Extrapolating the Trends of the Most Significant Patterns of World History

Csaba S. Kecsces

csaba56@freemail.hu

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EXTRAPOLATING THE TRENDS OF THE MOST
SIGNIFICANT PATTERNS OF WORLD HISTORY

CSABA S. KECSCES
INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR
BUDAPEST, HUNGARY
CSABA56@FREEMAIL.HU

Abstract:
The possibility of a very protracted existence of civilizations is examined and in the case of the largest ones (European, Middle Eastern, East Asian, South Asian, Sub-Saharan African, Central Asian) it is found to be probable. The long-term evolutionary stages of these civilizations are identified, in the case of the European civilization the usual historical periodization (Neolithic, Antiquity, Middle Age, Modern Age) is acceptable, but in the case of the others a different periodization (Neolithic, Antiquity, Age of Expansion) seems to be more satisfactory. A "halving rule of the ages" is found (the duration of an age is half of the duration of the previous one). The theory of the "periodical (European) world wars" is examined and recent results are surveyed. The large conflict zones (shatterbelts) are surveyed and the hypothesis of the "periodical crisis sequences" is examined.

1. Introduction

Traditional historiography usually amasses long descriptions of numerous events. Historians typically add some explanations to their descriptions (stating that some events were more important than others, such as establishing causal relationships) but these explanations tend to be too specific. There has long been a demand for a more "systematic" historiography. Among numerous experiments, probably the most significant is the description of breaking down history into "civilizations."

This method appeared in the 19th century (e.g. in the works of N. Danilevsky), but the most significant books based on this idea were published in the first half of the 20th century. Probably the best known example is the work of A. Toynbee [1]. A typical problem with this "civilizationist" description is the assumption that civilizations are "born," "mature," and "die," like human beings and that this life cycle is finite and sometimes brief. This assumption collides with a very common feature of the traditional descriptions of national histories, which frequently claim that the "core" of the nation exists continuously since
prehistoric times (one could mention here many examples from Ireland to Japan). In spite of the many successes of the 19th and 20th century archaeology it is very difficult to determine the truth about prehistory, but it seems probable that such statements are not altogether unfounded (at least if we interpret the notion of "core" not as a "sovereign state" but as a culturally identifiable ethnic group).

Recently D. Wilkinson created a civilizational theory that describes civilizations as continuous entities from prehistoric to modern times [2]. Unfortunately, his theory has another difficulty: he assumes that political and military contacts between civilizations inevitably cause the "merging" of the contacting civilizations, i.e., there now exists only one "Central Civilization." This is again a problematic assumption: the religious, political and other differences between and among the different countries (or regions) are probably not lesser today than a hundred (or a thousand) years ago, and even the widespread acquisition of modern weapons does not imply that every army has the same "military culture."

To avoid these problems one should identify (at least) the "major civilizations" that can be traced back to prehistoric times. "Civilizations" are usually defined as "cultures with complex social structures (states with significantly specialised labour-division schemes)." Major civilizations can be defined as those civilizations that produced "great powers" (in the usual politico-military sense) during their histories. But in prehistoric times, "civilizations" (with the implication of cities) did not exist, therefore we should examine the "cultures."

Interpreting the notion of culture as the archaeologists do (e.g., "a recurring assemblage of artifacts assumed to be representative of a particular set of activities carried out by a particular group of humans at a particular time") would lead to a hopeless confusion, there are thousands of archaeologically identified cultures. But a common definition of "culture" (which doesn't contradict the archaeological definition) can be the following: "culture is what a human group has in common but differing from other groups." In this case we can say that the major cultures coincide with the major human races because biological features are the most basic "commonality" that people may have. In order to avoid misunderstandings the followings should be noted:

* The author doesn't think that certain races are more valuable than others.
• The author doesn't think that "culture" is biologically determined. But culture is the result of common efforts: we learn it from each other, we practice it (usually) by acting together. Any common efforts are strongly facilitated by the feeling that we belong to the same group and common biological features are obvious sources of such a feeling.

The major human races (i.e., those which occupy large territories and have large populations continuously from ancient to modern times) are the following: African, East Asian, European, Middle Eastern, and South Asian.

Anthropologists usually consider the "European" and the "Middle Eastern" as a single race, but because of the very significant cultural differences here we must separate them. This classification is a good start: all of the mentioned groups have produced "great powers" during their histories. But if it is compared to the lists of civilizations produced by the "classical" civilizationists, then this definition seems to be rather crude. To refine it (to identify more closely the social groups which produce "great powers") one must examine each racial group separately.

2. Listing the (sub)civilizations

It is better to begin with European civilization because European history is probably the best documented (and certainly the most analyzed in detail) case of historiography. European civilization is a highly mobile phenomenon: the distance between the oldest ("Ancient Greece" which can be either Mycenae or Crete, see later) and newest (21st century USA) great powers is more than 8000 kms. Therefore the European subcivilizations are usually differentiated on the basis of religion: Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant. This grouping covers only the Modern Age (in the strict sense there were no Protestants before Luther published his theses) but if one draws the division lines between these groups on the map of Europe then it is visible that this religious division has a geographic meaning, too: South-western and Central Europe is Catholic, South-eastern and Eastern Europe is Orthodox, Northern and North-western Europe is Protestant.

