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Power Configuration Sequences in the Northeas African Civilization/World System to 1500 BC

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This paper examines the sequence of power configurations in the "Egyptian" or "Northeast African" world system/civilization to 1500 BC. That civilization is the fourth so to be sequenced; previous papers have examined the Indic (1996), Far Eastern (1999) early Central (2002) and Southwest Asian (2001) systems, some of the largest, longest-lived and best-known of the set of such systems delimited and discussed in a series of earlier papers (D. Wilkinson, 1987, 1992-1993).

Empirical power configuration sequences are theoretically interesting in that they shed light upon such issues as whether there is a "normal" or "stable" configuration (e.g. multipolarity), and whether there is a "normal" staged progression of system-level political-structural development (e.g. nonpolarity→ multipolarity→ unipolarity→ universal state), or a "normal" oscillatory process of alternating structures (e.g. hegemony→ multipolarity→ hegemony). The widespread and conventional assumption of the normality of the multipolar power configuration in systems of world politics appears increasingly problematic as the distance in time since the last such configuration vanished (c. AD 1945) increases. Consequently it becomes of importance to work toward a more advanced theory of system power configurations. An appropriate and indeed indispensable step in that direction is to inventory the actual power configurations which have historically existed, to trace their frequencies, durations, and sequences.

Polarity, or systemwide power configuration, is far from being the only variable descriptive of empirical civilization (aka "world historical systems") whose values should be, and are being, mapped: the work of Chase-Dunn and Hall on imperial sizes (2001), of Cioffi-Revilla and Lai (1999) and of Brecke (2000, 2001) on wars, of Cioffi-Revilla and Landman (1999) and Cioffi-Revilla on polities (2001), of Thompson on instability waves (2002), of Hui (2000, 2001, and forthcoming) on ethos, and of the current author on cities (1992-1993) may indicate the range of such variables now under study.

For sequencing the polarities of the Northeast African world system, starting and ending dates had to be selected. In principle, the sequence should begin with the appearance of states or "polities" with
cities (a concept discussed in D. Wilkinson 1992-1993), corresponding to the appearance of such terms as “city-state” and “kingdom” in the historical narrative literature. Ideally, the Northeast African sequence would begin in the late 4th millennium BC. However, for reasons which will be discussed below, a mid-3rd millennium BC date, 2625 BC, is in fact chosen to begin this sequence.

The end-date of this sequence is 1500 BC, on the grounds that at approximately that time the Northeast African world system ceased to exist as a world system in its own right and merged with the Southwest Asian system to form what we have labeled (1987) “Central Civilization” or the “Central World System.” From this juncture, not the Northeast African but the Central world system would accordingly be the entity whose power configuration sequence should be identified. (Incidentally, the Central civilization/world system has endured to the present date, despite wholesale and repeated turnover of its component persons, states, cities, empires, languages, religions, laws, etc., and grown to global scale by incorporating all others, in the same manner as the largest of a set of converging streams or condensing droplets is said to “absorb” those of its neighbors with which it collides and fuses.)

The classification scheme for world system power configurations herein employed is that previously developed (1996) and utilized elsewhere (1999, 2001, 2002): Nonpolar, Multipolar, Tripolar, Bipolar, Unipolar (non-hegemonic), Hegemonic, Universal (state/empire). In brief, these categories cut the continuum of possible degrees of centralization of state power configurations in a macrosocial system, or world system, or civilization, as follows in order:

- Centralized end, where one state encompasses the whole system, is the universal state (Toynbee) or empire (Quigley);

- Hegemony (or “unipolarity with hegemony”), where a single great power or superpower, with influence to match its capability, oversees a number of subject states which retain internal autonomy;

- Unipolarity (more precisely, unipolarity without hegemony), where a single great power, lacking the influence to match its capability, rests among a collection of weaker but non-subject, non-tributary states;
Bipolarity, tripolarity, multipolarity, nearer the decentralized end become familiar configurations with two, three, or more great powers;

Nonpolarity, the most decentralized, with many ministates and no great powers.

The spatial domain of world systems changes over time, primarily when and as new areas are politically linked to, and citified in response to, older “core” areas. The Northeast African world system, like all the others we have examined, grew in area over its long duration, beginning in the Lower Nile basin in the southern portion of the present state of Egypt, and expanding in all directions: northward along the Nile to its Delta and the Mediterranean Sea; southward along the Nile to its division into White and Blue Niles deep in the present state of Sudan; westward to the nearer oases of the Sahara desert; eastward to the Red Sea; and northeastward to Palestine, Syria and Lebanon, the locus of the collision and fusion of the Northeast African and Southwest Asian systems.

As also seems to be the rule [D. Wilkinson, 1992-1993], trade ties in the Northeast African system outran, foreran and foretold politico-military entanglement and ingestion (Egypt—Nubia, e.g. Grimal 27, 40, 50, 67, 68, 80, 81, 84-88, etc.; similarly for Egypt—Syria—Palestine, Grimal, 50, 69, 85; 139, 165, 168, 186, 194; the same appears to hold for Egypt—Sinai and Egypt—Libya, and indeed for Upper Egypt—Lower Egypt); to phrase this in system-level terms, an oikumene (trade network) is usually larger than the civilization/world system of cities and states within it, forming a “penumbra” to the latter, and expanding (or contracting) in some synchrony with it [D. Wilkinson, 1993].

