

THE PAX ASSYRIACA

The Historical Evolution of Civilisations
and Archaeology of Empires

Benjamin Toro



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Cover: Detail of a gypsum wall panel relief from Nineveh showing Assyrian soldiers and Kushite prisoners.
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Introduction

The concept of civilisation

Before considering the study of human civilisation, it is necessary to clarify the real meaning of this concept. In fact, *civilisation* is a neologism invented in France during the 18th century –*civilites*– used in cases of jurisprudence (Mazlish 2004: 1). In particular, this term was applied to designate a legal case ‘in accordance with legal norms’, transforming a criminal process using the ‘civil’ law (Velkley 2002: 11-30). Subsequently, it was also applied to the process of transforming or ‘civilising’ a person, with the objective of instilling good behaviour, manners and morality (Braudel 1970; Febvre 1930: 198).

It seems that the concept aimed to conduct a comparison between the ‘civilised’ and ‘barbarian’ for the French elite during the 18th century. It was considered as the principal parameter for distinguishing a primitive society, with respect to a civilised people who lived ‘in a city’ (Service 1975: 4). The root of this French neologism is derived from the Latin *civis*, which is a term used by Romans for exclusively designing the concept of a ‘city’. It could provide a standard by which European societies could be considered as the criteria ‘by which non-European societies might be judged sufficiently civilised to be accepted as members of the European-dominated international system’ (Huntington 2003: 41).

Thus, the first approach to the concept of civilisation in the 18th century was a name or concept employed in its singular form –*civilisation* – to denote Western European achievement or ‘self-consciousness of the West’. Nevertheless, in 1819 the word began to be used in its plural form –*civilisations* – to refer to the common characteristics of collective life belonging to human groups in a specific period, emphasising their geographic origin, cultural zones, economies and societies (Roudometof and Robertson 1995: 281).

The first approach of civilisation in its singular form has been the central idea used by Western scholars and philosophers from antiquity until today. Indeed, for millennia, different peoples have tried to differentiate themselves with respect to ‘others’, proclaiming their apparent superiority or exclusiveness (Mazlish 2004: 2). In this approach, the classical attitudes about ‘civilisation’ and ‘barbarism’ used by philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes and Rousseau had one major limitation because they ‘equated government or civilisation with society itself, and pre civilisation was

not understood as anything but anarchy, with people constrained only by nature rather than by cultural institutions’ (Service 1975: 5).

The second approach, of civilisation in its plural form, was adopted also by Western modern anthropological scholars during the 19th and 20th centuries. They preferred to define civilisations as the evolution of human groups from a primitive organisation to a more complex one, and this was developed by modern historians, archaeologists, anthropologists and sociologists.

However, they were not interested in the terms ‘civilised’ or ‘barbarian’ for describing societies. Rather, they wanted to explain the origins, development, interactions, achievements, decline and fall of civilisations according to an evolutionary process. In fact, human societies were segmented and in small groups with egalitarian relations, but eventually some of them became more hierarchical and were ruled by a central authoritarian power, which was instituted as a government (Service 1975: 3-4).

It seems that both approaches to civilisation – singular and plural – have a common characteristic: the sense of creativeness developed by human groups which is the most important indication of civilisation (Eckhardt 1995: 79). With this information it is possible to define *civilisation* simply as everything that humankind has created, preserved and used as artificial isolation to interact with the natural environment for its own benefit. This artificial isolation had been built in a relatively short period of time in the human past (40,000 years BC) and they were developed in different latitudes throughout human history with uncertain durations.

This is the reason why Huntington (2003: 40) believes that the history of humankind is, at the same time, the history of civilisations because civilisations ‘have provided the broadest identifications for people’. These characteristics confirm the interpretation of the French historian Fernand Braudel (1984: 23-27), who thinks that speaking about civilisations invokes concepts such as spaces, societies, economies, collective mentalities and continuities. These categories show that each civilisation developed itself in a particular space and its natural conditions influenced its peculiar characteristics.

This attempt to define and characterise a civilisation leads to another problem: the clarification of the difference between *civilisation* and *culture*. The Romans used the terms *cultus* and *cultura* when discussing agriculture or cultivation of domestic crops. It seems that this word was associated with an activity developed by sedentary people as a preamble of the later urban or *civilised* life (Mazlish 2004: 4). In 1830 a German philosopher from the University of Berlin, G. H. F. Hegel, argued that, in fact, civilisation was the same as culture; moreover, this German term (*Kultur*) was born as a German variant of the French concept of 'civilisation' (Fernández-Armesto 2001: 12).

Nevertheless, in 1848, Karl Marx established the difference between them, emphasising that 'civilisation' represented the *physical* infrastructure, whilst 'culture' was the *spiritual* superstructure. In other words, civilisation involved mechanics, technologies and material factors; and culture involved social values, moral qualities, language, religion, ideals and intellectual artistic qualities (Braudel 1970: 139; Huntington 2003: 41).

Using a similar approach, in 1921, Alfred Weber applied the concept of civilisation to designate technical knowledge, with culture being applied to the set of moral values. Additionally, Oswald Spengler highlighted in 1928, perhaps under the influence of the European milieu (which was adrift after the First World War), the existence of a first stage of human evolution called 'culture', which was characterised by a vigorous creative capacity; and a second stage called 'civilisation' characterised by its decline or moral weakness.¹

Consequently, anthropological studies are still defending the notion of culture as a social entity less developed than a civilisation. Anthropologists of the 20th century have considered that 'culture' could be associated with non-urban societies that are not very complex. Meanwhile, civilisations were linked with urban, developed and complex societies (Huntington 2003: 41). However, culture can also be defined simply as the social heritage that is transmitted from generation to generation, varying according to different groups of individuals and involving both material and intangible elements. For this reason, it is common to refer to

'material culture' to designate the characteristic artefacts produced by a specific society which, in turn, certainly binds with the mentioned concept of civilisation ('everything that humankind has created and preserved').

Service (1975: 3) argues that culture has been the most important achievement of humankind and societies have made their own contributions to maintain themselves, such as in the realms of technology, religion, art, recreation and traditions, among others. The objective of culture is maintaining, integrating and protecting the society, but the only way to achieve these objectives is to adopt a political organisation that organises these cultural elements. This political-cultural result could be referred to as 'civilisation', and its principal objective is to preserve a larger and complex society 'at the expense of competitors of its own as well as of other species'.

According to this point of view, according to Huntington (2003: 43), 'civilisation' seems to be a concept more durable than culture, because although many empires, kingdoms and governments have disappeared over time, civilisations 'remain and survive political, social, economic, even ideological upheavals'. In contrast, culture seems historically a reality that in some cases has disappeared. For example, many native cultures did not resist the impact of clashing against other more complex cultures or against certain elements of the technological development and, for this reason, their cultural roots have been lost forever.

To sum up, culture is how human groups live in relation to one another inside of a simpler and complete form that could be easily understood as a whole. In other words, a civilisation is a larger and complex entity that can be distinguished from simpler cultures by its greater control of its environment (agriculture, surplus of food, cities, public buildings, etc.): 'whereas a simple culture changes so slowly that it is usually studied in static terms, a civilisation changes rapidly to be considered chronologically: it has *history*' (Melko 1995: 29).

The historical evolution of civilisations

The traditional study of the evolution of historical civilisations inherited from Toynbee and Spengler has considered the changes in civilisations as natural processes of growth and fall, using the organic terms of living systems such as birth, maturity and death (Melko 1995: 42). Notwithstanding, the evolutions adopted by Toynbee and Spengler, and many other scholars, are fictitious creations with special personalities but without a historical basis. In other words, they were facile imagined generalisations that became the

¹ These concepts were not original ideas from the 19th century. Indeed, Giovanni Bautista Vico (1668-1744), who was inspired by the Roman Empire model and the later Christian order, proposed that when vigorous 'barbarian peoples' became 'rational people', they became weaker because the decline itself began when rationalism replaced the old 'energy' of the people. In another case, Flinders Petrie suggested in 1911, influenced by Darwinism, that there were 'periods of struggle' in human evolution where 'vigorous' barbarian peoples were absorbed by more sophisticated societies, but – as Vico suggested – this phenomenon also included a 'period of decline' whose origin was in the progressive decrease in these barbarian peoples' wish to 'fight' (Quigley 1979: 129-130).

philosophies of history but were never researched or proved.

So, a new study on the historical evolution of civilisations should be done.

a) The origin of civilisations

What would be the principal cause of the emergence of civilisations? Historically, ancient philosophers such as Aristotle provided a teleological explanation, in which everything – including the emergence of civilisation – had a purpose by itself. During the Middle Ages, this purpose was identified with the ‘love of God for humankind’, as a *formula* for explaining the origin of everything. However, since the 1600s, an explanation was sought internally to man; for example, Spinoza thought it was the ‘soul’ of a man, Schopenhauer in 1818 associated it with the strength of the human ‘will’, Bergson in 1890 called it *élan vital*, while modern scholars prefer to call it ‘energy’ (Quigley 1979: 55).