These geographic divisions can be extended to the areas conquered (and populated) by Europeans in the Modern Age. Latin America can be considered as extension of South-western Europe, North America as the extension of North-western Europe, Siberia as the extension of Eastern Europe. What is more important, these divisions can be extended in time, too. The border between the Eastern and
Western Roman Empire was officially drawn only in 395, but significant cultural differences existed between the Eastern and Western Mediterranean regions many hundred years earlier.

The peoples of Northern Europe were also prominent in antiquity; Celts and Germans many times played an important role in the history of that age. In their best days they certainly can be considered as "strong regional powers," but what is even more important, they were able to maintain their independence in spite of the Roman colonisation efforts. In the Early Middle Age these threefold divisions are not very obvious, but if one looks at the map of Europe in 800 CE (in [3]) then it is visible that the "large" cities (over 15,000 inhabitants) in the territories ruled by Europeans form three major groups: North-western Europe (in the Paris-Cologne region), Italy (Milan, Rome etc.) and the Byzantine Empire (from Cherson to Syracuse, with Constantinople as the largest city of Europe). This indicates that the major urban cultures followed this threefold geographic division even in that troublesome age of European history. Other major civilizations were much less mobile, therefore similar geographic divisions are less problematic.

In the Middle East, great powers usually emerge in the following regions: Egypt, Mesopotamia, Iran, Anatolia (these names here must be interpreted as strictly geographical terms, such terms as "northern Nile valley" or "Iranian plateau" would be more precise but rather awkward). These areas also show remarkable ethnic continuity (except Anatolia). Roughly the same ethnic groups inhabit them since early antiquity, therefore we can hope that their histories will show some repetitive patterns.

In East Asia, the significant geographic regions are: China, Japan, Central Asia (the Mongolia-Kazakhstan region), and South-east Asia (the Burma-Java-Philippines triangle). The latter is an ethnically (and historically) quite diverse region, probably should be divided into smaller parts, but really great powers never emerged in that region, only regional powers. Therefore from our viewpoint, finer divisions are not necessary.

The nomad culture of the Central Asian peoples differs significantly from the urban cultures prevailing in the other parts of Asia, therefore it is better to discuss the "Central Asian" as an entirely separate culture. It must be noted here that not all the nomadic peoples of the Eurasian steppe region can be considered as part of the Central Asian culture. The "original" (Neolithic) racial composition of these peoples was quite varied. There were European nomads in Southern Russia (the
name "Russia" is meant here as a geographic term which includes Eastern Europe and Western Siberia), Middle Eastern (pre-Turkic) nomads in the Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan region, and Asian nomads probably to the east of the Altai mountains only. But there was a general tendency among these peoples to wander (typically westward) into the territories of sedentary cultures where (if they were able to conquer the attacked state) they settled as a new "ruling class." Such settling down occurred only when the nomad tribes reached a certain level of social development. Different groups of nomads reached this level of development at different times: Indo-Europeans earlier, Asians later (see [4], [5]).

Therefore, when the really great nomadic empires were formed, the Asian nomads became predominant.

In India the truly Indian great powers usually united (almost) the whole subcontinent, therefore a geographic subdivision is not necessary. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the vastness of the continent and the ethnic diversity of the population certainly justifies some subdivision, but no great powers emerged there and the historical data about the significant states (regional powers) of Black Africa is rather unsure, therefore we may omit the subdivision of Africa, too.

Now it is possible to analyze the individual histories of each civilization. But instead of going into the innumerable details (which would certainly lead nowhere), we should concentrate on the "most important" events. Such "most important" events could be the following:

- Events / processes closely related to the existence of the great powers of the civilization
- Events / processes closely related to the (relative) status of the great powers of civilization

This list may seem subjective, but the following should be noted:

- This method is consistent with the traditional method of historiography. Conventional "world histories" are practically histories of the great powers, and historians usually comment on the importance of the various events (and the most decisive "commenting" happens before the writing: firstly they decide what is important enough to write down).
- If we find some repeating patterns / events (without ignoring many details it would be impossible - history never repeats itself exactly) then we may extrapolate these patterns into the future. If the predicted events really occur (we or our descen-
ly will see it) then it will be a strong indication of the theory's correctness.

3. Long-term processes

3.1 Europe

First we should examine the major "turning points" in the histories of the civilizations. Once again, the best place to start is European civilization. In traditional historiography, European history is divided into three major ages: antiquity, medieval, and modern. The Neolithic can be considered the first age. Neolithic societies also were based on surplus-producing economies, and many important innovations appeared in that age (bronze and iron working, domestication of animals for traction and riding, simple methods of long-distance navigation). Also, many important features of the societies of antiquity appeared in primitive forms (social stratification, cities, long-distance trade).

It is generally agreed that the medieval period ends with Columbus (reaching America in 1492) or with Luther (publishing his theses in 1517). The approximate starting date of the modern age is 1500 CE. The starting date of the medieval period is usually assumed to be 476 CE (deposition of Romulus Augustulus by Odoacer) but other dates also can be suggested (Christianity becoming the state religion of the Roman Empire in 391, partitioning of the Roman Empire into Eastern and Western Empires in 395, or the final fall of the Ostrogothic kingdom in 553). Therefore the approximate starting date of the Middle Ages can be 500 CE.

Although there is no generally agreed date for the beginning of Antiquity, it is reasonable to assume that it started with the appearance of the first major urban cultures in South-eastern Europe, i.e. with the Minoans or with the Mycenaes. The origin of the Minoans is unknown, but it is frequently assumed that they came from the Middle East. It is also possible that the Minoan culture was the result of the original Neolithic population's internal development (see [6]).

