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Universal Empires: Pathos and Engineering

David Wilkinson
University of California, Los Angeles

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Universal empire is one of two political equilibrium phases of world systems/civilizations. By comparison to states systems, universal empires are peaceable, repressive, stagnant—and short-lived. Why are they fragile? How do they break up? How might they become more stable?

Reprise. This is the seventh in a series of papers exploring the relationship of civilizations theory to world politics. The first paper in the series (Wilkinson, 1982) defined “a civilization” using criteria of level-and-connectedness rather than the more customary criteria of level-and-uniformity. Screening a list of some seventy candidates yielded a list of fourteen entities which appeared to be societies at a civilized level (criteria: cities, record-keeping, economic surplus, non-producing classes etc.) which were also connected world systems—militarily closed, geotechnologically isolated social-transactional networks with an autonomous political history during which they did not take or need not have taken much account of the possibility of conquest, invasion, attack—or alliance and cooperation—from any outsiders, although the members of each such system did recurrently conquer, invade, attack, ally with, command, rule, legislate, cooperate with, and conflict significantly and effectively only with one another.

Table 1 gives the resulting roster of civilizations/world systems. Figure 1 is a chronogram showing the lifespans and relative (Mercator) locations of the civilizations in the roster.

The most striking effect of the new definition on accustomed lists of civilizations was that such accustomed entities as Classical/Hellenic/Greco-Roman Civilization, Hittite Civilization, Arabian/Magian/Syriac/Iranic/Islamic Civilization(s), Orthodox Christian Civilization, Russian Civilization, and even our own familiar Western Civilization, were reclassified either as episodes of or as regions within a previously unrecognized social-network entity, by my definition both a civilized society and a world system,
hence a single civilization. This civilization I have labeled Central Civilization (Wilkinson, 1987).

Central Civilization was created in the Middle East during the 2nd millennium B.C. by an atypical encounter between two pre-existing civilizations. Civilizations may coexist, collide, break apart or fuse; when they have fused, they have typically done so by an asymmetric, inegalitarian engulfment of one by the other. But the linking of the previously separate Egyptian and Mesopotamian Civilizations through Syria was an atypical, relatively symmetric and egalitarian “coupling” which created a new joint network-entity rather than annexing one network as a part of the other entrained to its process time. The new Central network, in an unbroken existence and process since then, has been atypical in another way: it has expanded, slowly by the reckoning of national and state turnover times, but quite rapidly by comparison to other civilizations, and in that expansion has engulfed all the other civilizational networks with which it once coexisted and later collided. Now expanded to global scale, Central Civilizations constitutes the single contemporary instance of the species “civilization” (Wilkinson, 1982, 1987).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Civilization</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Terminus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mesopotamian</td>
<td>before 300 BC — c. 1500 BC</td>
<td>Coupled with Egyptian to form Central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Egyptian</td>
<td>before 3100 BC — c. 1500 BC</td>
<td>Coupled with Mesopotamian to form Central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Aegean</td>
<td>c. 2700 BC — c. 560 BC</td>
<td>Engulfed by Central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Indic</td>
<td>c. 2300 BC — c. AD 1000</td>
<td>Engulfed by Central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Irish</td>
<td>c. AD 450 — c. 1050</td>
<td>Engulfed by Central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Mexican</td>
<td>before 1100 BC — c. AD 1520</td>
<td>Engulfed by Central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Peruvian</td>
<td>before c. 200 BC — c. AD 1530</td>
<td>Engulfed by Central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Chibchan</td>
<td>? — c. AD 1530</td>
<td>Engulfed by Central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Indonesian</td>
<td>before AD 700 — c. 1550</td>
<td>Engulfed by Central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. West African</td>
<td>c. AD 350 — c. 1590</td>
<td>Engulfed by Central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Mississippian</td>
<td>c. AD 700 — c. 1700</td>
<td>Destroyed (Pestilence?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Far Eastern</td>
<td>before 1500 BC — c. AD 1850</td>
<td>Engulfed by Central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Japanese</td>
<td>c. AD 650 — c. AD 1850</td>
<td>Engulfed by Central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Central</td>
<td>c. 1500 BC — Present</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Civilizations considered in their political aspect (and as world systems, in their world-political aspect) ordinarily have one or the other of two political structures: the *states system* (= state system = multi-state system = system of many independent states) and the *universal empire* (= universal state = world state = one-state system). Figure 2 is the chronogram from Figure 1, complicated by symbolization of the states-system periods, epochs of universal empire, and currently unclassifiable eras, of each civilization.
FIGURE 2
ALTERNATIONS BETWEEN STATES SYSTEMS AND UNIVERSAL EMPIRES

Each vertical bar in this chronogram represents a civilization: see Figure 1.

The areas marked are universal empires.
The areas marked are states-systems.
The areas marked and are doubtful.

