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A REGIONAL INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM OR AN INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF STATES?

Near Eastern Diplomacy during the Late Second Millenium BCE

Alex Aissaoui

ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This article-based dissertation is a collection of three single-author articles, which set the stage for analyzing the Near Eastern world during the late second millennium BCE from the perspective of international relations (IR). At the center of this study is the aim of conducting a dialogue between the field of IR and the fields focusing on Ancient Near Eastern Studies (ANES). Engaging in cross-disciplinary research, the dissertation in question makes two contributions. First, it firmly extends our perception of the temporal roots of systems of states into the Bronze Age. Second, by using conceptual analysis in order to probe how we can apply key IR terms such as 'diplomacy,' 'balance of power,' and 'state' in the premodern world, the dissertation bridges the gap between the history of concepts and the phenomena they aim to describe, as the latter tend to precede the conceptual understanding. Finally, this research project also taps into the origins of great powerhood, the first written documentation of which emanates from the ancient Near East.

This Introductory chapter proposes to create a dynamic dialogue between the discipline of international relations and the fields focusing on the ancient Near East. The frame of reference focuses on the primary institutions of balance of power, diplomacy, great powers, and war by analyzing how far back into the past we can apply them. Furthermore, the main purpose is to locate the ancient Near Eastern world in cross-disciplinary context, which raises questions about the role of the use of history inside the field of IR. Special attention is dedicated to the relationship between the international system and international society as the two concepts encapsulate the level of interaction between the various ancient Near Eastern polities. While the argument in the dissertation clearly leans on the systemic side, elements of international society cannot be entirely excluded. The concluding reflections of the chapter include suggestions for further investigation by way of comparative analysis of the primary institutions in wider transhistorical context in pursuit of deepening our understanding of the way international states systems function in the Eurasian world.

In article 1, the analysis focuses on the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1600–1200 BCE), which constitutes a high point of interaction between the rivaling Near Eastern empires. The most important evidentiary document under scrutiny to bear witness to this is the Amarna letter archive dating back to the mid-14th century. The letter collection depicts political correspondence between the great states and smaller vassal states in Syria-Palestine and the way they cooperated with each other. The thrust of the argument centers on the textual analysis of the missives, as well as stressing the systemic aspect where there was a "web of interconnectedness" between various political communities throughout the Late Bronze Age (LBA). Moreover, the article highlights those cosmopolitan elements

of the ancient Near East that were mostly absent in the political arena of classical Greece, which has been more widely theorized in the IR field. Overall, this time period in international history provides rich material for a student of world politics to comprehend the early dynamics behind the workings of states systems.

In article 2, the object of study turns to the specific question of whether balance of power as a foreign policy strategy existed in the ancient Near East. Scholars inside the field of IR have disagreed over the existence of power balancing in the premodern world ever since the writings of David Hume. The article makes the claim that based on historical evidence, power balancing strategies did exist in the ancient Near East, thus stretching the genealogy of balance of power as a phenomenon back millennia rather than hundreds of years as it is usually presented in IR theory. The second aspect of the article indicates that if we can establish a balancing behavior in the second millennium BCE Near East, then there must have been viable states system(s) at play as well since the balance of power is intimately linked with the functioning of states systems. The balance of power theory is a key theoretical construct to appreciate the web of complex inter-polity interaction in the ancient Near East.

In article 3, the timeline expands into the history of ancient Egypt during first millennium BCE. At the center is an Egyptian high official, Udjahorresnet, who acted as a mediator in order to accommodate the conquest of Egypt by the Achaemenid (Persian) Empire in the early 6th century BCE. Although the chronological framework surpasses the explicit temporal boundaries of the object of study, the throughline of the article is consistently embedded in the earlier dynamics of the ancient Near East. Essentially, the idea behind the research article is to test a set of IR concepts, namely bandwagoning, empire, internal and external balance of power, international anarchy, international system, level of analysis, soft power, sovereignty, and state as explanatory variables to contextualize the political landscapes of ancient Egypt and the Near East during the last phase of indigenous rulership of western Asia* before the arrival of Hellenism in the region. What comes out of this effort is an exercise in matching theoretical concepts with the empirical realities of international history. Importantly, the article does not claim to rewrite the history of the first Persian period (ca. 525–400 BCE), but, rather, to give IR scholars tools for making novel interpretations of this phase in international history, which continues to be overshadowed by classical antiquity.

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* 'Western Asia' and 'Near East' are used as synonyms in this study.

The main discoveries and insights of the dissertation can be summarized in the form of three arguments. First, there are clear benefits of taking historical analysis seriously. IR scholarship, by immersing itself in the distant past, can better delineate to what extent the primary institutions of balance of power, diplomacy, great powers, and war are enduring rather than ephemeral phenomena of international life. Moreover, the focus on understanding historical processes helps in debunking the idea that there were mythical moments when essential political units and mechanisms of statecraft of the discipline such as states and power balancing started to emerge – this is the principal contribution of article 2 where the central argument underlines the fact that balance of power dates back millennia, instead of hundreds of years. Second, the advantages of conceptual analysis conducted in all three articles relate to mid-level theorizing, which in the eyes of several scholars is a way forward for the IR field to avoid being marginalized in order to focus on specific issues and historical periods and moving with ease between different levels of analysis (see Lake 2013: 567, 568, 572, 573–74). Importantly, this approach, in turn, provides an avenue for historians and IR scholars alike to find common ground – the dialogue between the two fields from the perspective of juxtaposing empirical facts with various concepts is present throughout the dissertation, and most prominently in article 3. Third, in articles 1, 2 and 3 the textual analysis of the primary sources indicates that during the second and first millennia BCE we can indeed speak of an international system in the Near East where the behavior of each political entity was a necessary element in the calculations of the other – thus, contrary to still widely held *idées reçues* within the IR field, the roots of international states systems precede classical Greece, ancient China and India, at least as far as the first literary evidence is concerned. A much harder question, however, is to demonstrate a similarly developed international society of states, although both systemic and societal elements were present in the ancient Near Eastern political landscapes (see Figure 1). All in all, the single most important conclusion of this article-based dissertation, based on primary evidence and historical interpretation, revolves around the fact that balance of power, with links to alliance formation, security dilemma, and complex interdependence, was a political reality in the ancient Near East.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Several years ago, as an undergraduate student, I came across Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language at a bookstore in the center of Helsinki. As I admired the beautiful lexical definitions of the language of Shakespeare, at the very end of the dictionary I came across a "Chronology of Major Dates in History". Suddenly, a curious date stood out in the timetable: pharaoh Ramses II battles with the Hittites and finally, in 1275 BCE, is forced to divide Syria with them. As a student of world politics, my first reaction was bewilderment. Could we seriously talk about two sovereign entities dividing an area in order to establish peace, should this not belong to a much more recent past? Indeed, was diplomacy in the framework of Westphalian order even possible in the context of ancient the Near East dating back to the second millennium before the Common Era? As I started to probe the matter more thoroughly, it became clear that scholars with a background in Ancient Near East Studies did not shy away from using terms like 'great power,' 'non-aggression treaty,' or 'international system.' How was this possible in such an ancient context? My mind was filled with questions itching for answers. It was against this background that the first bricks of my dissertation project were laid.

Writing a dissertation, which converses with past millennia, is indeed, in the words of René Descartes (1637), "…le même…que de voyager" ("…the same…as travelling"). In the course of preparing the dissertation, I had the opportunity to attend several conferences and workshops, meet inspirational researchers, as well as have passionate discussions about ancient history and the Near East and their place in the field of IR. For this, I want to express my gratitude to the National Graduate School of Political Studies (University of Tampere) and the Chancellor's Travel Grant (University of Helsinki) for making these meetings possible, the most important one for my research interests being the International Studies Association's (ISA) annual convention. Also, a membership in the Center of Excellence in Near Eastern Empires (ANEE) at the University of Helsinki proved to be a valuable experience for understanding the ancient Near East in a broader perspective. Finally, crucially important was the grant I received from the Kone Foundation (2018), which made it easier for me to start fully concentrating on my research project – I shall cherish with warmth the opportunity to spend two months at the Saari Residence in Mynämäki in Spring 2020; it made all the difference.

I am grateful to my supervisor Professor Teivo Teivainen (University of Helsinki) for his useful comments, who, over the years, learned to appreciate the somewhat "non-mainstream" topic of my article-based dissertation. I also want to thank Professor Heikki Patomäki (University of Helsinki) who, although not closely

involved with my research project, nevertheless time and again forced me to think critically about my research topic so as to take nothing for granted. Many other professors and scholars in the Finnish as well as foreign Academia have helped me over the years. Among them, I must include Professor Erkki Kouri (University of Helsinki), the director of the Finnish Institute in the Middle East (FIME) and Head of Assyriology Dr. Raija Mattila (University of Helsinki), Docent of Near Eastern Archaeology Sanna Aro-Valjus (University of Helsinki), Paul-Erik Korvela (University of Jyväskylä), Professors Barry Buzan (London School of Eco-nomics and Political Science), Amanda Podany (California State Polytechnic University), Marc Van De Mieroop (Columbia University), and Peter Machinist (Harvard University). Professor Kouri, a specialist in the history of early modern Europe and historiography of international relations, gave me the stimulus to further develop my thinking on the concept of balance of power. I am especially indebted to my second supervisor Dr. Raija Mattila whose useful comments and recommended reading lists proved invaluable. My thoughts also go to Professors Amanda Podany (California State Polytechnic University), Juhana Aunesluoma (University of Helsinki), and Riikka Kuusisto (University of Helsinki) who were kind enough to read and comment on the early manuscripts of my research project. More recently, Dr. Saana Svärd, Dr. Jason Silverman and Dr. Melanie Wasmouth who work(ed) at the Center of Excellence in Near Eastern Empires (ANEE) at the university of Helsinki have given me further opportunities to find a research community with common interests in the study of ancient Near East – for this, I am perpetually grateful to them.

Alex Aissaoui
Espoo, Finland

May 12, 2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS

1. Alex Aissaoui, 'The Amarna Diplomacy in IR Perspective: A System of States in the Making,' *Estudos Internacionais* 6(2): 9–29 (2018). https://periodicos.pucminas.br/estudosinternacionais/article/view/14069

2. Alex Aissaoui, 'Was There a Balance of Power System in the Ancient Near East?', *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 30(3): 421–442 (2019). https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09592296.2019.1641916

3. Alex Aissaoui, 'Diplomacy in Ancient Times: The Figure of Udjahorresnet: An International Relations Perspective,' *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 26: 12–34 (2020). https://egyptianexpedition.org/articles/diplomacy-in-ancient-times-the-figure-of-udjahorresnet-an-international-relations-perspective/

Henceforth, the publications are referred to in the text by their designated numbers.

INTRODUCTION

> ...to understand the course of world politics, it is necessary to focus attention upon the material and long-term elements rather than the vagaries of personality or the week-by-week shifts of diplomacy and politics...[1]

This article-based dissertation is a study about the dialogue between international relations (IR) and ancient history. The main purpose is to find out whether a meaningful discourse is possible between the distant past and world politics.[2] At stake is less what we can learn from international history as such although, obviously, this is a question that cannot be bypassed. Rather, the idea is to analyze whether classic themes of international anarchy related to war and peace – balance of power (BoP), bandwagoning, diplomacy, the security dilemma, and treaty making – are applicable in an international arena dating back millennia. Ultimately, this raises two questions: a) how do classical IR concepts such as "state," "international system," "international society," and indeed the generic term "international" per se fit in with the political landscape of the ancient Near Eastern world and b) what should we make out of the problematic coexistence between the disciplines of history and political science (see, e.g., Levy 2001). Inevitably, the second question leads us to issues of 'presentism,' which has different meanings within the disciplines of IR and history respectively – in the former field, the criticism centers on the excessive attention contemporary issues draw, and in the latter, on the way the present affects historians' approach to a given object of study (for further details, see Buzan and Little 2000: 18–19, 27; see also Burke 1993: x–xi; Hingley 2015: 40–41; Smail and Shryock 2013: 709–11; Smith 1999: 28–29). Suffice it to say, at this point, that in order to have a deeper understanding of the course of world politics, it is beneficial for the discipline to shift from contemporary twists and turns of everyday diplomacy into a more long-term approach (see, e.g., Kennedy 1987; Morgenthau 2006 [1948]: 18; for a discussion on the benefits of longer term narratives, see Guldi and Armitage 2014: 14–18, 34–35, 37, 54–57).

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[1] Qtd. in Kennedy 1987: 17.

[2] Throughout this article dissertation, international politics, international relations, and world politics are used as synonyms, and are only capitalized when they refer to the academic discipline of International Relations after Hollis and Smith's (1991: 10) useful convention. The phrase 'world politics' has gained currency among scholars in the 21st century, as it is more inclusive and generic than either of the alternative terms 'international politics' or 'international relations,' which refer more exclusively to relations among states – yet both 'international relations' and 'world politics' continue to be used in the IR literature almost interchangeably according to a study conducted in 2014 (see Albert 2016: 128, 131, n. 54; Owens, Baylis, and Smith 2023 [1997]: 6). By and large, however, the present study delves into areas that fall in the traditional state-centric sphere of international relations and international politics (on the use of terminology in the field of IR, see, e.g., Albert 2016: 126–32; Burchill and Linklater 2013 [1996]: 1, 13; Devetak and True 2022 [1996]: 1; Evans and Newnham 1998: 274–75; James 1993: 270).

