city's history in a national context. From the

Freedom Trail, developed in the 1950s to market Boston's history to tourists as the "birthplace of the American Revolution," to the Boston National Historical Park, organized by the National Park Service in the 1970s to show "how one city could be the Cradle of Liberty, site of the first major battle of [the] American Revolution, and home to many who espoused that freedom can be extended to all," this is the story it tells.² The same can be said for countless textbooks that place Boston's early history in the context of the United States' national founding, as do many scholarly monographs, popular histories, and biographies of Boston's leading events and figures. From Winthrop encouraging his fellow migrants aboard the *Arbella* with visions of a "city upon a hill," forward to the revolution with brewer-patriot Samuel Adams organizing resistance, the Boston Massacre and the Tea Party, Paul Revere's Ride, the "Shot Heard Round the World," the Battle of Bunker Hill, John Hancock's enormous signature on the Declaration of Independence, and Abigail Adams reminding John to "Remember the Ladies," then onward to the American Renaissance, abolitionist movement, and Robert Gould Shaw and the Massachusetts 54th Colored Regiment in the Civil War, Boston's popular history can seem like a long series of "just-so" stories and tableaux vivants, with the people and events that shaped its past perpetually available as usable exemplars for contemporary values and purposes.

As long ago as 1835, Nathaniel Hawthorne, in his story "The Gray Champion," lined up precisely these episodes in order to project a future consistent with Boston's independent past: "Should domestic tyranny oppress us, or the invader's step pollute our soil, . . . New England's sons will vindicate their ancestry."³ But the last of these four episodes, the rendition of Anthony Burns, strikes a sour note, spoiling the tune we've grown accustomed to hearing. In 1854, New York's Walt Whitman, never overly fond of New England's pieties, wrote a darkly satirical "Boston Ballad" about the city's defeat by the national slavocracy. In it, the skeleton of King George III is exhumed and brought to Boston to watch the "Federal foot and dragoons" with their "cutlasses" and "government cannon" march Burns back to bondage in Virginia. The king gets his revenge for Boston's

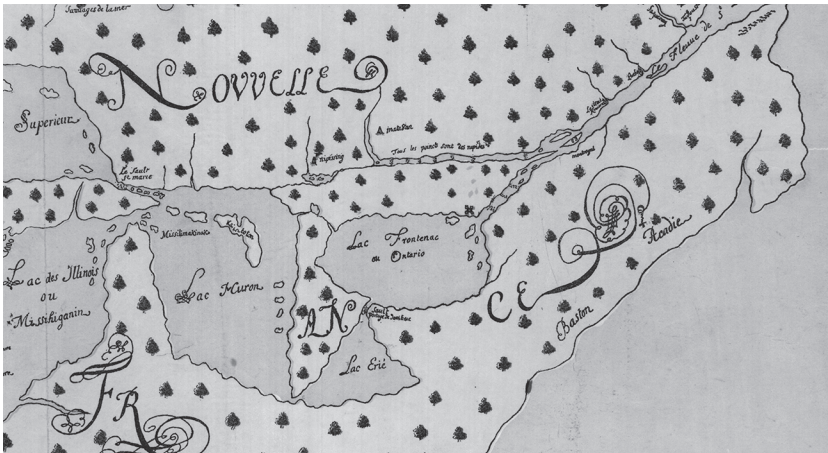
past rebellions in the sad irony that New England's sons failed to vindicate their ancestry against domestic tyranny and the invader's step—their hands restrained by the bargain that Boston had made with the slaveholders' union.⁴ The consolidation of the United States, not the tyranny of British monarchs, was the death of Boston—the Boston that Theodore Parker lamented, the Boston that is the subject of this book.

From Boston's viewpoint, the narrow vote on February 3, 1788, by which Massachusetts ratified the US Constitution, turned out to be a fateful mistake. The nature of the union that Massachusetts joined in 1788, especially as it evolved under the leadership of southerners, from Thomas Jefferson and James Madison to Andrew Jackson and James K. Polk, was not what Bostonians had bargained for. The subsequent course taken by US politics and territorial expansion dramatically undermined the autonomy that Boston and New England had long enjoyed. During the colonial period, Boston's economy was closely tied to Jamaica and Barbados, but the islands' planter elites had no political authority over New England. Under the US Constitution, however, the seventeenth-century bargain with slavery came back to haunt the city, as its government now lay increasingly under the thumb of the slaveholders of the American South. Inclusion in the United States compromised Boston's autonomy, remade its political economy, and diminished its hegemony over New England, ultimately dismembering the city-state built in the seventeenth century and subverting its capacity to define, let alone uphold, a vision of the common good for all. By 1854, Parker was right to think that in its humiliation at the hands of federal dragoons, the Boston of old was no more. In the wake of the Union's surprising victory in the Civil War, even the memory of Boston's former autonomy and its resistance to the dominant course of earlier US history vanished within a reconstructed national narrative.