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### TABLE 2
The Universal Empires of the Fourteen Civilizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Civilization</th>
<th>Empire</th>
<th>Span</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mesopotamian</td>
<td>a. Akkadian</td>
<td>c. 2350 — c. 2230 BC</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Third Dynasty</td>
<td>c. 2050 — c. 1960 BC</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of Ur</td>
<td>c. 1728 — c. 1686 BC</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Egyptian</td>
<td>a. Old Kingdom</td>
<td>c. 2850 — c. 2180 BC</td>
<td>670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Middle Kingdom</td>
<td>c. 1991 — c. 1786 BC</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. New Kingdom</td>
<td>c. 1570 — c. 1525 BC</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Aegean</td>
<td>a. Minoan</td>
<td>c. 1570 — c. 1425 BC</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Indic</td>
<td>a. Maurya</td>
<td>c. 262 — c. 231 BC</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Irish</td>
<td>None?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Mexican</td>
<td>a. Aztec</td>
<td>c. AD 1496 — 1519</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Peruvian</td>
<td>a. Inca</td>
<td>c. 1470 — 1533</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Chibchan</td>
<td>None?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Indonesian</td>
<td>a. Srivijaya</td>
<td>c. AD 695 — late 13th century</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Madjapahit</td>
<td>AD 1293 — 1389</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. West African</td>
<td>a. Ghana</td>
<td>c. AD 950</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Mali</td>
<td>c. AD 1330</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Songhai</td>
<td>c. AD 1500</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Mississippian</td>
<td>None?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Far Eastern</td>
<td>a. Ch'in-Han</td>
<td>221 BC — AD 184</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Sui-Tang</td>
<td>AD 589 — 750</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Mogul-Ming-Manchu</td>
<td>AD 1279 — 1850</td>
<td>571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Hideyoshi-Tokugawa</td>
<td>AD 1590 — 1868</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Near Eastern Phase</td>
<td>b. Persian-Macedonian</td>
<td>525 — 316</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graco-Roman Phase</td>
<td>c. Roman</td>
<td>20 BC — AD 235</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

About twenty-three universal empires and about twenty-eight states systems may be identified. The universal empires of the fourteen civilizations are listed in Table 2. Universal empires seem on the whole to be shorter-lived than states systems (Wilkinson, 1983).

An examination of the kinematics of world systems showed that, of six kinematic theories examined, Toynbee's revised theory (1961: 197-209, 304) best fits the data. Universal empires recur in civilizations' histories, but are more prominent in later
epochs; once established, they are unstable, and ordinarily destroyed, replaced by states systems; once destroyed, they can be re-established by the reunion of the states system, and they usually are (Wilkinson, 1986).

The conditions favoring and favored by states systems (Wilkinson, 1985) imply the analogous conditions for universal empires. A compact territory whose size and terrain permit fast transit with extant technology of movement, having a closed frontier and relatively sedentary population, should be easier to bring and keep under imperial rule than one lacking some or all these features. Cultural homogeneity, expensive sophisticated weaponry, and dominant offensive military systems all favor unity (Wright, 1965, 797n96, 1529; Quester, 1977, 208; Quigley, 1983, 38-40, 50-53, 56-59; Wilkinson, 1985). Universal states tend to homogenize their populations, to enforce peace, to repress freedom, and to stifle innovation (Wesson, 1967, 26, 36, 46; Wilkinson, 1985).

Pathos. Universal empires have on the whole been shorter-lived than states systems (Wilkinson, 1983). Furthermore, the average member of the set of universal empires seems to deviate farther from the ideal type than the average member of the set of states systems deviates from its ideal: control from the center is never quite fully established. This suggests the desirability of studying the pathos, the characteristic morbidity, of universal empire, by inspecting the mortalities of such empires. What are the conditions leading to the overthrow and downfall of universal empires and their replacement by systems of independent states? Let us approach this question by distinguishing the “fall” that concerns us from others, and by searching for pattern in those falls.

Falls, falls and falls. We are here concerned only with the fall of a universal empire, by which is meant the lasting loss of that empire’s universality, the displacement of a fundamentally unitary polity by a condition in which two or more significant independent centers of power compete at such a distance as to establish their own spheres of influence, territorialities, and/or capitals, with frontiers, buffers, disorder and/or condominium between.

The fall of a universal empire is consequently not identical to, and does not always nor necessarily entail, the fall of the empire (the loss of all or nearly all its non-metropolitan territories), the fall of the state (the loss of the metropole’s independence), the fall
of the nation (an end to the history of the ruling people as a self-conscious prime collectivity), nor the dynasty, the civilization, the constitution, the capital city, the regime, the elite, the ruler. All may in fact accompany the fall of the universal empire, as may have happened to the Incas; other falls may follow the first at a respectable distance, as with Rome, but with no particular implication that the first fall renders the rest inevitable, only perhaps more probable.

As we shall be concerned with describing the falls of universal empires, other associated falls are mentioned only incidentally, as they coincide with these and partly share the same causality. Those falls that occurred when intruders from an external civilization conquered the universal state (Aztec and Inca empires) or forced it to take a role in their states system (Manchu and Tokugawa empires) or in a new enlarged states system (New Kingdom Egypt) we shall set aside, on the ground that these events may have no interesting endogenous explanation: to remain universal, the empire would have had to subjugate the entire intruding civilization, or to fend off the intruders under circumstances that prevented coalescence of the civilizations (Japanese, Central and Indonesian civilizations all fended off Mongol, and West African civilization Moroccan, intrusions, though the intrusion into Japan stressed the Taiho UE and that into West Africa disrupted the Songhai UE).