The origin of the Mycenaes is much more certain: since their writing (Linear B) was deciphered by M. Ventris (see [7]) we know that they were early Greeks (i.e. Indo-Europeans). But the Linear B tablets contain only routine administrative notes, dated information about their large-scale activities is purely archaeological. They were quite rich already in the 16th century BCE (shaft graves used between 1600-1500 BCE) but their palaces were built somewhat later (1450-1350 BCE).
The date of 1500 BCE seems to be acceptable as an "average starting date" of the Mycenaean sub-civilization. It is an interesting parallelism with the Modern Age that even these early European states tended to colonise. They occupied Crete about 1450 BCE, and their first colonies on the western coast of Anatolia (Miletus, Colophon, etc.) appeared approximately in the same time. But it is possible that Minoan trading posts - or even small colonies - existed on the Anatolian coast before the arrival of the Mycenaeans.

The earliest Neolithic settlements in South-eastern Europe appeared about 6500 BCE, but those early farmers probably were not Europeans but were Middle Eastern migrants from Anatolia. There is a theory that claims that the whole Neolithic population of Europe descended from such Middle Eastern migrants (see [8]), but this is a strong claim which got much criticism. It is more probable that those migrants appeared only in certain areas of Europe (Balkan peninsula, large river valleys) whereas most of the Neolithic farmers of Europe were descendants of the previous Mesolithic population (see [9]).

Another difficult problem is the origin of the Indo-Europeans, which has great importance because all the "great nations" of Europe are of Indo-European origin. It is a much debated issue, too (see [4], [9], [10], [11], [12]). If we accept that the original homeland of the Indo-Europeans was in Southern Russia, then the starting date of the "Indo-European Neolithic" is approximately 5500 BCE. In this case we can make an interesting observation: if the starting dates of the "large historical ages" are listed as 5500 BCE, 1500 BCE, 500 CE, 1500 CE, then it seems that the durations of the ages are halving. The beginning of a "new age" can be expected in 2000 CE (certainly not exactly in this year but very probably before 2050 CE).

It must be noted that the validity of this "halving rule" really does not depend on the assumption of the "Indo-European primacy." After all, Indo-Europeans became Europeans only in Europe. When they migrated to the regions of other civilizations there they integrated into those other civilizations. We can assume that the Medieval Age began in 400 CE, which is reasonable because the Western Roman Empire was in steep decline at that time. Britannia and most of Gaul were lost before 410 and Rome was sacked by the Visigoths in 410. Extrapolate backward, then we get the following dates: beginning of Antiquity about 1800 BCE (the first Minoan palaces were built about 1900 BCE); and the beginning of the European Neolithic about 6200 BCE (not too far from the generally accepted 6500 BCE). In this case the starting point
of the "new age" is 2050 CE (a more realistic date than the year 2000 CE).

Antiquity and the Modern Age can be paralleled in many ways:

- European states were very active participants of the "world economy," and mass production and long-distance trading were typical
- The European great powers made major efforts at colonisation. In the second half of each age, large colonial empires were created (Roman, British, Russian, and others)
- Near the end of each age, the European great powers became militarily (and economically) weaker while the "third world" powers became relatively stronger (the defeats of the "super-powers" in Vietnam and Afghanistan are very ominous signs)

To avoid misunderstandings, the following must be noted: the "clash of the civilizations" is a popular theory now (see [13]), and it is possible to describe the end of the Antiquity as such a clash. But such a description is misleading; the decline of the (Ancient or Modern) great powers is caused mostly by internal problems and the "barbarian invasions" (which are the consequences of a well advanced decline) deliver the "coup the grace" only to the hopelessly weakened state or empire.

At least from the viewpoint of economy, the Neolithic and the Medieval Ages also can be paralleled. In both ages, the economic self-sufficiency of small regions was typical and long-distance trade was a rarity. One may say that the volume of the long-distance trade between Europe and the other parts of the world was increasing during the Medieval Age. This is true, but it doesn't negate the abrupt fall between the Late Antiquity and the Early Medieval Age.

If we compare the tables of large cities in [3], then we can see that in 361 CE there were four cities in Europe with more than 50,000 inhabitants (their total population was 570,000) But in 622 CE, there was only one city in Europe with more than 50,000 inhabitants (Constantinople, with 350,000 inhabitants). This indicates a great decline because the persons involved in mass production and long-distance trade are usually city-dwellers. Therefore, we may infer that the coming "new age" of the European civilization will be somewhat similar to the Medieval Age (i.e. it can be named as "New Medieval Age").

This is a surprising prediction: the "globalization of the world" is a seemingly unstoppable process now, but the discussion above indicates that the next 250 years will be the age of "localization" (at least in the areas belonging to the European civilization). The grave problems
caused by the current globalization process are clearly visible (see e.g. [14]) and it is quite possible that those problems will become fatal within some decades.

There is an other argument that is perhaps hypothetical, but also indicates the necessity of this "New Medieval Age." One of the greatest achievements of the medieval Europeans is the Medieval Technical Revolution, which provided (among other things) the tools necessary for world-wide colonisation (ocean-worthy ships, advanced navigational techniques etc.). If there will be another colonising age (from 2300 CE?), then probably the most important targets of colonisation will be celestial bodies (outer space). It is a common belief that we cannot colonize outer space now because our space transportation technologies are too expensive.