The historical method seems to have a similar pattern for explaining what motivates the emergence of civilisation. On the one hand, the French scholar Lucien Duplessy (1959) proposed the concept of ‘civilisation-strength’ to designate a ‘mysterious power’ that humans have used to create a civilisation and ‘civilisation-product’ as the final result of these human efforts in developing a civilisation. On the other hand, the English scholar Arnold Toynbee (1960) made a huge comparative analysis of 24 different civilisations in order to establish his principal contribution to the study of civilisations: that throughout history there has always been challenges in nature with a human response, which could be identified as the principal motive for the emergence of civilisations under the principle of ‘challenge and response’ or the ‘struggle for existence’.

There is a lack of consensus amongst scholars because their analyses were supported by studies on a number of small historical entities, on the one hand; or, on the contrary, they have studied too many of these entities without a specific criterion. Studies have been based generally on the Greco-Roman historical experience of late antiquity, and have confused different concepts about civilisations, cultures, peoples, political units, societies and religions. Redman (1978: 217) makes a critical assessment of these theories: ‘As universal synthesis based on very scanty data, except those drawn from the western civilisation model, these attempts were inadequate’.

Thereby, the historical study of civilisations is a phenomenon that is difficult to understand, inasmuch as it is dynamic (constantly changing in time), subjective (possesses very inaccurate data for analysis) and

irrational (because it exists and works, but not through a rational or conscious scheme) (Quigley 1979: 85-93). Nevertheless, the theme of the reasons that motivated the emergence of the civilisations could be attributed to the fact that human nature has been, throughout its existence, the sum of emotional, social and intellectual needs and the search for potentialities that allow them to satisfy these needs.

The summation of these potentialities has allowed humankind forging civilisations to undergo a process of historical change, which can be defined as a basic evolutionary process of rise and decline. In other words, the civilisation comes to constitute the cultural responses of a society to the pressures of the environment, following Toynbee’s idea. For instance, demographic pressure has been, since ancient times, a real ‘challenge’ for many societies, and they have ‘responded’ in different ways to control that pressure according to their respective cultures: by developing social class (Service 1975; Adams 1966); by the confrontation of classes, according to the Marxist theory (Diakonoff 1974); by fighting for resources (Carneiro 1970); or by developing commercial trade (Wright 1974).

Nevertheless, following a different approach, civilisations were able to rise when they used the ‘instrument of expansion’, which allowed the accumulation of surplus and investments in different areas of development such as economic, religious, political or warfare (Quigley 1979: 100-101). In other words, Quigley believes that civilisations need to grow, thrive and expand by the development of inventions of one or several instruments of expansion, which allow capital accumulation and future investment:²

This surplus-creating instrument is the essential element in any civilization, although, of course, there will be no expansion unless the two other elements (invention and investments) are also present. However, the surplus-creating instrument, by controlling the surplus and thus the disposition of it, will also control investment and will, thus, have at least an indirect influence on the incentive to invent. This surplus-creating instrument does not have to be an economic organization. In fact it can be any kind of organization, military, political, social, religious, and so forth.

The classical approach of Quigley has support in the modern economic interpretation used for complex societies. For instance, Tainter (1988: 91) suggests that human societies are maintained by a continuous flow of energy in their respective institutions and interactions. On the other side, the mechanisms used by humans for

² Quigley 1979: 138.

getting and distributing basic resources are conditioned by socio-political institutions. Energy flow on the one hand and socio-political organisation on the other hand will depend on each other but evolve in harmony.

Conflict starts when human groups become more complex and become civilisations, because they need more resources and mechanisms, such as networks, hierarchical controls, centralisation of information flow, and support of specialists not involved in resource production. The result, according to Tainter (1988: 92), 'is that as society evolves towards greater complexity, the support costs levied on each individual will also rise, so that the population as a whole must allocate increasing portions of its energy budget to maintaining organizational institutions'.

In sum, Tainter (1988: 93) proposes four stages for describing an economic explanation for the rise of civilisations developed by human societies. First, human societies are considered as 'problem-solving organizations'; second, the socio-political systems developed by human societies for solving problems require energy for their maintenance; third, the increase in complexity of these socio-political systems will also carry an increase in cost per capita; fourth, investment in socio-political complexity as a means of solving problems often reaches a point of declining marginal return from the periphery of the civilisation.

In this analysis, Tainter highlights:³

The principle of diminishing returns is one of the few phenomena of such regularity and predictability that economists are willing to call it a 'law'. In manufacturing, diminishing returns set in when investment in the form of additional inputs causes a decline in the rate of productivity. (...) The law of diminishing returns refers to changes in an average and marginal products and costs. Average product and average cost respond to, and ultimately follow, changes in marginal product and cost. Both are subject to this principle, which is called the law of diminishing marginal productivity.

Service (1975: 319) offers similar conclusions, although his terminology is different. He considers that the phenomenon of the rise of civilisations is the capacity of a society to adapt to the environment by the success of only one organism, called simply a 'government'. So, a civilisation rises when it is able to provide solutions for its inhabitants for different problems originating in the outside environment, by means of creating the solutions inside the society, such as a centralised bureaucracy. This 'instrument' allows the society to grow and spread into other environments.

This expansion also produces some changes over less socially developed peripheral communities, which are incorporated into the centre through conquering, economic interchanges or providing them with a new colonial model of social organisation. When this adaptation is successful, according to Service (1975: 313), there is a radiating and expanding movement into the periphery, which increases the contact between this expanding society and other communities. Thus, the society originally in expansion incorporates not only new lands but also other peoples, who are dominated, exploited, culturally absorbed or simply transformed by treaties or alliances. However, 'since success in adaptation eventually bespeaks conservatism, successful dominant societies become less able to adapt to any new or different circumstances'.

b) The development of civilisations

What is the process of historical change of any civilisation? As previously mentioned, the concept of 'civilisation' was originally associated with the idea of *city*, *citizen* or a *style of life* developed in cities, according to the reality developed in France during the 18th century. For this reason, cities have also been appropriate barometers of long-term economic and political development processes and trends, especially measuring pressures, movements and directions of change in the last 5000 years. To sum up, the only instrument that could be used for identifying the periods of historical changes in civilisations has been the study of the cities that have forged the respective civilisations

According to Redman:⁴

Cities exist only within the context of a civilisation. Hence, to be able to understand and distinguish a city, one must have an understanding of civilisation. Definitions of the two terms are closely interrelated, as are the phenomena themselves.

Nevertheless, historians, archaeologists and anthropologists (Kroeber 1968: 234) have associated the evolution of human civilisations mostly with the organisational aspects that existed before the first urban societies. Morgan (1950), for example, suggested that the evolution of civilisations is associated with the degree of evolution in the type of internal organisation of its society, which has varied according to the evolution of a specific human group.

In this way, some societies have lived in a state of 'savagery', whose principal characteristic is the conformation of a society of bands; meanwhile other groups became more organised as tribal societies

³ Tainter 1988: 92.

⁴ Redman 1978: 216.

within the ‘barbarism’ stage; finally, only some societies became ‘civilisations’, because they were able to build an urban society, characterised by the existence of government, development of social classes and common laws. Indeed, from the anthropological point of view of Trigger (2006: 43-46), the civilisation comes to represent a form of complex organisation that is not based on mere kinship relationships and whose maximum expression has been associated with the existence of urban settlements.

These models could be defined as complex because it has many elements working as a holistic system. For instance, Childe (1950) established which elements constitute a civilisation, specifying some primary characteristics based on the organisational characteristics of society

(construction of a monumental city, organisation of a state, class structure, specialisation of labour and accumulation of surplus); and secondary characteristics associated with their material culture (public works, monumental art, development of commerce, writing and development of science).

This approach is emphasised by Maisels (2010: 14-15), who identifies the different systems used by former civilisations, which also involved the existence of cities as an important element of their societies, but incorporated into a more complex system – city-states, small territorial states or kingdoms and large territorial state or empires – either by the proportion of their settlement, by the proportions of their

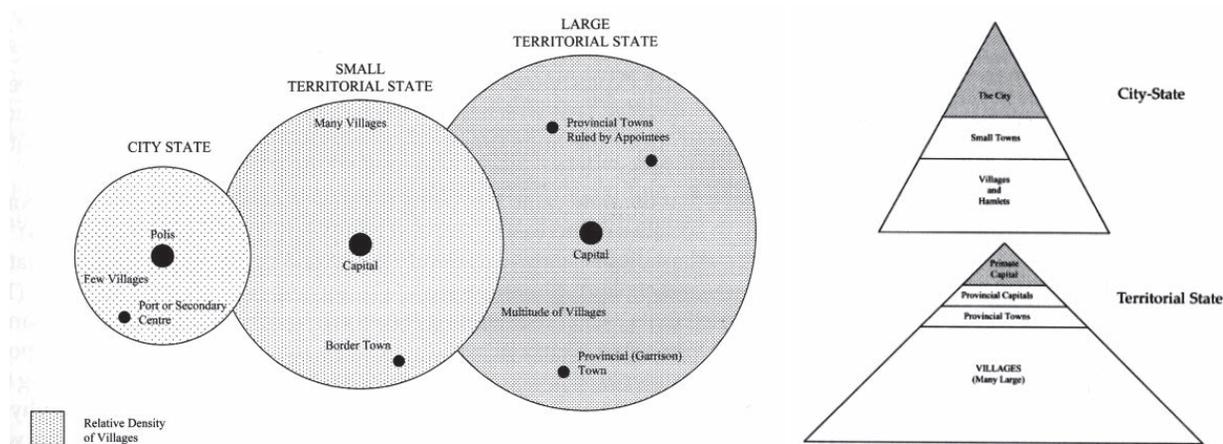


Figure 0.1: Different settlement attributes of city-states, small and large territorial states and the proportions of urbanised populations (Maisels 2010: 14-15).