Seventeen cases remain in which a universal empire collapsed for reasons other than engulfment of its civilization by another: in Mesopotamian civilization, Akkad, Ur, Babylon; in Egypt, the Old and Middle Kingdoms; in Aegean civilization, the Minoan empire; in Indic civilization, the Maurya empire; in Indonesian civilization, Srivijaya and Madjapahit; in West African civilization, Ghana, Mali, Songhai; in Far Eastern civilization, the T'ang; in Japanese civilization, the Taiho; in Central civilization, the Neo-Assyrian, Macedonian and Roman empires. What have the falls of these universal empires in common?

Themes of ruin. Collapses of universal empires, and consequent re-emergences of states systems, display a variety of motifs. Satraps usurp; provinces rebel; barbarians invade; border states arise; sects partition; classes struggle; enemies combine; troubles multiply. These themes recur with different frequencies, but none seems universal.
Satraps usurp: the centrally appointed civil or military governors of provinces acquire their own forces, wealth, lineages and clienteles, and in due course ignore or resist the edicts of the capital (Ur, Babylon, Old Kingdom Egypt, Madjapahit, Songhai, Han, T’ang, Taiho, Assyria, Macedon, Rome). Provinces rebel: imperial territories, once independent, remember that past and rise up to reclaim it (Akkad, Ur, Babylon, Middle Kingdom Egypt, Mali, T’ang, Assyria, Macedon, Rome). Barbarians invade: uncontrolled, unsettled peoples near or at the frontier, who may once have traded their goods or sold their labor to the UE, now infiltrate, raid, loot, and at last conquer and rule pieces of it (Akkad, Ur, Babylon, Middle Kingdom Egypt, Ghana, Mali, T’ang, Assyria, Rome).

Border states arise: former barbarians set up imitative but independent “reaction states” beyond the UE’s sphere of control, extending the limits of the civilization even as they restore to it a multistate structure of authority (Babylon, Maurya, Srivijaya, Madjapahit, Ghana, T’ang, Assyria, Rome). Sects partition: religious groups establish new and insubordinate structures of authority, territorially bounded, within the body of the empire; these become the bases for new, divisive or secessionist or border states (Maurya, Madjapahit, Ghana, Songhai, Han, Taiho, Rome). Classes struggle: the metropole is divided, and its ability to hold down the provinces reduced, when the metropolitan population rebels against the costs of empire (Ur); or the imperial bureaucracy evolves from a tool of imperial control into an office-owning, self-serving elite (Old Kingdom Egypt); or armies develop collective identities, consciousness and ambitions that render them mutinous and unserviceable from the point of view of the state (Rome).

Enemies combine: rebelling provinces, usurping warlords, invading barbarians, nascent borderers, disputatious sects and classes join hands to down their common enemy, the metropolitan state of the universal empire (Ur, Babylon, Songhai, Taiho, Assyria, Macedon).

Troubles multiply: rebellion encourages rebellion, secession secession; failure to win quick decisive victory against one enemy inspires others to attack; preoccupation with attacks at one frontier of the empire drains others of the forces that once deterred such attacks; crises become simultaneous, and “ally” implicitly
with each other (Akkad, Ur, Babylon, Old Kingdom Egypt, Middle Kingdom Egypt, Crete, Mauryas, Madjapahit, Mali, Songhai, Han, T'ang, Taiho, Assyria, Macedon, Rome).

One theme does however appear so often that we may reasonably hypothesize that it is in fact universal. It seems that the maintenance of a universal empire continually requires an extraordinary level of political performance from a monarchic leader, and that such a level of performance cannot be sustained over an indefinite period: the monarchy eventually fails to perform.

*The fundamental theme of monarchic failure.* Most political structures have some real, functioning monarchic office or component—King, Emperor, President, Prime Minister, Maximum Leader, General Secretary—whatever their nominal constitution. The monarchic element is however remarkably prominent or exaggerated during the foundation of universal empires, and during their successful maintenance as well: at such times their histories are inseparable, and nearly indistinguishable, from monarchic biographies. And monarchic crisis is very characteristic of the fall of universal empire. The succession may be so fast that no leader is ever secure enough in control of the metropole to have a long enough tenure to solve the problems of the provinces (Akkad, Mauryas, Mali, Songhai, Assyria, Rome), or so slow that the leader outlives his ability to rule (Old Kingdom Egypt). It may be so irregular that several dynastic lineages establish themselves in different territories and partition the empire (Middle Kingdom Egypt, Mauryas, Madjapahit, Taiho, Assyria, Macedon, Rome) or exhaust its ability to control its provinces in their struggles to control the metropole (Mali, Songhai, Han, T'ang, Assyria, Rome), or again so regular that properly selected incompetents occupy the imperial office and prevent it from functioning (Han, T'ang, Taiho, Macedon). The universal empire may indeed be so personal a work of art that it does not long survive its founder (Babylon, Maurya, Madjapahit, Macedon). Whatever the details, the failure of a universal empire to endure is so often associated with, and attributed to, a failure of its monarchy to keep its performance up to an exceedingly high standard to allow us to speculate that the personality, performance and institution of the monarch is the weak link of the UE.