Predynastic Period. The earliest cities and city-states of Northeast Africa are attributable to the “Late Predynastic” period, i.e. the late 4th millennium BC. Rather than an observed and discrete civilizational startup, there is, in Northeast Africa as elsewhere, a knowledge gap, with alternative stories—each implying a different power configuration sequence—being tried on, and fitted to, the slowly emerging data, which however are also construed in terms of the preferred narratives.

One narrative of the Late Predynastic, partly based on later Egyptian tradition, implies a Bipolar—Universal—Bipolar—Universal sequence. In this version, a bipolar system first arose, with one polar state, its ruler endorsing (or endorsed by) the falcon-god Horus, cen-
tered on an as yet unlocated place called Behdet in northern, or Lower, Egypt, and the other, its ruler endorsing the god Seth, with an as-yet-unidentified representative animal (Spencer 85), centered at Ombos (Nubet; Naqada) in southern, or Upper, Egypt. This bipolar configuration was upset when the north conquered the south, creating a short-lived unitary state, centered at Heliopolis in Lower Egypt, which successfully diffused the Horus-cult. This state then broke in two again, with a northern political center at Buto (home of the cobra goddess Wadjet) and a southern center, the latter first located at El Kab (Nekheb), home of the vulture-goddess Nekhbet, then moved across the Nile to Hierakonpolis (Nekhen), a city identified with Horus. Another north-south struggle ended in another unified state, ruled from This (Thinis), near Abydos. [See Edwards, 1-15; Vercoutter, 717-718; Grimal, 34-35; but cf. Kemp, 1989: 31, 37, 52; T. Wilkinson, 68; Trigger, 1983: 44-45; also Spencer, 48, 49, and T. Wilkinson, 20-21, on the archaeological attempts to verify the Lower Egyptian center at Buto.]

Another narrative, drawing more on modern archaeology than on tradition, modifies the first, noticeably arguing for uneven development: Upper Egypt formed centralized states before Lower Egypt. At least two protostates arose, in Upper Egypt only: a Seth-state whose capital was Naqada, and a Horus-state centered at Hierakonpolis; there may have been a third, at Thinis [Kemp, 1989: 34-44, 52], and a fourth, at Qustul in Lower Nubia [T. Wilkinson, 39-40]. High-density brick-built towns, with walls and tomb-cemeteries, began to appear there first, in the periods known as Naqada II c and Naqada II d. At about that time (c. 3300 BC), Naqada culture began to penetrate the Delta. Then, in a “relatively short period of growth and aggressive expansion,” the Naqada/Ombos state invaded, conquered, to some extent colonized and to some extent converted Lower Egypt, which may have had fortified towns rather than a single state. Naqada rapidly established a “single unified state covering both Upper and Lower Egypt during the first part of the Naqada III period.” There may have been a unification, a breakup, and a reunification of the state at the start of the 1st Dynasty. [Kemp, 1989: 37-39, 50, 52; Kemp, 1995: 680-689; cf. Spencer, 34, 36.]

A third story, also archaeologically based and a recension of the second story, places the development of powerful political centers at Thinis, Naqada and Hierakonpolis in late Naqada I c. 3500 BC, adds
lesser Upper Egyptian centers at Abadiya and Gebelein in Naqada II c. 3400 BC and a fourth center at Qustul in late Naqada II c. 3200 BC. Shortly thereafter, Naqada fell out of contention, and its god Seth was eclipsed by Horus; Thinis competed with Hierakonpolis, and was somehow successful, perhaps by reason of having gained control over the Delta. [Trigger, 1983: 49-50; T. Wilkinson, 31, 40, 49-52.]

A fourth story of the “predynastic” period, a sort of least common denominator of the second and third tales, simply proposes several protostates in the Delta and Upper Egypt, developing into city-states as war leaders turned into kinglets. Lower Egypt never united, Upper Egypt did; then Upper Egypt expanded into the Delta, creating a unitary state, but by a gradual conquest-process over a 200-year period rather than by the alleged abrupt conquest of “Menes,” who may be a retroactive New Kingdom myth conflating many conquerors, or the supposed great battle of Narmer, who may have been only one of many conquerors (Scorpion, Ka, Hor-Aha among others). [Assmann, 27-39; Murnane, 693-694, 712; Spencer, 53-57.]

While there was certainly some predynastic power configuration sequence, the contrasts between the defended narratives are still so profound as to render the Predynastic period essentially uncodeable. Nevertheless, it appears to have seen the emergence of the institutions, and the “Great Tradition,” or ideology, of a strong centralized universal state under a divine king [Trigger, 1983: 50-51, 56-57].