	CITY-STATE	SMALL TERRITORIAL	LARGE TERRITORIAL
Urban form	Nucleated (synoecism) ¹	Aggregated (clustered)	Aggregated (clustered; core-and-satellite)
Urban economy	Basically autarkic Citizens farm and trade	Relies on tribute/taxes Peasants are squeezed	Relies on tribute/taxes Peasants are squeezed
Settlement pattern	High proportion of total population lives and works in or from the city	High proportion of total population lives in villages	Overwhelming majority of total population lives in villages
Culture	(1) civic: institutions of civil society. (2) deity (Athene, Nanna etc) represents civic identity and cult. (3) culture is common to other city-states of the region: Mesopotamia, Greece, Italy etc.) (4) relatively widespread literacy	(1) court/aristocratic culture versus peasant/folk culture. (2) state ideology: divine kingship, son of heaven, pontifex maximus etc. (3) some elite literacy	(1) court/aristocratic culture versus peasant/folk culture. (2) royal/imperial ideology: divine kingship, son of heaven, pontifex maximus etc. (3) some elite literacy; corps of literate functionaries
Politics	Participatory	Confined to dynastic/court struggles	Confined to dynastic/court/military struggles
Military	Citizen army: ‘phalanxes’ of hoplites	Royal core plus infantry levies.	Standing army plus mass levies.

Figure 0.2: Distinguishing characteristics of an ancient city-state and two territorial states (Maisels 2010: 15).

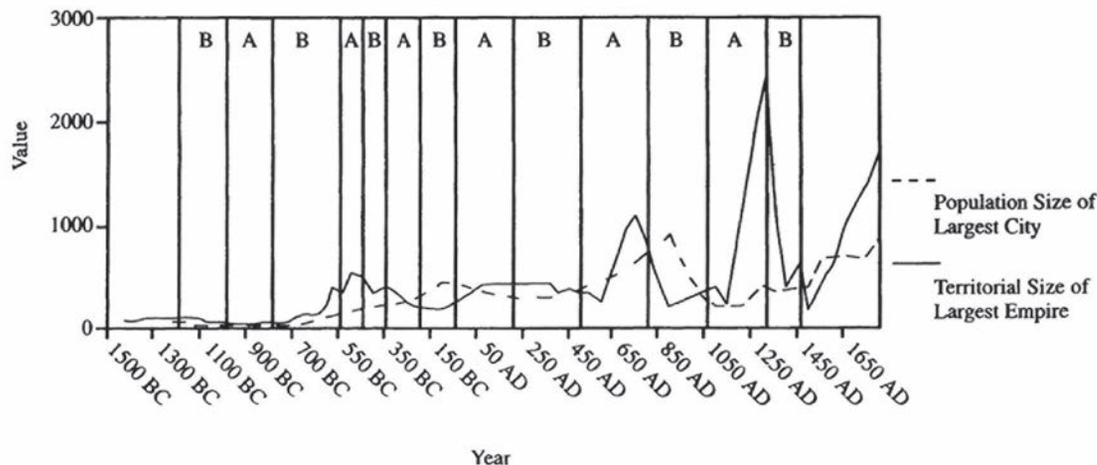


Figure 0.3: Example of historical evolution with phases of expansion (A) and contraction (B) in the Near East according to Chase-Dunn and Hall (1995: 130).

urbanised population (Figure 0.1) or simply for their distinguishing characteristics (Figure 0.2).

However, there are many problems with these interpretations. Redman (1978: 216-217) has been very critical because this model has problems in its data and their respective interpretations: ‘any classificatory scheme in which diachronic (through time) relationships are assumed on the basis of synchronic (at one point in time) examples is weak’.

In other words, it attempted to ethnographically classify different cultures with the objective of explaining the phenomenon of the origin of the civilisation of their societies in evolutionary terms, but in a very simplified manner. Besides this, the terminology was seen as prejudicial because it seems that ‘savagery’ is a worse state than ‘civilisation’ for survival. Finally, it should be considered that the building of cities is only one characteristic of the civilisation process but it does not explain the complete process of historical change.

Perhaps the general evolution of civilisations could be simplified following the ideas of Bosworth (1995: 206), who identified two basic tendencies that have become constant in the historical analysis of any civilisation: the existence of phases of expansion (‘A’), which are periods of simultaneous consolidation of hegemonies; and the existence of phases of contraction (‘B’) in political and economic matters. The alternation between both phases could generate a cycle of 250 or 500 years. Nonetheless, it is important to clarify that both tendencies are not ‘historical laws’ for the study of the evolution of civilisations.

Even more, the period of time between ‘phase A’ and ‘phase B’ has never been universal and it will change according to the respective civilisation (Figure 0.3).

If these concepts were applied to cities it would be possible to identify a sequence of political *centralisations* and *decentralisations* that all these urban centres have experienced, especially with the rise and fall of hegemonic core powers (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1995: 120). This behaviour will be the result of an interstate system of competing civilisations and their respective cities, which will seek to control the international trades linking their cores with their respective peripheries.

In other words, large cities are signs of a higher concentration of resources and a large population, which could be considered as an indicator of power, especially when some cities present a settlement-size hierarchy with respect to other settlements. This characteristic is emphasised by Chase-Dunn and Hall (1995: 124) because ‘when a city is able to use political / military power to acquire resources from surrounding cities, it will be able to support a larger population than dominated cities can and this should produce a hierarchical city-size distribution’.

Rather, they become hierarchical societies with an unequal division of the community, depending on power, wealth and social prestige. In these societies, a minority group of people use methods of coercive power to justify their authority, promote the distribution of resources amongst individuals, according to the role that they play in their society, and organise – by horizontal divisions called ‘classes’ – the community work of a large group of producers and artisans.

When civilisations arrive at this stage of power and domination over its periphery, it is possible to speak about ‘empires’, especially when civilisations reach an imperial form and start conquering other core states or adjacent regions with the objective of establishing a new order or ‘universal empire’ to extract taxes

and tributes from there. Eckhardt (1995: 91) suggests that there is a strong relationship amongst the three concepts *civilisations*, *empires* and *wars*, because all of them tended to go and grow together. Wars and economic support have been the principal instruments of historical change in civilisations during the course of human history and the principal tactics that have allowed civilisations to become empires:⁵

Civilisations and empires may not be twins, but they were very close relatives indeed. Civilisations seemed to precede empires in time, but empire had the effect of spreading civilisation over larger territories, which generally included more people. If civilisation was the parent of empires, empires returned the favour by increasing the territory over which civilisation were extended.

As a pattern of development, civilisations created around themselves a cultural splendour and military formidability, which depended on the concentration of food, commodities, goods and raw materials by exercising direct command (McNeill 1995: 311). For this reason, war has always been a policy of development for civilisations since early times, especially when a civilisation wishes to maintain itself in the imperial stage.

Perhaps war has been the principal 'instrument of expansion', using Quigley's concept, but it could be more accurate to outline that civilisations have used different 'instruments of expansion' in their respective historical evolution (trade, political organisation, cultural influence and so on). However, when civilisations arrive at the imperial stage – by expansion, conquest and domination – the only unique 'instrument of expansion' used by them seems to be war or military power. That is the reason why Wilkinson (1995: 19) emphasises war as a type of 'engine of history' in the imperial evolution of these civilisations:

A unifying social entity or system exists where we have evidence that a pair of groups alternates war with negotiation, or war with trade, or war with coalition, or war with subordination, or war with watchful waiting, or war with threats and preparation for war.

Besides, the imperial stage of some civilisations has a special relationship with historical periods identified as the 'Golden Age' of empires. They have been periods of high creativity in subjects such as philosophy, musical creativity and science. At the same time, these 'Golden Ages' have also been periods of aggressive variables that involve a large number of riots, aggressions and wars. Nevertheless, it is evident that these characteristics

have been made possible by economic power, whose growth and decline have depended on how this economy may support important expressions of military power.

In other words, more civilisations meant more empires and more empires meant more wars. Civilisation and empire could be considered good for those on the inside or who profit from it more. In a similar way, empires may be better for those who defend an imperial civilisation, but not necessary for their colonies because the quantity of civilisations, empires and wars change the social structure 'to one of greater inequality, indicated by slavery, caste, class, social stratification and so forth' (Eckhardt 1995: 92).

c) *The decline and collapse of civilisations*

When does the decline or fall of any civilisation begin? Civilisations enter into a period of crisis or decline – either during an imperial stage or not – when its 'instrument of expansion' becomes a simple 'institution' that is not able to produce accumulation of surplus and investments because, 'like all instruments, an instrument of expansion in the course of time becomes an institution and the rate of expansion slows down' (Quigley 1979: 128). This process is interrupted with the *institutionalisation* of this former instrument of expansion, which appears when there is a breakdown of one of the three necessary elements of expansion: invention, accumulation and investment.⁶

The decline starts when this instrument of a civilisation cannot adapt or respond to new environmental conditions because of their bureaucratic nature, they begin to increase inability and its instrument of expansion become less efficient. Following Quigley's model, the former 'instrument of expansion' becomes an 'institution' but, according to Service (1975: 320), 'this marks not exactly the decline and fall of the older culture, but simply that there is this obvious penalty in taking the lead, so that the leader is bypassed and superseded by a later more effective challenger'.