Such a speculation might either be treated as a hypothesis, and
tested, or as a conclusion, and applied. To treat it as a hypothesis would direct us to examine those cases of UE collapse where a monarchic failure is not obtrusively evident (Ur, Crete, Srivijaya, Ghana) and search for evidence of one or another characteristic type of such failure. To treat it as a conclusion might lead us from historical to practical speculation.

*Engineering.* As the contemporary global civilization is neither in nor predictably approaching a universal empire, reflections on UE political engineering are indeed speculations. They need not be entirely ungrounded, however. Some UEs have lasted for many generations; some universal emperors and imperial philosophers, especially those from Far Eastern, Japanese and Central civilizations, have left more or less detailed traces of how they treated universal empires as problems of practical, as well as speculative, political design.

Given the sources of past troubles, a universal empire designed for durability would surely spend its political design energies consciously monitoring the permeability of and movements across its frontiers, the division of power between its provinces and metropole, the condition of class and sect and national consciousness throughout its territories and institutions, as well as such more readily measured indicators as population growth, food production and storage, distribution of wealth, etc. The Roman, Han, T'ang and Taiho empires seem to have had better constitutional, bureaucratic and/or traditional means of carrying out these tasks than others. Their experience and activity might serve as starting points for designers of stable UEs.

But the most challenging UE design problem is necessarily the monarchy. The default, "normal," "natural" resolution of the monarchy issue in a UE seems to be arbitrary power + life tenure + succession either through male lineage or by coup and assassination. But arbitrary power sooner or later induces bizarre, perverse, impolite and impolitic behavior on the part of the Emperor. Life tenure promises incompetent finales, often quite protracted, and provokes assassination. Lineage succession rapidly produces minors as monarchs, regencies, crown-prince syndrome, incompetent successors, failure of issue (with remote and disputed succession), and manipulative intrigues (to control the person of the monarch) among regents, attendants, spouses, lovers, harems, relatives who cannot succeed, relatives who can,
in-laws, ministers, etc. Hereditary life tyranny seems unlikely to
be a monarchic form that will stabilize a UE; and dictatorship
tempered by assassination cannot take a very long view.

Where the ruling lineage becomes a merely reigning lineage,
the monarchy issue simply devolves upon the regents, chief
ministers, guardians, etc., since their succession must similarly be
arranged. The Taiho regime perhaps managed this best, but not
by any clear structure or principle. Some modern states with
relatively long, orderly and successful executive successions may
offer better exemplars. Most frequently such states have heredit-
ary reigning lineages, elected parliaments, overt and pluralistic
party systems, and powerful but short-term prime ministers. Re-
publics with no hereditary lineage, with the monarchic compo-
nent of the state in the hands of powerful elected fixed-term
presidents, or of powerful and (sometimes) recallable leaders of
single ruling parties supervising removable shorter-service prime
ministers, are less tested and probably less satisfactory institu-
tional resolutions of the monarchy issue. If a future UE were to
outlast the Taiho, it would probably have a political structure of
“republican monarchy,” with or without a hereditary-lineage
component.

UEs are characteristically formed by one regional state in a
states system conquering the rest, and display the peculiarities not
just of their civilization but of their founding state. China, India,
the Soviet Union and the United States are contemporary states
which already encompass territories and populations comparable
to those of the largest UEs of the past. The monarchic element of
their respective constitutions (meaning here the actual constitu-
tion, in the Aristotelian sense, and not a formal document) has
produced reasonably orderly successions for periods ranging
from less than a generation (China) to more than two centuries
(U.S.) It is unlikely that any historian would aver that the succe-
sion process in any of the four countries has produced uniformly
excellent “monarchs”; on the other hand, over the duration of
their orderly successions, large and heterogeneous territories and
populations have been held together despite secessionist tenden-
cies and movements. Of the four, only Russia and America cur-
cently possess both the capabilities needed, and the universalistic
ideologies inclined, to operate foreign policies of global scope,
whereby they extend their influence throughout Central Civiliza-
The current states system is not unconditionally stable and viable; most of its predecessors have in due course been united by one of their members, usually by a great power whose systemwide operations have been in evidence for several generations. It is proper to ask whether either superpower would, as metropole, be able to run a durable global UE, and how such empires, assuming them to be durable, might be expected to differ.

The Soviet state is younger, less well established, but has survived more violent civil war and external attack; though its monarchic succession system is less institutionalized, and its economy less successful in producing surplus for political use, the Soviet state is neither unstable nor impoverished by comparison to most states in the current system. Both America and Russia have faced the issue of "republican monarchy": both have rejected and avoided hereditary lineages, at the cost of making most successions unpredictable; the U.S. has thus far been more successful in finding workable substitutes for life tenure and arbitrary monarchic power, without in the process having also been able to assure consistently excellent performance. Both major current candidates for founder state do seem to have the institutional resources from which a relatively durable UE could be forged.