**Dynastic Period.** Chronologies remain unsettled: [Murnane, 712-713; Edwards, Gadd and Hammond, 994; and Grimal, 389-392] respectively date the start of the First Dynasty at c. 3000 BC, c. 3100 and 3150 BC, and the end of the reign of Amenhotep I (the approximate end of the configuration sequence for this paper) at c. 1493 BC, 1526 BC (this from Edwards, Gadd, Hammond and Sollberger, 819), and 1506 BC. Even when one chooses an overall (this paper follows Murnane), enough uncertainty continues past the Predynastic, through the Early Dynastic and well into the Old Kingdom, that datings before 2625 BC do not seem certain to allow for coding. Although a Universal State probably existed for much or even most of the period ca 3100-2625 BC, it seems best to do no more than narrate the apparent dynastic sequence:

“Dynasty 0,” c. 3100-3000 BC: an uncertain number of rulers, not necessarily a single ruling line, not necessarily all in control of a unified state, including Scorpion, Ka, and at least two others (T. Wilkinson, 55-58). This is the political label for the late Naqada III period in which all
four of the predynastic stories outlined above culminate in unification. Toward the end of the period, Upper Egyptian attacks on Lower Nubia (the territory between the First and Second Cataracts of the Nile) began the conquest and extinction of the Lower Nubian “A-group” polity and culture [T. Wilkinson, 176-180].

**Early Dynastic, c. 3000-2675 BC.** First Dynasty, c. 3000-2800 BC: eight kings, Narmer, Aha (one or both of whom some identify with Menes: Edwards, 11-15), Djer, Djet, Den, Anedjib, Semerkhet, and Qaa; also a queen, Merneith, preceding and perhaps regent for Den. The First Dynasty family came from This (Thinis), by tradition [Edwards, 17; Kemp, 1989: 53], but at the start of the dynasty, the capital was moved to Memphis, at the junction of Upper and Lower Egypt, where it remained to the end of the Old Kingdom. [Edwards, 15-16; Spencer, 61, 63-67; Kemp, 1983: 80; T. Wilkinson, 58, 66-82.] Little political history is known, but the relative scarcity of serious military incidents [Edwards, 22-29; T. Wilkinson, 77, 155-157] is consistent with the presumption that from Narmer or Aha there was a universal state. Slave-raiding, order-restoring, caravan-protecting and/or plundering expeditions into Sinai and Palestine apparently begin with the First Dynasty and recur thereafter in triumphalist art [Drower, 351-362]. The end, perhaps the destruction, of the Lower Nubian A-group population is usually attributed to this dynasty [Trigger, 1976, 42-46; Trigger, 1983, 61-63; Kemp, 1983: 124; cf. Edwards, 50].

**Second Dynasty, Memphis, c. 2800-2675 BC.:** eight to ten rulers: Hetepsekhemwy, Nebra, Ninetjer, Weneg, Sened, Nubnefer, Peribsen, Sekhenib-perenmaat (perhaps the same person as Peribsen), and “Khasekhem(wy)” (perhaps two different persons, Khasekhem and Khasekhemwy). Even less is known of the political history of this dynasty, though there are more reports suggesting warfare (Edwards, 30-35). Ninetjer may have lost control over Upper Egypt, and some of his successors may have been regional rulers, with Khasekhem(wy) reuniting the state from Upper Egypt, and extending hegemony to some foreign lands. [T. Wilkinson, 82-94]. There may have been an associated dispute between cults and followers of Seth and Horus, compromised and resolved by Khasekhemwy [Edwards, 31-34].

**Old Kingdom, c. 2675-2130 BC.** **Third Dynasty, c. 2675-2625:** five kings. This dynasty achieved highly centralized power, and undertook massive public works, notably the construction of monumental step-pyramids, but its political history is obscure. [Spencer 98, 104; T.
The presumption [e.g., Smith, 145-160] is again that of a universal-state power configuration.

**Fourth Dynasty.** c. 2625-2500 BC. More is known of this dynasty of pyramid-builders; and from this point, year-dates and names of rulers can to some extent be associated, so that coding becomes feasible. Still, the tentativeness of this association (and sequence) should be emphasized: e.g., while Grimal (390) agrees here with Murnane (712) that the Third Dynasty ends c. 2625 BC, T. Wilkinson (95) prefers a date of 2575 BC, while Edwards, Gadd and Hammond (995) use 2613 BC; the variance remains considerable.

Perhaps influenced by the “Great Tradition,” most writers on Egypt (e.g. Kemp, 1983: 103) have expressly or implicitly assumed that what we style the “Universal State” power configuration was the actual Old Kingdom norm, and usually explicitly report only on structures and moments which deviated therefrom. We are more or less constrained to follow suit. Even dynamic changes are treated in the literature [e.g. Kemp, 1983: 73, 76-77], and here as well, as palace revolutions, usurpations, affairs of court, requiring no change in a “Universal” coding, except where there is positive evidence to the contrary.