That means that civilisations begin to decline when they are not able to apply new surplus to stimulate new inventions and allow them to carry on the development of the civilisation. In other words, a civilisation starts to decline when its people are more interested in wasting the surpluses obtained in the past than to provide new and more effective instruments of production. In this

⁵ Eckhardt 1995: 86.

⁶ According to Quigley (1979: 101-102), an *instrument* 'is a social organization that is fulfilling effectively the purpose for which it arose. An *institution* is an instrument that has taken on activities and purposes of its own, separate from and different from the purposes for which it was intended. As a consequence, an institution achieves its original purposes with decreasing effectiveness. Every instrument consists of people organized in relationships to one another. As the instrument becomes an institution, these relationships become ends in themselves to the detriment of the ends of the whole organization'.

stage, the civilisation has three options to overcome the crisis. The first would be a policy of *reform* of the former instrument that became an institution, with the objective of bringing it back to being an instrument once more.

The second policy would be *circumvention*, where the former instrument remained as an institution preserved by a sector of the community. Meanwhile, the civilisation finds and promotes a new instrument of expansion that allows a new accumulation of surplus. The last policy is the *reaction*, which is produced, according to Quigley (1979: 144), when some members of the elite of a society decide to maintain the system of institutions, despite their limitations, because they are satisfied with the social order and do not want to change it through either reform or circumvention. Thus, the rate of expansion continues to decrease and becomes chronic, provoking the end or fall of the civilisation.

In a similar way, Gills (1995: 152) believes that the crisis is the result of 'over concentration of wealth and over extraction of surplus, as well as the deformation of the state from a facilitator of production and distribution to a parasitical and corrupt apparatus of economic exploitation', both in ancient and modern civilisations. So, any political consolidation of a civilisation precedes generally a period of economic prosperity, which also produces a favourable political and social framework. However, a spiral of political and economic disarray that tends to amplify itself could produce a general crisis inside of a civilisation.

The principal consequence could also be observed in cities: the rise of a civilisation could be identified by the existence of an important centre of control as a city-capital that controls its periphery; when this centre is in decline, it loses the control of its periphery, characterised by decentralisation, feudalisation and abandonment of this centre or by foreign conquest. Recently, it has been important to establish that the vanishing of an urban centre does not mean the fall or the end of a civilisation. Generally an urban centre could transform itself by fusing two separate urban entities and become autonomous, or it may be absorbed as part of another civilisation.

Even a civilisation could be composed of several urban centres and in this case, 'no multi urban civilization can properly be said to have fallen until *all* its cities are gone' (Wilkinson 1995: 54). Of course, it could be a moment of catastrophic destruction that ends an urban centre but Wilkinson insists (1995: 62) that it is not synonymous with the end of a civilisation because 'no multi urban society has ended its history as a civilisation until all its cities are destroyed or depopulated, then we have no

tolerable warrant for accepting epochs of succession of civilisations':

What is true of Rome's fall is true of the fall of other cities. Each fall of any city could have been horrifying and tragic. Some surely were, those of Hazor, Nimrud, Tyre, Babylon, Corinth, Syracuse, Carthage or Baghdad. But these seem to have been *local* catastrophes, balanced or more than balanced elsewhere within or at the edge of the urbanized area. Other Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Syrian cities remained or rose when their neighbours fell 2250 BC – 825 BC; semi peripheral Mediterranean cities rose while Middle East core cities fell 825 BC – 375 BC; Rome, Rhodes, Rayy, Seleucia, Antioch, Alexandria rose while Carthage, Syracuse, Corinth, Babylon declined 375 BC -145 BC; Constantinople rose as Rome fell, Tabriz rose –and semi peripheral Paris, Milan, Venice rose – as Baghdad fell. This is a picture of turn over, *not* of collapse and rebirth, at a civilisational level.

To sum up, civilisations have three alternatives in this stage: they may disintegrate and disappear suddenly from history, such as Carthage in North Africa or the Mayan cities in Mesoamerica (although this alternative has curiously not been the most common in history); or they may become fixed in a steady state of decadence for many centuries, such as the Roman Empire or the Ottoman Empire, before falling; or they may experience 'a period of transition in which disintegration takes place while new material is being added before the onset of further development' (Melko 1995: 42). The last alternative is the appearance of new civilisations that incorporate the legacy of their predecessors, and this alternative has apparently been the case for the majority of the civilisations in history according to the archaeological evidence.

First aim of this study: the Central Civilisation and the Mesopotamian / Egyptian merger

The last comment, that the appearance of new civilisations that incorporate the legacy of their predecessors as has apparently been the case for the majority of the civilisations in history has not been investigated sufficiently by scholars and it is one of the principal aims of this study. Generally, the analysis of civilisations made by scholars follows the same pattern of specific study about origin, development and fall of different civilisations. However, it seems that there is not any consideration about the possibility that the majority of the civilisations in the world did not disappear at all but that they merged with their successors and inaugurated new historical periods.

Nonetheless, that point of view does not have the consent of the scholars of today. The reason for this

academic view could be interpreted as the result of a traditional method of study that persists nowadays. According to Melko (1995: 26), one of the most common problems of historical research about civilisations is that there have been relatively few scholars who have decided to investigate civilisations in direct relation with other civilisations as comparative historians and using archaeological evidence. The reason could be that the concept of 'civilisation' has been generally studied under the principle of *uniformity* rather than *connectedness*.

That means scholars usually prefer to study with *uniformity* the different civilisations as a collection of adjacent, successive and different entities throughout history such as 'Mesopotamian', 'Western', 'Islamic', 'Medieval' or 'Greco-Roman' civilisations. In contrast, the criterion of *connectedness* would allow for the spatial temporal boundaries of an urbanised society to be located, whose inhabitants were interacting intensely with other societies, although their respective civilisations were dissimilar or their interactions were mostly hostile.

One of the first scholars that used the criterion of connectedness amongst civilisations was indeed the sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein, who adopted, in 1970, the concept of a *World System* (Wallerstein 1995: 239). His concept was the result of a synthesis from Braudelian historiography, Marxian historical materialism and the theory of Andre Gunder Frank. He defined a World System as a relatively large social system which is autonomous and persists on its own but with interactions with other World Systems.

Each World System has a complex economic division of work and contains a plurality of societies and cultures that experience different sequences of expansion and contraction throughout its history (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1995: 116). The problem has been that Wallenstein and his school of thought established an arbitrary starting point for the World Systems that began in 1650, possibly for the impact of the European expansion to other continents and the beginning of the first European colonial empires.

The ideas of Wallerstein inspired several scholars but many of his followers have disagreed with this arbitrary starting point. One of them is David Wilkinson, who has elaborated a criterion that unifies these World Systems with a single entity, its heterogeneous, divided and conflicted systems designated with a new concept: the *Central Civilisation* (Wilkinson 1995: 46). This is a concept that was invented for describing an ensemble of civilisations that through history have been converging from antiquity until now, becoming one unique civilisation, identified today under the concept of *Westernisation* or *Globalisation* (Figure 0.4).

Nevertheless, how did the contemporary global World System emerge from a number of isolated or loosely connected World Systems?

Precisely, Bergensen (1995: 196) is more specific and preferred going back many centuries, pushing and stretching the sense of systematic continuity deeper into this Central Civilisation in the historical past. Thus, the Central Civilisation would have been born in the ancient Near East about 5000 years ago (3500 BC), with two independent civilisations (Mesopotamia and Egypt) coming together through a long process of historical evolution known as the 'Near Eastern phase' in 1500 BC, inaugurating the first historical stage of the Central Civilisation.

This 'Near Eastern phase' of the Central Civilisation later incorporated the Aegean civilisation and finally all of them were absorbed chronologically by the Persian Empire, the Hellenistic kingdoms, the Roman Empire and so on until the present. In other words, it seems that there was one continuous World System throughout history that started firstly with this Central Civilisation in the ancient Near East. So, the modern concept of World System invented by Wallerstein is really a manifestation of many of these entities that have existed in history and that have finished coalescing around a common Central Civilisation (Sanderson and Hall 1995: 103).

In effect, actually it has grown to a global scale, with the network having expanded and absorbed or engulfed other civilisations, showing a long-term trend of steady geographic and demographic expansion. Although it has had occasional declines and crises, the Central Civilisation has never fallen until today. Even more, this entity has since then expanded all over the world, absorbing all other previous and independent civilisations until it will become a global one in the near future:⁷

Central Civilization is of course positionally 'central' only in retrospect, by reason of its omnidirectional expansion: this network, originally located where Asia and Africa meet, spread over time in all directions, encompassing the civilised networks of Europe, West Africa ... and East Asia by moving east, and thereby rendering itself historically 'central' as well.

