The Origins of States and Wars: Lessons From the Middle East[1]

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Prominent contributions to the history of IR make limited use of anthropology: they privilege kingship over kinship, military alliances over matrimonial ones, raid over trade, and polities over politics. In this paper, I combine political science, anthropology and history of the Ancient world to revisit the scholarly literature explicitly or implicitly devoted to inter-polities affairs in the Mediterranean. This undermines the distinction between pre- and post-Westphalia and stretches the pre-modern era until the fall of the multinational Empires ruled by family dynasties at the end of World War I. It highlights "interpersonal relations at world level": in ancient times, boundary transgressions were frequent; migrations played a paramount role; specific covenants between kings and newcomers superseded the egalitarian attribution of citizenship. Finally, two major differences between our world and theirs are singled out: the bottom-up dissemination of international processes, and the absence of regulatory institutions at regional level.

KEY WORDS ♦ history of IR ♦ international relations in the Ancient World ♦ political anthropology ♦ kinship ♦ Middle East ♦ Ancient Orient ♦

The Middle East is plagued with numerous woes. Most stem from the pre-Westphalia conditions that seem to prevail in the region: states are unconsolidated, boundaries are disputed, passports and loyalties do not coincide. Because religion is still associated with politics, internal and inter-polities problems are not opposing nation states but coalitions of peoples led by prophetic leaders – Wahabi Sunnnites, Khomenist Shiites, Nasserite and Baathi arabists, Zionists, Ataturkists, pro-Western secularists – as well as international organizations reflecting the same cleavages – the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Arab league, and the UN. Consequently, the region look very much like Europe before the fall of the Holy Roman Empire: culturally divided, politically unstable, and military active.

Such depiction fits rather well the conclusions drawn in large frescoes of World History recently published. Admittedly, these path-breaking works do not share the same vision of the past, and belong to various paradigmatic creeds. However, their assessments about the present do converge. In spite of theoretical divergences about

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the role of the state, the internal-external linkage, and the alleged specificity of the "international", they nevertheless agree on the *discontinuity* of time and space. First, there are "stages" and "breaks" all along history; second, in the periods preceding 18th century Europe various kinds of polities coexisted – tribal chiefdoms, city-states, national governments, and empires. Moreover, there is a broad consensus on the universality of these distinctions: the pre-Westphalia/post-Westphalia divide undoubtedly was an indigenous European breakthrough; nevertheless, this "modernity" was or will be duplicated in other regions of the world. Along that line, the Middle East should sooner or later reach a post-Westphalia stage, and as eventually experience all the consequences attached to the passing of imperial society: a stable balance-of-power if not a full democratic peace would build a liberal order; alternatively, freedom to live according to one's creed with co-religionists could bring to the fore neo-theocratic states (*cujus regio, ejus religio*).

Would Middle Eastern specialists follow that path, they would probably pick as the best approximate to a Westphalia moment in the region the demise of the Ottoman Empire, when the Treatises of Sèvres (1920), Kars (1921) and Lausanne (1923) were signed. As did the Münster and Osnabrück peace conferences, such agreements made room for the creation of national states on the ruins of a multilingual, multi-confessional and multiethnic empire. Furthermore, these new born states were endowed with modern constitutions, and most became independent, republican, and secular in the aftermath of the first or the Second World War It is tempting, then, to make a clear-cut distinction between a pre- and a post-Ottoman eras. Before the Fall of the Ottoman Empire, war was endemic and conflicts were enduring both at the borders with Russia, Austria, and Persia,; and within the limits of the Sunni Caliphate where whole peoples were fighting for their independence – Arabs, Kurds, Jews; as well as Maronites in Lebanon. After the emergence of two dozens new sovereign states, only one major enduring conflict remained: a war between Israel and its neighbours that could be analysed with the help of a variety of theories as a classical conflict over land, over identities, over power, etc.

In this paper, I challenge these views. This could be done on various grounds, like the challenging length of the alleged breaking period in the Middle East compared to Europe; or, the re-emergence of traditional conflicts in Lebanon, Iraq, the African Horn and the Maghreb, since eight large civil strives and ten interstate battles plagued the region[2]. But contesting theories is addressing their core arguments, and testing their most convincing statements. The enigma to which existing Westphalia paradigms are confronted is simple: why is the region still *traditional*, lagging behind Europe and displaying few instances of internationally accepted boundaries, full-

[2] Civil strives : Algeria, Lebanon, Iraq (at several occasions), Northern Yemen, Oman (Dhofar), Palestine (Fath against Hamas), Somalia, Turkey (Turks versus Armenians and Kurds), Sudan. Local wars: Morocco against Eastern Sahraouis, Algeria against Morocco, the two Yemen against each other, Iraq against Iran (twice), Iraq against Kuwait, Somalia against Ethiopia, Eritrea against Ethiopia, Armenia against Azerbaijan, Syria against various Lebanese parties (in 1976; after 2005). This already long albeit incomplete list does not include independence wars, international interventions (in Ethiopia, Egypt, Iraq), and uncountable coups (in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Qatar). However, such events did not spare other parts of the world, and even Europe (wars in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and now the Balkans; civil wars in Spain (the Basque country), Ireland, and France (Corsica).

fledged state apparatuses, and monopoly of armed violence? Alternatively, how come *modern* aspects of IR antedate Westphalia by millennia in the region? It may easiliy be proved that the Middle east, ancient or modern, is the locus par excellence of a reliance on diplomacy (whose invention is attributed to Richelieu); of enduring alliances sealed by treaties surviving to their founding fathers (that no specialist of Greece would locate elsewhere than in the Peloponnesian); of the creation of demilitarised buffer zones (usually traced to the Congress of Vienna); and even an aborted attempt at having regional institutions like the modern League of nations?

My contention is that historical explanations of international relations, however outstanding and exhaustive they may be, cannot fully answer such questions because they leave apart important explanatory factors. After having presented and discussed their achievements in a first section of this article, I shall make in the second part a more systematic and in depth use of anthropological and archaeological materials that is the case in existing theories in order to enhance our understanding of Middle Eastern specificities and its stupendous examples of political and international continuity over millennia. To explain the durability of internal disorder and external anarchy in the Middle East in spite of its diplomatic and political creativity, it is not sufficient to go back in time; we should also rely on evidence usually ignored or dismissed by political scientists and internationalists. On this new methodology that I suggest to name "archeopolitics", more will be said in the third and last part of this paper.