Assuming that either state were to establish a rather durable universal empire, of say a century's span: have we any basis for predicting the peculiarities of either? No; but the UEs of the past, the internal structure of each state, and the structures of their respective current alliances, hegemonies, spheres of influence, etc., provide at least a basis for speculation. National, religious and class differences and consciousness should be assumed to persist; there will be a "metropole" and "provinces," and an orderly fluctuating flow of protest and rebellion.

A durable American or Soviet UE could be speculatively constructed in several ways. The least imaginative of these is to visualize the minimum change from their current internal and imperial structures needed to give them global extent. As today, then, we might expect that twenty or thirty large local insurrections against local elites would exist at any given moment. Local military forces would, as now, keep order, with continuing metropole subsidy and occasional large-scale participation by metropolitan troops (an American UE would have larger subsidies, a
Soviet more direct participation). Metropolitan control over provincial elites would be maintained by a combination of direct appointment, command, subsidy, mediation among provincial-elite factions, and providing refuge or assistance to political opponents of ruling provincial elites: a Soviet UE would be more command-oriented and concerned with control over the provincial nomenklatura, an American more subsidy-oriented, with sanctions by reduction of access to metropolitan markets. Both UEs would assert legitimacy based on universal ideologies: an American UE would have a liberal ideology, probably emphasizing the economic components of that ideology (laissez-faire and liberalism), at the expense of its political component (liberty); a Soviet UE would be socialist in ideology, probably emphasizing the ultimate universality of socialist experience rather than the “many roads” of national socialisms. Both UEs would also assert legitimacy based on increased provincial consumption and wealth, with faster accumulation expected, and more fluctuation tolerated, in an American UE; the elites which would take the lion’s share of that increased wealth would be associated more with property-owning in an American, with office-holding in a Soviet UE. Both UEs would also depend for acceptance on a cultural, and especially a technological, “seduction” of the provinces by the metropole; an American UE would more likely attract provincials by opportunities to immigrate and grow rich, a Soviet by opportunities to secure an education and gain status in the provincial elite.

Which state might produce the more lasting UE, with its characteristic features (vices or virtues) of peace, order and stagnation? A Soviet UE might be expected to be better at the UE’s basic task of surviving, effectively (if inefficiently) deterring and suppressing rebellion and secession by maintaining, threatening, and where necessary applying overwhelming conventional military and police force. A Soviet UE would look more like the historic norm; an American would doubtless deviate towards greater disorder—more creativity, more violence, and a shorter lifespan.

There is plenty to doubt in these imaginings; still they are the sorts of imaginings to which the student of civilizations can bring a particular perspective. If it is true that collapses of universal empires, and consequent re-emergences of states systems, are strongly associated with performance crises in the monarchic
sector of the state, with rebellions of regional warlords, satraps and governors, with uprisings of unassimilated subject peoples, and with sectarian and class consciousness, these problems, and responses to them, must surely be features of any discussion of the future of universal empire. (The challenging consolidation of border states beyond some geostrategic boundary, or repeated blows from converging barbarians, belong in such discussions only if and when one expects to see such border states and barbarians again).

And if these things are so, then surely a universal empire designed for durability would be well advised to close its ecumene (or advance its military frontiers whenever a settled population arose outside them); thoroughly homogenize old and continuously reintegrate new ethnicities, sects and classes; divide power federally between provincial and metropolitan bureaucrats; maintain civilian control over the military; and, above all, seek to resolve the continuing crisis of the imperial leadership.

University of California, Los Angeles

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APPENDIX

Endogenously Fallen Universal Empires

1a. Akkad. The fall of the Akkadian UE impends in the reign of Naram-Sin, king of the Four Regions of the world, king of the universe, and God as well. The God Naram-Sin had constantly to fight to keep the universe, and fought all round his frontier: Lebanon, Ebla, Hurrians of the Taurus, Lullubi of Luristan, "Magan" in the south. Naram-Sin was able to claim victory in these encounters, and to pass the throne within his lineage. The fall occurs in or just after the reign of Sharkalisharri, "king of kings," Naram-Sin's successor. His struggle was as constant, but he was slowly driven back toward the metropole. In the northwest, Sharkalisharri had to fight a wave of Semitic Amorite nomad tribesmen from the Syrian desert. The Gutian hill people of the Zagros under Sharlak raided trade and upset irrigation. The Lullu also raided widely; Anubanini their king set up a victory stele. In the east, Inshushinak, vassal governor of Elam, rebelled, claiming Elamite supremacy over the "four regions" and the universe, and raided Mesopotamia to the fringes of the capital. An independent dynasty was established in the subject Sumerian city-state of Erech/Uruk. Sharkalisharri was "forced to turn desperately from one flank to the other, holding off with failing blows the pressure which was at length to crush his kingdom" (Gadd 1971b, 454). The Sargonid succession, perhaps fraternally arranged for Binkalisharri, was broken. Sharkalisharri vanished, to be succeeded by chaos at the center: four kings reigned or claimed to reign in three years. The Guti in due course succeeded to Akkadian primacy, but not to the universal empire. (Gadd 1971b, 454-456; Roux 150-153; Lloyd 138-139; Saggs 52-53).