In the late 1970s, Hedley Bull (2002 [1977]), a prominent English School (ES) scholar, wrote about the institutions of BoP, diplomacy, great powers, war, and international law that he considered as crucial to the maintenance of international order. With the caveat that 'international law'[3] does not in actual fact fit the premodern world as an anachronistic term and is thus left outside the purview of this study, the existence of these other primary institutions is the central theme of the present article collection (on this point, see Hurrell (2002 [1977]): vii–viii). They can be labeled as institutions in the sense that historically BoP, diplomacy, great powers, and war, have had an institutional-like effect on the structure of interstate relations, and this continues to be the case in the contemporary world although one can no longer consider these institutions as static as presented by Hedley Bull (for a take on this point, see Buzan 2006: chap. 4; see also Friedner Parrat 2017: 623–24).[4] This dissertation advances two hypotheses: a) the primary institutions of BoP, diplomacy, great powers, and war were relevant in the ancient world and b) their early manifestation can be found outside of the European experience. If it can be shown that international order, characterized by international anarchy, was distinctly present in the pre-modern world preceding even the archaic and classical periods (ca. 800–500 BCE[5] – 500 BCE–600 CE)[6], then this raises serious doubts about the traditional narrative of world politics where the emphasis has been on the significance of the Westphalian order. Consequently, in essence, this study probes the temporal limits of analyzing states systems.

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[3] Legal historians tend to be divided as to the question of whether we may consider the rules of the ancient Near East as the basis for modern European international law. However, since the 1980s, both in the fields of legal history and international relations, there is a better appreciation of the cultural heritage and continuum of the preclassical world. For further information, see Altman 2012: xxii–xxv; Preiser 1984a: 126–30; see also n. 23.

[4] As secondary institutions, such as ad hoc intergovernmental organizations like the United Nations (UN), NATO, or the World Trade Organization (WTO), are very much part of modern global politics, they do not fall into the category of systematic analysis as institutions in this study. For further reference, see, e.g., Youde 2018: 33–39; see also Schouenborg 2011: 28.

[5] Henceforth the term 'BCE' will be jettisoned as redundant as the chronology of the present chapter is based on events having occurred almost exclusively before the Common Era. An exception to this rule is only applied when making a reference to the expression of 'millennium' in order to avoid chronological confusion with time periods dating back to the Common Era.

[6] Classical antiquity traditionally refers to the Greco-Roman world from the archaic period to the fall of the Western Roman Empire. In world historical context, however, the river valley cultures of China, India, Egypt and the Near East are also included in the list as regards the archaic period. However, this study focuses on the pre-classical world with the emphasis being the early civilization period (3500–1000). For a closer look at chronological matters in Eurasia, see Tignor et al. 2018 [2002]: 80–81, 118–19, 196–97, 234–35; for a discussion on the periodization of the archaic period, see, e.g., Shapiro 2007: 1–2.

In recent years, the Eurocentric image has undoubtedly started to change in IR theory, triggered by an increasing awareness of the fact that some of the primary institutions, such as diplomacy and power balancing, can be found across history wherever polities have formed an international system (for further information on historical international orders, see, e.g., Buzan and Schouenborg 2018: 26; Armstrong 2014 [1997]: 37–39; Lawson 2023 [1997]: 40–42). Yet the Westphalian 'straitjacket'[7] or the belief that the seventeenth-century Europe, especially the Peace of Westphalia ending the Thirty Years War, should stand as a model for international states systems for all times and places has by no means lost its constitutive position as a defining moment inside the discipline. It follows that while the IR theory of the 21st century has in many ways moved beyond the strict interpretation of the Westphalian paradigm, its heritage continues to influence the self-image of the field of International Relations in a powerful way (see Larkins 2010: 3; Osiander 2007: 247; see also James 2024: 57–58, 62; Reus-Smit 2020: 87–90, 112–13). Importantly, however, the Peace of Westphalia is no longer automatically considered as the only starting point for thinking about the development of international orders, whether modern or ancient (see, e.g., Buzan and Little 2000; Ferguson et al. 2000; Lawson 2023 [1997]: 42; Mueser 2024: 9).

An important theme of the article dissertation revolves around the problematic relationship between various concepts and the phenomena they aim to describe – the tension between the two continues to be an issue in the discipline of World Politics (see, e.g., Berenskoetter 2016: chap. 1). In concrete terms, when we enter the ancient Near Eastern political landscape, concepts such as a) 'balance of power'; b) 'buffer-state'; c) 'club of the great powers'; d) 'superpower'; e) 'international equilibrium'; f) 'international system'; g) 'political system'; h) 'state system' pop up frequently in the literature. Yet these terms are not seriously put to the test through the lenses of IR scholarship since the authors are coming from different academic backgrounds, mostly from the fields of ancient history, anthropology, archaeology, Assyriology, Egyptology, and Hittitology. Indeed, insights of realism have, for the most part, only rarely and superficially been applied to the study of ancient states systems in the Mediterranean world whereas most realists and other IR scholars lack a

[7] For further details on the specific meaning of the expression 'straitjacket,' see Buzan and Little 2001: 24–25; see also Buzan 2004: 4, 169. For those readers interested in the historical analysis of the Thirty Years War, see, e.g., Osiander 1994: chaps. 1–3; Theibault 1997; Wilson 2010. For a take on the process of institutionalization of the myth of Westphalia in the field of IR, see, e.g., Edmunds 1919: 170; Gross (1948); Herz 1957: 475–80; Koskenniemi 2021: 811–15; Malchow 2020 [2016]: 191; Morgenthau (2006 [1948]: 317–18; Schmidt 2011: 605–07, 610–11; Snow 1912: 891; von Treitschke (1963 [1916]: 569–70; Wistrand 1921: 525; Wright 1954: 619–21; 1960: 526; 1965: 305; for a critical assessment of the 'Westphalian order' and the conception of sovereignty, see Cavallar 2023: 167–69; Evans and Newnham 1998: 573; Glanville 2013: 85–86; Koskenniemi 2021: 807–15; McKercher 2011: xviii; Roberts 1996: 252–55; Schroeder 2010: 92; Thompson 2006: 256; Wilson 2010: 751–54; see also Steinmetz 1999; Wight 1992: 140.

sophisticated knowledge of Mediterranean antiquity (see Eckstein 2006: chap. 1). Leaving the aspect of cross-disciplinarity aside for a moment, there is another reason why conceptual analysis is relevant for the present study. As Felix Berenskoetter (2016: 9) observes: "concepts have a history." The historical approach not only applies to exploring how concepts have been used in the past but also to examining how, in the absence of a theoretical understanding of a given phenomenon, the very phenomenon could exist altogether. The issue of concepts and words has gained traction in wider academia in recent decades under the label of 'linguistic turn', increasing the awareness "that concepts are often created and apply to a specific place and time," as the medieval historian, Christian Raffensperger (2024: 2), has observed. Moreover, since concepts like state, BoP, or sovereignty were first theorized in early modern Europe, how can we analyze these elementary social constructs in IR theory in the context of the ancient world? The question also applies to other fundamental concepts of the field such as power or war, which are not only subjective in nature, but also lose their analytical reach if we define them too narrowly (see, e.g., Reus-Smit 2020: 33, 49–50) – this challenge is always present the further back we move in time. However, we might ask, as does the French Assyriologist Bertrand Lafont (2001: 41): "…is it necessary to conceptualize diplomacy to make diplomacy?" Since this rhetorical question is at the heart of the conceptual analysis of the dissertation, it is raised in articles 1 and 3 focusing on the Amarna Age as well as the first Achaemenid conquest of Egypt respectively.

RAISON D'ÊTRE AND THE PROBLEM OF HISTORY

As with any effort to do academic research, one is always bound to face questions addressing the rationale of a given research project. In the field of International Relations, this challenge becomes even more pronounced when examining premodern political arenas, which predate even the classical world by millennia, and thus lack immediate relevance. Accordingly, let us contemplate a set of four issues, which will give further justification for the present article-based dissertation before tackling the problem that the discipline of history poses for IR scholarship.

First, we might just as well ask: "Why study the ancient Near East? Should this not belong to the fields of Assyriology, Egyptology, Hittitology, Sumerology and all the other disciplines focusing on Ancient Near Eastern Studies (ANES) instead of World Politics?" At the surface level, the answer is in the affirmative. Yet at a closer look, there are points of contact and mutual benefits for a cross-disciplinary approach. In the field of IR, we are familiar with the argument according to which the roots of an international system of states lead to ancient Greece of the classical period (510–323) and to some extent to ancient China. However, when we enter the political landscape of ancient western Asia, which precedes by two millennia the Greco-Roman and Chinese counterparts, exemplified by the writings of Thucydides and Sun Tzu, important structural differences vis-à-vis the latter two international arenas emerge (for a take on the comparative perspective between Chinese and

other Eurasian civilizations, see, e.g., Hui 2004, 2005). Indeed, one of the central claims of this dissertation is to demonstrate that the international scene of the ancient Near East meets the criteria for what Joseph Nye has called a 'complex interdependence,'[8] a phenomenon which became manifest already in the early second millennium BCE when several Near Eastern empires coexisted and rivaled one another (for a take on this aspect, see, e.g., Dossin 1938: 117–18). This assertion has important implications, for the existence of empires did not bring about the end of international anarchy as is sometimes assumed in IR scholarship, i.e., hierarchical imperial structures could operate within an anarchical environment as is shown in article 2 (see Buzan and Little 2000: 232–33, 373; Knutsen and Hall 2021: 398–99, 405; Wight 1977: 43; see also Reus-Smit 2020: 12–13, chap. 2). Another related factor giving legitimacy to the present treatise points to the fact that there is still a wide acceptance of thinking that sovereignty and the balance of power principle allegedly found their first expressions in early modern Europe and in the Peace of Westphalia in particular. Increasingly, however, these assumptions have been questioned as scholars within IR have started to recognize the need to go beyond the conventional narrative of what constitutes the basic building blocks of the field. Examples range from a new reading of classics in IR theory, including Rousseau and Thucydides, the former a thinker who no longer easily fits into the realist category and the latter someone who is no longer unequivocally considered as the founder of the realist tradition in his analysis of the causes of war (for a new reading on Rousseau in IR scholarship, see Aiko 2005: chap. 5; Aissaoui 2009: 23; Behr 2010; Boucher 1998: 300–02; Hakovirta 2010: 18–19, 20, 22–23; idem on Thucydides, see Williams 2005: chap. 2; Behr 2010: 23–24; Johnson 1994; Eckstein 2003; Lebow 2003: 19–20; for a take on the continuity thesis and a nuanced view of Thucydides in IR theory, see also Doyle 1991; Kokaz 2001: 92–93, 94, 98–99, 118).

Second, it is well established in Ancient Near East Studies that cities, writing, administration and collection of laws, social stratification, even a primitive democracy, and other innovations in human endeavor such as a rudimentary banking system, mathematical thinking, astronomy, and calendar saw their birth for the first time in western Asia (for a take on the cultural heritage of the ancient Near East, see, e.g., Eddinger 2010: 324–32; Hallo 1996: 419–23, 427; Kuhrt 2006 [1995]; Roberts and Westad 2014 [1976]: 51, 54–55, 63–67).[9] These innovations were made possible by the birth of agriculture, or what the

[8] In IR literature, the concept of complex interdependence is usually understood as a situation where economic manipulation and the use of and respect for international institutions rather than raw power prevail in interstate relations (Nye and Welch 2017 [2011]: 317–18; see also n. 4). However, in the context of the present study, complex interdependence implies a larger meaning of multiple channels of contact between polities, which together create an environment for a states system to exist.

[9] As of 2026, the world has, for the most part, left behind a global pandemic known as COVID-19, which killed around 6.5 million people during the active phase of the epidemic (2020–2022). Even though the most well-

Australian archaeologist Gordon Childe (1951 [1936]: chap. 5) called 'the Neolithic Revolution' in the Near East around 10 000 BCE. While these examples may seem to be vague abstractions from the distant past, they are relevant for the present study in that they establish a linkage between cities, writing,[10] administration and law collections, and, ultimately, the development of city-states, territorial states and empires. As a result, we can also trace the first tangible written evidence for power balancing strategies, state formation, and sovereignty and treaty-making in this part of the world – the BoP aspect, in particular, is tackled in article 2 of the dissertation where the IR focus addresses the question of whether there was a system of power balancing in the ancient Near East (see, e.g., Altman 2012; Barjamovic 2016: 120–53; Kitchen and Lawrence 2012 [Part 3]: 3–4). While the international arena of what constituted the ancient Near East remains underdeveloped in the field of IR, there is a recognition that the first political units formed in this part of the world (see Buzan and Little 2000: chap. 8; see also Malchow 2020 [2016]: 104). Yet persistent stereotypes about the nature of political power in ancient western Asia linger on, characterized by the concept of oriental despotism. Indeed, the Orientalism debate has marked Western attitudes, historiography, and scholarship on the Near East and Asia for over two millennia – an image that can also still be seen to resonate in the field of Political Science where the problematic relationship between East and West echoes in Samuel Huntington's (1993; 1996: 234) "clash of the civilizations" thesis. Yet the structure of the international scene in the Near East during the second millennium was both monolithic and decentralized at the same time as is explained in articles 1–3 of the dissertation.

A third reason for studying the early states and premodern international arenas is the rise of what Francis Fukuyama (1992: 276–77) has called a 'historical world' as opposed to the 'post-historical world' in his influential yet controversial book *The End of History and the Last Man*. The former is characterized by the prevalence of nation-state and power politics as well as religious, national, and ideological conflicts whereas the latter by economic integration, liberalism and democracy. If the first decade of the 21st century was marked by the fight against terrorism in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks (2001), the second

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known cases of flu epidemics date from the 20th century, the roots of the first crowd diseases probably hark back to the ancient Near East and more specifically to the city-state of Uruk some 5000 years ago – in the second millennium BCE, we have direct primary source evidence to show that plague, an even more deadly form of disease than COVID-19, affected human existence in the Near East (see, e.g., Spinney 2017: 18–19; see also Panagiotakopulu 2004).