In this book, I argue that Boston in New England developed as a polity consisting of a city and its hinterland that together formed its identity, and pursued its aspirations as one among many such competing entities in the early modern Atlantic world. Until it was swallowed up by the United States in the nineteenth century, it can

best be understood as the city-state of Boston, a self-conscious attempt to build an autonomous self-governing republic modeled on biblical and classical republican ideals in a New World environment. This is not a common way to understand Boston and its history, but I did not invent it; it has been lurking in the archives, unsought and overlooked, for centuries.

In the 1790s, Spanish colonial officials in Cuba registered the nationality, the *nación* of origin, of each slave-trading ship entering the port of Havana. The column on the register listing each ship's nation had entries for Spanish, English, Dutch, Danish, French, and American ships, and then a separate national category: "Bostonesa." Merchants from Boston had been trading in Havana for more than 150 years by this time, so perhaps it's not surprising that Spanish officials considered Boston to be an autonomous trading nation, requiring a separate category from the newly independent United States.⁵ But Havana was not alone in viewing Boston as the metropolis of a distinct nation. In the 1660s, England's King Charles II sent commissioners to New England to investigate the loyalty of his colonies: Massachusetts, Plymouth, Connecticut, and New Haven. In their subsequent report, the commissioners referred to all the colonists from the region collectively as "the Bostoners."⁶ King Charles himself would soon, in a formal decree to the Massachusetts General Court, address this body as "the governor and magistrates of our town of Boston in New England."⁷ Several years later, when the French explorer Louis Jolliet drew a map of North America to depict his wide-ranging discoveries, he labeled the entirety of the English colonial settlement north of the Chesapeake with a single word: "Baston."⁸ Later, during the eighteenth century's imperial wars between Britain and France, French troops commonly referred to all English colonial soldiers as "*les Bostonnais*." Their nineteenth-century descendants in Canada's maritime provinces came to refer to the New England region, where many of them would migrate, as "the Boston States." And during the American Revolutionary War, with France now an ally, French officers continued to refer to "*l'Etat de Boston*" in their correspondence.⁹



MAP I.2. *Nouvelle decouverte de plusieurs nations dans la Nouvelle France en l'année 1673 et 1674*, by Louis Jolliet. Detail. Note “Baston” just to the right of the large “CE” of “NOUVELLE FR-AN-CE.”

Today, these designations seem like misnomers. American schoolchildren learn that towns and cities are subordinate to states, which collectively comprise the country of the United States. Boston is not a nation or state; it is a city in Massachusetts—one of the states in the American nation. But King Charles and his commissioners, Jolliet, France's soldiers, and Havana's customs officials were not mistaken. Rather, they lived in an age when many a formal polity was built around a dominant city and its hinterland, and when our familiar hierarchies of sovereignty were not so clear-cut. And they were all witnesses to the emergence of one such powerful entity in the northeastern corner of North America. This was Boston in New England, known and regarded from Havana to Whitehall, from the fortresses of Quebec to the slave-trading factories of West Africa.

The persistent identification of Boston with New England, and widespread perception throughout the early modern world that Boston in New England was a *nación* or state in its own right, provide the rationale for my title. *The City-State of Boston* offers a new way of understanding early American history by tracing the long-term fate of the efforts that Bostoners made to transplant a viable and

venerable form of European polity to American shores, believing that this was the best way to support the social and moral vision fostered by their religious convictions.