1b. Ur. In the reign of Ibbi-Sin, subject city-states and provinces fell away, first slowly, then faster. Esnunna withdrew recognition of Ibbi-Sin's overlordship in his second year, Susa in his third, with apparent impunity. In the fifth year, Amorite tribes from the west, raiders of village and caravan, turned the flank of the defensive wall system, began taking fortresses, and cut communications with the still-loyal subject areas. The capital could not be supplied with grain. Fiftyfolding of grain prices was followed by rebellions. The king was unable to avoid delegating authority in Isin and Nippur to a regional governor, Ishbi-Ezza. Larsa fell to Nablanum the Amorite. In the eleventh year Ishbi-Ezza declared himself independent and proceeded to expand his domain at Ibbi-Sin's expense. Elam, Amorites and Subartans invaded, and fought or negotiated with the king, as Ur declined apace. Many Sumerian cities were occupied or destroyed. Elam, Subartu and perhaps others at last breached the walls of Ur, slaughtered the people, sacked, burned and
garrisoned the city and carried Ibbi-Sin away to Iran a captive. (Gadd 1971a, 609-617; Roux 165-169; Lloyd 157; Saggs 57-59).

1c. Babylon. Hammurabi the unifier died; Shamshuiluna succeeded, to continuous trouble. Raiding Kassites from the northeast mountains established a kingdom on the middle Tigris, cutting communications with Assyria, which Adasi led into independence. Elamites supported the Rimsin revolt in Uruk, Isin and Larsa, which, failing, gave way to the Ilumailu revolt in the south, the founding of the Sealand kingdom in Sumer, and a long war that inflicted attrition on Babylon. Eshnunna revolted in the northeast, was subdued, rose again, and was again put down. Amorites attacked from the northwest, then Elam from the east. Babylon's empire was reduced to the country of Akkad; even there revolt occurred. (Gadd 1973, 220-223; Roux 223-225; Lloyd 160; Saggs 74; MacQueen 96-98; King 197-203).

2a. Old Kingdom Egypt. Because of irregular royal successions followed by usurpers' distributing state wealth to placate officials; or because of the exhaustion of royal resources in self-aggrandizing constructions and self-serving mortuary endowments; or because imperial officials became a semi-hereditary class, for whose sons more and more numerous but less and less lucrative positions were created, impoverishing taxpayers and bureaucrats alike and thus paralyzing the administration; or because Ppios II reigned long past his ability to rule: central control over the nomes deteriorated, the titles of the nomarchs rose, strong personalities made their offices hereditary, and the nomarchs at last asserted their independence of the central power. (Kanawati 70-79; Starr 63; Smith 195).

2b. Middle Kingdom Egypt. At the breakup of the XIIth dynasty Egypt was divided between the XIIIth and XIVth (Xois) dynasties. Various Asiatic peoples whose sheikhs were "Princes of the Desert uplands" infiltrated the Delta. Foreign lands rebelled. By the reign of Sobkhotpe IV Avaris was in Hyksos hands. (Starr 66; Hayes 44-54).

3a. Crete. The Minoan thalassocracy remains hypothetical and disputed, but is generally judged to have controlled Cyclades, Anatolian mainland posts, perhaps Athens, Megara and "Minoa" in Sicily by naval, religious, and/or colonial means. Its end is similarly problematic: earthquakes, vulcanism, infiltration, arson, invasion, revolt, depopulation, the rise of Mycenaean power, are variously cited and disputed. (Hagg and Marinatos; Hägg, Marinatos et al.; Mellersh 1967, 127-134; Mellersh 1970, 119-125, 141; Alexiou 50-58; Hood 52-60; Willetts 128-142; Matz 1973a, 164; Matz 1973b, 557-558, 577-581).

4a. Mauryas. Asoka's administration was centralized and personalized rather than bureaucratic. Despite Asoka's propagation of Buddhism, no single national culture or consciousness existed. Long-lived legitimate monarchs of high ability and uniform doctrine would have been needed to stabilize the realm. There was no orderly succession to Asoka. Short weak reigns and early deaths were the rule for the later Mauryas. Three religions—Jainism, Saivism, Buddhism—competed for state favor. The most pacific, non-violent, and therefore state-paralyzing, Jainism, dis-
placed Buddhism in royal favor in the metropole. Male relatives of Asoka set themselves up as independent kings, with the imperial dominions being divided first perhaps on East/West and also Jain/Saivite lines, and later fragmenting further. A dangerous border state was established in Bactria by Euthydemus. (Alahakoon; Thapar 182-212; Thomas 511-513; Rapson 514-518; Sastri 242-248).

9a. Srvijaya. Trading principalities rose beyond the imperial frontier in northeast Java and Malaya, intercepting and diverting spice trade and revenues. The realm may have broken into 8 kingdoms by 1292. (Zainu’ddin, 41-46; Robertson and Spruyt, 49-57, 65-68).