[10] Interestingly, scholars specializing in ANES have started to argue that the level of literacy in the ancient Near East was probably higher than previously thought already from the late third millennium BCE onwards. Although the exact level of literacy among various groups is hard to assess with precision, the proficiency in reading and writing was not exclusively restricted to scribes alone but included, among others, members of the rulers' entourage such as heads of accounting, diviners, and even diplomatic messengers. For further details, see, e.g., Charpin 2008: chap. 1; Sasson 2015: 2–3; Van De Mieroop 2016 [2004]: 287.

decade saw the return of interstate conflict in Europe, bringing the old themes of great power rivalry, identity politics and nationalism much more visibly back on the agenda of world politics than was hoped for in the euphoria following the end of the Cold War – clearly, we have not yet entered into a 'post-national' era (see Kagan 2008: 4–13; Dunne and Schmidt 2020 [1997]: 143; Rosenboim 2023 [1997]: 142–45; see also Gat 2013: 313; McKercher 2011: xv–xxvii; Maiolo 2018: 583; Mandelbaum 2019b; for further details on the concept of post-national, see Calhoun 2007: chap. 1). The limits of globalization and *laissez-faire* capitalism also mean that the role of the state, especially in the Western world, has changed in the aftermath of managing the financial crisis of 2007–2008 by propping up banks in a Keynesian effort (see, e.g., Gylfason et al. 2010: 256–57). Although the long-term commitment of state interventionism in the economic field remains uncertain in the post-2007 world, the macroeconomic volatility has brought states back in as economic regulators (see Wolf 2014: 204, 213–18; for an early phase analysis of the ill effects of globalization on Western societies, see Rodrik 1997: chaps. 3–5). In international diplomacy, the cumbersome process of the United Nations Security Council[11] (UNSC) reform reminds us that power, prestige, and regional rivalry are permanent features of great power status, which do not date back to recent history – in the 21st century, as in the more distant past, great powers are careful to cling to their established positions in the international system (on the process and problems of reforming the UNSC, see Hanhimäki 2015 [2008]: 136–37; Lättilä and Ylönen 2019: 166, 171, 172, 179).

From the perspective of power politics in view of the resurgence of nationalism and macroeconomic uncertainty, the common accusation wielded against the field of IR and realist thinking, in particular, of being too state-centric is quite unwarranted as states continue to possess significant system-forming power (see, e.g., Booth and Erskine 2016 [1995]: 3–4; Holsti 2004: 306; McGrew 2023 [1997]: 30, 33; Waltz 2001 [1959]: chaps. 4, 7, 8; 1979). In February 2020, the problem of the return of great power rivalry between the US, China, and Russia was raised at the Munich Security Conference (MSC), which gathers international security policy decision-makers from around the world annually (1963–). According to Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the president of Germany (2017–) and one of the speakers at the opening of the MSC, "the world is witnessing destructive dynamics in world politics" because the three "great powers don't adhere to the rules and do not protect the world order anymore" (see MSC 2020 Opening: "Great Powers do not Protect the World Order Anymore") – the tone was even more dire in early 2026 when the German Chancelor

[11] Incidentally, a replica of the first known peace treaty between great powers that has survived to posterity hangs above the entrance of the Security Council Chamber of the UN – the Kadesh Treaty (ca. 1259 BCE) is a constant reminder of the relevance of questions of war and peace and great powerhood, which find their origins in the ancient Near Eastern political arena in terms of the first written evidence emanating from western Asia (for further details, see Aissaoui 2019: 425; see also Hast 2014).

Friedrich Merz stated that "a deep divide has opened between Europe and the United States" (see MSC 2026 Opening: "Germany in Europe and the World"). The reelection of Donald Trump as president of the United States in November 2024, the prospect of global trade wars, and the possibility of great power management of important security issues affecting the international system have only accentuated this power political turn, or, if you will, the return of the 'Great Game'[12]. Another source of instability is the lack of global leadership, which has weakened the cohesiveness of NATO and the whole Western alliance while making allies and adversaries alike seek close ties with the all-too-powerful United States – this is a pattern of political behavior that comes through in the post-Cold War world, possessing interesting analogies with premodern political landscapes, including the ancient Near East (see Ikenberry 2001: 253, n. 131; 2009: 78–80, 83–84; Ikenberry, Mastanduno, and Wohlforth 2009: 1, 3, 10, 26–27; Zaccagnini 2000: 145, 148, 150–52). To be sure, there are signs that the Euro-Atlantic partnership is starting to diminish significantly from the ideal model of integration defined by Karl W. Deutsch et al. (1957: 5–6, 67–69), who introduced the concept of a 'pluralistic security community' to emphasize the potential for making major war obsolete within the North Atlantic area. Consequently, the rules-based international order is at risk of fading away while the nefarious side of international anarchy of the past, with its specified spheres of influence, is reemerging (for a take on the role of the leading great powers, see Bull 2002 [1977]: 196, 200; Little 2006: 109–13; Schake 2025: 8–21; see also Aissaoui 2025: 276, n. 5, 293–95; Joseph 2025). Related to this phenomenon is the way the leading states resort to the use of hard and soft power: this aspect of global politics is also part of the story raised in articles 1–3. Accordingly, an international scene

[12] Historically, the term 'Great Game' is attributed to a British political officer Arthur Conolly, who used the expression in two letters (1840) to Major Henry Rawlinson, the latter has incidentally later been described as the "father of Assyriology." Subsequently, the metaphor, which has been employed with a variety of meanings, was popularized in Rudyard Kipling's (1901) novel *Kim* although the term gained wider currency only after the Second World War (for a thorough account of the historical context surrounding the concept, see Yap 2001: 180, 184–86, 198; see also Hopkirk 2006 [1991]: 123; Kiernan 1982: chap. 4, 179). In the first letter, Conolly informed Rawlinson: "You've a great game, a noble game before you…", implying that Britain had a *mission civilisatrice* in Afghanistan rather than the imperial designs of Russia to worry about (Kaye 1867: 101; see also Yap 2001: 181). In the second letter, Connolly implores "…the British government…to play the grand game" to secure both British and Russian interests in Central Asia (Kaye 1867: 104). Thus, from the IR standpoint, the latter missive explicitly refers to the Anglo-Russian political and diplomatic confrontation that existed for the most part of the late nineteenth century, anticipating the Cold War rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union on a global scale a century later. Yet the political conditions for the continual existence of the Great Game, this time between the global powers of the United States and China, in particular, followed by Russia, have revived after the Cold War period – three examples of this rivalry include the NATO expansion in Europe, the Belt and Road Initiative by China, and the question over Taiwan's sovereignty (see, e.g., Brzezinski 2016 [1997]: chap. 2; Hass, Glaser, and Bush 2023: 88–94, 101–05; see also Hast 2014; Rice 2024: 10–12, 22–23).

where high politics and questions of war and peace increasingly dominate the agenda of world politics, understanding the workings of political landscapes in the ancient Near East provides us with a valuable long-term perspective on BoP, diplomacy, great powers, and war, making it easier to evaluate to what extent these primary institutions are permanent rather than transitory, i.e., tied to a particular temporal context (see, e.g., Bull 1976: 112–13, 116; Cohen and Westbrook 2000: 5; Mansbach 2003: ix; Morgenthau 2006 [1948]: 18). While we have to avoid an ahistorical stance when evoking the 'permanence' of any institution, the *longue durée* vantage point, nevertheless, elucidates patterns and mechanisms behind the functioning of these institutions.

Finally, the fourth reason giving a justification for this research project is what we might call "the problem of history." An article-based dissertation scrutinizing political landscapes that predate by over a millennium seismic events like the Peloponnesian and Punic Wars, which are more familiar episodes among IR scholars, must take seriously the often thorny relationship between history and international relations. While it is not possible to fully cover this complex issue, for reasons of brevity, we can nevertheless open up some of the central aspects related to it. An important starting point is the argument brought up by the ES scholar Hedley Bull (1995 [1972]:182) who has observed that "historical study is essential…because any international political situation is located in time." Bull (2000 [1972]: 252–54), who elaborated quite extensively the rapport between the two fields, felt that there was an intrinsic educational value in historical explanation. Across the Atlantic similar echoes could already be heard in the 1970s from thinkers like Stanley Hoffmann (1977: 57) or R. B. J. Walker (1995 [1977]: 316–27, 332–35) who criticized the unnecessary presentism, structuralist explanations, 'anarchophilia' or Newtonian metaphysics they felt stood in the way of taking full advantage of an elaborate historical research agenda (for a more recent take, see also Malchow 2020 [2016]: 122). Even during the heyday of the behavioralist movement, Morton Kaplan (1957a: 694; 1967 [1957b]: 3) characterized history as "the laboratory for research, since controlled experiments, for the most part, are out of the question in the field of International Politics" (see also Lawson 2018: 75). In substance, IR theory cannot ignore history for every significant political process – whether democratization, interstate war, revolution, or state formation – is immersed in history, and the study of international history has an inherent pedagogical value for making better sense of these phenomena (see Bull 1995 [1972]: 182–83; 1972: 256–57; Tilly 2006: 417, 420, 433–34; see also Steinmetz 1999).

Despite the arguments advanced above, the question still stands as to why history matters for the discipline. A key point here is that an adequate understanding of international history is essential for explaining the nature of many of our present assumptions and ideas about the study of world politics. Consequently, historical evidence supports the proposition that what is ostentatiously considered new is in fact often deeply entrenched in historical experience – this state of affairs also applies to the internal dynamics of the field of IR (see Schmidt 2013: 4). Martin Wight, a founding member of the English School tradition, went

further in problematizing the complex relationship between international relations and history in an article provocatively titled as: "Why is There No International Theory?" In it, Wight (1960: 43) asserted that "…the play would be the same old melodrama. International politics is the realm of recurrence and repetition…." Wight's interpretation of the past is problematic, however, for it leaves little room for change, evolution and development, rendering international history cyclical in nature. Indeed, this kind of static view of assessing the past constituted a key rationale for me to write article 2 on power balancing so as to question the conception proposed by some modern scholars that the last few hundred years suffice to comprehend the BoP theory (on this point, see Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2009). Although balancing behavior tends to follow a well-defined pattern (see Appendix 1), IR research has started to distance itself from the position that BoP is attached to a particular moment in time, recognizing instead that the form the historical past, including the power balancing tradition, takes is a dynamic, non-static process of change (see, e.g., MacKay and Laroche 2017: 206–09; see also Dinneen 2018). If we can accept this premise, then what is the takeaway of IR scholarship on past history for the disciplines focusing on the ancient Near East in the framework of this article-based dissertation? We can approach this question from at least two angles, one tackling an historian's analysis of Mesopotamia, and the other the way a specific IR concept can enlighten the inner dynamics of the ancient Near Eastern world.

Almost seven decades ago, Joan Margaret Munn-Rankin (1956: 84, 109–10), an archaeologist and historian specializing in the ancient Near East, wrote an article titled 'Diplomacy in Western Asia in the Early Second Millennium B.C.' to explore the political landscape of Mesopotamia during the Old Babylonian (OB) period (ca. 2004–1595). Although not recent, the research article is still an authoritative assessment of the nature of complex interdependence during the first half of the second millennium. One of the core arguments made by Munn-Rankin is her analysis of the political implications of the parity vs non-parity relationship between major states and vassals, which captures the very nature of political rivalry in the ancient Near East during the second millennium. A strict power hierarchy demarcated the political status of small vassals from that of their overlords, but, importantly, as Munn-Rankin recognizes, kinship terms such as brother' or 'son' were not always reliable guides to describe political status. To be sure, as I raise in article 2, a key to understanding the inconsistencies of diplomatic protocol is to resort to a systemic approach in the form of international anarchy. This reminds us of J. David Singer's (1961: 80) levels of analysis problematics where he praised the systemic level of analysis for permitting "us to examine international relations in the whole, with a comprehensiveness that is of necessity lost when our focus is shifted to a lower, and more partial, level" – this kind of approach features prominently in article 3 where the three Waltzian images of individual (man), polity (state), and international system (war) intertwine (see Waltz 2001 [1959]). In the ancient Near Eastern context, in other words, the concept of international anarchy enables us to see the overall dynamics beneath the details of political history and appreciate how intent the competing great kings were on winning the loyalty of the small buffer kingdoms so as to preserve the balance – here the emphasis of the anarchical environment leans on the side of

system rather than a hierarchical power structure and is highlighted in article 2. This kind of political environment also contributed to the emergence of a complex web of treaties (see, e.g., Tignor et al. 2018 [2002]: 96; see also Liverani 2014: 219). Ancient Near Eastern specialists, Assyriologists, Egyptologists and historians in particular, who often focus on the accuracy of their translations of the primary sources and the soundness of their interpretations, provide a space for IR scholarship, packed with theoretical tools, to enter the scene.[13]

The security dilemma has been part of modern IR theory ever since it was brought to the attention of scholars by John H. Herz, who coined and popularized the term along with Herbert Butterfield of the English School tradition.[14] While important themes of unresolvable uncertainty in anarchy, vicious circle, struggle for power, and nascent elements of offensive realism were brought up by Herz (1950: 157; 1951: 3, 15, 239; 1959a: 235, 243), in fact, Herz was theorizing a phenomenon already known centuries earlier although he and modern scholars have been rather silent about this – in Western political thought, the implicit theorizing on security dilemma dates back to the classical period of ancient Greece when Thucydides tried to understand the root causes of the Peloponnesian War(s) (see, e.g., Booth and Wheeler 2008: 21–24; Ramsbotham et al. 2024 [1999]: 478). The French political philosopher of the Enlightenment, Baron de Montesquieu (1748) in his *De l'esprit des lois* (*The Spirit of Laws*), famous for his views on the separation of powers, observes how the increase of troops by one prince leads to a similar increase by another, thus weakening the security of all sides. In Montesquieu's (1951 [1748]: livre XIII: chap. XVII) own words:

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[13] A. Leo Oppenheim (1977 [1964]: 24–30) was one of the first Assyriologists to recognize the value of other disciplines in an effort to better contextualize the meaning of the cuneiform tablets found in Mesopotamia. For Oppenheim, the rationale for making cross-disciplinary dialogue operational relates to the challenges faced by Assyriologists and other disciplines focusing on the ancient Near East. Among these must be included the chronological gaps or blackouts and documentary evidence where problems of interpretation loom large and make it difficult to make balanced judgments and reconstructions about several areas and time periods. Yet these hurdles invite the participation of other disciplines to do their part to better understand the past experiences in western Asia. Oppenheim listed mathematicians, economists, social scientists, and anthropologists as examples of scholars who can and have contributed to ancient Near Eastern scholarship. In article 3, in view of this dialogue between disciplines, I applied the term 'political capital,' which is a derivation from Pierre Bourdieu's 'social capital,' in order to explain the way Achaemenid Persia used soft power strategies to smooth the takeover of Egypt as part of the Persian empire.