However, it is possible to establish two principal disagreements with respect to this historical 'Near Eastern phase' supported by these scholars with respect to the Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilisations. First, there is no mention of why the Mesopotamian and Egyptian entities merged with each other in 1500 BC

⁷ Wilkinson 1995: 47.

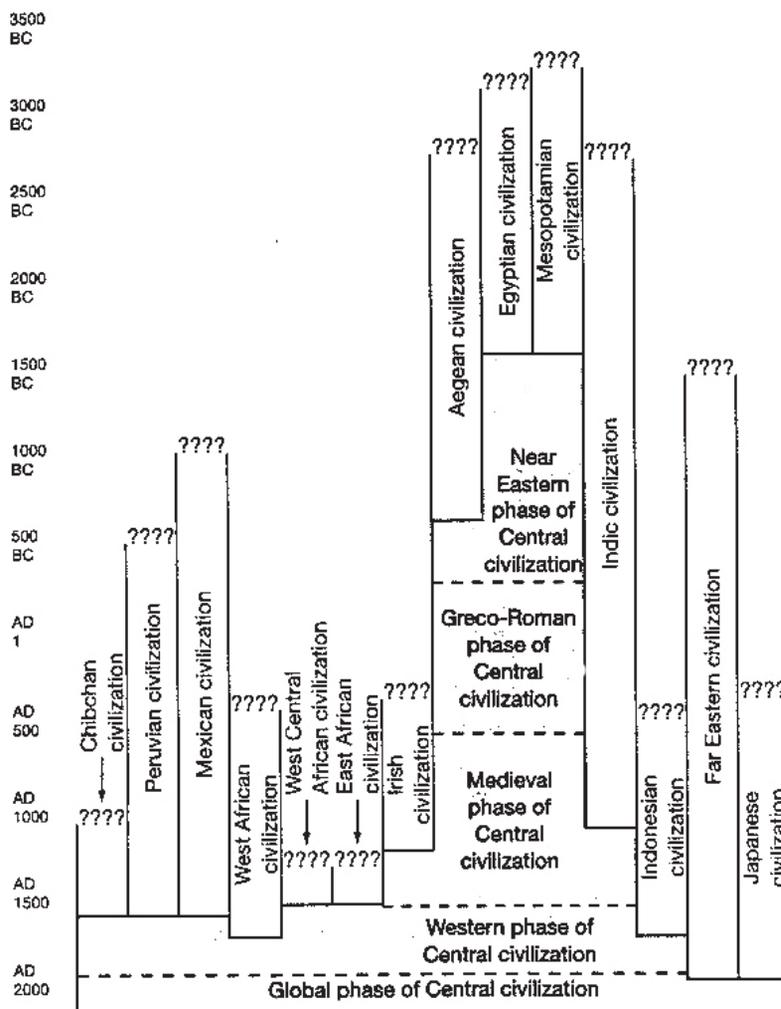


Figure 0.4: An outline of the Central Civilization and its later evolution, by Wilkinson (1995: 48).

and how. Second, there is no analysis of the historical evolution of both civilisations and whether they merged finally into a single and global imperial entity. In fact, the school of Wallerstein and Wilkinson seems to identify that there were no relevant imperial entities in the ancient Near East until 600 BC with the Persian Empire.

The appearance of the Persian or Achaemenid empire is pointed out by another follower of this school, Eckhardt (1995: 80), who mentioned that only the Persians ‘developed civilization, empire and war into arts based on a hierarchical delegation of power such as the world had not known before’ because ‘empires did not amount to much prior to 600 BC, when Medes and Persians introduced a degree of hierarchical bureaucracy unknown in human history’. So, it seems that for the World System school, and for the followers of the Central Civilisation, there was a ‘historical vacuum’ of one millennium without analysis because

there is no mention of what happened from 1500 BC to 600 BC in the context of the Central Civilisation.

The analysis of the evolution of the Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilisations carried out by these scholars would corroborate this appreciation. Figure 0.5 represents the imperial territorial expansion of ancient Egypt, which is calculated by the ‘mega-metre’. This is a metric unit of distance equal to 1000 kilometres or about 621 miles invented by Taagapera (1978) for studying the extension of ancient and modern empires. The figure shows the variation in size in mega-metres (vertical axis) during the principal chronological periods of Egyptian history (horizontal axis).

It is evident that the periods of major expansion of Egypt were during those times when strong dynasties ruled and allowed this civilisation to reach the peak of territorial extent in three specific periods: the Fifth Dynasty (Old Kingdom), the Twelfth Dynasty (Middle

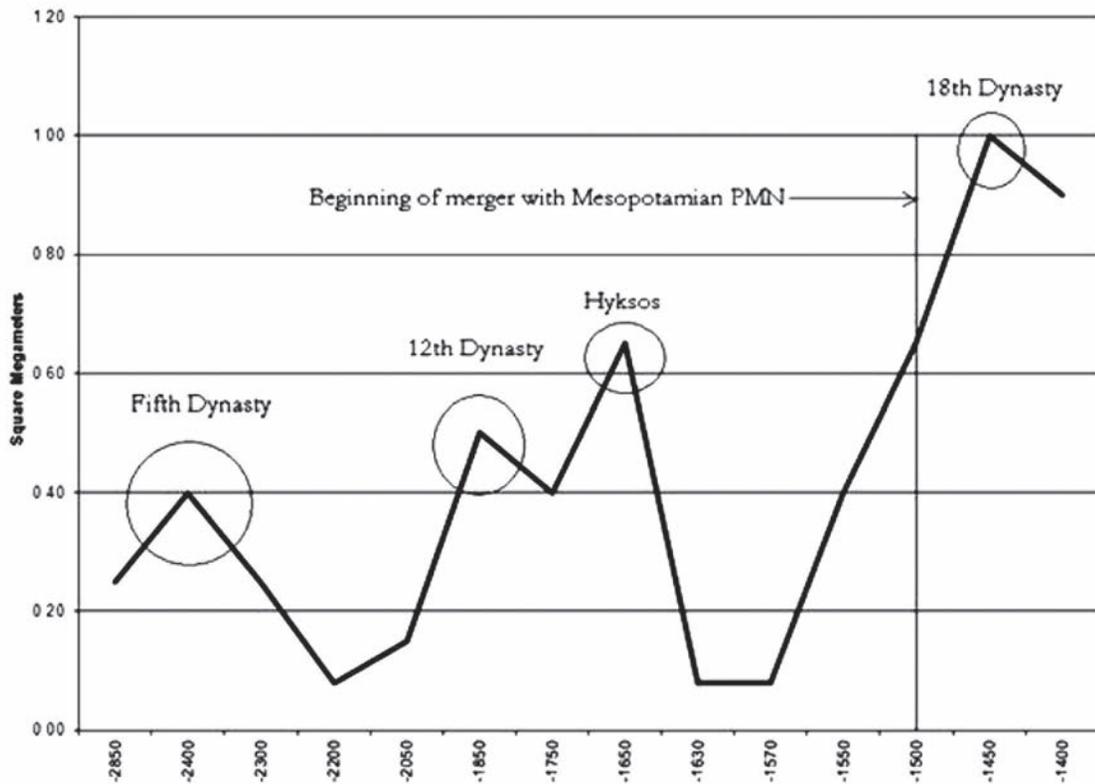


Figure 0.5: The historical evolution of Egypt before merging with Mesopotamia according to Taagapera (1978).

Kingdom) and the Eighteenth Dynasty (New Kingdom). However, it seems that Egypt suffered periods of decline – known by Egyptologists as ‘Intermediate periods’ – where the imperial extension plummeted to lowest level in size of square mega-metres at least in two periods and possibly in a third one, which is not shown in the figure.

Besides this, it is evident that the reference of the year 1500 BC when Egypt merged with Mesopotamia, identified in this figure by ‘Mesopotamian PMN’ (political / military network) – a modern term used by Chase-Dunn and Hall (1995: 111) for ‘civilisation’ – coincides with the apparently dramatic fall of the Egyptian state after 1400 BC, although it is not explained in the figure at all. Moreover, as it was previously mentioned, it is evident that this historical analysis did not consider the later period of 1500 BC to 600 BC.

In Figure 0.6, there is a similar scheme that shows the variation, also in mega-metre squares, of the principal Mesopotamian ‘empires’ and it is evident that its historical evolution is very different compared to Egypt’s. The level of imperial extension in square mega-metres is ostensibly less than Egypt’s and more fragmented, just as the political reality of Mesopotamia was. Indeed, it is possible to corroborate the existence of four different political entities that reached a peak of extension: the city of Lagash; the Akkadian kingdom,

which was a real exception with respect to other Mesopotamian periods with respect to its high level in terms of square mega-metres; and the kingdoms of Babylon and Mitanni.

Nevertheless, the general Mesopotamian imperial extension in this figure would only demonstrate a stabilised trend of growth and fall over several centuries, but without much variation. Perhaps the Akkadian Empire could be considered as a gigantic upsurge. Meanwhile, the Babylon/Mitanni upswing was not as relevant as the Akkadian had been, but at least it was more than a third larger than the average of the three previous peaks, and it could be qualified as an upswing but never to the level reached by any of the Egyptian kingdoms.