Reviewing uses of Ancient political and international systems in Political Science

Most scholars venturing into antiquity consider themselves as political scientists. Over the past decade, actually, books like those written by Buzan and Little, or Ferguson and Mansbach, have been published that address the same issues from outside IR, albeit within political science. This allegiance to PS has an important effect: even when addressing international issues, most scholars take the continuity between the inside and the outside for granted, since their interest in the history of IR lead them to assume as did Michael Mann a constant linkage between "politics" and "geopolitics". Ferguson and Mansbach, for instance, go as far as writing that "[p]olitics, rather than 'international relations' should be the bedrock of our inquiry." (Ferguson and Mansbach, 2004b: 60). However grounded such contention raises two problems: on the one hand, it downplays the inter-polities aspects of the region since the eldest times; on the other hand, it turns down the anthropological turn that political science as well as international studies are presently experiencing.

Advances and shortcomings in the history of IR

As political scientists rather than historians scholars who wrote books on the history of international relations are less interested by the particularities of the past than fascinated by the specificity of the present. Their main quest is for an international system displaying all the characteristics associated to modernity: the containment of war by various institutional devices, the deregulation of commerce,

and the individualization of decision making – all allegedly absent from earlier times. Since the understanding of the present is more and more enlightened by a growing bulk of relevant empirical data about the past in the Ancient world, there is an increasing trend in international studies to look at it with greater attention. True, references to this era often come as quotations of and comments on Thucydides. The Sumerian League, the Biblical account of the Jews' settlement in Palestine, and the Peloponnesian wars are the top three stories of this literature. However, some scholars are tempted by broader comparisons of international regimes (Buzan and Little, 2000; Ferguson and Mansbach, 1996, 2004a, b[3]).

Since the main purpose of the latter group of authors is to separate our present state-centred world from its predecessors, they also ambition to draw an evolutionary and systemic history of international politics[4]. This makes sense at the global level, but it may also loose sight of more basic processes, like the ethnic aspects of inter-polities' relations[5] in the past[6] to which Ferguson and Mansbach pay more attention than Buzan and Little do. They nonetheless fall short of constructing a relevant explanation of the actual differences between polities (say, city-states and empires) in the eastern Mediterranean. Ferguson and Mansbach are more systematically tracking local varieties of political mechanisms. Their search for "nesting" autonomous identities in ever larger, i.e., more and more imperial frames of statehood, complete Buzan and Little's claiming that in ancient times one single frame ("empire", or "state") superseded the former ("city", or "dynasty"). Both tandems agree on two

[3] Note that in comparative politics, some prominent scholars like Shmuel Eisenstadt and Aaron Wildawsky also made curious trips into antiquity. More will be said about a third author, Samuel Finer, in the last section.

[4] According to Buzan and Little (2000), their book is an "attempt to develop an *evolutionary* and comparative conception of international systems that transcends the particular experience of modern Europe and the world it created" (67, my itallics).

[5] Actually, the use of the term "polity" is in itself the sign that "States" are not taken for the only way of organizing world politics, since "polities" share some of the characteristics that are at the roots of any order. As they say, "[w]e term the institutional expressions of collective identities, whether sovereign or not, 'Polities'. Polities are collectivities with a measure of identity, hierarchy, and capacity to mobilize followers for political purposes (that is, value satisfaction and relief from value deprivation)".

[6] It is not my intention here to carry out a review of the books published recently by these two tandems. Suffice it to say that they mix an outstanding use of expert sources, and an arbitrary selection of cases. There is little logic in keeping silent on Italy before the recovery from Barbarian invasions, or ignoring Pharaonic Egypt to the benefit of the Maya and Incas. Since city-states in Mesopotamia look more or less like city-states in Greece, every other form of government is ignored and "empires are simply considered as the forerunners of great post-Westphalian powers. Such explanations raise two problems: firstly, a considerable number of polities existed between the apparition of hunter-gatherer bands, their transformation into chiefdoms then cities or tribal confederations, and their later becoming fully-fledged states; secondly, communities could act "internationally" in a corporate way (Hoffman, 1980, 1986). If "the world is a living museum" (Ferguson & Mansbach, 1996, 57) some exhibition rooms are permanently closed and their collections never shown.

points: states are not the sole actors operating transnationally, and their format may vary to a considerable extent (this is particularly well phrased in Ferguson and Mansbach 2004b: 33-47). Their constant attention to tribes, "ethnos", and the relevance of family links in politics a long time after polities became eventually embedded into territories (Ferguson and Mansbach, 1996: 130-132, 386) goes in the right direction, although Buzan and Little correctly draw attention to the risk of diluting state actors into non-state polities[7].

One thing is missing, though, in both accounts of world international history: except for brief remarks on the vocabulary of kinship in politics (states are "households", and allies pretend to be "brothers"), and apart from some scattered comments on the considerable role played by tribal confederations in unifying Mesopotamian city-states, there is no systematic attempt to go beyond Hellenic words now included in any IR textbook glossary, like "xenia" and "philia"; "demos", "ethnos", or "polis". Due to the dependence on Greek sources and lexicon at the expenses of Semitic models of international relations, IR studies do not discuss enough, or do not assess properly *the impact of kinship on kingship*[8]. In spite of their attention to ethnicity Ferguson and Mansbach apparently do not give much credit to anthropology, since they wrongly believe that "many archaeologists and anthropologists (….) tend to use the highly misleading practice of labelling every political entity a 'state' " (2004b, 41). Actually, anthropologists are closer to them than they believe, since their vocabulary is also made of "political units", or "polities". For Buzan and Little, on the contrary, this insistence on the survival of kinship in later times' politics goes too far in the wrong direction. Although anthropological inspiration is present as well in their own work, these two authors are less interested in family life than in technological change, and they borrow more from geography and physical anthropology than from cultural studies[9]. As with several scholars working on state- and nation-building in history, they rely heavily on agricultural innovation and means of transportation to explain the birth of states. While agreeing on the knowledge gain accruing from such analyses, I suggest to proceed differently, assuming that cultural changes in kinship rules sufficed *to convert matrimonial alliances into political ones, marriage contracts into social contracts and therefore non-state polities into stately ones* with little regard for material transformations. More on this will be said in the next section.

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[7] See Ferguson and Mansbach' reply to Buzan and Little in their 2004b paper, 45-7.

[8] Note that the possibility of a "neo-medievalism" bifurcation towards a "system of overlapping authority and multiple loyalties, held together by a duality of competing universalistic claims" (Friedriechs, 2001) cannot be endorsed in the Middle east, in spite of first-glance convergences between the Ancient world, the Middle Ages, and present post-international society.

[9] This is evidenced by their selection of sources, from which Barry Kemp is notably absent, although he is the most prominent author on the building of the Egyptian unified Kingdom out of hunting and gathering bands.