[14] IR scholar Alexander Astrov (2005: 166, n. 15) considers Herbert Butterfield as the first to articulate the central realist concept of 'security dilemma' in his *History and Human Relations*. Butterfield's (1951: 20–23) approach, however, was less precise than that of Herz as the former spoke of the 'absolute predicament or irreducible dilemma' although the basic elements of the security dilemma such as uncertainty and the inability to "enter into the other man's counter-fear" were present in Butterfield's analysis.

> Une maladie nouvelle s'est répandue en Europe; elle a saisi nos princes, et leur fait entretenir un nombre désordonné de troupes. Elle a ses redoublements, et elle devient nécessairement contagieuse: car, sitôt qu'un État augmente ce qu'il appelle ses troupes, les autres soudain augmentent les leurs, de façon qu'on ne gagne rien par-là que la ruine commune. Chaque monarque tient sur pied toutes les armées qu'il pourrait avoir si ses peuples étaient en danger d'être exterminés; et on nomme paix cet état d'effort de tous contre tous. [15]
>
> A new disease has spread across Europe; it has afflicted our princes and made them keep an inordinate number of troops. It redoubles in strength and necessarily becomes contagious; for, as soon as one state increases what it calls its troops, the others suddenly increase theirs, so that nothing is gained thereby but the common ruin. Each monarch keeps ready all the armies he would have if his peoples were in danger of being exterminated; and this state in which all strain against all is called peace. (Translation after Cohler, Miller and Stone 1989 [1748]: 224.)

At the center of the excerpt are the lines where Montesquieu writes "…for, as soon as one state increases what it calls its troops, the others suddenly increase theirs, so that nothing is gained thereby but the common ruin…and this state in which all strain against all is called peace." Undoubtedly, there is a touch of exaggeration here, as security dilemmas are not inevitable and do not always lead to direct conflict – both historians and political scientists are increasingly aware of this (for a take on the limits of explaining the Peloponnesian War(s) by leaning on the concept of the security dilemma alone, see, e.g., Novo 2016: 1, 14; Novo and Parker 2020: 36; Nye 2009 [1993]: 18–19). Yet, at the same time, there is a timeless quality to these statements by Montesquieu who was writing during the continent-wide great power war known as the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–1748). Not only do Montesquieu's writings capture the vicious circle, which is characteristic of the security dilemma, but they also echo Thomas Hobbes's sinister image of the never-ending cycle of violence under international anarchy.[16] More to the point is the fact that Montesquieu is describing unequivocally the logic behind the security dilemma without, however, explicitly naming it. Significantly, Montesquieu was not alone with his analysis of the security dilemma.[17] Jeremy Bentham also understood its sinister meaning in interstate relations. In

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[15] Montesquieu first developed his views on the vicissitudes of international anarchy in an essay titled *Réflexions sur la monarchie universelle en Europe* (1734), some of the parts of which he later reproduced almost verbatim in *The Spirit of Laws* as highlighted in the excerpt above. For further reference, see Caillois 1951: 1479–480; Montesquieu (1951 [1734]): 37.

[16] Incidentally, Thomas Hobbes was intimately familiar with Thucydides' thinking as he had translated the Greek historian's chef d'œuvre, *History of the Peloponnesian War* into English in 1629.

[17] Another French-speaking political thinker of the Enlightenment, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, also elaborated the dynamics of the security dilemma, but his approach was more implicit than Montesquieu's. However, he did recognize the mechanics behind the concept in the framework of international anarchy in *A Lasting Peace and the State of War* (1761) by pointing to the fact that "…each one of us being in the civil state as regards our fellow citizens, but in the state of nature as regards the rest of the world, we have taken all kinds of precautions against private wars only to kindle national wars a thousand times more terrible." Similarly, in *The State of War* (ca. 1756–58) "…all the horrors of war are born out of the measures taken in order to prevent one…"

A Plan for an Universal and Perpetual Peace, which forms part IV of the *Principles of International Law*, Bentham (1843 [1786–1789]: 559) writes that "Measures of mere self-defence are naturally taken for projects of aggression…" for "…each makes haste to begin for fear of being forestalled…" with the result that "…if on either side there happen to be a minister or a would-be minister, who has a fancy for war, the stroke is struck, and the tinder catches fire" (see also Wolfers 1962: 159, n. 12). Like Montesquieu, Bentham does not mention the security dilemma by name, but he captures the psychology of military escalation in most unambiguous terms. It is of great interest to note that it was Martin Wight (1960: 43–44), who brought up the excerpt from Montesquieu's *Sprit of Laws* in his polemical essay on what he saw as the lack of international theory. However, he did not recognize Montesquieu's description of the spiral model as the security dilemma, although Wight did deplore the "fatalistic doctrine" behind Montesquieu's words – modern scholars have not made this kind of conceptual linkage either even though the elements for filling the gaps are clearly there (see, e.g., Booth and Wheeler 2008: 21–26). John H. Herz (1950: 163), who is associated with the modern use of the term, did mention Montesquieu's name in his article but he did not associate him with the concept of the security dilemma (for background information on the coinage of the term, see also Herz 2003: 412–13). And yet, when we compare Montesquieu's assessment of the state of interstate relations of his day in Europe with that of Herz's (1950: 157), two hundred years later, there are striking similarities as demonstrated by the following excerpt from the latter's article:

> Wherever…anarchic society has existed – and it has existed in most periods of known history on some level – there has arisen what may be called the 'security dilemma' of men, groups or, or their leaders. Groups or individuals living in such a constellation must be, and usually are, concerned about their security from being attacked, subjected, dominated, or annihilated by other groups and individuals. Striving to attain security from such attack, they are driven to acquire more and more power in order to escape the impact of the power of others. This, in turn, renders the others more insecure and compels them to prepare for the worst. Since none can ever feel entirely secure in such a world of competing units, power competition ensues, and the vicious circle of security and power accumulation is on."

Both Montesquieu and Herz see an environment of mistrust where the accumulation of power by one group of people strikes fear in the other group as the principal source of insecurity, thus creating the conditions for the security dilemma to exist. In contrast to Herz, Montesquieu did not use the term security dilemma but he understood and described the logic of it *avant la lettre*.

In a forthcoming article (Aissaoui 2026), which lies outside the scope of the article-based dissertation, I tackle the concept of the security dilemma, for it acts as an important systemic

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Rousseau captures the idea that military buildup leads to the never-ending cycle of security dilemmas. For further details on the citations both in English and French, see Vaughan 1917 [1761]: 38; Rousseau (1964 [ca. 1756–58, 1761]): 564, 603; see also Battistella (2003): 437.

variable in explaining the expansion of various city-state polities in southern Mesopotamia during the late third and early second millennia BCE. Although not explicitly addressed in the current dissertation, the explanatory power of the security dilemma in also addressing the dynamics of inter-polity relations in the LBA context is rather convincing. Furthermore, the concept has a similar function to the BoP in the sense that the security dilemma, with its vicious spiral of security-insecurity, which is akin to the action-reaction logic of power balancing, creates the conditions for the appearance of larger systemic behavior, including "systems of rival alliances," leading ultimately to the emergence of states systems (cit. in McNeill 1991 [1963]: 43–44). Theoretically, the security dilemma touches one of the main arguments of this article-based dissertation as regards the conceptual analysis, namely the temporal discrepancy that often tends to emerge between concepts and the empirical world they intend to describe. This is certainly the case when we are dealing with the dynamics of the security dilemma, which, as shown above, was implicitly recognized already in 18th-century political thought, but was explicitly theorized in the field of IR only in the post-Second World War context.

To close this subsection on the problem of history, it is time to briefly look at how IR scholarship has addressed the ancient Near Eastern world. Although not part of the mainstream scholarly focus, the field of International Relations has taken an interest in analyzing the premodern international arenas. Quincy Wright (1942: 576–77, 759), belonging to the early generation of IR scholars, in his classic *A Study of War*, did recognize the relevance of ancient Mesopotamia for the study of world politics admitting for instance that 'unformulated functioning' of the balance of power can be studied "among Babylonian, and Egyptian civilizations" – overall, however, Wright's approach to the ancient Near East is quite anecdotal. The more systematic theorizing from the 1990s includes Yale H. Ferguson and Richard W. Mansbach's (1996) *Polities: Authority, Identity, and Change* where the authors define the concept of 'polity,' which will be of concern to us throughout this study, and then apply it in different political landscapes over time, including the ancient Near East. Adam Watson's *The Evolution of International Society: A Comparative Historical Analysis* (1992) was an important attempt to combine the English School approach with historical analysis in order to elucidate international states systems in Eurasia and throughout the globe starting from early Mesopotamia and ending with contemporary international society. Despite its ambitious goal and scope, Watson's treatment of the ancient Near East was somewhat cursory – this becomes clear in the way he alludes to the mid-fourteenth-century BCE Amarna diplomacy by erroneously attributing to Aramaic the role of the diplomatic language of the region instead of Akkadian – a similar error was made by Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (1984: 5) a little earlier in *The Expansion of International Society* (see article 1). More significantly, Watson (1992: chap. 3) does not focus on the more multicentric second millennium history of the ancient Near East but instead on the first millennium, which saw the hegemonic phase of Assyria. Most strikingly, however, Watson (1992: 32, 51–52) rejects the idea that there were ever power balancing strategies in the ancient world although he suggests that the Sumerian city-states did constitute 'a states system.' Barry Buzan and Richard Little (2000: chaps. 8–11), two prominent ES scholars, in their worthy

effort to contextualize world history from the perspective of state systems in *International Systems in World History*, only in somewhat vague terms allude to the existence of complex alliance system in the ancient Near East. Richard Little's (2007: 148–49) *The Balance of Power in International Relations: Metaphors, Myths and Models*, although an original way of approaching the BoP theory by treating it as a metaphor and raising valuable concepts like 'adversarial' and 'associative' balances of power, does not really tackle the question of power balancing in the ancient world (see criticism in Zhang 2011: 642). Finally, Stephen A. Kocs (2019) in *International Order: A Political History* scrutinizes the important concept of international order from a 21st-century perspective, but the approach is fairly conventional as the author covers the familiar ground of European history from the Renaissance to the present day. Without a doubt, the above list is selective, but it goes to show to what extent the discipline of World Politics has sidelined the history of the ancient Near East in its theory-building. On a positive note, however, the IR scholars do raise pertinent questions, but, in most instances, they are looking for answers in spatiotemporal contexts that ignore the political arena of ancient western Asia.

THE ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN INTERNATIONAL ARENA IN CONTEXT

> Nous avions l'impression que tout commençais avec la civilisation Grecque et on s'est aperçu qu'il y a eu quelque chose avant et que cet avant avait une influence sur le devenir de la civilisation à l'époque classique.[18] (Margueron 2001: 04:21–04:36).

In the Western world, the story of studying the ancient Near East dates back to the 19th century, and earlier, non-academic, observations in the modern sense to ancient Greek and biblical accounts as well as to medieval travel literature. It suffices to say that the corpus of primary sources emanating from western Asia is enormous. In the early 21st century it is estimated that between half a million and two million cuneiform tablets, the most widely used primary source of the ancient Near East during the third and second millennia, have been discovered out of which only a small fraction actually have been published (see Sasson 2015: 4; Hallo 2005: 39; see also Bottéro 1992 [1987]: 20; see also article 1). According to one estimate, in Babylon and Assyria alone, some 246, 000 texts are available, amounting to twice as many as known for ancient Egypt (Stol 2016: 1, n. 1; for an assessment of the Old Babylonian archival material, see also Beaulieu 2018: 60, 62). What these figures signify is that while the ancient Near Eastern primary sources remain substantially untapped, they, at the same time, leave considerable room for further discoveries and interpretations for a wide spectrum of academic fields, including international relations.

[18] "We believed that everything started with the Greek civilization, but it became clear that there had been something else before, something that influenced the development of classical civilization." All translations by the author of the dissertation, unless otherwise noted.

While being massive, only a relatively small number of cuneiform tablets actually give us an idea of the way interstate relations were conducted, most of these being administrative texts, although other types of literature do exist (see Charpin 2010: 247; Michalowski 1993: 1–2; Oppenheim 1977 [1964]: 16–18, 23–24; Podany 2010: 11). This state of affairs can also be attributed to other epochs in the distant past such as the classical period, for only a fraction of the Greco-Roman literature has survived to posterity, the commonest form of writing being the letter of recommendation instead of the diplomatic correspondence (Goldsworthy 2009: 45; see also Avi-Yonah 1994: chap. 4). Yet because cuneiform was written on clay rather than on papyrus, as was the case during the first millennium BCE, and important texts were baked for posterity, this explains why a large number of readable tablets have survived to modern times (see, e.g., Charpin 2010: 14–15, 71–72, 178). Importantly, specialists focusing on the ancient Near East, especially in Assyriology, have had a tendency to pay more attention to the linguistic aspects, that is writing as accurate translations as possible, rather than to the political history (see, e.g., Wilcke 2007: 10). Similarly, most historians specializing in ancient western Asia, have not taken a strong interest in IR theories while analyzing the dynamics of interstate relations during the second millennium. Several scholars have used IR terminology including 'balance of power,' 'political system,' or 'states system' already mentioned without, however, a deeper reflection on the applicability of such notions in the political landscape of the ancient Near East. At the beginning of the 21st century, there are also signs that a lack of systemic approach is a wider lacuna for international historians who have been more occupied with issues of globalization and national discourses at the expense of international structures and processes (for further information, see Maiolo 2018). A central aim of the article dissertation is to show that IR theorizing on the premodern world can contribute to a better understanding of this past and, more importantly, act as a gateway between historians and IR scholars.