Modern American places have seldom been described as city-states—a term we commonly associate with the ancient Mediterranean, medieval Italy, smaller principalities of the Holy Roman Empire and Hanseatic League, and the rare modern holdover such as Singapore or Monaco. The residents of early Boston did not use this term to describe themselves. Then again, neither did the people of ancient Athens or Sparta, Renaissance Venice or Florence, or anyone else until well into the nineteenth century. Coined first in Denmark (“*bystad*”) and Germany (the ungainly “*stadt-staat*”), the term “city-state” only entered the English language definitively in 1893, when W. Warde Fowler’s *The City-State of the Greeks and Romans* gave the term its durable modern form.¹⁰ Before the nineteenth century, small self-governing polities comprised of a city and its hinterland, relatively autonomous but not necessarily independent, were common sociopolitical forms.¹¹ There was little need for a special term of art to describe them until large consolidating nation-states began to devour them right and left. Thinking of the world that Boston made as a city-state allows us to think more flexibly about evolving forms of power over the three centuries from the earliest European colonies in North America to the consolidation of an American nation-state. It also offers an opportunity to assess the value, both the virtues and defects, of a once-common form of polity that has largely disappeared over the past two centuries. As secession and devolution movements arise in countries like Spain and Great Britain, two classic examples of consolidating nation-states from the early modern period, and as public confidence in the governing institutions of large countries like the United States or multinational entities like the European Union declines, the city-state model might be needed again as the nation-state falters.¹²

To bring this hidden history of the city-state of Boston to light requires unearthing and foregrounding many unfamiliar people and

events from Boston's and New England's past, the importance of which has been obscured by the proclivities of America's national narrative. As a result, many familiar people and events from the just-so version of Boston's history will not appear in this book, or will make their appearances in unfamiliar guises. This is not to deny that there is a great deal of historical truth, meticulous scholarship, and narrative power behind the way that Boston's history has usually been told. The problem is that there is too much power, too profound a desire among authors and readers alike for narratives that sustain American national identities. The overly familiar narratives effectively drown out other stories that the rich archive of Boston's past affords.

The modern fame of John Winthrop's "A Modell of Christian Charity" illustrates this problem. Winthrop, the first governor of Massachusetts, wrote a discourse on "Christian Charity" as a principle that would unite the colonists and promote their survival. By the late twentieth century, it had become an unshakable belief, repeated everywhere from history textbooks to op-ed columns, that Winthrop delivered this address in a shipboard sermon to his fellow migrants, prophesying an exemplary future for the city they would found and the nation it would become: "We shall be as a city upon a hill."¹³ President Ronald Reagan endorsed this image in 1984, adding the word "shining" to Winthrop's phrase and assuming that the "shining city upon a hill" was the United States.¹⁴ Reagan's rendition was derived from Perry Miller, the twentieth century's most influential historian of puritan New England, who suggested that Governor Winthrop was "preternaturally sensing what the promise of America might come to signify."¹⁵ Yet these interpretations badly distort the meaning and influence of the governor's words. Winthrop was warning against the danger of failure, not predicting a glorious future. Cities on hills are exposed places, their misdeeds visible to all, and if the colony were to fail, "wee shall be made a story and a by-word through the world."¹⁶ The modern nationalist reading also misleadingly implies that Winthrop's words had a strong influence on his contemporaries and successors. In reality, we have no evidence that Winthrop's discourse

was spoken aboard the *Arbella* or to any other audience.¹⁷ The idea that “Christian Charity” was a foundational text in American history began only in the nineteenth century, when a Winthrop descendant discovered a manuscript copy. The manuscript was published for the first time in 1838, more than two hundred years after its composition.¹⁸ Until then, it was essentially unknown. The prophetic interpretation of Winthrop’s city upon a hill is a modern invention of American historians, journalists, and politicians in search of a usable past.¹⁹ The demands on the past made by the modern American nation transformed Winthrop’s obscure fragment of colonial planning into a dominant metaphor for the American nation-state’s historical destiny.

Metaphors are not easy to dislodge. But stronger ones can displace them, and the foundational literature of Boston contains a powerful image on which the origin of the city-state of Boston rests. In spring 1630, in the city of Southampton on the English Channel, the Massachusetts migrants waited for the winds and tides that would launch their fleet across the Atlantic. Their spirits were buoyed by the preaching of John Cotton, vicar of St. Botolph’s Church in old Boston, Lincolnshire, spiritual mentor to the colonists, and soon to be minister of the new Boston’s First Church.²⁰ Cotton tried to assuage the colonists’ fears about embarking on a dangerous journey to an uncertain future. He posed their doubts as a rhetorical question:

Quest. But how shall I know whether God hath appointed me such a place, if I be well where I am, what may warrant my removeall?