**Old Kingdom, to c. 2130 BC.**

The 4th Dynasty ruled from Memphis, c. 2625-2500 BC. c. 2625 BC. Universal. Ruler: Sneferu. The polity of this reign and its successors is inferred from the ability of the rulers to tax and to conscript, to extract enormous amounts of material and labor, and mobilize and organize skills, in self-glorifying and ancestor-glorifying public works. [See e.g. Smith, 160-179; Kemp, 1983: 82-87, 95-96.] Sneferu is credited with at least three pyramids, including the Bent Pyramid at Dahshur. [Spencer, 110-112, 116]


c. 2575 BC. Universal: Cheops (Khufu). [Smith, 168-172.] His is the best-known civil engineering project in history, the Great Pyramid at Giza, not far from Memphis, from c. 2580 BC. [Spencer, 116.] More border raids against nomads [Smith, 169]. No later than this reign, Egypt created a settlement, perhaps a base, at Buhen North near the Second Cataract in Lower Nubia [Kemp, 1983: 125].

c. 2550 BC. Universal: Chephren (Khafre/Rekhaef). [Smith, 174-176.] The second of the Giza pyramids was his construction.
c. 2525 BC. Universal: Mycerinus (Menkaure). [Smith, 176-177.] His building project was the third, last, and least of the pyramids at Giza. The 4th Dynasty royal family was displaced, with no sign of widespread disturbance or disorder, by a new ruling house from Heliopolis, which promulgated a state cult of its local sun-god Re [Smith, 176-180; Abu Bakr, 93]. This 5th Dynasty ruled from Memphis, c. 2500-2350 BC.

c. 2500 BC. Universal: Shepsekhaf, 4th Dynasty/Userkaf, 5th Dynasty. The main event of Userkaf’s reign was, as with his chief predecessors, the construction of his funerary complex, at Saqqara near Memphis [Smith, 180].

c. 2475 BC. Universal: Sahure. While his “main event” was again pyramid and temple-building, now at Abusir near Memphis, there may also have been raiding, trading or tribute-taking from Libyans and Asians [Smith, 182-183].

c. 2450 BC. Universal: Nyuserre. Another pyramid-builder at Abusir, whose funerary temple is decorated with the increasingly common scenes of ritual killing or subjugation of foreign chieftains (Smith, 185), scenes whose implications (history? exaggeration? threat? metaphor? aspiration?) are however not entirely clear.

c. 2425 BC. Universal: Nyuserre/Menkauhor. More pyramid and temple-building [Smith, 186]. Provincial governors and court officials (e.g. the minister of agriculture Ti) began through their offices to acquire substantial economic resources, allowing the construction of large fine private tombs, and prefiguring the later growth of provincial political power and independence [Grimal, 780].

c. 2400 BC. Universal: Djedkare Isesi. Expeditions, pyramid, temple (Smith, 186-188). Further development of official wealth, e.g. by Rashepses, governor of Upper Egypt [Grimal, 79].

c. 2375 BC. Universal: Djedkare Isesi. There was again a rather obscure transition between dynasties. The incoming 6th Dynasty ruled from Memphis, c. 2350-2170 BC.

c. 2350 BC. Universal: Unas, 5th Dynasty/Teti, 6th Dynasty. Both rulers are best known for their pyramid building [Smith, 1971, 188-190].


c. 2300 BC. Universal: Pepi I.
c. 2275 BC. Universal: Pepi II (Phiops, Neferkare). Early in this long reign, a small Nubian state was effectively independent, increasingly so over time [Trigger, 1976: 49-60]. It does not, however, seem to have been large or significantly powerful enough to alter the “universal” coding; but it anticipates “the shape of things to come.”

c. 2250 BC. Universal: Pepi II.

c. 2225 BC. Universal: Pepi II.

c. 2200 BC. Universal: Pepi II. His massive funerary- complex was the last for several centuries [Kemp, 1983: 112], indicating both that the universal state continued well into his very long reign, and that it did not survive him. Local officials were becoming hereditary local landowners and rulers [Smith, 195; Grimal, 88-89]. Egyptian imports from and influence in Sinai, Syria and Palestine became slight after his reign; control over the Sinai frontier was lost, and Asiatics entered the Eastern Delta as settlers, nomads, raiders and mercenaries [Posener, 532-533].

c. 2175 BC. Hegemonic. The ruler may have been Merenre II or Queen Nitocris. Nomarchs (provincial governors/regional subrulers of the “nomes,”) provinces organized by the central government about the 3rd Dynasty [Assmann, 47], increasingly asserted their identity and independence in the late 6th Dynasty [Abu Bakr, 85-95; Kemp, 1983: 115]; the Memphite kings lost their ability to extract vast resources and build on a monumental scale, but remained able to influence the careers of powerful provincials, if not to direct their actions [Kemp, 1983: 112-113]. At some time in this dynasty, the Egyptian base at Buhen in Lower Nubia was abandoned, and three Lower Nubian entities, Satju, Irtjet and Wawat arose [Kemp, 1983: 126].

There was apparently a sudden crisis—a brief period of drought, famine, internal violence, imperial pullback, trade collapse, and local nomarchic independence, with only formal subordination to Memphis [Grimal, 138-139; Kemp, 1983: 113], where there emerged a brief “7th/8th Dynasty” [Smith’s label, 197-200; Kemp finds the two indistinguishable, 1983: 112; Grimal does not, 135-140], short-lived, c. 2170-2130 BC, but with many “rulers,” implying very short reigns (Kemp, 1983: 112) or many contemporaneous local rulers [Assmann, 81-85].

c. 2150 BC. Multipolar. The (nominal) 7th/8th Dynasty ruler is uncertain. Possibly disintegration went so far that this coding should be Nonpolar [Assmann, 84].