In around 1500 BC, the Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilisations merged to become what these scholars call the primeval Central Civilisation (or the Central PMN, as it is called in the figure). This situation will be evident with the analysis of the figure that combines both realities (Figure 0.7) and it would demonstrate the deep differences in the historical evolution between Egypt and Mesopotamia. Principally, it does not allow us to understand how both civilisations became merged and how the ‘Near Eastern phase’ of the Central Civilisation started.

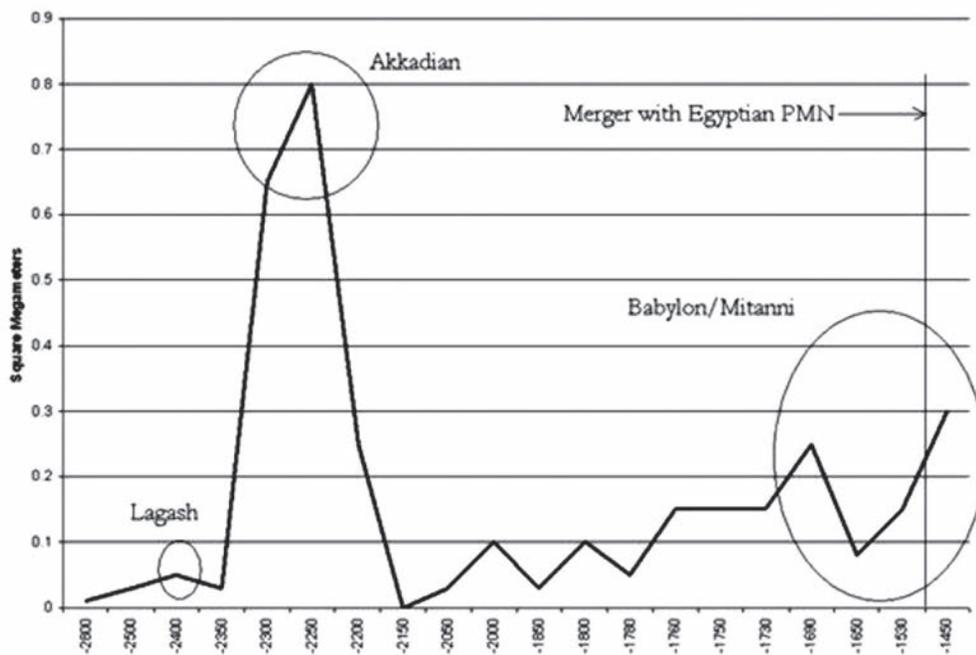


Figure 0.6: Historical evolution of Mesopotamia before merging with Egypt according to Taagapera (1978).

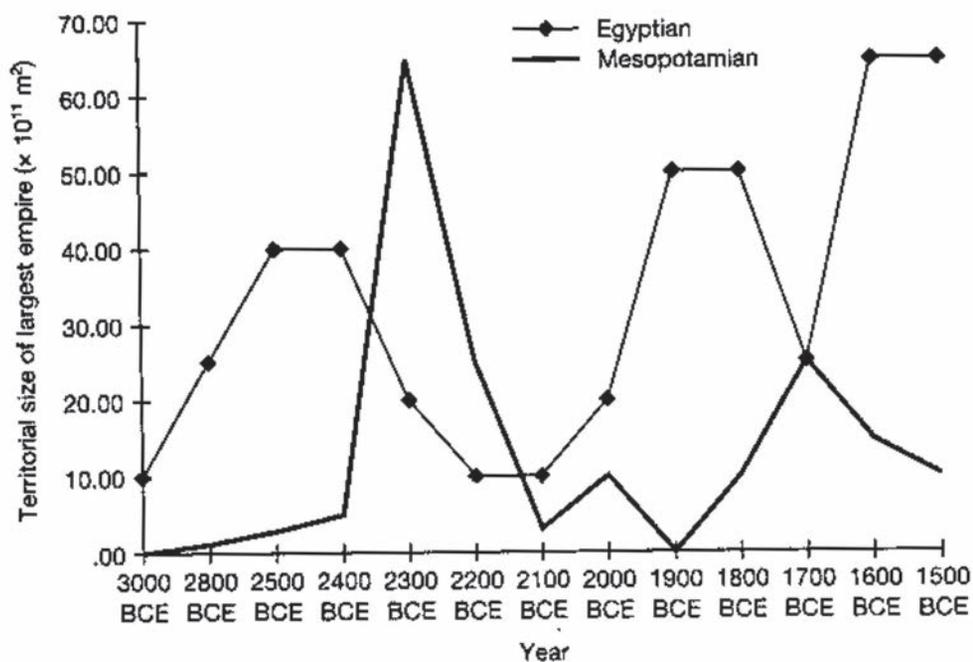


Figure 0.7: Comparative graph of the expansion/evolution of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia according to Taagapera (1978).

In effect, the figure shows that the periods of territorial expansion of Egypt do not coincide with the expansion of Mesopotamia. So, during the periods when Egypt was at a peak (2500 BC – 2400 BC, 1900 BC – 1800 BC and 1600 – 1500 BC), Mesopotamia had lower levels of territorial

expansion and vice versa. For instance, the period of the Akkadian power coincides with the First Intermediate Period in Egypt; and the peak of the Babylonian dynasty of Hammurabi coincides with the following Egyptian crisis of the Second Intermediate Period.

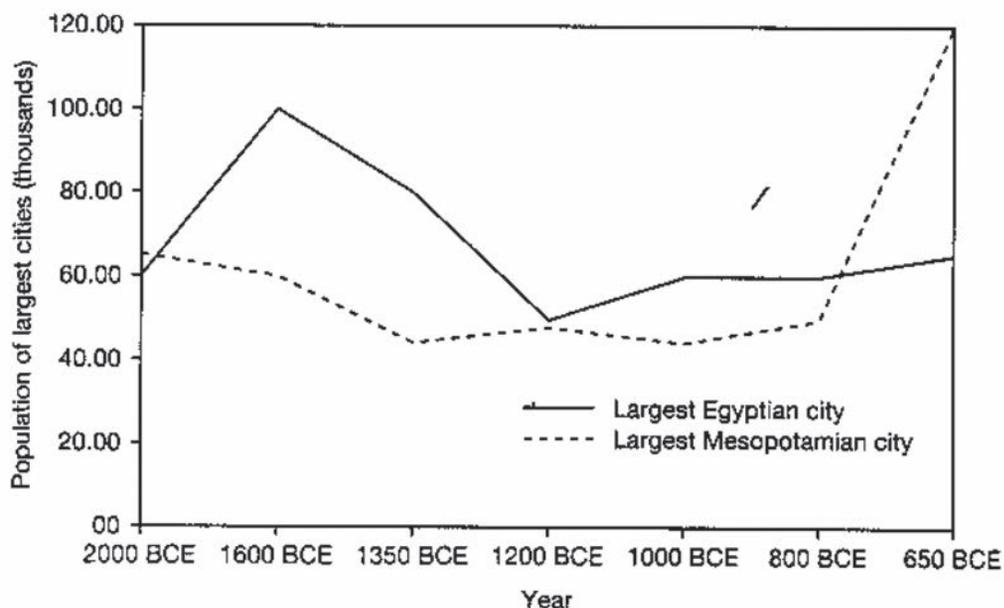


Figure 0.8: Population of the largest cities in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia from 2000 BC until 650 BC, by Bosworth (1995: 212).

The only conclusion that could be drawn would be that in 1500 BC Egypt was at the historical peak of its power, while Mesopotamia declined. So, that could be a signal that if the so-called 'Near Eastern phase' of the Central Civilisation occurred in that period, Egypt was in a better position of expansion and it should have engulfed the Mesopotamian region. However, there is no historical or archaeological evidence of any Egyptian conquest of the Mesopotamian core and the inauguration of the Egyptian universal empire. To sum up, the theory of the origin of the first stage for explaining the origin of the Central Civilisation in 1500 BC elaborated by Wilkinson and his school of thought is wrong or inaccurate.

Fortunately, there are other archaeological sources that could be used for understanding the evolution of this Central Civilisation better. One of these is to calculate the amount and movements of the population of the largest cities in Egypt and Mesopotamia. The second is the historical chronological prolongation until 650 BC applied in the following graphic (Figure 0.8), whose lines of fluctuation for the urban population are initially very different with respect to both civilisations. In the Egyptian case, it rose from 60,000 to 100,000 inhabitants in less than 200 years but it started too quickly and suddenly decreases; meanwhile, the Mesopotamian population gradually decreased and later it stabilised in 1350 BC followed by a very important and fast variation of increase since 800 BC.

In addition, there is another particular phenomenon: both civilisations reached the same amount of urban population in around 1200 BC (the consensus date for

the end of the Bronze Age). After that, the Egyptians remained proportionally stabilised and recovered slowly, while the Mesopotamian line has a light decrease until 800 BC, when it had a huge and remarkable ascent never seen before. The long interval from 1300 BC to 825 BC should be taken into special consideration because it shows a special tendency: many cities had been simultaneously reduced but suddenly thereafter the cities and the population increased (in the middle of the 1st millennium BC). That is significant evidence of the formation of an imperial entity and its respective urban centres.