Answ. . . . [W]e may remove . . . to plant a Colony, that is, a company that agree together to remove out of their owne Country, and settle a Citty or Common-wealth elsewhere. Of such a Colony wee reade in *Acts* 16. 12, which God blessed and prospered exceedingly, and made it a glorious Church.²¹

Among the most gifted puritan writers and preachers of his generation, Cotton was not commonly at a loss for the proper word.²² But the flurry of terms that he uses here—plantation, colony, com-

pany, city, commonwealth, and church—suggests that his vision for this venture was no simple thing to define. Nevertheless, a clue into the nature of Cotton’s vision lies in his biblical reference: “Of such a Colony wee reade in *Acts* 16. 12.”

Cotton’s audience would have immediately understood its meaning. English Puritans strove “to live ancient lives,” to place the drama of their existence on a continuous spectrum of time that stretched back to antiquity and to find inspiration in ancient texts for their dreams of a better world.²³ In this light, Acts 16:12 is central to the founding of Massachusetts, cited not only in Cotton’s sermon, but in other documents justifying the puritan migration.²⁴ In the King James Bible, Acts 16:12 reads, “And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony.”

Why did Cotton comfort the anxious colonists by referring to the Macedonian city of Philippi? The answer lies in the layers of meaning buried in this cryptic passage, which reveal the founders’ vision for the kind of city and colony they hoped to plant in America, rooted in the biblical story of the spread of Christianity and in classical models of ideal city-republics.

In 356 BCE, King Philip II of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great, built a fortified city on the Aegean coast to exploit nearby gold mines, granted it a charter for self-government under an assembly, populated it with Macedonian colonists, and named it Philippi. Two centuries later, in 168 BCE, the Roman Republic conquered Macedonia and reconstructed the main road to its eastern domains, the Via Egnatia, to pass through Philippi on the way to Byzantium and the Bosphorus Straits, the traditional boundary between Europe and Asia. It was at Philippi, another century later, that the Roman Republic entered its twilight. Mark Antony and Octavius pursued Julius Caesar’s assassins, Brutus and Cassius, along the Via Egnatia and defeated their armies in the Battle of Philippi in 42 BCE. Octavius (as Caesar Augustus) made Philippi into a Roman colony, repopulated by his former legionnaires, its land divided among them and administered by Roman law as a “miniature Rome.”²⁵

But this history mattered to Cotton and Boston’s founders because Philippi became, after nearly another century, the first place

in Europe to hear the Christian gospel. In 49 CE, the apostle Paul established the first Christian church in Europe at Philippi. As Acts 16 relates, Paul, Silas, and Timothy had been preaching throughout the cities of Anatolia (now central Turkey). During his mission in Anatolia, Paul had a vision in the night: “There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, ‘Come over into Macedonia, and help us.’ And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, . . . to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony.”

Paul’s plantation of a church in Philippi was the culmination of a series of colonizing projects that prepared the way for the gospel to reach Europe. The author of Acts self-consciously placed Paul’s plantation of a Christian church and commonwealth at Philippi within the Greek and Roman colonizing tradition, but also as a challenge to that tradition. When Paul and Silas caused trouble in Philippi with their preaching, the locals complained that they “teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.” Paul’s novel religion violated the emperor cult and worship of pagan gods that flourished among elite Romans.²⁶ Moreover, the early Christian churches practiced communal property sharing, renouncing private wealth in favor of the common weal. Caesar Augustus had reorganized Philippi, erased the traces of Greek and Roman republican traditions of egalitarian self-rule, and placed power in the hands of a military elite.²⁷ The customs of the Christian plantation challenged the imperial model. Philippi was the place where the Roman Republic had met its end, and Philippi would become the place where a Christian commonwealth in Europe began.

It is worth dwelling on the meaning of Philippi because it is fundamental to understanding the vision that framed the founding of Boston. Look no further for evidence than the Great Seal, created in 1629 when Charles I granted the Massachusetts charter. The words spoken by the figure in the Great Seal, “COME OVER AND HELP US,” are taken from Acts 16:9, where the “man of Macedonia” spoke to Paul in his vision: “Come over into Macedonia, and help us.”



FIGURE I.2. Great Seal of the Massachusetts Bay Company, 1629.



FIGURE I.3. Great Seal of the Virginia Company of London, 1606.

The Massachusetts seal was highly unusual. Its image of a Native American uttering a biblical quotation differed dramatically from the seals of other chartered colonies. The Great Seal of the Virginia Company of London (1606), with its regal expression of power and authority, adding “*Virginiae*” to the other realms (*Britanniae*, *Franciae*, and *Hiberniae*) over which King James ruled, presents a marked contrast.