The contribution of history to the theory of international relations

It is noteworthy that these reflections considerably enrich the usual theoretical assumptions made in IR. English school analyses of an "international society" in which every kind of institution plays its part (Bull, 1977), for example, are completed with the inclusion of societal ones such as families. Neo-realist theories are altogether vindicated on particular aspects, and falsified on other aspects. Authors of a realist persuasion should welcome the antiquity of "buffer states", and the assignment to the great powers of the time a duty to "redesign" world politics periodically (Waltz, 1979), since this is exactly what Egyptian Pharaohs did when they sent troops far from home. Other neo-realist assumptions are nonetheless turned on their heads: in the Ancient Mediterranean, anarchy between "like-units" was actually contained to barbarian territory, whereas polities lived in a world of permanent negotiations between "unlike-units". Constructivists are more concerned with history than realists and neo-realists who tend to exclude time from their analyses: they should endorse the long run an dynamic perspective of such broad views of IR. However, they also emphasise the specificity of every polity embedded in a particular historical context, that global trends tend to neglect if not conceal. As for international historical sociologists, they should sympathize with such books, even though some of their own work may underestimate the dynamic perspective based on the change over time in the interaction patterns intertwining societies and assigning them their own identity (Rosenberg, 2006: 335)[10]. The only paradigms that do not seem at first glance especially comforted by the venture of political scientists into the history of IR are institutionalism, neo-institutionalism, and liberalism – not to speak of rational choice for reasons that will come to the fore later. As depicted by Buzzan, and Little, as well as Ferguson and Mansbach, the ancient world is an institutional vacuum, and self help predominates over self interest.

What is missing in such works is the full understanding of the sophisticated nuances between "private" and "public", "internal" and "external", "familial" and "political", "military" and "diplomatic" displayed by Ancient Oriental international actors. In the Middle East, ancient or modern, contrary to post-Westphalia Europe, there were and there still is no clear-cut lines delineating the opposite terms of each dichotomy. They are placed at the two ends of a continuum, where ratios of, say, private to public, change over time and space – without ever evicting the "private" from the "public". In this realm, the Middle East is not only different from Europe; it is also opposed to Japan and Korea, where these distinctions became more and more precise as soon as the early 18th (Maruyama). Here, comparative politics involving much anthropological studies come to the rescue of international studies and point out the issues that remain to be more carefully analysed. In this field of political science, the "tradition-modernity" axis has been much debated since a long time. The conclusions of this debate are clear: in most cultural areas, and certainly in the Middle East, traditional aspects of political life never disappear; conversely, dispute

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settlement mechanisms that we consider modern always existed. In the next section, I shall try to give some evidence that these statements are not too far-fetched[11].

The added value of Middle Eastern studies

In the Middle East, culture seems unbelievably stable over millennia – which, of course is partly an illusion since continuity cannot be theoretically assumed over such a long time. Nonetheless, among the many peculiarities of the region the durability of several political designs is intriguing: the attention given to justice rather than non domination; the transmission of power from ruler to siblings; the preference for an authoritarian government over a democratic one; the preference for a grim present over a risky future; and the lack of trust towards rulers than do not belong to one's social community. Social mechanisms also contribute to make the region specific. Firstly, endogamy favours political expansion but limits economic prosperity, since neighbours are not espoused, and strangers are not trusted. One exception is striking, though: in ancient Egypt matrimonial alliances were at the roots of the emergence of a unified polity of settled landowners and peasants whose rulers married their enemies' daughters; this compared well to the divided and impoverished tribes' land that preceded the Pharaohs and surrounded them for centuries. With such a background, it is no surprise if modern Egypt is the only uncontested national state of the region. Elsewhere, the absence of marriage contracts did not end up in a social contract. Lack of confidence in potential adversaries inside and outside only made room for limited political pacts (I shall not do to my rivals what they could do to me if I am ousted from power). Secondly, the transmission of property from father to brothers - and from father and uncles to sons - deplete economic resources since the number of male heirs will inevitably become disproportionate to available land or industry. This was true in various guises (mainly, "foundations") in Sumer and Akkad as well as in Egypt of the Pharaohs, and the Muslim empires. Overall, these political and social mechanisms are conducive to illegitimate regimes: they lack legitimacy because politics as a non noble activity is the realm of foreigners. They may rule directly (the Kurdish Fatimides, the Turkish janissaries and Mamluks, the Albanian Khedives in modern Egypt, the Hachemites in Jordan and early independent Iraq); or indirectly (several governments in past and present Lebanon, Pahlevi Iran, present Iraq, the various Emirates, and even Saudi Arabia, all suspected to keep in power because of Western support). But they always rule firmly since they cannot expect spontaneous compliance from the citizens of their country. They also make blunt and dangerous decisions in foreign policy to regain in international politics the people's consideration than is internally missing, and take great care to do it in the name of highly ideological and religious goals. Actually, the less support they get internally, the higher their claims to conquer the region are.

[11] Unconvinced readers may find more documentary evidence presented and discussed in my book, where the sources can be scrutinized and assessed at length (Schemeil, 1999). Consequently, historical and archaeological references will be limited here to the strict minimum.

Such patriarchal and family oriented world is not conducive to state and nation building, stable military alliances, and even political stability in the long run. However, it would be a mistake to oust the region from the realm of modernity. Middle Eastern IR, at any time, were not only made of "national" and "international" *covenants* (between "brothers") that would not survive the *dynasties* that where thereby committed to peace. They did not rely on *allegiance* only. Wars were not the prolongation of *raids* by other means. Rulers also signed treatises, built states, obtain some compliance, and succeeded in short- and long-distance trade. Therefore, it is this curious combination of archaic and modern aspects of external relations that we must now try to explain. Why the new habits in politics and foreign policy did not chased the old garments of power?

Covenants or treatises?

To start with, it is sometimes uneasy to distinguish interstate treatises from simple interpersonal covenants, because the vocabulary of kinship tends to hide the juridical aspects of such documents. Notwithstanding this methodological difficulty, a closer look at the texts provides some evidence that the Ancient Near East is the only place where formal treaties between great powers were signed very early in history. This fact alone ruins claims of a western seniority in this matter[12] as well as depictions of the world (dis)order as being in a state of anarchy from its inception. Several documents dating from the eighteenth and certainly the early thirteenth century are recorded circa 1286, when the famous Treaty of Qadesh was officially ratified. The most detailed one is a 1280 agreement – maybe endorsing an earlier one – between Hatti and Babylon, because it sets the standards for future diplomatic documents. It includes two series of measures, one private, the other public: the "ethnologic" (and "traditional", or "ancient") part provides norms for rulers to act in an appropriate way when ordinary outlaws took refuge in the neighbouring kingdom – they simply sent back expatriated people to their own families and tribes, whose heads would be responsible for their prosecution and their punishment. They also provide rules for intermarriage between royal families. The "political" section (i.e., the "modern" one) deals with interstate agreements carefully designed to prevent conflicts, resolve them, and organise non-aggression at the very least, or full peace between governments where possible. They deal with joint defence against third parties, designate common foes and enumerate situations in which troops should be sent to rescue allies in distress. They sometimes legally recognise precise state borders as distinct from "natural" *boundaries*, as mentioned in a 1300 treaty between Babylon (under Kassite rule) and Assur. They also include a specific section on *political asylum* and *diplomatic immunity*, as distinct from "legal" immigration and law enforcement evasion – two "private" affairs. Texts conclude with a legal section, containing pledges to respect them in the end, an explicit way of committing future generations to policy engagements they never made themselves, as well as *provisions against*