First Intermediate Period, c. 2130-1980 BC. A state emerged at

C. 2125 BC. Unipolar: Achthoes I (Akhtoy), 9th/10th Dynasty. Achthoes helped the Eastern Delta nomarchs drive out and hold off Asiatic invaders [Posener, 533-535]. The 9th/10th Dynasty was also unstable, with a turnover of 18 rulers in 50 years c. 2130-1980 BC, and lost control of the nomarchs of Upper Egypt [Murnane, 713; Kemp, 1983: 113-114]. The wealthy hereditary nomarch-princes administered their provinces, raised armies, built monumental cliff-tombs, variously claimed national or regional overlordship, or served or allied with one or another claimant, or conciliated or resisted invading armies [Hayes, 1971: 468-472].

C. 2100 BC. Unipolar: 9th/10th Dynasty (ruler uncertain). The Upper Egyptian nomes became involved in a process of rebellion, alliance, war and political consolidation: Hierakonpolis acquired Edfu and perhaps Elephantine, Thebes acquired Coptos, Dendera acquired Thinis [Kemp, 1983: 113-114]. Thebes became powerful, and its rulers became the 11th Dynasty, Thebes, c. 2081-1938 BC. Its national claims began only later, c. 2065 BC, but were then piously backdated two reigns to c. 2081, [Kemp 1983: 114].

C. 2075 BC. Bipolar: 9th/10th Dynasty (Herakleopolis/Memphis; ruler uncertain), and 11th Dynasty (Thebes; ruler uncertain). Herakleopolis maintained hegemonic lordship over semi-autonomous Asiatic immigrant populations in the eastern Delta [Hayes, 1971: 464-466]. Thebes, under Mentuhotep I and Sehertowy Inyotef I, emerged as the most powerful state in the south [Hayes, 1971: 472-475; Abu Bakr, 85-95; Murnane, 698; Grimal, 141-143].

C. 2050 BC. Bipolar: Unknown ruler, 9th/10th Dynasty, and Wahankh Inyotef II, 11th Dynasty. Thebes brought Upper Egypt under its full control in this reign, and civil war with the 9th/10th Dynasty state followed [Hayes, 1971: 466-467, 476-477; Kemp, 1983: 114; Grimal, 143-145].

C. 2025 BC. Bipolar: Nubkaure, 9th/10th Dynasty, and Wahankh Inyotef II, 11th Dynasty. Probably an interval of “peaceful coexistence”
and trade [Hayes, 1971: 467, 477].

c. 2000 BC. Bipolar: Merykare, 9th/10th Dynasty, and Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II, 11th Dynasty. The war between Herakleopolis and Thebes resumed, with nome after nome falling to the latter [Hayes, 1971: 467, 479-481].

Middle Kingdom, c. 1980-1720 BC.

About 1980 BC, the 11th Dynasty Theban state conquered the 9th/10th Dynasty state and established the unifying Middle Kingdom in Egypt [Abu Bakr, 85-95; Murnane, 698]. The end-date for the Middle Kingdom is more usually given as c. 1630 BC, but the relatively unitary Egyptian power was by that time long defunct.

c. 1975 BC. Unipolar: Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II, 11th Dynasty. The 11th Dynasty political structure was based upon loyal and well-controlled, hereditary or appointed, nomarchs (Hayes, 1971: 481-485; Grimal, 155), hence was, within Egypt, hegemonic. However, if we accept the early dating of a kingdom of Kush, ruled from Kerma, stretching from the Third Cataract to the White Nile, as extant from 2000 BC onward, with Egyptian frontier fortresses implying that Kush was independent, powerful, and hostile to Egypt [Adam and Vercoutter, 238-239], then the 11th Dynasty should be coded Unipolar rather than Hegemonic. In this reign, Egypt began the reconquest of Lower Nubia, between the First and Second Cataracts [Hayes, 1971: 485-488; Kemp, 1983: 130; Kemp, 1989: 168]. An active policy of expeditions against Asiatics was resumed, at least in Sinai [Posener, 535-536].


A 12th Dynasty replaced the 11th Dynasty c. 1938 BC, perhaps with a coup or a usurpation, there was a moment of disorder, and Asiatic nomads again invaded the Eastern Delta [Hayes, 1971: 493-495; Posener, 537]. The 12th Dynasty, c. 1938-1759 BC, moved the capital from Thebes north to Itjtawy, somewhere between the former 9th/10th Dynasty capitals Herakleopolis and Memphis [Murnane, 699; Kemp, 1983: 80].

c. 1925 BC. Unipolar: Ammenemes I (Amenemhet). The original 12th Dynasty political structure, while mobilizing and regulating nomarchs, continued to allow them considerable status, wealth and autonomy [Hayes, 1971: 496, 505; Murnane, 699-700; Kemp, 1983: 177]. Ammenemes I campaigned into Nubia, and placed a fort at the
Second Cataract [Hayes, 1971: 496-498; Grimal, 160-161]. He drove Asiatic nomads out of the Eastern Delta and controlled that frontier again, campaigning beyond it [Posener, 537-538].