Wilkinson (1995: 61) himself suggested that 'it seems more likely that Central Civilisation will be found to have persisted, even if wounded and reduced for the Iron Age troubles'. Even more, it is more plausible to suggest that the key should be found in the following tendency: both civilisations were following separate territorial expansion paths and urban growth, where levels of territorial expansion of Egypt were proportionately greater than Mesopotamia.

However, both civilisations reached a turning point in history, in around 1200 BC, when the trend changed forever and the Mesopotamian civilisation grew to a level never seen before. Thus, Mesopotamia ended up incorporating or conquering the Egyptian territory into its own sphere of influence from 800 BC. In other words, this should be the beginning of the 'Near Eastern phase' of the Central Civilisation, when an empire from Mesopotamia established a new order in the ancient Near East, incorporating the Egyptian territory.

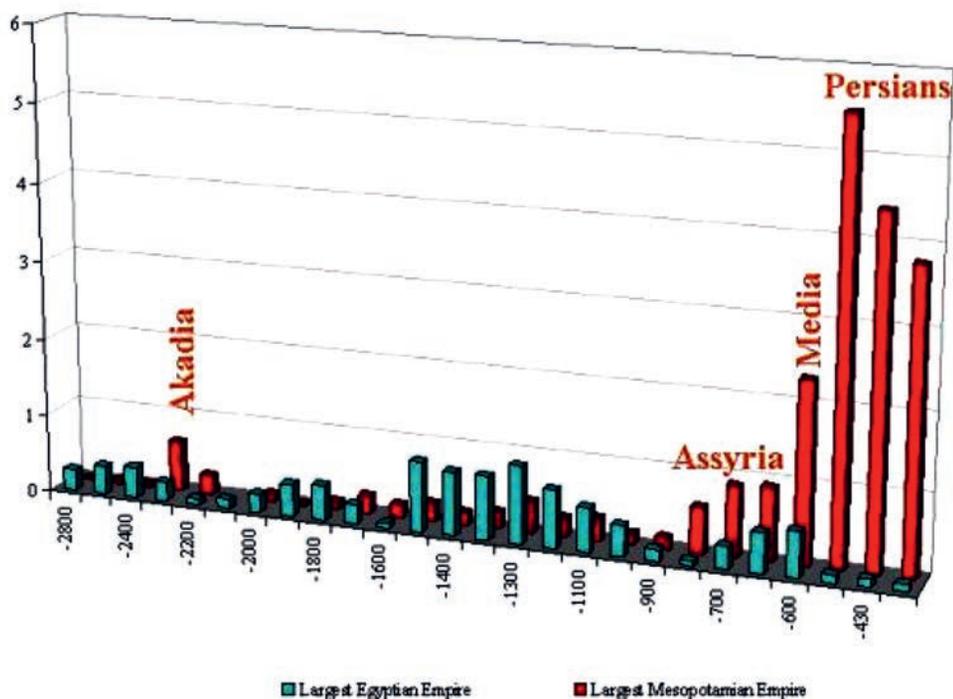


Figure 0.9: Comparative graphic of the expansion/evolution of Egypt and Mesopotamia until 430 BC according to Taagapera (1978).

Figure 0.9 sums up the historical evolution of both of the aforementioned civilisations. On the one hand, the Egyptian territorial expansion in square mega-metres allows us to identify the three traditional periods of the Egyptian kingdom with their respective intermediate periods. On the other hand, the Mesopotamian evolution is very flat – with the lone exception of the Akkadian kingdom, – and this poor territorial expansion is evidence of the fragmentation of the Mesopotamian civilisation.

Nevertheless, there is a crucial point at 1200 BC when the Egyptian kingdom begins a gradual decline until it reaches the minimum expression in 800 BC. This date coincides with the appearance of Assyria whose increase in the columns of square mega-metres would demonstrate the appearance of a real imperial civilisation in Mesopotamia that would be continued significantly by the successive Mesopotamian empires such as Media and Persia. While Egypt looks to have made a revival under the Assyrian predominance, which could be understood as the last Egyptian attempt at resistance against this Mesopotamian power, it became more insignificant in the later periods, which could be interpreted as the final integration or subjection of the Egyptian civilisation to the Mesopotamian sphere (500 BC – 300 BC).

An important objective of this research would be to elucidate the connectedness developed in the ‘Near Eastern phase’ with this Central Civilisation, originated

by the fusion of the Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilisations. In this case, emphasising the different historical evolutions of both civilisations and especially the period between 1200 and 600 BC, this apparently constituted the formative period of the first expression of the universal empire developed in Mesopotamia and continued later by the Media and Persian civilisations.

Second aim of this study: the methodological approach to the archaeological knowledge of the Ancient Near East

The problems of inaccurate historical data amongst the scholars of the World System and Central Civilisation schools of thought described before, would demonstrate a general tendency that has become common in modern research in the analysis of civilisations. It could be ironic but several of these scholars who have studied the process of origin and evolution of civilisations are not historians or have little factual knowledge or knowledge about historical methods of research. Indeed, a great number of these scholars are social scientists with different specialisations such as sociologists (Wallerstein), political economists (Weber), anthropologists (Service), political scientists (Huntington), archaeologists (Childe) or simple theorists (Quigley).

As was previously mentioned, Wallenstein and his school of thought established an arbitrary starting point of 1650 for the Central Civilisation, motivated

possibly by the impact of the European expansion to other continents and the beginning of the first European colonial empires. Nevertheless, it is another convention inherited from the idea that the studies about civilisations and World Systems should be restricted to Western civilisation. The principal reason, according to Gills (1995: 156), is the development of the capitalistic economy in the Western civilisation that allowed it to unify and civilise the entire world for the first time. Thus, the contemporary world in the 21st century is a product of this event because of the mythological idea that 'progress', 'capitalism' and 'the West' are synonymous.

The principal problem is that this view was, in fact, invented 100 years ago with the objective of defending the idea of Western superiority in world history, giving 'scientific' support to Eurocentric or Western colonisation and the importance of capitalism as the economic system. This vision also denigrates the role and contribution of any civilisation whose roots are not precisely Western. Gills (1995: 155) states, 'all or most of the known historical modes of production (accumulation) have existed since about 3rd millennium BC. This includes the capitalistic mode, based on the existence of capital, as abstract wealth taking money form and of wage labour'.

It is important to declare that there is no problem with these professionals wanting to investigate ancient history but, as Sanderson and Hall (1995: 232) outline, 'their training has seldom given them the factual knowledge they need to make sense out of world history in their own terms'. The same criticism could be made with the majority of the historians who have no knowledge about theory or try to avoid the theoretical approach to history, especially with respect to ancient history. Nevertheless, this research considers that it is necessary to have a continuous dialogue between historians, archaeologists and theorists for understanding the historical evolution of any civilisation.

In such dialogue it is necessary to avoid any objective whose ultimate goal could be the discerning of general laws of human behaviour (as with Spengler and Toynbee) because that practice would want to imitate the classical method used in physics and replicate it in history. The experience would demonstrate that the search for general laws in the sphere of the historical evolution of civilisations is as futile as it is dangerous because it has pushed scholars away from their primary task: the *empirical reality* which is not always coincident with the theoretical approach of these scholars. The orthodox Marxist theory of history applied to Mesopotamian history (the Leningrad school) is an example of that.

Besides this, historical study of the social reality in antiquity is made more complex because subjects such as the Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilisations are known superficially by the specialists in civilisation studies and too specifically by the historians. On the one hand, the civilisation specialists or archaeologists have paid more attention to the social structures and dynamics of agrarian communities, looking for patterns or regularities that are usually cyclical in nature, to apply them in any latitude or any historical period, whether it be in the Southern Asian continent, Mesoamerica or China (Sanderson 1995: 262).

On the other hand, historians have been studying very specific cultural themes such as philosophies, literature, art styles, and political and religious matters, avoiding the use of theoretical approaches or the study of the general structures of the historical evolution in both civilisations. For this reason, it would be important to unify the criteria of a specialist in history interested in the evolution of the ancient civilisations, emphasising subjects such as economic development, political structure and historical changes both in Egypt and in Mesopotamia, with the objective of studying these agrarian and preindustrial societies from a very different point of view.

Third aim of this study: an approach to World Systems Theory and archaeology

What is the connection between World System Theory and Archaeology? It is very important to underline that originally the concept of 'world' for the World System theory was linked more with economic interdependence than any conception of geographical, political or cultural approach (Hopkins and Wallerstein 1977: 123). In other words, a World System is not a system of planetary size but rather a self-contained unit that combines the essences of worldness and systemness in a single unit (Hall, Kardulias and Chase-Dunn 2011: 236). Thereby, that interdependence would reveal that the World System perspective is always an economic process according to the original Wallerstein school.

Although the World Systems theories have repercussions on many approaches of sociological and historical studies, according to Peregrino (1996: 1), 'most archaeologists still only marginally accept the World System perspective. Rarely does one find an article written from an explicitly World Systems perspective in any widely-read archaeological journals, particularly in the Americas'.