[12] The most ancient seems to be the Kurushtuma treaty between Egyptians and Hittites, referred to long after its ratification by a 1380 agreement, and cited in the Qadesh treaty (Green, 1985).

defections. Copies of the treatises in two or three languages were posted everywhere, on steles, papyruses, walls, and frescoes to give them maximum publicity. Contents of the texts were so bluntly put that they left little room for interpretation. They were carefully reiterated in each new document signed by the same powers, and re-examined from time to time by Councils or Assemblies. Changing sides as regards the provisions of a treaty was considered illegitimate and seems to have been very rare.

However, two major differences distinguish ancient treaties from modern ones. Firstly, they could not be used to claim one state's rights before an international court that obviously did not exist before the end of the nineteenth century AD. Secondly, such texts were *less* binding than domestic agreements (like loyalty oaths), since *private*, almost *tribal* law overtook *public international* law, contrary to our own understanding of the norms' hierarchy since Westphalia (Schemeil, 1999: 287). In order to avoid conflicts, rulers were therefore more ready to compromise than we may imagine. They were also resolute to deter potential trespassers of "international" rules. To this end, military manoeuvres, retaliation operations and records of past victories were depicted on large painted panels in palace halls; lyrical poems, exaggerating the damage inflicted on enemies, were disseminated (Liverani, 1979). Trading posts in the middle of nowhere had small garrisons watching over uninhabited lands (Gibson, 1991). Huge stone buildings or exquisitely decorated mansions were scattered across semi-desert areas. In a time without opera, cinema, and news, such landmarks were endlessly telling the story of the strong to the weak, and their owners were expressing power without ever having to test it. One can imagine the feelings of those merchants whose caravans stopped at Baalbeck, Palmyra, Hatra, Nemrud Dag, Pergama, and later on the Umayyad hunting posts in the Jordanian desert. Seeing beautiful and expensive monuments or splendid cities adorned with huge public buildings exceeding modest local needs – so strange in such arid areas – must have provoked both admiration and anxiety. Sometimes, steles deeply embedded in the ground at the crossroads of caravan trails would play the same function: when one realises that soldiers marched incredible distances to erect them, their performance was surely considered impressive by potential foes. Even without frontiers, customs or passports, or indeed formidable armies defending strongly fortified castles, population movements were controlled. Kings' titles incorporated much of this philosophy, since *they were not ruling one country but several peoples*, and claimed to be respected from East to West and North to South[13]. In an early anticipation of Bonaparte's expedition in Egypt, they made big efforts to send scouts as far as they could go, collecting plants and animals, or at least coming back with drawings and literary descriptions of exotic species unknown to their fellow citizens. Assyrian and Egyptian palaces, for example, contained so-called "botanical gardens" (Beaux, 1990): the drawings and sculptures were the testimony of nature recognizing the cultural superiority of the most advanced kingdoms of their

[13] As noted by Ferguson and Mansbach, 2004b, political space differs from territory: "Political space refers to the ways in which identities and loyalties among adherents to various polities are distributed and related, and territorial space is only one of the possibilities"

time, whose armies went as far as possible in the direction of the end of the world. Moreover, edible plants and tamed animals were flanked by wild species, proof that nothing natural, including barbarians, could escape civilization and domestication by the strongest powers to prevent an ever-possible collapse of the universe.

In brief, every possible way to deter subversion of existing treatises, civilize nature, integrate barbarians and nomads was used extensively by every actor. In the ancient Orient, war was the last resort to resolving interstate conflicts. "Empires" did not exist in the sense we give to the word today (Schemeil, 1999: 303-313). Imperialism, of course, regularly plagued the region, but conquests were limited. War goals were limited to prevention: it was deemed sufficient to deprive declared or potential foes from their source of strength, like their gods' statues, valuables, weapons, and, in the worst cases, reproductive young women or productive young men. Most often, though, wars were "preventive". In spite of the absence of a "just war" doctrine, Mesopotamian and Egyptian wars tended to fulfil *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* standards. Admittedly, "crimes" were committed from time to time. Esarhadon's was most celebrated in Assyria and Babylonia: he tore down Babylon's walls, razed its houses and returned it to *res nullius*. Such an illegitimate decision had a negative impact on his successors' reputation and room for manoeuvre for decades. Another ruler was criticized for having brought back the head of his Elamite enemy to his city capital (Reade, 1979) and there is at least one complaint about a Pharaoh's excessive cruelty. Such examples were a far cry from the legitimate codes of the fight, and a departure from the usual motivation of war: declaring a state of belligerence was a last resort to make a disturbed World retrieve its former equilibrium. Rulers were all assigned a role in the great harmony of the cosmos. Because they felt in charge of the whole universe, they fought against evil, and tried to suppress subversion by reckless enemies. As Pharaohs fought against the forces of the underworld and allowed the sun to rise every morning after it "dying" every evening, his or her generals on earth pursued rogue leaders as far as Nubia, Palestine and Libya (and so did Assyrian and Babylonian chiefs of staff, in Arabia, Persia, and Urartu). We must keep in mind that these military operations were not religiously motivated, at least not before the last quarter of the second millennium. Religion had but an indirect role in compelling its servants to behave consistently with its description of the universe and the conditions for equilibrium it laid down. War was a cosmological affair rather than a merely religious one. Only Israel fought to please God and settle in the Promised Land. When they fought enemies, other ancient kingdoms just tried to prevent great natural disorders ignited by small cultural ones and complied with a *cosmological constraint* that does not fit neo-realist predictions on the absence of norms in IR (Burchill, 2005).