More than simply a sign of the colony’s missionary zeal, the Great Seal’s reference to Philippi anticipates Cotton’s use of this image in *Gods Promise to His Plantations*. As Philippi was the site of the first Christian church planted on a new continent, superseding the corrupt imperial remnant of the formerly virtuous Greek and Roman republics, so Boston in New England would bring the first reformed Christian commonwealth to a new continent, escaping the imperial decay and religious persecution that threatened England’s government and church.²⁸

Philippi’s importance to Boston’s founders highlights two aspects of their vision for the new plantation, and therefore two critical themes of this book: first, that it would strive to be an autonomous body, committed to republican self-government in both church and state; and second, that within the corporate body of voluntary members, the principle of mutual charity maintained by Paul and the early churches would be crucial to its success.²⁹ Neither of these principles was a necessary aspect of English colonizing ventures or

English Puritans' aspirations. Rather, they emerged from two significant influences on Boston's founders. One was the widespread interest in utopian, ideal, or reformed cities and commonwealths—"the best state of a publike weal"—that flourished in early modern England and Europe, and achieved a heightened intensity in the decade before the migrants' departure for Massachusetts.³⁰ Second and equally influential were the examples of many prior colonization attempts—most of them abject failures.

Boston in New England was not, strictly speaking, a utopian enterprise, nor can its particular features be traced to any specific one of these model colonial precursors. But these models are important because they help us recognize that the idea of Boston emerged in the late 1620s during a period of intense curiosity, debate, and disagreement about what an ideal society could possibly be like, tempered by careful observation of other colonial experiments. Thomas More inaugurated the discussion with his fictional satire *Utopia* (1516), which depicted an ideal republic on a remote New World island. Its 1551 translation from Latin into English, and subsequent editions in 1556, 1597, and 1624, made More's text accessible to a wide audience. But less familiar strands of thought, such as an early modern fascination with the ancient city of Jerusalem, also played a part in generating conversation about ideal cities and commonwealths.

In 1595, an English Puritan minister named Thomas Tymme translated and published *A Briefe Description of Hierusalem and the Suburbs Therof, as It Florished in the Time of Christ*. The book included a "beawtifull mappe" on which the famous sites of scripture could be easily located, giving the reader a view of "that faire and most auncient Citie . . . by God him self bewtified aboue all other Citties . . . the cheefe, most noble and famous Cittie of the world."³¹ For the poor or illiterate, similar lessons could be learned from a busker in southwest England named Will Gosling, who built an intricate model of Jerusalem on a wheelbarrow that he pushed from town to town. For a few pennies, Gosling would pull away the cloth and allow customers to study the earthly Zion in miniature.³² In 1621, Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* described a "Utopia

of mine owne,” located on “one of those floting islands in the Mare del Sur” or else in the “inner parts of America”—a monarchical utopia, unlike the egalitarian commonwealths described in other works.³³ Further instances of this profusion of model cities included Johann Valentin Andreae’s *Christianopolis* (1619), Tommaso Campanella’s *Civitas Solis* (1623), and Francis Bacon’s *The New Atlantis* (1624). All of these, like Burton, mimicked More’s *Utopia* in being set on remote islands in the oceans surrounding the New World, whence travelers return to report on the inhabitants of strange commonwealths.³⁴ In the decade before the Massachusetts Bay Company received its charter, the discussion of ideal societies intensified with this remarkable series of new publications, growing discontent among Puritans over the policies of Charles I, and movement toward colonial projects spawned by this discontent.³⁵

Juxtaposed with these utopian visions were recent efforts to create actual cities and colonies on new models. Some were the product of unusual circumstances, such as the great fire in 1613 that destroyed much of Dorchester, in southwestern England. Dorchester’s destruction allowed its puritan leaders, especially the minister John White, later one of the founders of the Massachusetts Bay Company, to remake their city as “a reformed, godly community, . . . a new Jerusalem.” White and his fellow Puritans directed their efforts toward charity, from the creation of new hospitals and schools to new methods for raising money for the poor. Earlier efforts by Protestant reformers in European cities, such as John Calvin’s Geneva and Huldrych Zwingli’s Zurich, served as models for the Puritans in Dorchester.³⁶