An interest in the international history of the ancient Near East can at times elucidate important aspects of the Greco-Roman world. In the course of the first millennium BCE, which is chronologically the most closely linked to the Western Mediterranean civilization[19], we learn for example that there was a grand coalition of states in the mid-sixth century

[19] The term 'civilization' is a complicated and rather ambiguous word, which is part of the lexicon throughout this study. In the present context, a civilization implies "cultural phenomena which tends to occur with the particular form of socio-political organization known as the state" coupled with the existence of urbanization and cities (qtd. in Flannery 1972: 400). It should be clear that excluded from the term civilization are the older 19th century views of civilization vs barbarism and savagery – similarly, writing systems are no longer exclusively associated with civilization as there was no perceptible overall difference in terms of social, economic, and political complexities between early civilizations that utilized writing and those that did not (for further details, see Yoffee 2004: 13–14, 17; Scarre, Fagan and Golden 2021 [1997]: 6–8; Trigger 2003: 43–44).

consisting of Egypt, Lydia, Chaldeans of Babylonia, and even Sparta, all trying to counter the rising power of Persia under Cyrus the Great (see article 3; Kuhrt 1995: 658; Lloyd 2000: 373; Mallowan 1985: 408). Not only does this indicate that the notion of the logic of power balancing existed in the pre-modern world, it also helps explicate the Achaemenid Empire's interest in the affairs of Greek poleis or city-states besides the general explanation of empire-building. Another example is the way researchers have started to take a more unitary approach to the Mediterranean civiliza-tions, trying to find common elements and connection points among them (see, e.g., Bresson 2005: chap. 4; Harris 2005: chap. 1; Manning 2018; see also Appendices 2 and 3). Typically, however, scholars in the field of World Politics have made a clear distinction between the Eastern and Western Mediterranean – it was supposedly in the latter part of the world that the bases were laid for the study of international relations. Democracy, international law, political thought, republicanism, and state formation are widely considered as products and a legacy, which the Western world has inherited from classical antiquity. In a closer analysis, however, we will find that these preconceived ideas can no longer be taken for granted. While the Greco-Roman world has left an indelible legacy for posterity, the cultural impact of the ancient Near East is more significant than has traditionally been recognized outside the fields of ANES.

Robin G. Collingwood, a philosopher and historian, in his classical study *The Idea of History* (1946), made observations about the ancient Near East in an attempt to show that Sumerians lacked a historical consciousness and consequently the idea of history. While Collingwood did recognize that behind divine actions, in the Sumerian cosmos, were human ones, those actions were conceived not as human actions but as divine ones. As a result, Collingwood (1994 [1946]: 11–12) concludes that Sumerian 'historiography' is not historical in respect to its object (divine not human) nor in respect to its method (no interpretation of evidence). This assessment is increasingly outdated, however, as is explained in article 1. Already in the 1950s there were scholars who recognized the finality and plurality in the historical thinking of ancient Mesopotamians where the local theocracy did not pose an insurmountable barrier to research and inquiry – history ruled the gods more than the gods ruled history, which was ultimately made by men and women (for further details on the argument, see Speiser 1955: 55–56, n. 50 contra Collingwood 1994 [1946]: 5). In addition, various literary genres like king lists, royal inscriptions and chronicles that existed in Egypt, Syro-Palestine, and Mesopotamia put the deeds of human, rather than divine, actors at the forefront. Even though it would be somewhat anachronistic to qualify these texts as historiographical, for national histories in the ancient Near East would not see the light of day before the Hellenistic period (323–146 BCE), they nevertheless demonstrate that the peoples of the ancient Near East had a keen interest in the recent as well as the more remote past and wanted to explain them in terms of historical realities (see Van Seters 2006 [1995]: 2433–443; also Bull 1955: 3, n. 2). In view of the above, it is no longer tenable to consider the international political arena of the ancient Near East as merely theocratic in nature – *tout au contraire*, human agency and plain *realpolitik* rather than divine forces were also at

work inside societies seemingly dominated by the power of the religious authority (see, e.g., Pfoh 2013: 36; for a larger discussion on the problems of how to apply the term 'historiography' to the interpretation of Egyptian and Near Eastern texts, see Schneider 2014: 117–21, 127–30, 133–35).

There is also other evidence to indicate that the Mesopotamians were quite capable of systematic thinking and inquiry. One of the most famous mathematical innovation emanating from the ancient world is the Pythagorean theorem. Long considered as exclusively a Greek achievement, this conception changed when in the early 1920s, at the ancient city of Larsa in southern Iraq, a clay tablet called Plimpton 322, presently conserved at Columbia University in New York, was excavated (for further information, see Joseph 2011 [1991]: 160–69, 171; see also Robson 2002: 109–10). The tablet, believed to have been written ca. 1800, during the OB period, and published immediately after the Second World War in 1945, describes the principles of the Pythagorean triple almost a millennium and a half before a similar theorem would see the light of day in ancient Greece and India. While, admittedly, only in Greece proper did the conditions for theoretical mathematics seem to have come about in the late fifth century, a tradition of sophisticated mathematical thinking did exist in the ancient Near East where the principle of the Pythagorean theorem was already known (see Robson 2001: 168; also Asper 2009: 109, 120–21; Romano 2009: 235, 237–38; for a criticism of a Greco-centric approach, see Robson 2008: 269–74; see also Joseph 2011 [1991]: 177–78). While the Pythagorean case reflects in Western scholarship a sense of superiority vis-à-vis the Orient Other, which starts with the writings of Herodotus and Aristotle, it gained modern academic impetus through the works of such thinkers as Karl Marx and Max Weber, the latter of whom occasionally made blatant mistakes by claiming that "Babylonian astronomy lacked a mathematical basis" (for further details, see, e.g., Springborg 1992: 7–12).

From the perspective of international relations and political science, more interesting is the question of the origins of premodern democracy as the struggle for freedom is still an ongoing process in world politics (for further details, see, e.g., Freedom House's report "Freedom in the World 2020: A Leaderless Struggle for Democracy"). It has been well established that the roots of modern democracy lead to ancient Athens and a few dozen other Greek city-states. Yet Thorkild Jacobsen (1943: 160, 165, 172; see also 1970 [1959]: 193–95), a Danish historian specializing in Assyriology, in a groundbreaking article called 'Primitive Democracy in Ancient Mesopotamia', advanced the argument that a 'primitive democracy' was part of the political landscape in the prehistoric Near East before gradually giving way in the face of the rise of kingship during the Sargonic period in the latter part of the third millennium BCE. Jacobsen (1943: 159–61, 169) defined primitive democracy as "…a form of government in which internal sovereignty resides in all free, adult, male citizens without distinction of fortune or class…that major decisions – such as the decision to undertake a war – are made with their consent…", while admitting that voting was a technique of much later origin. Modern scholars are not as sure as Jacobsen that one can use the term

'democracy' in such an unequivocal manner in this context (for further details, see, e.g., Baines and Yoffee 1998: 220; Glassner 2000: 49; Yoffee 2004: 110–11). More importantly, however, they have left behind the idea that we can make a clear distinction between a supposedly freedom-loving prehistoric as opposed to an autocratic Near East during the historical era – too much evidence has surfaced to show that collective bodies with real restraining powers over rulers were part of the political landscape among ancient Near Eastern polities in the latter period as well (see Van De Mieroop 1997a: 118–41; see also Glassner 2000: 43–47; Keane 2009; Emberling, Clayton, and Janusek 2015: 310; Nissen 2015: 120; Speiser 1955: 44–45, n. 22; von Dassow 2011: 205–08, 211–13, 217–19). Yet the number of scholars who share Jacobsen's thesis has increased to the point where it would be difficult for any serious researcher of the history of democracy to ignore the developments in Mesopotamia (see Isakhan 2012: 40). Nevertheless, undeniably, some elements of early 'democracy,' such as general assemblies (*puḫru* in Akkadian of townsmen and groups of elders having a say on questions of war and peace, were present and actually governed in the ancient Near East already in the third and second millennia – admittedly, however, there is no direct indication that voting by ballot as a mechanism of change of power ever existed in the region as it did in Hellas during the classical period. Consequently, in recent years, some scholars have started to question the commonly held assumption that democracy was 'invented' in ancient Greece – the claim being that the Greeks undoubtedly coined the term, although we do not know exactly where and when, and were the first to theorize on it, but they did not concoct the very practice of democracy.[20] This fact is in line with the evidence emanating from tribal societies all over the world, which were in many instances egalitarian with collective decision-making mechanisms reached by tribal assemblies of all free men (see, e.g., Gat 2006: 182). In any case, while there is reason to be cautious, the existence of early or 'primitive' democratic practices in western Asia confirms that there were time periods when a pluralism of power reigned not only between political units but also within them. Again, the model of oriental despotism does not fully fit the political and social realities of the ancient Near East – to think otherwise, would be to misrepresent the very essence of human nature as "we are not dealing with a bunch of simple and obscure primitives, but with people embedded in…mature cultures…" (qtd. in Kitchen and Lawrence 2012 [Part 3]: 3; for more details on modern scholarship distancing itself from the 18th- and 19th-century orientalist models, see, e.g., Sinopoli et al. 2015: 381–85; for a critical view of

[20] The literature dealing with the question of early democracy in history is considerable. The most relevant sources referred to in the paragraph besides that of Jacobsen's article include Eckart Frahm (2007: 87, n. 55), Daniel E. Fleming (2004: 176, 190–91, 204–06, 222–23, 238–41), Steve J. Garfinkle (2016 [2013]: 107–10), Jack Goody (2006: 39, 50–54), John Keane (2009: x, xxv, 159, 743), and Eva von Dassow (2011: chap. 10). Daniel E. Fleming, in particular, stands out because he compares in an analytical way the ancient Greek democracy to that of the ancient Near Eastern world. Jack Goody, for his part, questions the preconceived ideas of the cradle of democracy, which was supposedly exclusively a Greek thing.

the Weberian conception of 'occidental' vs oriental city, see also Van De Mieroop 1997a: 4–5, 252–53).

By and large, it is fair to say the general tendency in IR scholarship has been either to overlook or consider the ancient Near East from an anecdotal point of view. This kind of approach has prevailed not only in the field of World Politics but also in other academic disciplines. A rather extreme view is that of the classical scholar Moses Finley (1999 [1973]: 27–28; see also Goody 2006: 38–40) who has insinuated that the civilizations of the ancient Near East do not really merit being categorized as 'ancient history' in the sense the Greco-Roman world does. Finley justifies this sweeping statement on the grounds that the Western and Eastern Mediterranean cultures supposedly diverge in their social and power structures as well as in the relationship between the power structure and religion. He further backs his argument by stating that it is impossible to translate the word 'freedom' – *eleutheria* in Greek, *libertas* in Latin – into any ancient Near Eastern language, or into any Far Eastern language either. Finley (1999 [1973]: 28–29) made similar arguments about Near Eastern economies, which he saw as dominated by palace- or temple-complexes where there was essentially no room for private ownership unlike in the Greco-Roman world. What comes out is an uninteresting, monopolistic, and unchanging premodern world in contrast to the economies of the last five hundred years of Western Europe. This static view of premodern economies has been increasingly brought into question since the 1990s in an effort to shake outdated assessments in the face of overwhelming evidence showing that complex transactions, long-distance trade, and even economic coercion at both ends of the Mediterranean were entirely possible (see Appendices 2 and 3, and 4) – in any case, the quest to understand the ancient economy goes on (see Goody 2009: 10, 59; Hansen 2000: 615; Manning 2018: 8–9, 20–22; see also, e.g., Parkins 1998: 1–14; Wilson 2014; for a take on how economic measures served political ends during the LBA, see, e.g., Beckman 1999 [1995]: 104, 177; Van De Mieroop 2016 [2004]: 150).

Even from a purely linguistic point of view, Finley's statement is questionable – scholars specializing in the ancient Near East have observed since the early 1960s that in both Sumerian and Akkadian languages the term 'freedom' existed.[21] Also, at a more abstract

[21] The so-called Urukagina reform document dating back to ca. 2350 BCE and depicting a power struggle between the temple and the palace with the citizens of Lagash in southern Iraq who took the side of the temple amid corruption and bad governance by the palace officials is the key to understanding the development of the term 'freedom' (see Kramer 1963: 79). It is in this context that we find the word 'freedom' used for the first time in recorded history although scholars like Niels Peter Lemche (1979: 15–16) put the use of the term to the year 2450 BCE. The Sumerian word for it is *amargi*, literally meaning "return to the mother" – it is not known with certainty why this figure of speech came to be used for 'freedom' although some scholars suggest that it referred to the unification of nuclear families separated by corvée labor (see Kramer 1963: 79; for a take on the historical

level, the evidence is clear that there were situations where the societal power hierarchy was momentarily completely overturned, which indicates a recognition of the existence of social injustices in the form of freedom versus servitude. Accordingly, during the Sacaea, a Babylonian New Year festival, masters would serve their slaves, a criminal would act for five days as a mock king and would even have access to the legitimate king's harem before being executed – this reversal of the established social order would manifest itself elsewhere as well in later epochs, including during the Roman festival Saturnalia and its later medieval equivalents in different parts of Europe, and even in the households and small farms of New England in mid-17th century North America (for further details, see Bremmer 2007: 37–39; Ferguson and Mansbach 1996: 100; on celebrating the Saturnalia, see, e.g., Dolansky 2011: 492–93; for a take on the Negro Election Day ritual in Massachusetts, see Staloff 1996: 12: 15:33–16:40). Similar festive practices also took place in the land of Hatti[22] where an Epic of Release (ca. 1400 BCE) tells us of the release of slaves and the remission of debts (Bremmer 2007: 37). Obviously, these festivities were parodies, and everyone knew that revoking the social hierarchy was temporary and had its limits. Yet, psychologically, the reversal of the established roles sent the message that societal injustice did not go unnoticed – in a sense, it is fair to say that the festivities in the ancient Near East and elsewhere served as a kind of discharge for venting social frustrations. Moreover, there is further historical evidence to support the fact that from the third millennium BCE onwards down to the first there was a longing for the idea of a just king exemplified by the Akkadian term *mīšarum* or 'justice,' the use of which became widespread in royal circles during the OB period (see Garfinkle 2016: 109, 116; Lemche 1979: 13–15). As regards the structural explanations Finley tries to put forth, in an effort to separate the two civilizations, they paint a picture of a stereotypical and static reality of the ancient Near East from which modern scholarship has increasingly moved on – the three articles tackled in the dissertation covering power balancing practices, competing rival empires, and complex interdependence highlight this reality.[23] Yet the legacy of seeing the ancient Near East as 'despotic' is still present in the way western Asia

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context of the word *amargi*, see Wilcke 2007: 21; see also Finegan 1954: 145–46; 1979: 36, n. 44). In the Akkadian language the word for freedom was *andurāru(m)* literally meaning 'freedom,' 'exemption,' or in certain contexts "release from (debt) slavery" – while the origin of the term seems to be linked to the manumission of former slaves, the word itself started to gain currency during the late third millennium (for further details on the etymology, see Black et al. 2000: 17; see also Lemche 1979: 15–21).