When they had to wage a real war instead of launching a police operation, rulers had to respect recognized rules, and act rationally. Self-restraint was proof of diplomatic wisdom and political maturity much before Castelreagh exercised Great Britain's benign neglect towards continental Europe in 1815 when British power was at its apex (Schroeder, 1994, 2004). It was also sound economic policy, since there was no rationale in looting a potential taxpayer and ruining its economy whereas easy arrangements could be made between the hegemonic power and its richest competitor for more-or-less regular payments accruing to the stronger state. Political goals were

as simple as military ones: contrary to modern nationalism, cosmopolitanism was still anchored in the region, and people moved willingly from one kingdom to the other, where they could make a great political career. Several Pharaohs did, and founded dynasties, and notably the Ramessides who were of Syrian origin; but Libyans, Nubians, and Ethiopians also ruled Egypt. Although the distinction between inside and outside was formally known and had deep implications (Buzan and Little, 2000: 167), it applied to political units, not to people. The most divisive boundary distinguished "civilized" ways of life from barbarian ones: wooden, brick or stone houses, cotton wear, cooked food and buried corpses were opposed to tents, raw food, clothes made of wool or animal skins and bodies left in the wilderness.

Allegiance or compliance?

To sum up, "wars", "boundaries", "sovereignty", "domestic" and "foreign", as well as "Empires" had different meanings for westerners after Westphalia, and antic people living in Mesopotamia, Egypt and part of the Mediterranean coastal lands between the third millennium and the fifth century BC. The Egyptian New Kingdom, often praised for the success of its military expeditions in Palestine, was still viewed as "the Great House" accommodating the royal family and spouses of every possible origin (this is what "pharaoh" actually means: "*per âa*", the "great house", not an "empire" whose very idea was alien to the inhabitants of Kemit). The *beit* or *bit* of Arab or Chaldean and Aramean rulers had the same meaning. People did not fight for their gods' or king's "house", they defended their household, albeit extended to the whole home country – the royal family included.

At the dawn of history, the mechanics of state-building was not war but allegiance[14]. Because exogamy was the sole means of accumulating land (marrying one's daughter to a foreigner would increase the amount of property, whereas marrying her to a close cousin would divide it between brothers), the Kingdom of Egypt was borne on a new balance between patrilineal and matrilineal marriages. On the steles found in tomb excavations, brothers, fathers, grandfathers and paternal uncles progressively leave their privileged position next to the deceased and are replaced by mothers, maternal uncles, daughters and sisters. In Mesopotamia, the transformations of the Sumerian world *emu* into the Semitic *amm* (in-laws on the father's side, still in use among Arabic speaking countries where the *bint 'amm* marriage has some supporters) are proof that the same process eventually ended up in the constitution of the neo-Assyrian empire. As demonstrated by trade of agricultural items against kitchen tools, wine or oil jugs and precious clothes, matrimonial and political alliances and the commerce generated by them were more able to unify two valleys than anything else[15]. This heritage from the very inception of states in the area

[14] This vindicates Ferguson and Mansbach's claim that polities are always competing for loyalties.

[15] In modern Jordan, substituting "conjugality" to "consanguinity" is pushing the process further ahead: now, the nuclear family is the major collective actor, whereas the extended family – to say nothing of larger tribes – is gradually loosing momentum. Although such a move is conducive to a "lively ethos of civility" and "plurality of opinion" that were absent in previous periods, the process is in a way

would have enduring consequences in the end, amongst which a preference for family alliances stretching well beyond the borders, as well as treaties between dynasties, and over-reliance on regulatory institutions. Bonds of allegiance were assumed to achieve ends now entrusted to international organisations. Apart from the famous Sumerian League that may have been endowed with regional responsibilities, such interstate actors did not exist. However, this is not proof that their international systems were not as fully-fledged as ours were. Actually, the benefit accruing to modern international powers channelling their dissent via IGOs might be questioned if such personal bonds no longer existed, whereas observers still find them prevalent in international and regional organisations' lobbies. Whether domestic or international, large conferences are deliberately designed to increase the density and intensity of "friendship", multiply the opportunity of informal negotiations and legitimate emerging actors via a well-publicized and appropriate ritual. In ancient times, marriage ceremonies were a good proxy to our present international conferences. Since brides belonged to several countries and often met their spouse the same day, diplomats from major states of diverse status attended the celebration and took this opportunity to settle unresolved issues back-stage.

Accordingly, the terms for "peace" and "alliance", "contract" and "allegiance", were closely related to each other. They were mainly used in dialogues between equals. Akkadian *silm* is for instance related to *salam* and *Islam* in Arabic. In this language, however, the word infers "submission", as in Akkadian *salâmu,* since asymmetric relationships were also known. The outside world was modelled on the inside one: as a network of bonds of allegiance and bilateral contracts (*adu* in Akkadian; *ahd* in Arabic). To please the gods and preserve the Universe, rulers had to find peace in their mind and soul, satisfy their people, appease neighbours, contract with equals and demand support from friends and siblings when needed. In this virtuous circle of alliance, every one but the Great King paid allegiance to someone else, and the monarch himself paid allegiance to the gods. Therefore, "international relations" were composed of countless bilateral relationships, whether symmetric or asymmetric, with a tendency to conflate political, economic, and military alliances with family ones, and interest-led politics with kinship obligations. It was a transactional world with little respect for territorial borders.

The inside-outside frontier

As in the present situation, although this was even more pregnant in the ancient world, it was difficult to make a clear-cut distinction between the "inside" and the "outside". Kingdoms tended to be enlarged until they reached desolated lands inhabited only by Bedouins, fishermen and sailors, or mountaineers – all considered "barbarians". Their communities also had to pay tribute to every great power circling them – a resource that they sometimes tended to generate themselves by imposing tolls on trade routes. Whenever possible, they remained neutral if a dispute rose between "empires". Actually, they were buffer groups if not buffer states, occupying lands that were large enough to separate potential contenders. They travelled by foot,

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bounded since "the domain of kinship cannot be separated from the domain of politics…This is as true today as it was in 1960". (Antoun, 2000, 457-9).

with donkeys and mules, and later on horses (in the thirteenth century there were very few horses, and they were only used by kings who very rarely left their palaces), and camels (in the eighth) bearing the heaviest loads. It should be remembered that these trade and military auxiliaries came late in the history of the region, which means that they did not play any significant role in battles before the eighth century: at that time, cities and empires had already been through several life cycles. In short, although armies and governments had few opportunities to be in contact, people and social communities crossed these "foreign" lands to trade, intermarry and settle in neighbouring polities. This is why cities were for a long time deprived of walls. Built in the middle of nowhere, to leave enough space between polities, they afforded their inhabitants a feeling of safety: emptiness was thought more protective than boundaries between sovereign territories.