9b. Madjapahit. The state was the personal construction of a few remarkable men, notably Gadja Mada. Split lineages divided the domain. Local penetration by Islam reduced the legitimacy of non-Islamic rulers. Malacca, Thailand, and Islamic trading principalities on the north coast of Java rose, shifting main trade routes and diminishing central revenues and relative wealth. Communications were inadequate to prevent the outer extremes drifting into independence. (Zainu’ddin 49-52; Vlekke 48-69; Tas 10; Robertson and Spruyt 75-115).

10a. Ghana. The strength of northern neighbors rose; they conquered, plundered, subjugated and partly converted Ghana. Local neighbors also gained strength, and the empire slipped away. (Levtzion 376-377).

10b. Mali. There were no defined rules of succession. Monarchic succession quarrels among sons and brothers produced plots, coups, nine successions in 60 years (5 “irregular”), and familial civil wars. Weak kings could not defend the non-Malinke (non-metropolitan) territories where authority and legitimacy depended on the ability to provide security. The Mossi attacked Timbuktu; it was not defended; Tuareg took it over. Other subject areas broke away. (Levtzion 381-385; Ly-Tall 172-174).

10c. Songhai. There was no genuine system of royal succession. The established practices actually excluded and provoked to rebellion the ablest and most trusted lineage members, who as regional governors were far from the capital whose intrigues produced the proclaimed successor. Partisan factionalism divided Muslim from traditional-Songhai groups and areas, and provided recruits for rebellious claimants. Two-thirds of the askiyas were deposed. The repeated succession crises and struggles—6 successions in 45 years, then 3 in 9 years—preoccupied the lineage. Periods of stability were squandered as the askiyas consumed the privileges of power, while making no attempt to invest in strengthening the state or the army. One succession crisis led to a civil war which destroyed half the army, and whose losers welcomed the opportunistic foreign attack of encroaching borderers from Central Civilization on the winners. (Cissoko, 1975, 227-228; Cissoko, 1984, 187-196; Levtzion 439-446).

12a. Han. A minor emperor was the center of a power struggle between the palace eunuchs, in-law clans, and gentry-officials. The monarch was weak, incapable, isolated; the power-seekers were ambitious and unscrupulous. A variety of small rebellions broke out; the largest, led by a
charismatic faith healer, aimed at a change of dynasty. To deal with all at once, provincial governors were appointed to mobilize all forces in their provinces and crush rebellion. These governors in their turn became independent centers of power. The next succession produced massacre and chaos at the center, and then a division of the empire among the warlords. (Ssu-ma, xxvi-xxviii, 2-38).

12b. *T'ang*. During the Hsüan-tsung reign (712-756) an arguably universal empire arguably ceased to be so. On the northeast frontier the states of Parhae (Po-hai) and Silla were nominally tributary, actually independent, but untroublesome. The mobile nomadic Khitan and Hsi provided persistent pressure against the frontier, usually at war and always needing to be pacified. In the northwest the Uighurs were nomadic, relatively peaceful, friendly and untroublesome despite tribal coalitions that occasionally looked like empires. The semi-civilized Tibetan frontier was locked though violent. But in response to the continuing barbarian frontier pressure, the empire had created massive border standing armies under autonomous military governors. To maintain imperial unity required their careful selection and central control; but the T'ang central army had been allowed to decay, and after the death of the chief minister Li Lin-fu there was no strong responsible leader. The monarch was inactive; the new chief minister was a factional rival of the most powerful military governor. 751 saw many military reversals: by Arabs at Talas in the northwest, by Khitan and Hsi in the northeast, by the allied state of Nan-chao, foolishly provoked to rebellion, in the southwest, where unready and unhappy T'ang conscript armies, incompetently generated by factionalists, dissolved, to the ruin of metropolitan prestige. The northeastern general, An Lu-shan, provoked by central weakness and plotting, and hoping to establish a new dynasty, revolted. To defeat him required great devolution of authority to regional warlord-governors, some themselves rebels, and hence the loss of effective control within much of the imperial frontier; and the withdrawal of garrisons facing Uighurs and Tibetans, and the consequent radical contraction of that same imperial frontier. (Backus; Twitchett, 438-463; Peterson, 464-487).

13a. *Taiho* (named after the Japanese legal code of 702). In this long-lived, homogeneous and remarkably stable universal empire, succession problems arose repeatedly and were solved irregularly, with each irregularity tending to evolve into a constitution. Prerogatives of the Yamato clan imperial lineage had been usurped by the in-law Fujiwara clan via regency and civil dictatorship; Fujiwara incompetence was dealt with by the Minamoto warrior clan’s military dictatorship; the Hojo clan usurped the Minamoto role and then ruled through Fujiwara and Yamato figurehead military dictators. Yamato puppet emperors occasionally regained real power by abdication, as retired emperors and priestly retired emperors, but were weakened by a rivalry between junior and senior subclans. In due course the Hojo regents grew lax in their attention to the loyalty of their vassal clans and the respect of the rest. Emperor Daigo II
mobilized disaffected monasteries, nobles and warriors; Hojo vassal clans revolted; the Ashikaga clan took leadership and destroyed the Hojo. Daigo sought to rule; the Ashikaga revolted again, and set up the rival Yamato line as puppet emperors. So far unity. But Daigo then set up a rival “Southern” imperial court at Yoshino which maintained itself, through wars and frontier shifts, for 56 years of Ashikaga-Yamato split hegemony. From 1392 to 1467 there was only partial reunification, with the Yamato under Ashikaga shogun control, but with Ashikaga primacy among rather than hegemony over the provincial military governors, the shugo, and an unstable balance between hegemony and independence. After the Onin war of 1467-1477, the regional lords, daimyo, were autonomous regional hegemons for the next century. (Hall, 1970, 102-107; Kawai 65-66; Hall and Toyoda 11-13; Hall, 1977, 39-43).