There is some truth in this, but the real problem occurs when the astronauts arrive somewhere. They have no logistics to remain long before their reserves run out. This is a straight consequence of our modern industrial technologies: everything is produced in large quantities, in large factories containing many highly specialised machines, utilising the best raw materials (no matter if those must be delivered from thousands of kilometres). In outer space, one cannot have enormous equipment and the only available raw materials are just "ordinary stones." A radical change in our industrial technologies will be necessary to produce industrial-quality products in small quantities with relatively small equipment from low quality raw materials. In the modern globalized world economy such a change is impossible, but in a "localized" world where industrially advanced groups may find themselves isolated in an adverse environment in a not too large territory, there will be a strong incentive to develop such technologies (not only for industrial but for agricultural production too).

3.2 Middle East

Historians sometimes use the terms "Antiquity" and "Medieval Age" for non-European civilizations, too, but there are no generally agreed upon delimiting dates such as in the European case. The beginning of the Neolithic is well defined: the first farmers/herders, although in practice, there are few anthropological remnants that could distinguish between cultures.

It is generally agreed that Antiquity begins with the appearance of relatively large states. In the case of Middle Eastern civilization, the Neolithic began about 9500 BCE (first herders in northern Iraq, see
[15]), but according to R.Unger-Hamilton [16], if the function of some Epi-Paleolithic tools is interpreted properly, then there was agriculture in the Middle East before 10,000 BCE.

In Egypt the first large state was the Old Kingdom, which was formed about 2800 BCE. The unification of Upper and Lower Egypt happened a bit earlier, but because of the general uncertainties in the Middle Eastern chronologies (see [17]) it is better to accept this date. In Mesopotamia the first certainly existing large state was the Akkadian Empire, created about 2300 BCE. In earlier times, Sumerian city-states sometimes conquered other cities and created small empires, but the extent of these empires is very unsure, therefore it is better to consider the Akkadian empire as the first. As an "average" date for the beginning of the Antiquity in the Middle East, 2600 BCE seems to be acceptable.

In the history of the Middle East there is only one more event which is generally accepted as a major turning point: the appearance of Islam. The "Hegira" happened in 622 CE, but the real force of the new faith manifested itself during the rule of the "elected Caliphs" (632-661) and the Omayyads (661-750), when Muslim armies conquered almost the whole Middle East and some parts of South-Western Europe.

Therefore the "third Middle Eastern age" began approximately in 700 CE. To call it "Medieval Age" would be quite misleading. City life and long-distance trade flourished under the Islamic Empire, and even more important, Arabs were the first real Middle Eastern colonisers. All the previous Middle Eastern empires were rather unifiers than colonisers because they didn't conquer territories outside the Middle East.

There are seeming counter-examples, the most important ones are the following:

- Phoenicians. They founded colonies in the south-western Mediterranean (including Sicily and Spain) during the 10th - 6th centuries BCE, in parallel with the Greek colonisation of some northern and central Mediterranean regions. The original inhabitants of Phoenicia were a Semitic people (Canaanites) but during the invasions of the "Sea Peoples" in the 12th century BCE, the region changed significantly. On the coast of Palestine (next to Phoenicia) a large group of the Sea Peoples settled down (the Philistines). It is very probable that other Sea People groups were received into the Phoenician cities where they mixed with the original population. It is almost certain that advanced maritime technologies appeared in Phoenicia after these invasions. Therefore the Phoenician sub-civilization cannot be considered as a purely Middle Eastern one; it had
a significant "European inheritance" too.

- Persians (the Achaemenid empire, 553-330 BCE). They conquered almost the whole Middle East, but they didn't conquer territories outside it and probably didn't want to.

The famous Greco-Persian wars can be interpreted as punitive actions triggered by a revolt of the Greek cities on the Anatolian coast. The Indus valley also belonged to the Persian Empire but it is questionable whether that region is really an "ancient homeland" of Indian civilization (see below).

If we accept the above described periodization of the Middle Eastern history (the third age could be named as the "Age of Expansion") then the starting dates of the ages are the following: 9500 BCE, 2600 BCE, 700 CE. We can see that the duration of the Antiquity is roughly half of the Neolithic, therefore, it is probable that we have a "halving rule" here, too. In this case, the end of the "Age of Expansion" can be expected about 2350 CE. The prediction which follows from this is that the history of the Middle East in the next three centuries will be rather similar to the previous 1300 years: sometimes a large empire is created, this empire makes some colonisation efforts, and after several centuries it disintegrates.

3.3 India

The Indian subcontinent can be divided into three large regions: the Indus valley, the Ganges valley and the southern region. The development of these regions was rather asynchronous, especially in prehistory. Neolithic villages appeared in the Indus valley very early (between 7000-6000 BCE), while in the other regions, the Neolithic began only after 5000 BCE. The domesticated plants and animals (wheat, sheep etc.) used by the early farmers in the Indus valley were of Middle Eastern origin. In the same region appeared the first urban culture of the subcontinent, the Harappan sub-civilization, which existed approximately from 2500 BCE to 1800 BCE.