In some cases, though, states were too close to each other and land was too precious for indulging in self-restraint. This is the very story of Umma and Lagash, often mistaken for an "international" conflict – one should remember that both cities once belonged to the same Sumerian League, a polity that can be depicted as lying between a monolingual interstate Concert needed to regulate the use of the irrigation system in order to prevent downstream cities from abusing the waters of the Euphrates, and an actual confederation flanked by an arbitration council. For that purpose, they benefited from a specific kind of neutralization of potential conflict, the *bal/palu* system (Arabic *dawla*, i.e., "state", but not a solidly-established one, on the contrary: a vulnerable polity ruled by fragile rulers and doomed to be substituted by a new one in the near future). In this case, power – be it domestic or otherwise – is cyclical, it circulates between cities, dynasties, commanders-in-chief, priestly families, etc.[16]. At the time of the Sumerian League, each city was the depository of one species of power: the *religious* hierarchy had its seat in Nippur, where kings had to be crowned by the great priest; the *military* was established in Ur; the *landed aristocracy* settled in the other cities of the confederation, mainly Lagash and Umma, then Uruk), and so forth (Westenholz, 1979: 109-10). Nothing great could be done without involving every member of this exclusive club, and each had a right of veto on foreign policy decisions (Brinkman, 1984). If these conditions were not met, the gods would punish transgressors whose hubris and excessive personal ambition would have challenged their divine decrees: Gilgamesh's closest friend died in front of his very eyes; Sargon's grandson lost his kingdom; the people of Israel were turned into a Diaspora.

Note that such a distribution and even circulation of power within "networks of interdependence" to quote the late Harold Jacobson did not rule out sincere nationalism: Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and Hebrews had a high awareness of belonging to a single political community. There is documented evidence about their patriotism, measured in various ways (eagerness to fight for one's country as Greek hoplites did; homesickness; nostalgia for glorious past episodes during periods of turmoil; detailed justifications for bringing their values to foreigners to 'civilize' them).

[16] It is no surprise that the last lord of Anatolian Pergama, left without a male successor, bequeathed his city and its luxurious properties to Rome.

What was missing to reach a Westphalia stage in international relations was the hegemony of *nation-states* as the major actors of the time. In his extensive review of antique political units, Finer opts for "generic states" rather than nation states or even "country states" – a way of focusing on state-building instead of taking the outcome of this historical process for granted. A generic state may take four forms, depending on the level of *administrative centralization* and *cultural homogeneity*: nation states are but one of these forms, with centralization and homogenisation at their apex (Finer, 1999: 4-15). Actually, only one hegemonic power at a time matched the standards of a nation-state. In the Mediterranean, this was the case of Egypt before the rise of Carthage, then the final triumph of Rome: such states were unified, centralized, and able to tax citizens and traders and invest in logistics and public utilities. Signing up for the army was reserved to national citizens only. Egypt in particular was a rather territorialized country. Its military even incorporated militias whenever they plagued the country in periods of unrest. Foreign policy decisions were made according to a well-known institutional process about which the texts are very clear, and which provided for several consulting stages (see, for instance, Tuthmes' siege of Qadesh). Contrastingly, the Hebrew were most of the time divided between communities like the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, as were the Mesopotamians who maintained the division between North and South throughout their history, even when conquered and allegedly unified by nomadic tribes (the Kassites, the Ammorrheans). The Phoenicians were more or less persuaded as the Lebanese and Syrians are nowadays that they shared most social and political values, but they did not infer from this *cultural* bond a *juridical* citizenship (and not even a religious or sportive one, as accurately noted by Ferguson and Mansbach about the Greeks). In Finer's words, they were a *social* community of people (Hebraic *kahal*), not a *political* community (Finer, 1999: 26-29).

The situation did not change much in the Near East after the fall of Phoenicia, Canaan, and the Hebrew: political communities are still absent least in the Arab states at the very least (Schemeil, 2005). From that period to the present most countries were submitted to external hegemony (from Rome to Byzantium, the successive Muslim kingdoms, and the Western powers). Consequently, rulers remained strangers to their own people, with no public space for contradictory debate. No legal immunity could or can be guaranteed to contesters and demonstrators: making a statement in public endangers one's life. Social communities are the only protective shields against arbitrary measures or excessive retaliation: this considerably limits loyalty-building towards one's own government, since social communities bypass boundaries - as is still the case in Lebanon and Syria; Palestine, Syria, and Israel; Turkey and Iraq, etc. In such a context, the only way to stay in power is to be an acceptable provider of external resources, i.e. a good negotiator and a successful trader.

Raid or trade?

There might be politics without war; there are no politics before trade. Needs for inside and outside coordination are simultaneously increased by trade growth. The Assyrian traders in Anatolia are perfect examples of this process. Detailed procedures had to be invented, and authority had to be transferred to local public officers to prevent cheating and smuggling. Trade in luxury items or primary goods, for which

three or four generations moved over one thousand kilometres to foreign shores, required as many guarantees as possible in this hostile and remote environment. This is why ancient merchants invented so many institutions relevant to long-distance trade. Sumerian in the Gulf during the second half of the third millennium (Oppenheim, 1964; Oates et al., 1977; Powell, 1977); Old Assyrian traders in Cappadocia in the first quarter of the second millennium B.C. (Larsen, 1979); as well as Meccan merchants in pre-Islamic Arabia of the first half of the first millennium A.D. (Crone, 1987) created courts, banks, insurance (Ibrahim, 1982), subsidiaries and local branches. With them came lots of investigations, arbitrage, witnesses, deliberations, verdicts, etc.), official documents and warrants, contracts and memoranda, archives; and even private correspondence (whose authenticity was confirmed by stamps, seals, signatures, and envelopes not to be broken before delivery). Contrary to the Greeks, Middle Easterners were, from the earliest times, concerned with money, savings and investment. As any skilled merchant usually did, they quickly turned their backs on their tribal ways.

It is no surprise then that traders do not behave as raiders. While junior citizens are looking for glory, senior citizens are moved by profit. The elders, therefore, were not as different from modern representatives as depicted by liberal and neo-liberal theories (Burchill, 2005). Although they did not "represent" their constituency in domestic debates, they did represent their city or state in "international" negotiations. They took great care to accumulate guarantees on both sides and exchange clear messages with potential adversaries. In Phoenicia, as in most cities along the Euphrates during the second millennium, elders prepared and even signed very detailed and sophisticated treaties. Nowadays, leaders also are family heads: old names whose origins can be traced to the seventh century matter much in Middle Eastern politics; new names periodically join the elites via military coups, success in civil war, or in business abroad. They could not be absent from the political scene since the contribution of all to the final decision is a requisite of legitimacy.

To sum up, most authors who studied the ancient world's politics did conclude that diplomacy and trade were preferred to war, a statement that makes common sense. However, they also said that war was not the ordinary experience presumed to be the rule. This is not true: although military incidents may have been frequent, real wars had to be avoided at any rate. Escalating from family feuds to domestic ones and from there to international conflicts was so costly in systems ruled by collective responsibility towards one's own kinsmen, and so easy when many "coercers" paved the way of autocrats, that it was well worth halting the process early on. This is non-conventional wisdom in IR whatever the paradigm chosen. It remains to be shown that such a finding was made possible by the methodology used in this paper.