Radical dissenters, whose strident critiques of the half-reformed Church of England were met with persecution that pushed them into exile, conducted other experiments. English separatists established churches in urban centers of the Netherlands, where free from English ecclesiastical authorities, they experimented in remaking church polity, taking the apostolic churches as their models. Among the clergymen who took part in these Dutch experiments were leading figures in early New England, such as William Ames, Hugh Peter, and John Davenport. The exiles argued fiercely with

one another and their Dutch hosts about how to implement scripture, questioning everything from the legitimacy of a pastor's wife wearing silken finery to the theology of the Dutch Arminians. These experiences, like the utopian writings, offered conflict and disagreement, not a single model of a perfect church polity.³⁷

In 1597, Francis Johnson, minister of an exile church in Amsterdam, took part in an Anglo-Dutch attempt to settle a colony of puritan separatists on the Magdalen Islands off the coast of Newfoundland.³⁸ Johnson's failed colony was one of many such experiments, most of them disastrous, and these forerunners also shaped Boston. American mythology imagines Winthrop and his fellow colonists, along with Jamestown and the Plymouth "Pilgrims," as the nation's beginnings, but we should remember how *late* Massachusetts came in the long series of English efforts to plant colonies in America. Many of these, like Johnson's Newfoundland venture, are now obscure or forgotten. But for Boston's founders, they created a litany of failure, illustrating how rapidly even the most hopeful and well-funded project might descend into bleak dystopia. Martin Frobisher's three voyages in the 1570s to Baffin Island, north of Labrador and west of Greenland, where he collected thousands of tons of ore that proved to be worthless; Humfrey Gilbert's Newfoundland venture in the 1580s, from which Gilbert never returned; Walter Raleigh's "lost" Roanoke Colony and disappointing Guiana venture; Charles Leigh's similar failures in Newfoundland and Guiana; the Sagadahoc Colony in 1607 in Maine, led by George Popham and Raleigh Gilbert, which lasted a year and gathered only a cargo of sarsaparilla before disbanding; George Calvert's failed attempt in the 1620s to create a Catholic refuge at "Avalon" in the "wofull country" of Newfoundland—all yielded nothing but wasted money, vanished settlers, and dashed hopes.³⁹

Even the plantations at Jamestown and Plymouth that did manage to gain a toehold were not inspiring models. In 1610, three years after Jamestown's founding, all but sixty of its first five hundred colonists were dead. Some of the survivors staved off hunger by digging up the graves of their fellow colonists to eat the corpses. Over the next decade, Virginia's organizers coerced four thousand more

of England's poor to cross the Atlantic. Three thousand of them had already died of disease and starvation by 1622, when an Indian attack killed a quarter of the remainder in a single day.⁴⁰ Plymouth's disasters were quieter than Virginia's, but the "starving time" that killed half the original colonists in 1620–21 was well known. Their English investors abandoned the colony, leaving the "pilgrims" to buy out their debts and fend for themselves.⁴¹

These dreadful examples, no less than the utopian dreams of godly commonwealths, were in the minds of Winthrop and his fellow organizers as they weighed the decision to migrate in their "General Observations for the Plantation of New England":

Ob[jection] 4. But we may perishe by the waye or when we come there, either hanginge, hunger, or the sworde etc., and how uncomfortable it would be to see our wives, children, and freindes come to suche misery by our occasion?

Ob[jection] 7. We see those plantations, which have been formerly made, succeeded ill.⁴²

Such conversations among potential migrants to the New World mimicked the fictive dialogues of the utopian writings, from More to Bacon. These documents were circulated in dissenting circles and discussed by worried participants. The "General Observations" strove to quell such objections, acknowledging the woeful history of English colonization projects while still sustaining the dreams that the reforming tradition encouraged.

The upshot of this intense engagement with models both ideal and practical, hopeful and discouraging, not only among the Massachusetts Bay founders, but across the spectrum of English colonial ventures in the 1620s, was intense disagreement. Each group planning a new plantation had its own interpretation, its own way of melding idealistic dreams with the received wisdom on successful colonization. In the 1620s, puritan noblemen like the Earl of Warwick, Lord Brooke, and Lord Saye and Sele developed the Providence Island colony in the heart of the Spanish Caribbean. They shared the conviction of the Massachusetts organizers that the Protestant churches of England needed a refuge from the devastation

of war and a corrupt English monarch. But these powerful grandees were also militantly anti-Spanish. They wanted to plant a colony where they could launch attacks on Spain's imperial stronghold. Their vision of colonial rule involved aristocrats like themselves dominating policy, not self-government by commoners. To compete with Spanish power, they would imitate Spanish models of colonial authority.⁴³