Before discovering the early Neolithic villages of the Indus valley, archaeologists thought that the Harappan (sub-)civilization was created by migrants from the Middle East. Nowadays this culture is usually considered as the result of the internal development of the indigenous Neolithic population, but it is still possible that the previous theory was correct. In some Neolithic villages of the Indus valley a "destruction layer" was found which can be dated about 2500 BCE; this could be the result of an invasion by the founders of the Harappan culture.
In the ancient history of India there is only one more major turning point: the creation of the Maurya empire (about 300 BCE) because this was the first really large state which united almost the whole subcontinent. If we consider the ancient Indus valley as an integral part of the Indian civilization, we get the following starting dates of the great historical ages: 7000 BCE, 2500 BCE, 300 BCE. Here we can see again a "halving rule"--the duration of the second age is roughly the half of the first age. Using this rule we can extrapolate the sequence of the starting points, the following elements are: 800 CE, 1350 CE to 1900 CE (end point).

But this is very unconvincing; these dates are not especially significant in the history of India and this history certainly didn't end in 1900. But there is another possibility: the Indus valley may not belong to the Indian civilization. If we want to draw a dividing line between the Middle Eastern and the Indian civilizations in modern times, then we should choose the India-Pakistan border. This dividing line is not a new phenomenon: a similar border existed between the Indus valley and the rest of the subcontinent many times (during the existence of the Harappan sub-civilization, the Achaemenid Empire, the Kushan Empire, the Abbasids, the Ghaznevids etc.).

If we ignore the Indus valley, then we have only two significant dates in Indian history: 5000 BCE (beginning of the Neolithic), and 300 BCE (creation of the Maurya empire). If we suppose that the general development of the Indian civilization will be similar to the development of the Middle Eastern civilization, then we may expect the beginning of the "Indian Age of Expansion" about 2050 CE. But this date might be too early. If we assume that the Indo-Europeans ("Aryans") played the most significant role in the development of the Indian civilization, we must put back the beginning of the Neolithic to 5500 BCE. In this case, the "Indian Age of Expansion" will begin about 2300 CE.

3.4 East Asia

For East Asian civilization, the most important country belonging to it is China. In China the Neolithic began about 9500 BCE (see [18]). The first large Chinese state was the Shang Empire, which was founded about 1500 BCE (the extent in time and territory of the previous Hsia empire is uncertain). In the history of ancient China there are no more similarly significant dates. Since the end of the Shang empire, disintegration and integration phases follow each other rather unevenly. If we assume that East Asian civilization follows the long-term develop-
ment pattern of the Middle Eastern civilization then we may expect the beginning of the "East Asian Age of Expansion" in 2500 CE. This is a rather far-off date, but the starting dates used in this calculation are not very certain and the previous assumption also may prove false. But it is certain that China was not a colonising power throughout its history. Just two examples:

- China never colonised Siberia (in spite of its closeness)
- When the expeditions organised by Cheng Ho (in the first half of the 15th century CE) created the possibility of China becoming the greatest naval and trading power of the Indian Ocean, the Ming emperors refused this and introduced a strict isolationist policy.

Japan is seemingly a counter-example, at least its very active role in the 20th century may suggest this. But Japan didn't intend to colonise territories belonging to European civilization; its clashes with the European great powers followed after those great powers had colonised Asian territories (Manchuria, Philippines, Singapore etc.).

3.5 Black Africa

In the case of the Black African civilization, the earliest Neolithic villages and the earliest states appeared in the Nile valley, not too far from Egypt. But this is probably a product of the strong influence of the nearby Middle Eastern civilization centre, not of an indigenous development. It is better to examine West and South Africa.

The earliest neolithic (agricultural) sites in the southern part of West Africa are dated about 4500 BCE, but pastoralism in the western Sahara (much more humid in the Neolithic than now) began earlier (about 6000 BCE, cattle domestication). The earliest states in West and South Africa (Ghana, Zimbabwe?) appeared about 600 CE. If we assume that the long-term development of the African civilization follows the pattern of the Middle Eastern civilization, then the starting dates of the "African Ages" are the following: 6000 BCE, 600 CE, 3900 CE, i.e. an "African Age of Expansion" can be expected only in the far future.

3.6 Central Asia

For Central Asian nomad civilization, the Neolithic began with the domestication of the horse. This happened about 5500 BCE in the southern steppe of Eastern Europe, but it reached Mongolia at a much later time, probably about 3000 BCE. As we have already seen, Asian nomads were the most important constituents of this civilization (at
least in historical times). The existence of the first large Hsiung-nu state (tribal alliance?) was noted by Chinese chroniclers about 200 BCE.

The aggressiveness of these early nomad states didn't mean that they were colonisers: they just wanted to collect tribute or sometimes wanted to enforce the continuation of an advantageous trade. If a sedentary state met them with force, then they tried to crush it but when they succeeded, they didn't take over the administration of the area (see [5]).

This method was changed only when Genghis Khan created his great empire (about 1200 CE) with a sedentary capital (Karakorum) and with an administrative organisation. From this point, the Mongols were able to take over the government of sedentary states (or create their own sedentary states) but in this way they lost their nomadic advantages and sooner or later their dynasties (or even their states) disappeared.

Their starting dates are the following: 3000 BCE, 200 BCE, 1200 CE. In spite of the significant differences between the Middle Eastern and the Central Asian civilizations, the names used in the case of the Middle Eastern civilization (Neolithic, Antiquity, "Age of Expansion") fit well in this case. The extrapolation of this sequence yields 1900 CE as the next significant date.