"Archeopolitics" and the improvement of knowledge of IR

What exactly "archeopolitics"is, to what extent it is original, and what kind of contribution to the advancement of knowledge on the Middle East may be expected from its use?

So far, using a specific region of the world I tried to show how enlightening a glance at other historical paths than the European process of nation and state-building could be. I now need to raise another issue: is it possible to build a more systematic knowledge of past IR not only on the middle east but elsewhere as well? I believe so, with some reservations. To be efficient, I recommend to hybridise our methods, i.e., combine sociology of *past* societies with the *ethnology* of *existing* polities in building a *political science* of *modern* IR[17]. In effect, IR may gain much from the *triangulation* of issues separately addressed by history, ethnology and politics. Combining their strength may solve the *continuity-discontinuity* dilemma and help focus on the *similarity-specificity (or difference)* issue. Actually, the present paper did not try to explain how international systems emerged out of previous inter-polity configurations: it is not the *longitudinal* component of history that mattered here. What I have sought to do is to put historical cases on an equal footing with contemporary ethnological and political studies within a broad *comparative* project transcending time[18]. Incidentally, John Hobson's hopes that the combination of history and sociology is the solution to the realist-constructivist dilemma does not do justice to the fact that what allows the sociology of IR to do better than Weberian, Gramscian, Critical, and Marxian sorts of historical sociologies or sociological histories (Hobson, 2002 for a detailed presentation of this genealogy) is its extensive use of the concepts and findings of a third discipline, mainstream political science[19].

"Archeopolitics" defined

Let us name this political science embracing the *ancient*, the *primitive* and the *modern* worlds "archeopolitics". Whereas the questions debated within the community of political scientists stem from the present, it seems fruitful to use materials and data from antiquity as well as tools used in cultural anthropology to test new hypotheses on both past and current problems.

Of course, this epistemological stance relies on the assumption that anthropology of IR exists. Is this true? It is a provocative question: in a discipline split between rationalism and institutionalism, and one that makes increasing use of rational choice, statistics, linear regressions, psychology as well as neurosciences, etc., there is little room for history and philosophy, and only scavengers are left to those scholars who may be tempted by anthropological research. Such parsimony is

[17] In this process, we must try to escape the flaws accurately identified by Buzan and Little (i.e., "presentism", "ahistoricism", "state centrism", "Europeanism", "anarchophilia", 2000: 18-22) and John Hobson ("chronofetishim" and "tempocentrism", 2002: 6-12) as well as the assumed divide between domestic and international politics which all these scholars accurately contest (Hobden, 2002: 43)

[18] Buzan and Little (19): when "the dictum about using the past to understand the present is reversed", "the few historical times and places that resemble the international anarchy of modern Europe get a disproportionate amount of attention, most notably classical Greece, Renaissance Italy, the 'warring states' period in China".

[19] A fact acknowledged by Stephen Hobden (Hobson, 2002), who "argue[s] that a return to the inclusion of a *multidisciplinary* approach would be a positive step for the discipline" of IR (Hobden, 2002, 42, my itallics).

due to several factors, and particularly the universal assumptions sometimes made by political scientists themselves when they look at anthropologists' achievements from a constructivist point of view: when historicity is said to be the standard with which theories and findings must be assessed, the study of societies whose history is difficult to know because their members do not even know it themselves is not very attractive (Schemeil, 2006). Furthermore, at a time of a growing "theoretical" sophistication that contributes to singling out IR studies from mainstream political science, anthropology is presumably an "empirical" form of knowledge, which does not fit the goals of a modelling age. This is why, to the best of my knowledge, the closest material to any anthropology of IR made by an established author is Jack Snyder's recently published paper on "anarchy and culture". In this text, the author makes extensive use of ethnological findings to prove that war is a universal phenomenon with local and historical variations in the ways it is waged. While "nature" may explain why men make war, "culture" makes them opt for war or for diplomacy, and to choose between various ways to treat prisoners and conquered cities. I certainly share some of his views, but I contest the idea that war is "natural": according to my sources, the "nature" of humankind is characterised by a universal trend to avoid and control violence.

At the very least, trying to build an archeopolitics, even if limited, for the time being, to a single region of the world, is a huge task, still in its infancy. Notwithstanding the difficulties facing those who try to follow that course, this paper will review existing and sometimes outstanding attempts to close the gap between current post-Westphalia theories (on which most internationalists rely), the actual transactions between polities of the past (as deciphered by archaeologists), and the political arrangements dreamed up to settle conflicts whenever small communities challenge their neighbours (as depicted by ethnologists).

The challenge of a time comparison

A last issue that deserves attention: the problem of comparing changing societies and polities over time. Historical sociology does it, and political scientists use it. However, comparison simultaneously made in time and pace is paved with difficulties. This issue I known in the literature as the option for comparing comparables or incomparables. Comparing comparables means working on political units where people speaking related languages interact within the same cultural and geopolitical area. Comparing "incomparables" (to quote Marcel Detienne, 2000) is addressing units crossing the limits of each civilisation, like the Middle East, Central Asia, India, China, and Europe.

My assumption is that different conclusions may be drawn from these two epistemological stances. To give but a couple of examples of the latter stance in international studies, Victoria Tin-Bor Hui compared the unification of Chinese kingdoms to the non-unification of European states. According to her very enlightening book, the success of the Qin dynasty was due to an extensive use of "nasty, brutish" and "ruthless tactics" in which European states could not themselves indulge. The same added value to mainstream IR is to be found in Ernest Gellner's comparison between Europe and the Muslim world. In it, he describes how unlikely the demise of the Mamluk and Ottoman Empires was. Compared to them, indeed, in

spite of the Machiavellian ruse, Renaissance Italy was unable to achieve its unification (Gellner, 1995: 195-201). Both authors converge on one particular conclusion: it was the weakest system of the two that scored better in the long run on the domination-seeking/domination-avoiding axis[20]. It must be noted, however, that they remain within their original sphere of competence, i.e. the Far and Near East, before venturing a broader comparison with the society in which they live. Even though IR specialists are welcoming mega comparisons more willingly than their colleagues in historical sociology do, I assume that caution is recommended when addressing such overarching fields[21].