By contrast, the chief figure in planting colonies on the coast of Maine, Sir Ferdinando Gorges, director of the Crown's Council for New England in the 1620s, wanted nothing to do with puritan refuges or reformed churches. Gorges envisioned his American colony as a return to feudal forms of authority, not an experiment in commonwealth government.⁴⁴ He imagined a city ("Gorgeana") at the center of his colony that would be the episcopal seat of the Church of England in America, with a resident bishop and cathedral, governed by aldermen and a mayor, and with many ceremonial offices ("two to four sergeants to attend on the said mayor . . . called forever sergeants of the white rod").⁴⁵ The Massachusetts Bay Company, with its middling investors and plans for self-government, differed dramatically from both of these contemporary alternatives.

Boston's founders were taking an enormous risk with no certain outcome. No single plan or version of colonial plantation had yet proven to be particularly effective. They were betting their lives and fortunes on a model of colonization for which they found an encouraging biblical precedent along with some successful examples from classical antiquity, but with no more guarantee of success than any of their predecessors. Not surprisingly, as Cotton came to the conclusion of his parting sermon on *Gods Promise to His Plantation*, he addressed a concern that was surely on the minds of his audience:

Quest. What is it for God to plant a people?"

In other words, what does this "plantation" metaphor really mean? What can we count on?

Answ. When he promiseth to plant a people, their dayes shall be as the dayes of a Tree, *Isay* 65. 22. As the Oake is said to

be an hundred yeares in growing, and an hundred yeares in full strength, and an hundred yeares in decaying.⁴⁶

Cotton was offering a prophecy of remarkable prescience. *The City-State of Boston* follows his lead in dividing the history of the plantation of Boston in New England into three books, arranged along a chronology much like the days of the oak tree in Isaiah 65.

Book I, titled “Render unto Caesar,” depicts Boston’s rapid development in the seventeenth century. It focuses on Boston’s expansion across New England, the hiving off of new colonies and their consolidation into a confederation, and the construction of an integrated political economy, linked to the markets of the West Indies and southern Europe. Boston began in the utopian dreams of dissident Puritans that a new kind of godly republic could be formed in the wilds of America, far from the decadent and corrupt power of European monarchs and state churches. But the challenge of survival pushed the infant colony into a fatal bargain: an economic alliance with the sugar islands of the West Indies. This effectively made Boston a slave society, but one where most of the enslaved labor toiled elsewhere, sustaining the illusion of Boston in New England as an inclusive republic devoted to the common good. To preserve the autonomy necessary to sustain its wide-ranging trade economy and egalitarian puritan culture meant that Boston was engaged throughout the century in a complex struggle with England’s Stuart monarchs. Book I ends at a moment of vindication, when Britain’s overthrow of James II and turn to constitutional monarchy seemed to ratify Bostonians’ evolving vision of Protestantism, free trade, and political liberty.

Book II, called “The Selling of Joseph,” begins after Britain’s revolution of 1688 and Boston’s simultaneous rebellion against James II’s royal governor, which brought about a fundamental alteration of Boston’s long antagonistic relationship with the Crown, and opened up new vistas for both commerce—rapidly growing trade in the Atlantic economy—and culture—the prospect that the city could play a major role in the creation of a Protestant International. But the hopes of the booming port city began to sour within

the increasingly militarized British Empire of the later eighteenth century—a disturbing trend punctuated by Bostonians’ forced participation in the 1755 ethnic cleansing and repatriation of the Acadians, the French population of Nova Scotia. The gradual deterioration of Boston’s relationship with king and Parliament was marked by the ever-growing prominence of the “government of soldiers” in Britain’s attempt to rein in the godly republic of New England, ending in rebellion and war, the city ravaged by military occupation and siege. Book II ends with Boston’s liberty preserved, but with the older vision of an Atlantic world of liberty and commerce destroyed, and an uncertain future to be framed in its new relationship with a disparate group of other disaffected colonies.