The Central Asian nomads did nothing important at that time (they were too few and too weak already), and experienced their last age -- the "Age of Final Decline" which will lead to their disappearance. The parallelism of the Middle Eastern and the Central Asian civilizations might suggest that the next great "Middle Eastern Age" will be an "Age of Final Decline" too. But it is not certain; the differences are plentiful.

The next great "Middle Eastern Age" might be quite different (e.g. one may imagine a true "Middle Eastern Medieval Age").
3.7 Summary

The great historical ages of the major civilizations are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Civilization</th>
<th>1st age</th>
<th>2nd age</th>
<th>3rd age</th>
<th>4th age</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Antiquity, from 1500 BCE</td>
<td>Medium Age, from 500 CE</td>
<td>Modern Age, from 1500 CE</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(from 6000 BCE?)</td>
<td>(from 1800 BCE?)</td>
<td>(from 400 CE?)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle Eastern</td>
<td>Neolithic, from 9500 BCE</td>
<td>Antiquity, from 2000 BCE</td>
<td>Age of Expansion from 700 CE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>Neolithic, from 5000 BCE</td>
<td>Antiquity, from 300 BCE</td>
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<td>Antiquity, from 1500 BCE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Central Asian</td>
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<td>Antiquity, from 200 BCE</td>
<td>Age of Expansion from 1200 CE</td>
<td>Age of Final Decline, from 1900 CE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Medium-term processes

Here again, better to begin with European civilization, because it can be more apparent what is the event that will initiate the "New Medieval Age" predicted in the previous section. It is a well known feature of Europe's Modern Age history that there is roughly a hundred-year cycle of "world wars" (great power wars involving the majority of the European great powers). This was known already in the 19th century (see 1), but there was no general agreement about which were "world wars." This cycle was (seemingly) not connected with other historical phenomena, therefore it was considered as a hypothesis only. The theory was obviously successful (WWI came exactly as one could expect and from hindsight we know that "WWII was only a continuation of WWI"). In the last two decades, this theory has been explored:

- The data necessary to describe every war in comparable terms
was identified (severity, extent etc.) and collected about each war of the European Modern Age (see [19]).

- The data about the strengths of the great navies was collected (see [20, [21]) and it was recognised that the relative capability of these navies shows a concentration/deconcentration pattern (sometimes one great power owns more than 50% of the total naval capability of the great powers).
- It was shown that throughout the whole Modern Age, there are long economic cycles (the Kondratieff cycles, named after N. Kondratieff, who first identified such cycles but only in a shorter historical interval) with a roughly 50 years period, each period consisting of an "upswing" and a "downswing" phase. It was shown that the severity of the "great power wars" (number of battle fatalities in a given interval) strongly correlates with these economic cycles (see [22]).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Sources: [19] - war severity data, war classification. [22] - Kondratieff cycle timing. [21] - significant naval power concentration timing.</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time intervals</td>
<td>Total war severity (thousands of battle deaths) of great power wars in 50 years intervals and the number of each war (in which at least one great power fought on each side in these intervals)</td>
<td>Time intervals of the significant naval power concentration (more than 50% share of one country of the total great power naval capabilities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1501-1550: 397</td>
<td>1501-1550 (U): 161</td>
<td>1502-1544 (Portugal)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1509-1528 (D): 60</td>
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<td>1529-1538 (D): 277</td>
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<td>1551-1600: 481</td>
<td>1551-1600 (D): 100</td>
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<td>1751-1800: 1080</td>
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<td>1751-1800 (D): 1080</td>
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<td>1801-1850: 452</td>
<td>1801-1850 (D): 452</td>
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<td>1851-1900: 34</td>
<td>1851-1900 (D): 34</td>
<td>1851-1900 (D): 34</td>
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https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol54/iss54/5
These results are summarised in Table 2.

In spite of all these results, the most basic question as to a recognisable cycle of great European wars with the period of 100 years is still unanswered. Some authors think that the cycle of the "world wars" has the period of 150 years. They argue (see [22]) that the three highest peaks in war severity data (in [19]) occur at the Thirty Years War (1618-48), at the Napoleonic Wars (1803-15) and at WWII (1939-45). This agrees with the traditional historical narratives, that these wars (and the concluding peace agreements) are usually considered as major turning points of European history.

Others argue that the history of the Modern Age should be considered as a succession of "hegemonic powers," see [23]. These hegemonic powers are those states which obtain a more than 50% share of the total naval capability (see [20] and Table 2). It is usually assumed that these naval capability concentrations are the results of great power wars, i.e. the most important great power wars are those which precede the occurrence of these concentrations (see [21]). This is a rather problematic argumentation; e.g., according to this concept, the Thirty Years War was not an important war. In recent studies (see [24]) it was shown that these hegemons are primarily "trading hegemons," not "military hegemons."

According to this new concept, in the downswing phase of every Kondratieff cycle, certain innovations (organisational, commercial, and technical) appear. The future hegemon pioneers the utilisation of these innovations and obtains a large share in world trade during the next upswing phase. This extensive trade makes it possible and worthwhile to create a large merchant fleet and to protect this fleet with a large navy. This causal chain agrees well with the historical narratives. It is also characteristic that the "hegemons" are not the main participants of the great wars, but as "fortuitous outsiders," they can increase their wealth enormously during the wars by selling war materials. Their economic advantages are increased but not created by the great wars.