[22] More famously known as the Hittite Empire from the mid to the late -second millennium BCE.

[23] At the other end of the continuum is Martin Bernal's (1987) *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* where the author makes several unsubstantiated claims – in the footsteps of several *hommes de lettres* of the Enlightenment – about the origins of ancient Greece by proposing that the Hellenic culture was to a significant degree influenced by ancient Egypt and the Near East. Nevertheless, Bernal (1987: 408–12) did correctly recognize the contacts in the form of interregional trade, dating back to the LBA, between the Aegean and the Levant, in particular. For a take on the criticism of Bernal's approach, see, e.g., Daniels (2020 [2005]: 428; see also Monroe 2009: 222, 249.

has received significantly less attention than the Greco-Roman classical civilization (see Manning 2018: 77–78).

Nevertheless, the situation described above has started to change, somewhat, in recent years as concepts and theories like bandwagoning, BoP and power transition theory can be studied over different spatiotemporal landscapes. In the IR field, however, researchers tend to invest their scholarly efforts in the more familiar premodern political arenas, namely the classical period. Noteworthy publications include *Hegemonic Rivalry: From Thucydides to the Nuclear Age* (1993), which remains highly relevant. Another valuable contribution is Nathan Dinneen's (2018) article 'The Corinthian Thesis: The Oratorical Origins of the Idea of the Balance of Power in Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon,' or Andrew R. Novo's (2016, 2020) novel reinterpretations of the writing of Thucydides and our reading of the Peloponnesian War(s) by combining historical and political science approaches without, nevertheless, probing the more distant past in the eastern Mediterranean world, to mention just a few examples. For his part, Nikolaus Leo Overtoom (2020) has, in *Reign of Arrows: The Rise of the Parthian Empire in the Hellenistic Middle East*, interestingly dealt with the Parthian Empire from the angle of BoP, the security dilemma, and the power transition theory. Like Andrew R. Novo, Nikolaus Leo Overtoom is a historian by profession – characteristically, historians are more prone to use IR concepts in their research as opposed to IR scholars delving into the more remote past, this kind of cross-disciplinary venture being probably easier for historians due to their training and relative ease with the primary sources.

Another observation relates to the way three influential research traditions of IR, i.e., realism, the ES, and constructivism position themselves vis-à-vis the theorizing of the ancient Near East. Unsurprisingly, the three schools of thought in question have addressed the ancient world. Classical realism and its prominent representatives like Hans Morgenthau (2006 [1948]: 10, 38), and more recently, Robert Gilpin (2005) and Richard Ned Lebow (2005: 553–54) have found Thucydides' writings, in particular, useful for highlighting the classic realist themes of struggle for power, hubris, and other 'timeless' truths about human nature. Still, the impression one gets is that the realists tend to reify and overly stress what is supposedly the 'beginnings' and overall animus of international relations as when Gilpin (1984: 293; 2005: 366–67) states that "everything…can be found in the *History of the Peloponnesian War*" or that "…the story I'm [Thucydides] telling will repeat itself over and over again throughout history" (for further details on scholarship emphasizing the uniqueness of the conflict, see also Booth and Wheeler 2008: 12–13). The English School of international relations stands out as a research paradigm that has perhaps made the most systematic attempt to use historical knowledge in the theory-building of IR as theorizing on international systems enables the analysis to focus diachronically on a regional level – overall, however, this remains underdeveloped. Furthermore, it is not entirely clear what the interrelationship between system and society is, i.e., the school has not succeeded in giving a proper account of how an international system can move towards

an international society (see, e.g., Copeland 2003: 428, 429, 431; Linklater and Suganami 2006: 265). For its part, social constructivism became part of the IR research traditions in the late 1980s when it was becoming increasingly evident that the field was intellectually in a state of stagnation as a result of the battle between neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism. Constructivists highlight the importance of continuity and change and the possibility of alternative social and political trajectories by emphasizing that the ideational forces matter in world politics, not just the material forces – this idea was powerfully stated by Alexander Wendt (1992: 406–07) who claimed in an article that international anarchy is socially constructed, and internal and external balancing strategies, and security dilemmas are not bound to emerge because of anarchy, they are produced by the practices, which make these phenomena a reality (see Onuf 1998: 59). Its emphasis on the social construction of state formation, power balancing, or the security dilemma provides fertile ground for theorizing from a *longue durée* historical perspective, but the leap into a deeper historical analysis is yet to be realized. Conspicuously, however, none of the traditions cited have so far seriously shown interest in the political landscapes of the ancient Near East where the political environment was propitious for anarchical self-help security systems to emerge.

Before concluding this section on putting the ancient Near Eastern international arena in context, it is time to briefly further develop the literary list, already addressed in the previous section, examining ancient western Asia in order to give a more balanced picture of the academic interest this part of the world has received. To be sure, Raymond Cohen (1996a, 1996b, 1999, 2000, 2001), an Israeli IR scholar, has contributed, in a series of articles, to what stands out as perhaps the most serious attempt to bring the mid-second millennium world of western Asia to the research agenda of the field. Another notable effort is that of *Amarna Diplomacy: The Beginnings of International Relations* (2000) edited by Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook. The significance of this book is comparable to William Moran's *The Amarna Letters* (1992) insofar as the former raised awareness of the ancient Near East to a wider academic audience from a cross-disciplinary framework, whereas in the latter, one of the key primary sources originating from the LBA was translated into the English language for the use of researchers across academia. The constant relevance of the letter archive is evident in the up-to-date edition of *The El-Amarna Correspondence*[24] (2015), which is based on the need to publish corrections and new readings for a number of tablets. Another important scholarly effort is that of Kaufman et al.'s (2007b) research team who wanted to analyze how the balance of power theory could be studied in the context of ancient history in *Balance of Power in World History* – it remains a valuable study to historicize power balancing although the chapter on the ancient Near Eastern analysis focuses on the first millennium. Notable earlier analyses on the topic also include Adda B.

[24] Hereafter the 'Amarna Letters' is referred to as EA (El-Amarna) when indicating the numbering of the Amarna letter archive.

Bozeman's (1960: 17–36) book *Politics and Culture in International History* and Ragnar Numelin's work *The Beginnings of Diplomacy: a sociological study of intertribal and international relations* (1950). The latter treatise, in particular, seems to be one of the earliest studies in social sciences on the subject matter. Also, in *Satow's Diplomatic Practice* (2018 [1917]), there is a short reference to ancient Near Eastern diplomacy in recognition of the fact that the roots of diplomacy – as far as the first written records are concerned – lie in western Asia (see article 1).[25] Another noteworthy scholarly effort is *The Oxford Handbook of the State in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean* (2013), which sets the goal of bridging the disciplinary gap between historians, anthropologists, historical sociologists and political scientists through various angles. Although the book is written almost exclusively by historians, the historical and conceptual analysis over state formation and empire building is a valuable asset for IR theorists. Finally, a recent edition introducing the discipline of world politics called *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations* recognizes – although passingly – that in the ancient Near East "treaties between the 'great kings' and their vassals concerned matters such as borders, trade, grazing rights, intermarriage, extradition, defense, and the rights and duties of citizens of one state visiting or residing in another" (Armstrong 2014 [1997]: 37). David Armstrong does not develop Near Eastern diplomacy much further, but, significantly, the fact that he mentions 'treaties,' 'borders,' 'citizens,' and 'state' outside of the Greco-Roman context is already a telling statement – these concepts and their relevance in the ancient Near East will occupy us greatly in this study.

ANALYZING INTERNATIONAL SYSTEMS AND INTERNATIONAL SOCIETIES – HOW DO THEY BLEND WITH THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPES OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST?

There are three core claims that this section aims to advance. First, in the late second millennium BCE Near East there is sufficient evidence to support the argument of a systemic interaction, i.e. the existence of a states system (articles 1 and 2). Second, what maintained this states system was the gradual institutionalization of three primary institutions: balance of power (shifting alliances), diplomacy (lingua franca), and great power management (brotherhood, club of the great powers, article 2). Third, the theoretical entry point for IR to engage with ANES relates to conceptual analysis (article 3). In view of this third criterion, it is time to focus on two features that are essential for any international system or international society to function, namely the concepts of state and sovereignty.

[25] Interestingly, a paragraph on diplomacy in the ancient Near East, including a reference to the Amarna Letters, was added to the general introductory chapter on diplomacy a century after the publication of the first edition, the earlier versions having solely referred to the ancient Greco-Roman legacy (see Roberts 2018 [1917]: 6).

What to make of an entity called the state depends considerably on the way we define this political community – this question is lurking under the surface in all of the three articles under scrutiny. At this point, suffice it to say that the more we attach modern attributes of what constitutes a sovereign state, the less students of world politics can participate in the dialogue concerning premodern state formation – often it is a question of mutual misunderstanding about the status of the state in IR theory (see Polansky 2016: 270; see also Hansen 2000: 12–14). A common misconception in scholarship, and not only in political science, is either to consider early states as too loosely organized to qualify as such or alternately to classify them as empires that did not recognize other states (Poggi 1990: 23, 25; see also Scheidel 2016: 7). In a political landscape of this kind, supposedly, there is not much room for sovereignty, which creates the basis for a states system to exist. However, this is a stereotype, which does not really correspond to reality. At the very least, this study purports to show that in the ancient Near East power had many faces and that it was more polycentric than what the existence of empires and empire-building projects would suggest. Finally, as Buzan and Little (1996: 403, 405–06) recognize, it is worth noting that, both on theoretical and historical grounds, anarchy *is* possible with differentiation of political units, i.e., there have been more than just (nation-)state-based international anarchies including anarchies of city-states, territorial states and empires (for further information, see also Polansky 2016: 270).

An important enabling element in understanding the functioning of international systems is sovereignty. It is important to note that the concept of sovereignty is two-dimensional, consisting of internal and external sovereignty. In the fields of international relations and political science the internal aspect of sovereignty has received considerable attention through Max Weber's (2004 [1919]: xiv, 33–34) definition of the state as "human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory – and this idea of 'territory' is an essential defining feature". However, the German sociologist was explicitly referring to modern states rather than early states, emphasizing the bureaucratic nature of the early 20th-century state – yet, importantly, Weber (1978 [1968]: 1055–068) acknowledged the limitations of his bureaucratic model, and that not all major states in history had evolved extensive bureaucracies, this being the case in Germany, Russia, and even Britain (Poggi 2006: 105, 109–10; Popitz 2017 [1992]: 184; for further information on the aspirational nature of the Weberian ideal type of bureaucracy, see Badie and Birnbaum 1983: 23–24; see also Ferguson and Mansbach 1989: 48–49; 1996: 12, 15, 411–12). Still, as late as the mid-1980s Anthony Giddens (1985: 4, 50–51) would write that the existence of "…international relations is coeval with the origins of nation-states…" and that "…borders are only found with the emergence of nation-states…" (see also Giddens 1981: 45, 164). This kind of interpretation of world politics is problematic, culturally limited, and historically narrow (see, e.g., Trigger 2003: 94). Essentially, it alludes to the fact that the existence of a states system is directly linked with the formation of modern states instead of understanding the latter as a transhistorical, even universal, notion of what is considered as "one of the most

competitive cultural institutions of humanity" (see Nardin 2013 [1996]: 316; Watson 1990: 100; see also Bang and Scheidel 2016: 14; Patomäki 2017: 256).

Sovereignty, especially external sovereignty, is connected with the institutions that make the international order function in the sense meant by Hedley Bull. Balance of power, diplomacy, great powers, and war, which all fall into the structural frame of international anarchy, exist only to the extent that there is enough sovereignty inside any given states system (see Evans and Newnham 1998: 504; Poggi 1990: 23–24). When we examine the legacy of Westphalia, at the center is the question of how far back in history we can trace the roots of the concept of sovereignty. If we take the birth of a nation-state as a yardstick, then early modern Europe seems like a logical choice for analyzing the formation of modern states. Yet the Westphalian system leaves large chunks of international history unnecessarily outside the purview of IR theory – in effect, modern scholars have observed that long before the peace of Westphalia, many European states were sovereign, even if the very term had not been used (see Cavallar 2023: 168). Correspondingly, it is not enough nor is it historically accurate to concur that in the premodern world suzerainty or overlordship alone rather than sovereignty was the order of the day and leave it at that (see Bull 2002 [1977]: 17; Glanville 2016: 151–53; Wight 1977: 23–29).

For IR scholars the theorizing of international systems and international societies constitutes one of the central interests of the field – similar to the concept of power, they are omnipresent, unavoidable and sometimes elusive as mentioned in article 3 of the dissertation tackling diplomacy in the Near East during the first millennium BCE. While we cannot entirely exclude the possibility that there were elements of international society in the ancient Near East stretching from the third millennium to the first, probably there were a few, as we shall see; this article-based dissertation firmly leans on the premise that what the primary sources reveal is the formation of international systems rather than international societies. However, the emphasis on the systemic dimension carries with it two challenges. First, the connection between a systemic and societal interaction tends to overlap rather than remain distinctly separate. Second, the use of the word 'system' is unable to connotate an associational aspect of human relationships with its mechanical resonance as Alan James (1993: 279, 281, 286) has observed. Nevertheless, in this early context of diplomacy, the concept of complex interdependence probably better serves the purpose of putting forth the systemic argument than the societal form of contact. Before further elaborating the system/society question, let us explore how the IR scholarship has approached the definition and dynamics of international systems in order to have a better understanding of the way the Near Eastern political landscapes functioned.