Book III, “A New King over Egypt,” resumes the story after the cataclysm of revolution had seemingly passed. Boston’s independent commonwealth rebuilt its Atlantic commerce and negotiated new political relationships within the confederation of United States. Yet the arc of book III traces the dissolution of Boston as a city-state. The fateful decision to ratify the US Constitution began the slow demise of Boston’s independence and regional power, as southern planters with continental ambitions dominated national politics, damaging Boston’s interests and corroding its values. Additionally, the rise of New England’s mechanized textile manufacturing, an economic shift made by Boston’s merchants in response to Jefferson’s trade embargoes and Madison’s war, forged a new set of commercial relations with the American South. The rise of a powerful cotton interest within Boston’s economy further divided the increasingly segregated city’s population over the legitimacy of property in human beings. Despite efforts made by Boston’s cultural leaders to reinvigorate its traditions of charity and cohesion, the city’s internal divisions increasingly mirrored those of the American nation-state as both descended into violence and war. With the Union’s triumph in the Civil War, Bostonians were at the forefront of seizing the spoils of victory and embracing the US imperial project. In that transformation, the centuries-old idea of Boston as an autonomous city-state, an idea that had been slowly deteriorating for decades, slipped away largely unnoticed.

Three centuries is an unusually deep time span for a book about an American place. But Boston's founders had a strong sense of time's depth; they understood their own project as a living extension of antiquity. Throughout this book, individual chapters attend to the layering effect of cumulative events over time, to the ways that lived experience built on, echoed, or rhymed with the past. Bostonians' awareness of the past often shaped the meaning of events through their understanding, consciously perceived or unconsciously felt, that the present moment was implicated in (though not determined by) the past and might be judged against the standards of history. By attending to the past's lingering echoes, I aim to convey a sense of the city-state of Boston's history as a slow and gradual emergence from the early modern world, rather than an impatient rush to find its place within a modern United States.

In structuring such a large work about a place so thoroughly documented from its beginnings, I have had to make choices about which events and people to focus on, and how to convey change across time and space, in order to construct what amounts to a biography of Boston in New England. But what does it mean to write the biography of a city-state? The story must attend to how this complex entity came into being and evolved over time—a story of growth, maturation, crises, and ultimate decline. That means following the actions of the emerging city's residents in their efforts to create durable connections with the region's hinterland, shape a self-sustaining political economy, and weather internal storms and stresses. This book dwells less on the internal development of the town and city of Boston proper—its political institutions and conflicts, population growth, built environment, and social and cultural life, or what is typically seen as the conventional materials of urban history—than on the life of Boston as lived beyond the boundaries of the city and region.

The life of a city-state takes place not only within the city's limits but also in its outreach to the hinterland to recruit talent and resources for the metropolis, and in the extension of its influence into the wider world. It would be absurd for a biography of an influential person to look only at the internal workings of that person's

physical body, and ignore its subject's notable interactions with and significance in the world. So too this biography of the city-state of Boston is deeply concerned with the life that Boston led beyond its immediate boundaries, its struggles to define itself and sustain the autonomy and prosperity necessary to cultivate a distinctive identity within the Atlantic world.

Neither is this meant to be a complete narrative history of Boston. Even an internal history, focused only on events occurring within the city limits, would be an overwhelmingly large task, to which centuries' worth of dense historiography can attest.⁴⁷ The complexity of the task is compounded when it includes people from throughout the region who were recruited to join Boston's projects, reaches outward to the larger New England region that Boston shaped, and explores places around the Atlantic where Bostonians pursued their interests. As an antidote, the book's chapters are designed around particular moments, important problems, or significant passages in the history of Boston and New England. The chapters often focus on a relatively small number of Bostoners whose efforts to build and sustain the region's political economy, society, or culture, or whose connections in the larger Atlantic world are especially revelatory about the changing relationships between the city and its larger contexts. These individuals are not presented as typical Bostonians (it's hard to imagine what such a person might be) but instead as figures whose experience allows readers to develop an empathetic understanding of the public life of Boston in New England.

Boston's survival was precarious, and so were the qualities that sustained it as it grew: autonomy and security, material prosperity, self-governance, a commitment to commonwealth values, and a spiritual culture of reform and internal improvement. All these things were continually challenged and frequently in doubt. In each of them, the citizens of Boston in New England would sustain defeats, experience humiliating failures, and at times deal falsely with their god. Sometimes Bostonians chose life and good, and at other times death and evil. My inclination has been to call this story a tragedy. The city-state of Boston would be the noble hero

of the drama, whose virtuous aspirations toward self-governing autonomy and an internal ethic of charity were eventually undermined by fatal flaws—an exclusionary social vision and a dependency on slave-based economies—that were present from New England's origins, aided its growth and prosperity, but ultimately destroyed both its autonomy and internal cohesion. And while that is the arc of the story to come, to call it a tragedy denies the open-ended choices that each generation faced in its efforts to create and sustain the city-state of Boston.