This "hegemonic" description resembles somewhat that description of Antiquity in which the history of the Mediterranean is discussed as a succession of thalassocracies (Minoans, Mycenaeans, Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Byzantines). This is a much criticised concept (see [25]) but in spite of these criticisms, it has been popular since Antiquity. It is an interesting analogy that the first thalassocracies / hegemons (such as Minoans or the Portuguese) are rather small and weak (a typical counter-argument in the mentioned criticisms), but their
successors are gradually stronger and at the end, real "superpowers" (Roman Empire, British Empire) appear.

The author thinks that the best way to explain the war severity data distribution listed in Table 2 is to assume the existence of two factors. The first is economic (as discussed in [22]) and increases the severity of the great power wars in the upswing phases of the Kondratieff cycles. The second factor is not yet identified, but it is well synchronised with the calendar centuries. It increases the severities of great-power wars in the first half of every century and decreases the severities in the second halves of the centuries. The intensity of this "second factor" is gradually increasing; it was quite ineffective in the 16th century but very effective in the 20th century (see Table 2). This "second factor" might be connected to the "hegemonic cycle" but the causal link is not obvious.

Using this model, one may expect the outbreak of the next "world war" of European history near the end of the next Kondratieff upswing phase, approximately between 2015 and 2025. Right now this looks like an improbable prediction because today there is only one superpower, and any attack against it seems to be hopeless. But we must take into consideration the following:

- A sudden collapse of the USA (similar to the collapse of the Soviet Union) is improbable, but its relative strength is gradually declining
- Two previous world wars were preceded by the "sudden rise" of the attacking great power (France from 1792 to 1802 and Germany from 1930 to 1940)

As it was mentioned, there is no generally agreed answer to the question "which were the most important great power wars of the Modern Age?" But most authors agree that the last three "world wars" were the followings:

- War of the Spanish Succession and the (second) Great Northern War (1701-14, 1700-21)
- Napoleonic Wars (1803-15)
- WWI and WWII (1914-18, 1939-45)

The Great Northern War is sometimes ignored, but in fact it was an "auxiliary war" of the Spanish Succession (somewhat similarly to the WWII when the "German" and "Japanese" wars went on rather independently). After the peace of Utrecht, some belligerents (Prussia, Denmark etc.) of the latter war joined the former one to increase their territorial gains. There was a common feature of these "world wars:" a large invading army entered Russia and after a long forward push, it
was crushed by the Russians. These catastrophes were decisive events, therefore we may expect that Russia will be an important participant of the next world war, too. It indicates that in the beginning of the 21st century the "suddenly rising great power" will be Russia. This is again a surprising prediction but the followings also show that it is a probable development:

- Such a sudden rise is not unprecedented in Russian history (compare the status of the Soviet Union in 1922 and in 1945)
- Russia still has many key features necessary for a superpower (large territory, large population, large industrial base with high-tech capabilities, etc.). The Russian GDP fell significantly when the Soviet Union collapsed, but it is increasing since 1997 although unevenly. The active participation of Russia in the international space program shows that the key parts of its high-tech industries are functioning well.
- Russia still owns and maintains the nuclear arsenal inherited from the Soviet times; the build-up of a comparable arsenal by any other great power in the next 20 years is very improbable

The great military successes in the previous world wars probably created the impression in many Russian strategists that they are invincible in a defensive war. This is not necessarily true, because in earlier times, there was at least one important counter-example: the successes of the Mongol armies. If a modern military genius could combine the firepower and short-distance speed of modern armies with the mobility and self-sufficiency of nomad armies, then he could win, even against Russia. But such a development is very improbable in the near future; therefore, Russian leaders might be too easily tempted into a war. They might not win it, but certainly would not suffer an annihilating defeat. The real danger comes not from this, but from the opposite possibility. If an advancing Russian army reaches the borders of a "nuclear power" (this might be even Pakistan), then that power might decide to use its nuclear weapons. From this point, the war might escalate very quickly into a total nuclear exchange, involving all the "nuclear powers" and their allies, too.

Because the occurrence of the next world war in the predicted interval would be a great success of social theory, it would also be the greatest catastrophe for mankind, and we must try to prevent it. Typical suggestions (see [24], [26]) for prevention would be to increase the importance and power (including military power) of various international organisations, especially the UN. This should lead to the formation of a
"world state" that controls most nuclear weapons (i.e. has its own army) and which is governed democratically by some top-level council of the UN (probably not the present Security Council, which is frequently paralysed by vetoes).

Unfortunately the formation of such a world state in the near future is certainly impossible. The modern nation-state (with "sovereignty" among its most cherished values) will not subjugate its military forces (especially if they have nuclear weapons) to any international organisation. But there is another possibility: from the analysis of the long-term processes of European history, we know that the "New Medieval Age" will start soon and the various European states/regions will be rather isolated and self-sufficient in that age. If the great powers could deliberately create such a "localized" world, then there wouldn't be a next world war. "Localization" principles are well known in international politics, like the famous "Pancha Shila" (mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, no intervention in the internal affairs of other states etc.).

Such actions would be quite consistent with a certain type of great power politics: isolationism has a long tradition in many countries. The current "interventionist" politics of the USA and some European great powers is very unfortunate, especially in regions near Russia. Creating new military bases near the Russian borders are aggressive moves even if it is done in the name of "peace."