c. 1900 BC. Hegemonic: Sesostris I (Senwosret), co-regent for 10 years with Ammenemes I, who was assassinated. Sesostris may have staged a countercoup against the usurper-assassin [Hayes, 1971: 498-499]. Egypt solved its “Nubia problem” for the time being, conquering and re-colonizing Lower Nubia, setting heavily fortified towns at Buhen, Aniba and Kubben [Trigger, 1976: 64; Kemp, 1983: 130; Kemp, 1989: 168], and acquired control over Upper Nubia to the Third Cataract [Hayes, 1971: 499-500; Grimal, 164-165]. Sesostris’ military preponderance, expressed by raids against Libyans and garrisons and settlements in Palestine, allowed widespread mining and quarrying, and he was able to build a funerary complex of the scale and grandeur last seen in the 6th Dynasty [Hayes, 1971: 501-502; Posener, 539-540]. Asiatics were increasingly present in Egypt as servants and soldiers [Posener, 541-542].

c. 1875 BC. Hegemonic: Ammenemes II. Apparently a peaceful reign with much emphasis on mining, quarrying, economic development and long-distance trade. Egypt had authority over Byblos, in Lebanon. [Hayes, 1971: 503-504; Grimal, 165-166.]

c. 1850 BC. Hegemonic: Ammenemes II.

c. 1825 BC. Universal: Sesostris III. Over time, the 12th Dynasty recentralized the state (Murnane, 700). The reign of Sesostris III in particular saw a major increase in public works and economic planning. A channel was dug at the First Cataract, rendering the Nile navigable from the Mediterranean to the Second Cataract), and the frontier of annexed Lower Nubia was fortified at the Second Cataract zone. Regulation increased, subordinating nomarchs to ministries. [Hayes, 1971: 505-506; Quirke 2-3; Kemp, 1983: 131-134; Kemp 1989: 172-178; Grimal, 167.] Sesostris III led intensive punitive expeditions against Kush, reasserting influence without seeking or exercising sovereignty [Hayes, 1971: 506-507; Trigger 1976: 66-68; Grimal, 168-169]. Very detailed political intelligence was collected on the dozens of “countries” and rulers of Palestine, Lebanon and Syria [Posener, 541, 548-549, 554-555].

c. 1800 BC. Universal: Ammenemes III. A long, peaceful prosperous, prestigious imperial reign focused on mining, quarrying, irrigating, settlement, and monument-building [Hayes, 509-512; Grimal, 169-
c. 1775 BC. Universal: Ammenemes III. "Nubia had been reconquered and the Egyptians had once more reached a position of supremacy in the Near East"; then the 12th Dynasty ended abruptly, with the short reigns of Ammenemes IV and the Regnant Queen Sobeknefru [Grimal, 182, 171; Hayes, 1973: 42-43].

A "13th Dynasty," c. 1759-1630?, emerged at Itjtawy. There were many brief reigns, fifty to ninety in 120 years, often by "kings" risen straight from the general population [Hayes, 1973: 44-48; Murnane, 713; Grimal, 182, 391; Kemp, 1983: 149, 152]. Murnane (701) regards this "dynasty" as not a true monarchy, nor even a "constitutional" monarchy, but an oligarchy except in name. Kemp suggests, alternatively, that some of these rulers may have been contemporaneous client kings of city-states (Kemp, 1983: 153-154). Grimal (183) suggests they were elected rather than hereditary.

c. 1750 BC. Hegemonic: 13th Dynasty, unknown ruler. The 13th dynasty was weaker in its control of Egypt than the late 12th, but exercised a general overlordship in north and south. The administrative structure, and presumably its ambitions, remained the same, but extracted less: kings' tombs, which included pyramids, shrank [Kemp, 1983: 149, 153-154].

c. 1725 BC. Hegemonic: 13th Dynasty, unknown ruler. Egypt maintained its authority in Nubia and at Byblos [Grimal, 184]. Shortly after this time, a "14th Dynasty" at Xois, near Buto in the western Delta, rejected 13th Dynasty authority; and soon thereafter, about 1720 BC, a "15th Dynasty" was set up at Avaris by the "Hyksos" or "foreign chiefs" of the immigrant Asian population of the Eastern Delta, who elevated the local deity, Seth, to chief state-god status. (Hayes, 1973: 52, 56-57; Abu Bakr, 98-99; Trigger, 1976: 83; Grimal, 184-185) At the other end of the empire, after 1720, 13th Dynasty influence also receded from Nubia, and the influence of now-independent Kush expanded into Lower Nubia, though without colonization or occupation (Trigger, 1976: 96-97; Kemp, 1983: 160).

Second Intermediate Period, c. 1720-1539/23 BC

Murnane (713) dates this period from c. 1630, the extinction of the 13th dynasty, by then reduced to local status; but this is a "legitimist" rather than a substantive dating. Grimal (182) starts the period at the end of the 12th Dynasty; but the early 13th, if declining, seems to have maintained a widely recognized authority.
c. 1700 BC. Unipolar: 13th Dynasty. The Hyksos 15th Dynasty infiltrated and slowly expanded through the Delta [Grimal, 185].

