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cordonné par Joël FÉLIX

Before Fiscal Transparency

Today, transparency is hailed as a key to good governance and economic efficiency, with national states implementing new laws to allow citizens access to information. It is therefore paradoxical that, as shown by a series of crises and scandals, modern governments and international agencies frequently have paid only lip-service to such ideals. Since Jeremy Bentham first introduced the concept of transparency into the language in 1789, few societal debates have sparked so much interest within the academic community, and across a variety of disciplines, using different approaches and methodologies. Within these current debates, however, one fact is striking: the lack of historical reflection about the development of the concept of transparency, both as a principle and as applied in practice, prior to its inception. Accordingly, the aim of this special issue is to contribute to historicising the ways in which communication and control over fiscal policy and state finances operated in early modern European politics.


Limits to fiscal transparency in parliamentary monarchies


Provincial estates in composite polities


Control and intermediation of corporate bodies


Publicity and communication in absolute monarchies


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