The originality of the Middle east should not be stretched too far, if only to avoid being the victim of a change in methodology that would eventually overpass its potential contribution to the science of international relations. Overall, and to take but a single example, kinship also play an enduring role in Roman times, as it did in earlier periods. When blood ties did not exist, succession relied on adoption – a fictitious form of parenthood. Plots were frequent, and kings' mothers played a decisive role in the making of the new emperor, a fact well-documented in the Orient, be it Pharaonic Egypt, Mesopotamia, or the Ottoman Empire. The outstanding achievement of the Roman Empire, however, was the constitution of a juridical bond of "citizenship" which prevailed among the *elites*, and this above any other loyalty, such as "national" identity. To bridge the gap between rulers and the upper castes of society (such as the two Roman *ordo*) on the one hand, and the masses on the other, history had to wait until the fall of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires, long after the Peace of Münster and Osnabrück. In contrast, beyond kinship and clienteles what may be left of the so-called "Middle eastern specificity" when other variables have been controlled for is a cleavage between mass and elites that is not yet mediated by juridical bonds. Consequently, institutions are rarely "institutionalised": since interactions are not framed by the law, few organisations have the privilege to be enduring. Accordingly, anticipations are impossible, which in turn dismiss any attempt to make rational choices.

Conclusion

What were the characteristics of IR in the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean as revealed by archeopolitics? What is archeopolitics about? In this paper, I did three things: firstly, I defined "archeopolitics" as a combination of archaeology, anthropology, and

[20] However, the two systems achieve these ends by opposite means. The Chinese did not use mercenaries, whereas the Ottomans benefited from a disciplined guard of foreign and non-Muslim origin.

[21] This is not to say that there are not obvious limitations in comparing, say, the Ancient Orient and the contemporary Middle East: although they belong to the same *area* we have no clue to explain why institutions such as economic and social Foundations, loyalty oaths, and preferential marriages are so similar in these two *eras*. However, languages, cultures, and topography are quite similar in the long run, whereas religion stems from the same grove. Such similarities help understand an area in depth, and limit the possible errors of interpretation when evidence is sketchy.

political science, relying heavily on history, sociology, linguistics, as well as ethnoarcheology and ethnomethodology. Secondly, I tried to show that transactions between polities in the Ancient world were less international than transnational. They were also short of current IR, since external relations between polities were more interpersonal and interethnic than interstate. But they were also more encompassing due to their "intercosmological" aspect, with great powers confronting their various conceptions of the universe (religious an scientific) and tending to reach full understanding and sometimes full command of the globe, as they knew it (a flat area of irrigated land limited by desert, sea, and mountains), but expanding as the universe does in big-bang theory.

In the Ancient world, imperialism existed, albeit within severe limitations, and conditioned to specific justifications – like preventing subversion of the universe, regaining control of threatened trade routes, and occupying a land claimed to be promised by God(s) without trying to trespass on these sacred boundaries. In spite of their few explorations of Africa, Egyptians usually did not permanently settle in Syria, Nubia, and Libya or in the Mediterranean islands; Old Assyrians had trade counters in Anatolia during the old kingdom, but they did not convert them into military vanguards. Admittedly, Babylonian troops marched to the south in the fifth century, and took over Jerusalem as they suppressed Arab chiefdoms, but contemporary observers recollected this as a counter-productive move at the roots of the disappearance of Mesopotamia from the front stage of power politics. Actually, no ruler was free to conquer parts of the world considered "uncivilized"; and each kingdom had some prescribed area on earth whose limits should not be trespassed. Limits mattered, even though they were not systematically traced on land. Ideally, behaviour should be constrained, responsibility acknowledged and tempers tamed. In this sense, polities coexisted without official borders, and a pragmatic peace was possible without any ideological endorsement of any other ruler's claims to be the sole legitimate king of the universe. Buffer territories were instrumental in preventing any "race-to-the-bottom", since they allowed time to assess the situation in times of crisis and find the appropriate answer to any international problem.

A second characteristic is also of note. The distinction between inside and outside was less dichotomous than gradual, and it was not fully free from personal and kinship considerations. Notions such as "national citizens" and "foreigners" existed in most eras and areas, but with little impact on population movements, politicians' careers or foreign policy moves. Sovereignties over people, as measured by the solidity and complexity of networks of allegiances, overcame sovereignty over territories – as is still the case in present Gulf Emirates where passports matter less than genealogy. Consequently, relationships between a ruler and his or her tributaries, or those who paid allegiance to his or her throne, varied from one "nation" (or ethnos, or social community) to another. Not only concepts such as the "most favoured nation" did not exist, but also tribal groups and villages or cities each had a different covenant with the hegemonic power of their region. Equality in law did not exist; just fair treatment of groups and persons varying in status gained, support recorded, and respect due.

Above all, and this is the last finding of this paper, treaties and international agreements were designed according to domestic and familial frameworks, with

special sections dedicated to what was actually "international" in the present meaning of the term, but not completely distinct from considerations about ruling families' links, social and individual issues. Instead of being perceived as a horizontal and flat system, the world was either pyramidal (a metaphor which suited Egypt and its hinterland quite well) or conical (with one peak or two embedded ones, as in Mesopotamia). In both cases, it looked like an hour-glass: the terrestrial pyramid or cone was the inversed counterpart of a heavenly one, and every event on this earth had an impact on "events" in the nether world.

This is close to what could be called "*interdependent and interpersonal relations at world level*", bearing some resemblance to present transnational politics, characterized by the coming into existence of an overarching network of agreements between actors of various sorts and statuses – a web some scholars (following James Rosenau) call "world governance". It may be too audacious to call such a framework of intertwined networks of heterogeneous actors thus; moreover, this may confine to anachronism[22]. In spite of this risk, all the ingredients of such a "turbulent" stage in world history were there (to say nothing of the well-documented trend to "bifurcate" at any moment in history): multilevel decision-making, heterogeneity of stakeholders and inequality in treatment received from major powers, be they "public" or "private", "internal" or "external"; coalition instability; corporatist attitudes instead of a solid nationalism serving the motivations of ambitious rulers opposed to their peers; and buffer territories to compensate for the quasi-absence of multilateral organizations to balance their power.

To conclude, it is tempting to raise an epistemological question. Were ancient Eastern Mediterranean polities more "modern" than we thought – with international governance and turbulence instead of polarity, balance-of-power, and multilateralism? Or, on the contrary, did "modern" scholars come to understand that a world ruled by states, whether through wars and alliances, or using intergovernmental organizations, was a construction of western science? If families, dynasties, ethnicity, and identity, with all the divided loyalties between public and private commitments they convey, still play such a great role in present IR; if continuity from matrimonial alliances to interstate organisations was never disrupted – either by Rome, or by the end of the post Roman Empire in Münster and Osnabrück – is it due to a historical milestone (a return from government to governance and from state to non-state actors), or to a scientific milestone (a tendency to search for instances of identity-building instead of focussing on state- and nation-building only)?

Notes

[22] Ferguson and Mansbach, 2004b, 58: « [o]ur description of polities competing for loyalties across a multitude of issues may sound suspiciously like our old friend pluralism, and it does bear some resemblance to that concept." However, pluralism works alongside sovereignty, and most ancient states had no sovereignty over a particular territory.

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