C. 1675 BC. Bipolar: 13th Dynasty; Hyksos 15th Dynasty. The Hyksos used the desert trade routes to ally with Kush against the 13th Dynasty [Grimal, 185, 187]. At about this time or shortly afterward, perhaps in a sudden coup, the Hyksos occupied Itjtawy, claimed to be Pharaohs, and reduced the 13th Dynasty to local power in Upper Egypt [Hayes, 1973: 52-53; Trigger, 1976: 83; Kemp, 1983: 155, 158; Grimal, 185].

C. 1650 BC. Unipolar: "Hyksos" 15th Dynasty, Avaris. The Hyksos state was relatively effective, able to mobilize very substantial resources for monumental building projects and artistic and craft production [Hayes, 1973: 55; Grimal, 186]. Only custom, and Egyptocentrism, stands in the way of calling the period of Hyksos dominance c. 1630-1550 a "Third Kingdom" rather than part of an "Intermediate Period."

The 13th Dynasty continued through twenty or so rulers, probably no more than vassal or independent nomarchs, like the 14th Dynasty, which persisted at Xois [Hayes, 1973: 52-54]. An uncertain number of city-state "kings," some Hyksos, mostly in the north, became 15th Dynasty clients, and were grouped as a "16th" Dynasty [Kemp, 1983: 153-154, 158; but cf. Grimal, 187]. In southernmost Upper Egypt, the 17th Dynasty from Thebes, a branch of the 13th, displaced it, initially maintaining good standing with the Hyksos (Hayes, 1973: 64; Grimal, 189-190). About 1630 BC, the 13th and 14th Dynasty vanish [Murnane, 701-702; Grimal, 188].

It is accepted that the Hyksos dynasty had economic ties to the Minoan civilization of Crete, as well as elsewhere in the Levant. If it were to be shown that there was extensive politico-military-diplomatic interaction as well, the end-date for the separate Northeast African world system would have to be set at 1650 BC or thereabouts, rather than 1500 BC as in this paper.

C. 1625 BC. Unipolar: "Hyksos" 15th Dynasty. The Hyksos state exerted a general oversight in Egypt [Abu Bakr, 98-99], ruling through proxies (including the "16th Dynasty") up to Hermopolis in Middle Egypt; the 17th Dynasty at Thebes were at peace with, and quite possibly vassals to, the 15th [Hayes, 1973: 61-64; Murnane, 701-702; Kemp, 1983: 154, 159; Grimal, 187, 189]. Kush "increased its independence and power" [Hamid Zayed, 143], and was a Hyksos ally rather than a
c. 1600 BC. Unipolar: "Hyksos" 15th Dynasty.

c. 1575 BC. Unipolar: Apophis I, "Hyksos" 15th Dynasty. 17th Dynasty. Thebes under Seqenenre Tao II (?-c. 1543 BC?), a devotee of the god Amon-Re, repudiated Hyksos suzerainty and made Thebes the center of an Egyptian nationalist state which may either have expelled Hyksos power from southern Upper Egypt, or merely fought the Hyksos to no decisive result [Hayes, 1973: 62, 72; James, 1973: 290].

c. 1550 BC. Tripolar: Apophis I, "Hyksos" 15th Dynasty/Seqenence Tao II, 17th Dynasty, Thebes/Kush. Seqenenre Tao II's successor Kamose (c. 1543?-1539) explicitly equated his power with that of Avaris and its ally Kush, fought both, and may have taken control of Lower Nubia. His successor Amosis (Ahmose, c. 1539-1514) overthrew the Hyksos power in Egypt, and subdued their bases in southern Palestine, between c. 1529 and 1523, probably incidentally eliminating the 16th Dynasty kings as well [James, 1973: 290-296; Kemp, 1983: 162, 173-174; Murnane, 707, 713; Adam and Vercoutter, 240; Sherif, 261; Abu Bakr, 99; Trigger, 1976: 103-107; Grimal, 189-195].

New Kingdom, from c. 1539 BC. The 18th Dynasty, Thebes/Memphis, from c. 1539 BC, was merely a protraction of the 17th, distinguished only by having come to supreme power and by a dual situs—Theban by origin and religious affiliation, its political capital was at Memphis [Kemp, 1989: 201].

c. 1525 BC. Unipolar: Amosis (Ahmose). Kush remained strong and independent, though Amosis recovered Lower Nubia [James, 1973: 296-299; Grimal, 194-195]. Aside from that conquest, the reign was apparently peaceful; Egypt became prosperous again; luxury trade goods flowed in; major architectural projects resumed [James, 1973: 300-305; Grimal, 199-200].

c. 1500 BC. Unipolar: Amenhotep I (Amenophis). Egypt went on a permanent war footing (O'Connor, 1983: 206). Amenhotep began the conquest of Kush, but not until Thutmose I (Tuthmosis, c. 1493-1479 BC) did Thebes finish off its southern enemy, conquering Kush to the 4th Cataract and ending its independent kingdom [James, 1973: 308-309; Murnane, 702; Adam and Vercoutter, 241; Sherif, 261; Trigger, 1976: 109].