On substance, analyzing international systems is not only a gateway to transhistorical enquiry, it also permits us to find out whether we can see something else, i.e., mature anarchy or interaction characterized by a set of social conventions besides the seemingly anarchic nature of interstate relations. The modern working definition of international

systems in the field of IR was provided by Hedley Bull in *Anarchical Society*, who further developed the idea of international systems based on the writings of Martin Wight. Bull's definition of international systems continues to be regularly cited and can be seen as a starting point for comprehending the big picture of international politics (Hurrell 2002 [1977]; Little 2007: 131, 139). One of the reasons why Bull remains a popular reference source among IR scholars coincides with the fact he used a concise and parsimonious method to describe the system/society problematic unlike Martin Wight (1977: 129–50), who spent several pages describing the criteria for the existence of a states system. Bull's contribution was certainly a leap forward from the tenets of general systems theory, which had defined the word 'system' in most vaguely terms as "sets of elements standing in interaction" (see von Bertalanffy 1968: 38; see also Lampert, Falkowski, and Mansbach 1978: 144; see also Dunne 1998: 186–87). In contrast to the systems theory, which drew upon several disciplines extending from biology to mathematics, cybernetics, information and game theories, Hedley Bull's understanding of the dynamics of international systems was more in line with a social scientific reasoning.

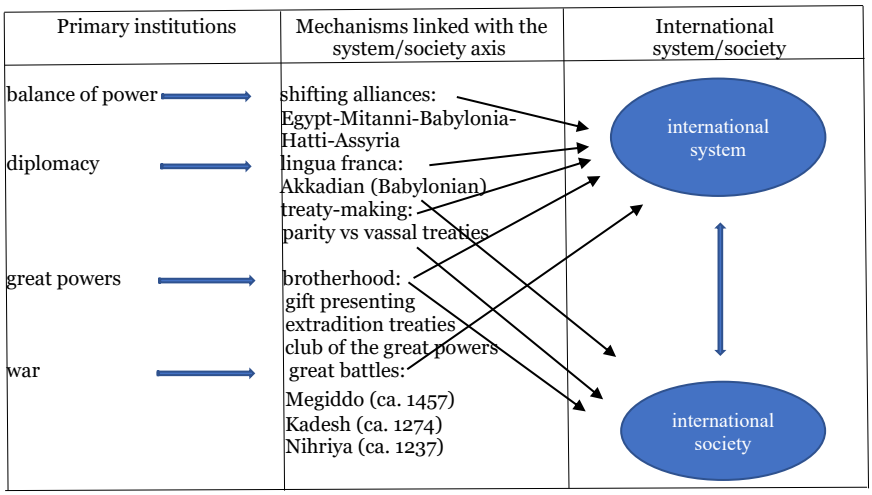
Bull (2002 [1977]: 9–10, 13) defined an international system as an environment where "states are in regular contact with one another, and in addition there is interaction between them sufficient to make the behavior of each a necessary element in the calculations of the other". By contrast, international society, according to him, was "a group of states or independent political communities which have established by dialogue and consent common rules and institutions for the conduct of their relations, and recognize their common interest in maintaining these arrangements" (see also Bull and Watson 1984: 1). In Bull's view the main difference between a system and a society is that on the systemic side of the pendulum an intersubjective agreement – with its shared norms, rules and institutions among the actors – is missing, i.e., the focus is mainly on the interaction. Despite Bull's neat categorization, he seemed unsure at what point the international system and international society intertwine with each other. As a result, IR theorists have rightly criticized Bull's conceptual classification as too rigid and categorical – for when there is a system, there are inevitably elements or seeds of society in the making such as communication and diplomacy – but also as too Eurocentric and historically narrow, linking as he did these two concepts to the birth of the modern state. Beyond the dual relationship between system and society, it is important to recognize that the formation of either a system or society is a gradual process, which necessitates a close sustained interaction between the two with one distinction though: "an international system can exist without a society, but the converse is not true." This observation by Barry Buzan (1993: 331) means that the leap to the societal level can only come from the systemic level, which is the more basic, and prior, idea.

However, some scholars have gone as far as to claim that "states systems precede states" altogether or that "the balance-of-power regime antedates the units that engage in the balancing" (see Waltz 1986: 337–38; Blaney and Trownsell 2021: 54). This kind of theorizing

seems quite excessive, illogical, and ahistorical, as Jack Donnelly (2024: 24–26, 92–93) has observed, for, logically, "a relation needs relata," concluding that "neither comes first" as relationship between the two is mutually reinforcing and symbiotic. Importantly, it is at the very moment when two political units, whether groups of people or states, at the other end of the spectrum, start interacting incessantly, that the systemic element enters the scene, and the system starts to have an effect on the individual parts – the two are, in other words, inseparable from one another. The careful study of city-state cultures in world historical context follows this logic, as is explained in article 3 when the analysis turns to the relationship between a city-state and an empire, which was in constant motion in the ancient Near East, especially during the second millennium. This kind of debate is a reminder that IR scholarship needs to be firmly rooted in empirical historical reality when assessing the functioning of various international systems. As both historians and political scientists are well aware, international systems do not just exist 'out there' awaiting discovery, for the identification of what constitutes a 'system' whether by a scholar or practitioner comes as a result of the perception of those who create them (see, e.g., Lampert, Falkowski, and Mansbach 1978: 146; see also, e.g., Griffeth and Thomas 1981: 203).

Since Hedley Bull's contribution on theorizing international systems, contemporary IR scholarship has recognized the inadequacy of separating the systemic interaction from the societal interaction as the system inevitably brings deeper societal elements into the equation with it (for further details on an influential critique of the system vs society divide, see James 1993: 278–86; see also Dunne 2001: 225–27; Navari 2009: 4; Reus-Smit 2017: 75, 77, 82; Watson 2007: 31–34). In fact, Adam Watson (1992: 13) went as far as to "become increasingly doubtful about sharp distinctions between systems of independent states, suzerain systems and empires," preferring instead to state that "…when a number of…political entities are sufficiently involved with one another for us to describe them as forming a system of some kind, the organization of the system will fall somewhere along a notional spectrum between absolute independence and absolute empire". This is just another way of saying that excessive interest in conceptual classifications is less productive than the actual diachronic and empirical investigation of the dynamics of conflict and cooperation within a given states system (for further details, see Kokaz 2001: 92; see also Shapiro 2002). If the demarcation line between the system/society axis has proven to be somewhat blurry, what were the mechanisms that made either the systemic or societal dimension operational in the ancient Near East?

Figure 1
MECHANISMS OF THE PRIMARY INSTITUTIONS VIS-À-VIS THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM AND INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY IN THE NEAR EAST DURING THE LATE SECOND MILLENNIUM



In Figure 1 the aim is to illustrate the way the four primary institutions kept the system operational in the Near East during the LBA. At this stage, there is no need to go further into the specifics as regards the Near Eastern system – it suffices to show what the particular mechanisms that activated the systemic and societal levels were. What makes the Near Eastern case unusual is not only the chronology, making it anterior to any other states system as far as the written evidence is concerned, but also the structure of the system itself. While power balancing was almost certainly present in one form or another in all other Eurasian international arenas from ancient China and India to classical Greece, the environment where it functioned in the Near East differed somewhat from the rest of the lot. In the second millennium Near East, balancing strategies had to take into account the presence of both competing empires as well as rivaling vassal states and independent states, which made the balancing act all the more delicate and subject to volatile change (see Appendices 2 and 4). Besides the primary institution of the balance of power, which was clearly present in the ancient Near East, it is the Akkadian language (Babylonian dialect), used as a diplomatic *lingua franca*, that has a direct link to the systemic level of interaction among the polities of West Asia – even Egypt, the most powerful regional political unit, had to adopt the language in order to communicate with its western neighbors. The use of the common language has both systemic and societal attributes as it not only made everyday diplomacy between the political communities possible but also symbolized the cultural and political capital of Babylonia over the entire Near East. It is this bilingual and multilingual

tradition that differentiates the Near Eastern political arena from the Greek world of poleis where the latter shared many cultural elements, including the language.[26]

The strongest link to international society in the premodern world is connected with the concept of brotherhood, a term that has connotations with the psychological need of recognition, wanting to belong to a restricted "club of the great powers" after the term was first introduced by the Israeli Assyriologist Hayim Tadmor (1979: 3). It is perhaps the closest we can get to attaining the status of an institution as the great states vied for a place in the club. Importantly, brotherhood as an institution of diplomacy was sufficiently cosmopolitan as an ideational concept for individual elite cultures of particular imperial and territorial powers that it spread independently of the ancient Near East to other ancient cultures in Eurasia and beyond – great powers were envious to attain their rightful place in the reserved club (see, e.g., Baines and Yoffee 1998: 259; for further formation on international diplomacy in the Near East built around brotherhood, see Feldman 2006: 15, 16, 70, 150; article 2, n. 64). This leads us to the fourth mechanism of great battles. In the ancient Near East, we witness for the first-time detailed descriptions of military battles – not only do these clashes prove important for historical analysis, they also matter for students of IR because major battles potentially had systemic effects on the regional balance of power, as is highlighted in article 2. Great battles are also linked with prestige and great power status, for both historians and earlier generation of IR scholars like Edward Carr (2016 [1939]: 102–03), A. J. P. Taylor (1954: xxiv), and Quincy Wright (1942: 268) have stressed military strength and staying power in the face of strategical overstretch as two distinguishing features of great power status. Finally, treaty-making, a firmly established practice in the Near East since at least the mid-third millennium BCE, is a clear connection point for seeing the region as a system of states, for it laid the foundations for external sovereignty by creating "the sanctity of international borders" (see, e.g., Cooper 2003: 241; Westbrook 2003: 82). Since the treaties, which can be divided into parity and vassal treaties in accordance with the power hierarchy, regulated to a high degree the relations between different polities, they brought a certain predictability into interstate relations. One of the intriguing aspects concerning the primary institutions in the ancient Near East during the

[26] In classical Greece, bilingualism was a rarity – the use of interpreters by the Greeks was a common practice. One exception being Themistocles, an Athenian politician and general during the early years of Athenian democracy, who spoke Persian fluently (see Hansen 2000: 143; Harrison 1998: 4–6; Momigliano 1975: 19; Vignolo Munson 2012: 255; Thucydides 1.138). This state of affairs seems to have been less so in the case of ancient China where several local languages thrived before the language of the Zhou states under the unifier state of Qi was imposed on the rest of China, which gradually lead to cultural and linguistic uniformity for the rest of China during the Warring States period (see, e.g., Hui 2005: 85, n. 88, 163–66; for details on the linguistic diversity of China, see Boltz 1999: 75; for criticism against a holistic view of China's history, see Clark 2018).

late second millennium is tied to consistency, which made these institutions operational or not – treaty-making and the diplomatic protocol of brotherhood were often subordinate to systemic pressures, which made them volatile, i.e., small vassal states sometimes had leverage over their overlords beyond their own political weight when preserving the general balance between the major states was at stake. Vassals, like Abdi-Ashirta in the Levant, a notoriously difficult area to control, were aware of this and tried to take advantage of this fact to advance their own interests (see articles 1 and 2).

One of the aims of this section has been to take a mental leap from a Eurocentric approach to sovereignty by focusing more on the external side of it in an effort to examine international systems and international societies. IR scholarship is yet to turn the page on this matter, for there are still scholars in the field who believe that the "development of external sovereignty was dependent on the emergence of a particular kind of international politics in Europe…" (Thompson 2006: 253). This kind of reified approach to a concept that forms the very basis for statehood to exist is problematic as Cynthia Weber (1995: 1–3), with a background in IR, recognizes. However, constructivists, such as Alexander Wendt, see it differently. According to Wendt (1999: 214) "…if there were organizations with sovereignty and a territorial monopoly on organized violence before the thirteenth century, then there were states. And there clearly were: Greek city-states, Alexander the Great's empire, the Roman Empire, and so on." Wendt is a bit vague in his statement as he puts city-states and empires in the same category of states, but the conclusion he makes is sound. However, Andreas Osiander (2001: 284) goes further by asserting that "…sovereignty as currently understood does not go back to the seventeenth century…relations among autonomous actors were perfectly possible without waiting for the concept to be invented…" This observation is at the heart of the conceptual analysis of this study, for it means that the empirical rather than the theoretical reality is often the determinant factor when examining diverse political and social phenomena. It follows that the history of various concepts is not the same thing as the history these concepts aim to describe – the theoretical appreciation usually comes at a later point in time. This state of affairs we also encounter when dealing with other constitutive concepts of world politics. In the end, what matters, however, is the fact that in the ancient Near Eastern world there was indeed a sense of territoriality although, admittedly, it was more rudimentary than in the contemporary world.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

> …the conceptual framework and theoretical insights of Realism have only rarely and superficially been applied to the study of the state-systems of the ancient Mediterranean…This is because most scholars of the ancient world know little or nothing of the vast Realist theoretical literature on

> international relations and the historical case studies attached to it, while conversely most Realist theoreticians lack a sophisticated knowledge of Mediterranean antiquity.[27]

This article-based dissertation set a goal of studying the Near Eastern political arena during the late second millennium BCE from the premise of international relations. In the first article, the idea was to analyze the political correspondence between the great kings and their vassals in the mid-14th century, and decipher how the political arena functioned from Mesopotamia to Egypt and from the Levant to Anatolia and the Zagros Mountains. The second article built its argument around the concept of balance of power, inquiring whether we could assume that a region-wide power balancing tradition existed in western Asia. The third article applied all three Waltzian images, instead of leaning on the systemic level of analysis alone, in order to find out whether various essential concepts of world politics were applicable in explaining a foreign imperial takeover in ancient Egypt.