14a. Assyria. Shamash-shumukin, ruling in Babylon, led Chaldean north and central Babylonia in rebellion against his brother Ashurbanipal, with support from Elam, some Arabs, and Nabu-bel-shumat of the Sealand. The revolt was put down and Babylon and Susa taken, but lasted seven years. Lydia under Gyges and Egypt under Psammetichus I broke away about this time. The growing hill state of the Medes at Ecbatana threw off its treaty of submission. Ashur-Elil-ilani fought down his brother Sinsharishkun to gain the throne, put down another revolt, reigned about four years, and was replaced by his brother. The Phoenician cities fell away. Judea intervened in Samaria with impunity. Babylon rose again under Nabopolassar, who slowly conquered the fortified cities of Sumer and Akkad. The Elamites regained their freedom. Cyaxares’ Medes, neutralizing Assyria’s Scythian allies, invaded Assur, massacring, plundering, slaving, deporting. Babylon and Media allied, conquered Assyria, captured, plundered and destroyed Nineveh. (Laessøe 123; Saggs 134-139; Starr 137-138; Roux 343-347; Brinkman 93-111).

14b. Macedon. Alexander astonished the world for the last time in 323 B.C., dying with no legitimate son (but a pregnant non-Macedonian wife), and no competent heir (but a retarded half-brother). There was no definite capital, though Babylon had been considered: Macedon, the metropole, was on the empire’s far frontier; the army was the de facto capital. There was no definite constitution: the officers and cavalry declared for the fetus, the infantry for the idiot; a compromise established the nominal rights of both. Meanwhile the Greeks of Bactria, Athens and Aetolia rose up to seek independence. There was no single ablest logical de facto successor, but three equally implausible ones: the aged isolationist Antipater was in Europe as de facto metropolitan regent, the ambitious upstart de facto second-in-command Perdiccas was with the army in Asia, the trusted nominal proxy Craterus was home- ward bound with returning veterans. Perdiccas tried to overset the other “triumvirs” and was assassinated; Craterus was killed in the fighting; Antipater soon died. The provinces had been parcelled out to ambitious and able satrap-governors like Ptolemy, Antigonus Monopthalmos,
Eumenes, Lysimachus, later Seleucus. Once the center had vanished, coalition wars ensued, in which the "rival generals balked each other of securing over-all mastery." (Starr 403; Will 23-39).

14c. Rome. Here the "fall" of the UE well predates the falls of empire, state, and city, though coinciding with falls of ruler, quasi-dynasty, and quasi-constitution. The key point for the UE appears to be the displacement of "Parthia" by Sassanid Persia. There is however a key question of interpretation. If Parthia was a significant, independent, viable and civilized power from the time of Augustus to that of Ardashir, basically a unitary state; if the Augustan peace was one of equals; if the captures of Ctesiphon by Trajan, Verus and Septimius Severus were ephemeral and meaningless: then there was no Roman universal empire. If, on the contrary, Phraates' return of the Roman prisoners and lost eagles of Carrhae was a concession extorted by a massive threat of force; if Parthia was thereafter at its strongest a relatively insignificant frontier state which could do no more than defend itself, and was unaggressive because grossly unequal to Rome; if "Parthia" was more usually a disunited collection of weak local feudalities; if the Parthians were not full members of Central Civilization but semi-barbarian overlords whose city provinces need not be defended because they were not essential to their power; if the Romans could take but not hold precisely because at a civilization's frontier it can never quite force its peripheral peoples to come to grips with it; if the Roman expeditions were in fact punitive frontier excursions that controlled those beyond as much as necessary and possible by wearing down and disrupting: then there was, as I believe there was, a Roman universal empire.

The third-century troubles of the Roman state included weak young "emperors" managed by others, conspiracies, assassinations, usurpations, mutinous legions, armed forces inadequate to handle simultaneous troubles on German and Persian frontiers. The overtaxation was more wastefully overspent than usual. From 235 to 285 there was a high-speed turnover of emperors, mostly murdered, with about 2½ year tenures (five departures in the one year 238—Maximinus Thrax, Gordians I and II, Pupienus and Balbinus). Ardashir's Persian state took full advantage of the German frontier problems, the murder of Alexander Severus, and the subsequent chaos to establish a stable Persian empire, clearly "civilized" in its ability to mobilize, conquer, shift its frontier, found cities and deport populations. Thenceforth the Roman state, intermittently united, was no longer plausibly "universal." (Ensslin 68-81; Yarshater 1-liii; Bivar 66-67, 80-81, 91-97; Frye 116-127).