From about 1500 BC, codings for a Northeast African system cease to be meaningful codings of a world system, for the history of Northeast African power configurations becomes enduringly linked with, and
comprehensible only in the context of, the power configurations of Southwest Asia: for instance, Thutmose I also fought his way into Asia to the Euphrates, probably vs. the important Southwest Asian state of Mitanni (Murnane, 702). New Kingdom Egypt soon acquired “an international position as an imperial power” with restive vassal city-states in Palestine and Syria, in a world of other great powers—Babylonia, Assyria, Mitanni, Hatti, Alashiya (Kemp, 1989: 184, 223, 225). The collision and fusion of these two previously separable world systems gives rise to the “Central” system, whose long later history, extending unbroken to the global order of AD 2000 and after, has been discussed elsewhere [D. Wilkinson, 1987].

Summary. The tentative sequence of power configurations in the Northeast African civilization/world system is then the following:

2625 BC. Universal.
2600 BC. Universal.
2575 BC. Universal.
2550 BC. Universal.
2525 BC. Universal.
2500 BC. Universal.
2475 BC. Universal.
2450 BC. Universal.
2425 BC. Universal.
2400 BC. Universal.
2375 BC. Universal.
2350 BC. Universal.
2325 BC. Universal.
2300 BC. Universal.
2275 BC. Universal.
2250 BC. Universal.
2225 BC. Universal.
2200 BC. Universal.
2175 BC. Hegemonic.
2150 BC. Multipolar.
2125 BC. Unipolar.
2100 BC. Unipolar.
2075 BC. Bipolar.
2050 BC. Bipolar.
2025 BC. Bipolar.
Discussion. The period 2675 BC—1500 BC encompasses 1175 years and 46 codings, summed as follows:

- Nonpolar = 0
- Multipolar = 1
- Tripolar = 1
- Bipolar = 5
- Unipolar = 12
- Hegemonic = 6
- Universal = 21

This world system spent most of its career in the more centralized unipolar, hegemonic, and universal forms (39/46=84.78%): in general it could be described as stably centralized. By far the most prominent form was that of the universal state (21/46=45.65%), Egypt’s “Great Tradition.” The system’s structure was in general rather stable, or one might say “sticky”: the form of the system at the end of the 25-year interval between codings was unchanged from that at the start in
32/45 = 71.11% of cases. While the longest such “run” was that of the universal state 2625-2200 BC, there was a 75-year run of bipolarity (2075-2000 BC) and another of unipolarity (1650-1575 BC), and 50-year runs of unipolarity (1975-1925 BC), hegemony (1900-1850 BC) and universality (1825-1775 BC).

There is much justification, however, for dividing this period into two epochs, essentially contrasting the high Old Kingdom (the wondrously stable universal state of 2625-2200 BC) with all its successor periods. If this is done, the distribution of forms (less the 18 universal codings for the Old Kingdom’s extraordinary run) becomes:

Nonpolar = 0
Multipolar = 1
Tripolar = 1
Bipolar = 5
Unipolar = 12
Hegemonic = 6
Universal = 3

The system so abbreviated remains overwhelmingly a centralized one, but unipolarity is now the most prominent form (12/28 = 42.85%), and the system looks markedly less “sticky,” with 12 of 27 intervals (44.44%) seeing a change of configuration. As between the two periods, then, the system moved from an extremely stable, extremely centralized structure to a moderately stable, rather centralized one.

There is no indication of an evolution toward a stable terminal state, nor of any staged “progressive” developmental sequence of configurations, though the movement between the two periods might be taken as developmental.

The several characterizations of the Northeast African system would not fit any of the four other world systems hereto examined [D. Wilkinson, 1996, 1999, 2001, 2002], nor would any of their descriptions fit any other system. World system power configuration sequences appear to display a high degree of individuality.

What of the theory of multipolar stability? If we had only the Eurocentric world system of, say, 1648-1939 to go by, we would doubtless conclude that the normal power configuration of a world system is indeed multipolar. If we had only the global system 1948-1991 to go by, we would be tempted to treat bipolarity as the norm. If we had only
the Northeast African system in the high Old Kingdom to supply our data, we would without doubt conclude that the universal state is the normal form for a world system. The entire Northeast African sequence, like the Far Eastern and Indic sequence (but unlike the Southwest Asian sequence), provides no support for the hypothesis of multipolar normality.

Can we account for the variety of power-configuration sequences and stability structures? Geopolitical, geoeconomic and geocultural variables invite exploration. The dynamics of world systems may also show individuality, differing across space and over time. Whether inclusive complex system-dynamic mechanisms can be found to account for the actual diversities and coherences of world system power configuration sequences in general, or the North African sequence in particular, remains to be seen.

Conclusion. Political structures of the Egyptocentric civilization/world system in Northeast Africa were estimated at 25-year intervals from c. 2625 BC to c. 1500 BC. Centralized forms overwhelmingly predominated, and the universal-state configuration could be seen as a norm. However, two periods emerged, the later being somewhat less centralized and considerably less stable than the high Old Kingdom. No support emerges for the theory of multipolar normality. This and other world system power configuration sequences display a high degree of individuality.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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