In the case of non-European civilizations, there is no such commonly known "historical pattern" like the periodical world wars of the European history, but there is one common feature in every great civilization: the rise and fall of empires. According to A. Toynbee, before the final decline of any civilization, a "universal empire" is created which lasts for approximately 400 years. According to the concept presented here, the "final decline" of most civilizations will happen only in the far future (if it will happen at all), but it is quite possible that the "typical" lifetimes of great empires fall into the 300-500 year intervals. Further analysis within the limits of this article is not possible, but one may find relevant informations about the spatial and temporal extent of the great empires in [27], [28], [29], [30].

5. Short-term processes

Here again, the best choice is to begin with European civilization. The most salient repetitive events of European history in the second half of the 20th century are the crises of the East-central European countries:
1956: violent revolt and Soviet intervention in Hungary
1968: non-violent revolt and Warsaw Pact intervention in Czechoslovakia
1981: non-violent revolt and coup d'etat in Poland
1991-95: civil/secession war in Yugoslavia.

One may think that these crises were only the manifestations of the "general crisis of communism," but this interpretation is wrong. The most serious event (the Yugoslavian war) occurred after the fall of European communism and Yugoslavia was the "least communist" and most independent among the East-central European countries. If we try to extrapolate backward from the above sequence, we get the following dates: 1944, 1932, 1920, 1908. In fact, there were serious crises in the region at these dates (or near to these): 1944 - Warsaw uprising, 1934 - coup d'etats in Bulgaria, Estonia and Latvia, 1919 - Romanian-Hungarian war.

The Balkan wars (1912-13) were somewhat "out of phase," but this points to the real cause of the crises: the East-central European region (in its modern form) was created after the WWI rather unnaturally (ethnic boundaries were not respected). The region has been plagued with ethnic problems since then. Naturally these problems manifest themselves regularly in the form of violent crises. We may expect another crisis in the 2001-5 interval. The exact nature of this coming crisis is not yet obvious. Right now it would be easy to point to Kosovo and to predict an Albanian-Serbian war, but easy solutions are not always the right solutions. For example, in an early description of this theory, the author predicted that the crisis in the early 1990s would occur in Romania (see [31]). This was not a bad guess (the fall of the Romanian dictatorship at the end of 1989 was a violent event), but now we know that the real crisis of the decade was the Yugoslavian war.

The severity of an ethnic crisis is probably proportional with the size of the ethnic minority involved. There is a large (almost two million) Hungarian minority in Romania, and the outbreak of a grave conflict is probable, although not necessarily in the near future. If Kosovo will secede from Serbia, then the Hungarians will be the last significant minority there, and this also may cause a conflict. The largest ethnic minority in the region since the fall of the Soviet Union is Russian. Their presence in Belarus and in the Ukraine is not very disturbing (these peoples are culturally similar to the Russians), but in the Baltic states, they are frequently treated as undesirable aliens. A crisis involv-
ing a Russian minority group (if it occurs in the right time, i.e. between 2015 and 2025) could provide the perfect ignition mechanism for the next world war unless the other great powers will respect the limits of the "Russian sphere of influence". There are no such generally agreed limits today.

It must be noted here that in the earlier centuries of the Modern Age, east-central Europe was rather an "average" region, whereas the really dangerous conflict zones were the divided countries of Western and Southern Europe (the Netherlands, Germany, Italy). If the great powers could agree on the limits of their "spheres of influence" in the region (as in the 19th century), then the "dangerousness" of East-central Europe would decrease significantly.

In political science, the conflict zones similar to East-central Europe are described as "shatterbelts" (see [32], [33]). According to [33] in the second half of the 20th century the shatterbelts are the following: Middle East, East Asia, South-east Asia, South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle America (i.e. Central America and the Caribbean islands). East-central Europe is not considered a shatterbelt because the Russian occupation of the region putatively stabilised it. As we have seen, even this occupation didn't eliminate the conflicts, it only dampened them. Now that the region is "free" again, we have good reasons to consider it a shatterbelt (there is serious internal instability and great power rivalry in it). The previous list contains only the "great shatterbelts;" there are some zones which could be described as "small shatterbelts" (e.g. Northern Ireland), but because of their relative unimportance, these are ignored. The above list is over-generalising, too, because in most cases, the mentioned (sometimes very big) geographic regions are not the shatterbelts, whereas some smaller subregions are. Such subregions can be identified by various methods, but a detailed analysis would exceed the limits of this article.

One may ask whether there are such periodical crisis sequences in the other shatterbelts as in the east-central European one. The answer is not easy; the crises are so numerous in these regions that almost arbitrary "crisis series" can be created. But the following examples (in which the elements of the series are somewhat similar events) probably indicate that such cycles exist:

- Arab-Israeli wars: 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, 1982, 1991 (in the latter war, Israel participated only passively, but this happened only because of the very active presence of the USA)
- Chad: 1965-67 (anti-government revolts), 1971 (strikes, govern-
ment crisis), 1975 (coup d'etat), 1980-81 (civil war, Libyan intervention), 1986 (civil war, driving out the Libyans), 1990 (coup d'etat)


The above lists only indicate the probability of the hypothesis of "periodical crises" but certainly don't prove it. But if the predicted crisis in the 2004-8 interval will occur in East-central Europe, then at least in this region the hypothesis can be considered as proven.

Note: an unabridged version of this article is available on the Internet at www.geocities.com/csaba56/expolhis.html.

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