Moreover, if Wallerstein always considered his theory for application in the study of Western Capitalist society since the modern 17th century, the most common

criticisms amongst archaeologists are that World System theory is too economist and ignores individual actors, which makes this theory inappropriate for ancient studies or pre-capitalist settings. According to Hall, Kardulias and Chase-Dunn (2011: 246), 'the widespread critique that World System analysis as presented by Wallerstein in 1974 was not written for the kinds of contexts that archaeologists typically investigate'.

Considering this limiting background, some scholars such as Ekholm and Friedman (1985: 113-114), have upgraded the original basis of Wallerstein's World System with some ideas coming from archaeology and anthropology. For example, these scholars preferred to talk about a 'Global System' instead of 'World Systems', emphasising both modes of production and the mode of social reproduction, and not only the concept of 'production' as Wallerstein suggested. Also, they added a new concept between the 'core' and 'periphery', which is 'dependent structures' that always interact between the core and periphery but are neither one or the other.

In other words, any World System is developed inside of a geographical sphere that involves a *core* and a *periphery*. According to Hall, Kardulias and Chase-Dunn, 'core states incorporate peripheral areas and receive a disproportionately large share of the surplus or benefits'. Inside of this geographical sphere, their respective populations develop different roles that continually change according to their economic, cultural or political demands. The natural result is a continuous competition between the core and periphery, whose principal consequence is a special relationship of competition and differentiation (Schneider 1977: 20).

Another contribution of Ekholm and Friedman (1985: 114-115) is the concept of 'independent structures' existing outside of their 'Global System' but whose performance has repercussions at a greater or lesser grade on that system, such as having predatory human groups such as nomads, refugees or mercenaries in the peripheries. This phenomenon is pointed out by Peregrino (1996: 4), because these independent structures are themselves small World Systems, which implies local cores exploiting local peripheries. However, these independent World Systems 'also exist within a larger World System based on the dependent, but not necessarily exploitive, trade of elite symbols between independent polities. The independent World Systems could physically survive without linkage to the larger system, but elites could not socially reproduce without this connection'.

Thus, between the core and peripheries, there are *semi-peripheries* that generally act as intermediaries between

both extremes of the system (Hall, Kardulias and Chase-Dunn 2011: 236). With respect to *semi-peripheries*, scholars such as Chase-Dunn and Hall (1997: 78) argue that there are different types of them depending on studies and scholars. Some are regions that mix core and peripheral forms of organisation; others are regions spatially located between the core and peripheral regions; some are regions situated between two or more competing core regions; still others are regions where mediations are carried out for activities between the core and peripheral areas; and finally are regions in which institutional features are intermediate in their form between those found in adjacent core and peripheral areas.

Peregrino (1996: 1) also believes that there is a basic confusion between the World System *perspective* that allows us to create a view for studying the world as a set of autonomous political units joined by economic interdependence; and World System *theory* that defines the nature of that economic interdependence. So, while there are different World Systems theories, there is only one perspective of a World System; and one perspective is too restricted for archaeologists because 'even the smallest ethnographic or archaeological site cannot be understood only in isolation. The converse is also the case: no local site can be understood only from an external perspective. Rather, the interaction of the two must be examined' (Hall, Kardulias and Chase-Dunn 2011: 234).

These authors (2011: 238-239) also seem to consider that the root of the problem is that the World System idea is not only a *theory* or a *perspective* but also a *school of thought* and a *paradigm*. A *theory* is a dynamic explanation built on logical assumptions and empirical evidence that changes through time due to new findings and repeated testing that may entail extensive revision of the original theory or the development of a new one.

A *perspective* is a general approach to an array of problems but it is not a unique one, because it is possible to recognise the existence of others' perspectives about the same problem and none of them could explain everything but only some aspects of the problem. A *school of thought* is a group of scholars that investigate a process with a variety of approaches that could be indeed contradictory, but these scholars share a general perspective constituted of a wide ensemble of methods and assumptions. A *paradigm* is a model for only asking questions using a coherent body of assumptions and empirical facts, which is no longer used when this model of paradigm is not able to give more answers.

Despite this inconvenience, Peregrino himself believes (1996: 2) that there are three important and useful reasons for applying the World System *perspective* in archaeology. The first of them is considering that the

World System perspective is essentially spatial because it studies cores and peripheries and their respective relationships considering approaches such as resources, transportation and populations.

These general features are also studied by archaeologists when they use socio-spatial analyses that include, according to Peregrino, 'the search of patterns in spatial data and relating them to the world of social, economic, and political behaviour'. The modern approach of World System analysis considers that societies of any time in the past never existed in complete isolation and these societies always tended to follow cycles or patterns (Hall, Kardulias and Chase-Dunn 2011: 240).

The second reason is associated with the concept of multi-levels within societies that establish a World System. In other words, World System theories work with different layers within layers, that means different economic, social and political relationships that exist inside of a society but 'are also seen to extend outward to inter-societal relationships and inward to intra-family ones' (Peregrino 1996: 2). This approach is also used by archaeologists when they analyse archaeological sites, which are only one level inside of larger social or temporal structures generally defined as 'traditions' or 'cultures'.

The third and last reason is the evolutionary perspective. The World System view shares with archaeologists some basic principles of theoretical scope, which are valued by Peregrino (1996: 2-3) because: 'it allows one to propose a typology of socio-political forms among which there is a strong probability a given society will move under an hypothesized set of conditions (...) exactly what archaeologists attempt to do in developing theory (at least high-level or grand theory)'. In this way, archaeologists could contribute to the further development of World System theory in ancient societies for explaining the origin of the modern World System using empirical questions (Hall, Kardulias and Chase-Dunn 2011: 233).

Hall, Kardulias and Chase-Dunn (2011: 237) emphasise those approach:

Thus, world-systems analysis (WSA) has replaced world-systems theory (WST). WSA expands the temporal range of studies, introduces comparative analyses, and typically transforms assumptions in the early formulations of WST into empirical questions. In short, WSA is a general approach that encompasses several competing theories, all of which emphasize interaction as central to cultural and social change (...). We also note that the original impetus for extension of WSA into ancient and prehistoric settings was, and to some extent remains, to understand how and why the

modern World System appeared when and where it did, in the form it did, and how it might change in the future (...). But like much of archaeology, it has become focused on long-term change or evolution of world-systems and the societies that constitute them.

To sum up, this research will seek to conduct a study on the historical process of evolution of civilisations. However, this topic has been studied mainly by theoretical sociologists rather than professional historians. The principal drawback has been that the theorists have shown little knowledge of the archaeological data and historical evolution; while the historians expressed little interest in the theoretical scope, especially in ancient history.

Therefore, this research will rescue some theoretical models developed since 1995 in the light of Wallerstein's World System, and especially its implication in the later vision of the 'Central Civilisation' invented by Wilkinson. This 'Central Civilisation' would represent the original civilisation, which merged with or engulfed the majority of the civilisations known today, and whose origin would be the merger of two originally ancient and independent civilisations: Mesopotamia and Egypt. Besides, there will be discussion about the concepts of *centre*, *periphery* and *semi-periphery* devised by the World System analysis in some specific parts of this research.

Both civilisations ended up merging through a long historical process whose starting point was the maelstrom of 1200 BC and the end of the Bronze Age, but whose consolidation was between 800 BC and 600 BC through the existence of an entity of imperial character from Mesopotamia called Assyria, according to the evidence of territorial and urban expansion from Mesopotamia to the detriment of Egypt. It is at this time that the consolidation of the so-called 'Near Eastern phase' can be considered, which marks the beginning and the consolidation of the Central Civilisation.

Therefore, this study will cover in the following chapters these subjects:

1. An introductory study, following Braudel's analysis, about the relevance of the geographical formation of Mesopotamia; the structural changes in that civilisation, in terms of urban development and its instruments of expansion; and finally the most important historical data and facts on the formation of the first city-states and kingdoms or territorial states, according to the archaeological data. This analysis will conclude with the global crisis that shook the Ancient Near East at the end of the Bronze Age in 1200 BC and its implications for the

- consolidation of Assyria as the first universal empire known in Mesopotamia from 1000 BC.
2. A theoretical analysis of the scope of the notions of 'empire' and 'imperialism' developed by the Assyrian civilisation from 800 BC to 600 BC, the period of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, highlighting its main characteristics and its application in the archaeological context of the Ancient Near East before the incorporation of the Egyptian civilisation into this new world order.
 3. A study of Egyptian civilisation, emphasising its geographical, structural and historical peculiarities, along the same lines as the study made with respect to the Mesopotamian civilisation. Thereafter, this study will explore how the Egyptian civilisation confronted the Mesopotamian expansion represented by Neo-Assyrian imperialism and how ancient Egypt ended up becoming incorporated into the new order of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, establishing the 'Near Eastern phase' of the primeval Central Civilisation that originated from the conquest and incorporation of Egyptian territory.
 4. Finally, this research will try to explain the final process of the fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, emphasising the theoretical and archaeological implications of concepts of the 'fall', 'decline' and 'collapse' of an imperial entity such as Assyria both at the epicentre of Mesopotamia and in the Egyptian territory. The main issue to be clarified is whether it is possible to speak of an end of the civilisation expanded by the Neo-Assyrian Empire or whether it was a fundamental step in the initiation and consolidation of the so-called Central Civilisation from the new order established by the Neo-Assyrian Empire and continued by the imperial states that followed it.