At the start of preparing the dissertation project, I rather naïvely wanted to lean on the Rankean ideal[28] while reconstructing the international history of the second millennium BCE Near East. Fairly quickly, however, it became clear that this research strategy would not work, as it has not worked in the contemporary historiographical tradition, for the amount of information available is quite overwhelming amounting to at least tens of thousands of cuneiform tablets even when engaging with texts addressing the political history of the Near Eastern polities. Instead, a nomothetic strategy via the use of various prominent IR concepts, especially in political realism, proved to be a more viable option. This research strategy resulted in my decision to draft an article-based dissertation instead of a monograph.

One of the driving forces behind this dissertation project is linked with the attempt, on my part, to discard misperceptions about the allegedly monolithic nature of power in what constitutes the political landscape of the ancient Near East during the second millennium. The passage above from Arthur M. Eckstein, a historian specializing in ancient Rome and familiar with IR theory, underscores the somewhat thin contacts between the field of International Relations and ancient history even when it comes to the Greco-Roman past – it reminds us that disciplinary boundaries powerfully steer academic research interests. Nevertheless, the complexity of power relations among polities in western Asia has been overlooked by IR scholars in the face of the better-theorized examples of classical Greece

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[27] Qtd. in Eckstein 2006: 7.

[28] The 19th-century historian Leopold von Ranke, the pioneer of critical historical science, set the goal of writing the past in the spirit of "wie es eigentlich gewesen" ["how it actually was"] (see, e.g., Breisach 2007 [1983]: 232–34). Ranke's method has been accepted as the ideal research goal ever since although modern historians do recognize that it is impossible to arrive at full description of past events (see Carr 1990: 8–9, 19; Prost 1996: 289).

and, to a lesser extent, ancient China dating back to the first millennium BCE. On the other hand, as highlighted earlier in this introductory chapter, the contribution that the discipline can bring to the fore hinges on conceptual analysis combining theoretical insights with empirical facts. Assuming we can meaningfully apply concepts like power balancing, power transition, and great powerhood in the Near East of the late second millennium BCE, this leads us to the larger issue of whether international anarchy, multipolarity, and, ultimately, an international system of states, whether systemic or societal, existed in this phase of international history. Another reason for combining historical analysis with IR theory points to the fact that if any of the analytical claims made in the research traditions of realism, the ES, and constructivism in the context of understanding the ancient past can be substantiated, this would give increased theoretical rigor to the discipline at large (see, e.g., Strauss 1991: 190–207; Eckstein 2006: 10; Wohlforth 2007a/2007b: 1–21; Kang 2007). Before laying out what possibilities historically oriented conceptual analysis can hold for future IR research under the framework of analyzing premodern international systems, it is time to propound a few concluding reflections.

Throughout the study, the basic premise has been that what we come across in the late second millennium BCE Near East points to the existence of a systemic behavior with some touches of societal elements in the inter-polity relations, namely the treaty-making, Babylonian dialect of the Akkadian language as the lingua franca of international diplomacy, and the concept of brotherhood among great kings, respectively. While this is not a novel observation among specialists focusing on the history of the ancient Near East, systematic IR analysis has yet to seriously contribute to ANES. This becomes especially relevant when we enter the LBA, for it was during the late second millennium that the diplomatic conventions of the Near Eastern empires reached a culmination point. The concept of international anarchy, in particular, is a promising theoretical construct because, while parsimonious and transhistorical, it also possesses a rather large explanatory toolbox for analyzing inter-polity behavior, including power balancing in its various forms as well as other seismic changes inside states systems such as the emergence of power transitions and security dilemmas. Specialists concentrating on the ancient Near East from the perspective of their various fields could benefit from IR scholarship equipped with conducting a systemic level of analysis rather than being occupied with making judicious primary source translations or focusing on reconstructing the temporal and narrative events as correctly as possible.

While there have been occasional probes made into the political landscapes in ancient Greece and China in the first millennium BCE, in view of future research projects, the seeds have been sown for a more comprehensive analysis of states systems in Eurasia. This would include the comparison of the classical Greek world of poleis and that of the Warring States period in China with those in ancient western Asia during the second millennium. The method through which to carry out this kind of ambitious research project would include using the four primary institutions of balance of power, diplomacy, great powers, and war

in order to assess their historical evolution and life cycles in broader Eurasian historical context (see Buzan 2004: 181–82; Friedner Parrat 2017: 625; Holsti 2004: 18–24, 308, 318). There have been calls for this kind of cross-disciplinary research agenda where history meets with IR theory by Amitav Acharya, Richard Little and Barry Buzan (1994, 2000, 2010). Another interesting set of studies consists of Victoria Tin-Bor Hui's (2004, 2005) comparative efforts to elaborate the connection points between ancient China and early modern Europe. However, to date, similar projects covering the ancient Near East and other premodern anarchical state systems have not yet seen the light of day, with the exception of the edited collection of Stuart J. Kaufman, Richard Little, and William C. Wohlforth (2007) – but even in this useful collection of research articles the approach leans more on analyzing the modus operandi of power balancing as it has manifested itself across Eurasia rather than making broader comparisons between the various international political arenas.

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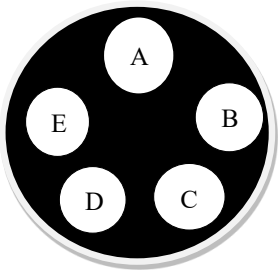
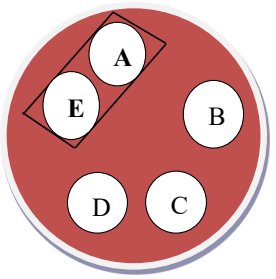
APPENDICES

Appendix 1. An Illustration Indicating the Workings of External Power Balancing in International History[29]

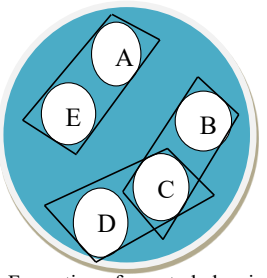
A. Adversarial balance of power



1. Starting point of the balancing behavior in a multipolar environment



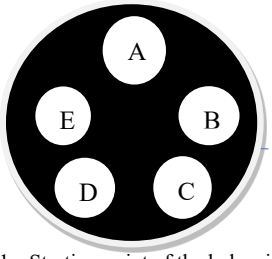
2. *A* and *E* form an alliance creating an upset in the general balance



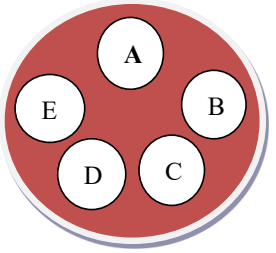
3. Formation of counterbalancing alliances between B-C and C-D

Examples: Pentarchy of great power rivalry in the Near East during the LBA (ca. 1600–1200 BCE)/Europe's alliance between 1879 and 1914 CE.

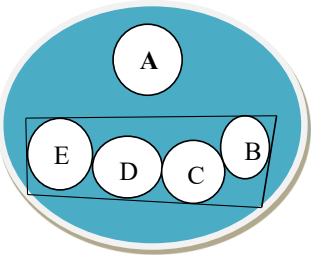
B. Anti-hegemonic reaction/Associational balance of power



1. Starting point of the balancing behavior



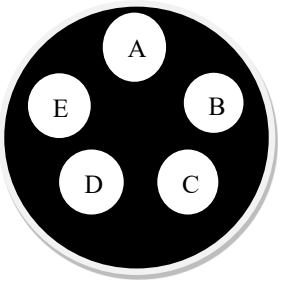
2. *A*'s power and might increases in a way as to threaten the general balance. A aims for hegemony



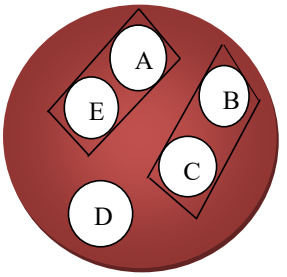
3. B, C, D and E form an alliance against *A* in order to preserve the b

Examples: The peace treaty between Egypt and the Hittite Empire (ca. 1259 BCE) to balance the rising power of Assyria/Coalition Wars against Napoleon (1792–1815).

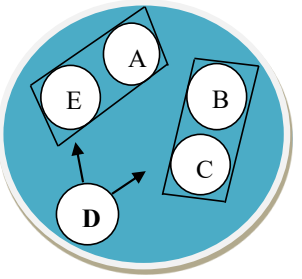
C. Balancing behavior of the balancer (power balancing at its earnest)



1. Starting point of the balancing behavior



2. Formation of alliances that upset upset the general balance



3. *D* avoids entangling alliances and prepares to throw its weight on the side of the losing side

Examples: The policy of Hiero of Syracuse during the Mercenary War (ca. 241–237 BCE)/England's power balancing policy during the 17th and 18th centuries CE.

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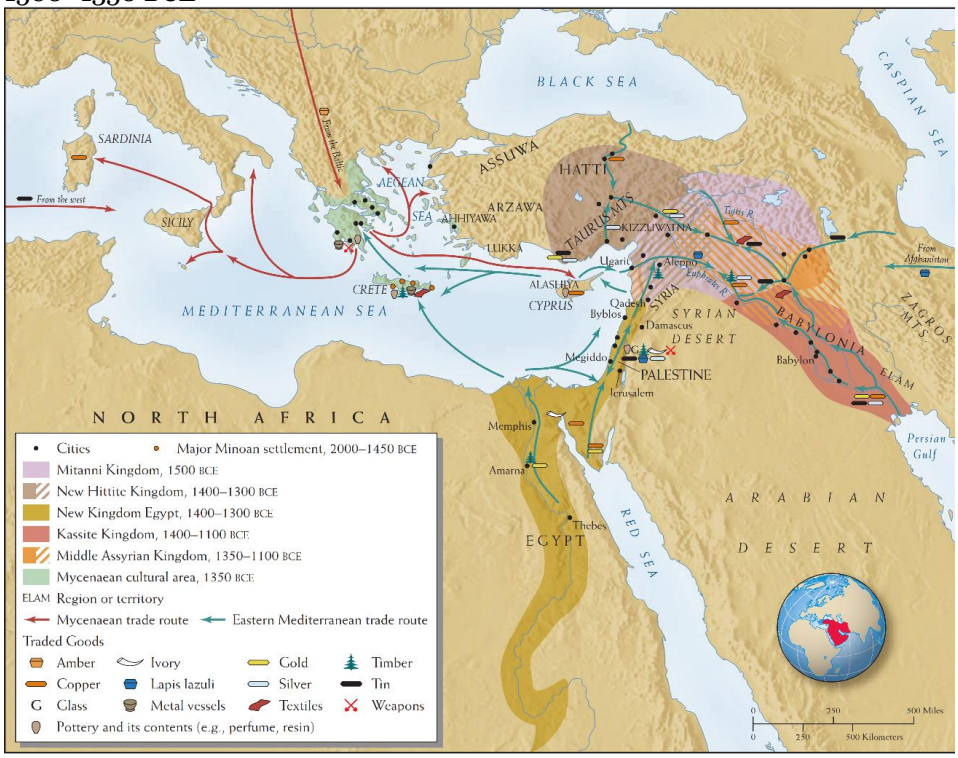
[29] Partly adapted from the configuration of Hakovirta (2012 [2002]): 223.

Appendix 2. Territorial States and Trade Routes in the Eastern Mediterranean, 1500–1350 BCE[30]

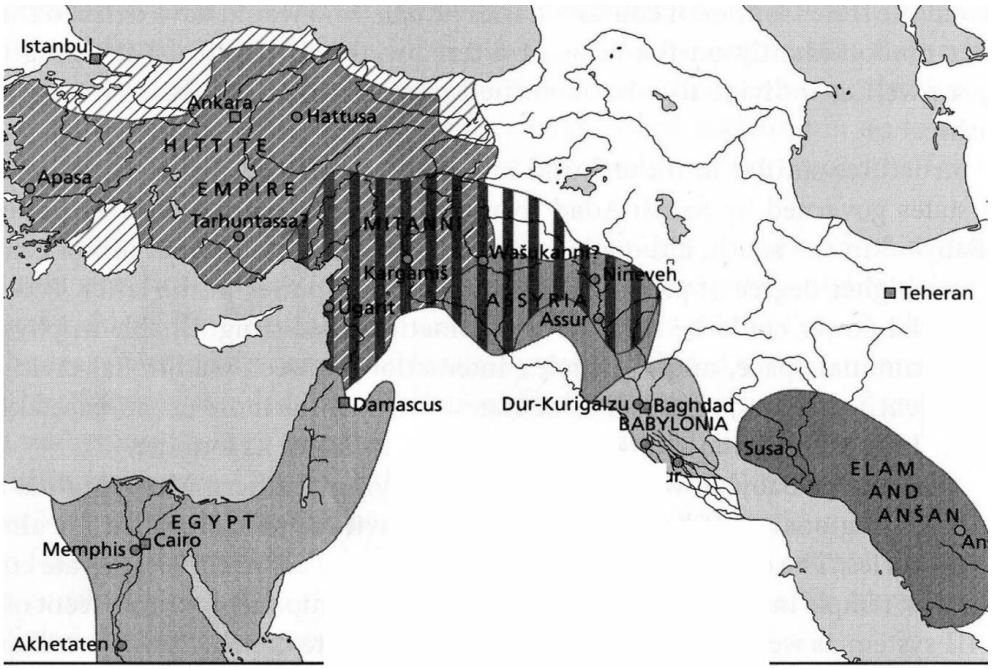


[30] See Robert Tignor et al. (2018 [2002]): 89.

Appendix 3. Uluburun Ship's Possible Trade Route (ca. end of the fourteenth century BCE)[31]

[31] Pulak (2008): 297–299.

Appendix 4. Empires of the Near East, ca. 1500–1100 BCE[32]



[32] Based on original designs by Ivan d'Hostingue. See Barjamovic (2016): 136.

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