Two Political Linkage Archetypes:

Rome/Byzantium vs. Parthia/(Sassanid) Persia;

and the Eastern Zhou Era of the Far Eastern System

David Wilkinson

UCLA Political Science department

[dow@ucla.edu](mailto:dow@ucla.edu)

What criteria should we use to decide whether, when and where two civilizations/systems of states/world systems have fused to become one? What standards exist against which we can set candidate cases of linkage?

A premiere archetype would be the long relationship (66 BC—AD 628) between the Roman Empire and its Byzantine successor of the one hand, and the Parthian Empire and its Sassanid Persian successor on the other. This relationship displays a variety of indications of genuine political linkage, which can be enumerated.

1. War Oppositions

Rome (Crassus) vs. Parthia (Orodes II) over Mesopotamia, Armenia and Syria: 53-51 BC

Rome (Antony, Ventidius) vs. Parthia (Orodes II) over Syria, Judea, and Anatolia: 40-38 BC

Rome (Nero, G. Domitius Corbulo) vs. Parthia (Vologases I) over Armenia: AD 61-63

Rome (Trajan) vs. Parthia (Osroes I) over Armenia and Mesopotamia: AD 113-117

Rome (co-Emperor Lucius Verus) and Parthia (Vologases IV) over Armenia and Mesopotamia: AD 161-166

Rome (Septimius Severus) vs. Parthia (Vologases V) over Mesopotamia: AD 197-198

Rome (Caracalla, Macrinus) vs. Parthia (Artabanus V): AD 216-217

Rome (Severus Alexander) vs. Persia (Ardashir I) over Mesopotamia: AD 230-233

Rome (Maximinus Thrax), The Six Emperors of AD 238, Gordian III, Philip the Arab) vs. Persia (Ardashir I, Shapur I) over Mesopotamia and Armenia: AD 237-244

Rome (Valerian, Gallienus) and Palmyra (Odaenathus) vs. Persia (Shapur I) over Mesopotamia: AD 250-263

Rome (Carus) vs. Persia (Bahram II) over Mesopotamia: AD 282

Rome (Diocletian, Galerius) vs. Persia (Narseh) over Mesopotamia, Armenia, and Caucasian Iberia: AD 295-299

Rome (Constantius II) vs. Persia (Shapur II the Great) over Mesopotamia: AD 337-350

Rome (Constantius II, Julian, Jovian) vs. Persia (Shapur II) over Mesopotamia and Armenia: AD 358-363

Byzantium (Theodosius II) vs. Persia (Bahram V) over persecution of Christians: AD 421-422

Byzantium (Theodosius II) vs. Persia (Yazdegerd II) over Mesopotamia: AD 440

Anastasian War: Byzantium (Anastasius I) vs. Persia (Kavadh I) over subsidy to Persia: AD 502-506

Iberian War: Byzantium (Justin I, Justinian I) vs. Persia (Kavadh I) over Mesopotamia, the Transcaucasus, and Persian demands for subsidy: AD 526-532

Lazic War: Byzantium (Justinian I) vs. Persia (Chosroes I) over Lazica: AD 541-562

Byzantium (Justin II, Tiberius II, Maurice) vs. Persia (Chosroes I, Hormizd IV, Chosroes II) over Armenia, Mesopotamia, and the subsidy to Persia: AD 572-591

Byzantium (Phocas, Heraclius) vs. Persia (Chosroes II) over Asia Minor, Syria, Judea, Egypt, Mesopotamia and the Caucasus: AD 602-628

2. War Alliances

Rome (Pompey) and Parthia (Phraates III) vs. Armenia (Tigranes the Great): 66-65 BC

3. Treaties

Rome (Augustus) and Parthia (Phraates IV) over Armenia and the standards of Carrhae: 32 BC

Rome (Gaius Caesar) and Parthia (Phraates V) over Armenia: AD 1

Rome (Germanicus) and Parthia (Artabanus III) over Armenia: AD 18

Rome (Lucius Vitellius) and Parthia (Artabanus III): AD 37

Rome (Nero, G. Domitius Corbulo) and Parthia (Vologases I) over Armenia: AD 63

Rome (Septimius Severus) and Parthia (Vologases V) over Mesopotamia: AD 202

Rome (Macrinus) and Parthia (Artabanus V) over Mesopotamia: AD 217

Rome (Philip the Arab) and Persia (Shapur I) over Mesopotamia and Armenia: AD 244

First Peace of Nisibis: Rome (Galerius) and Persia (Narseh) over Mesopotamia, Armenia, and Caucasian Iberia (Georgia): AD 295-299

Second Peace of Nisibis: Rome (Jovian) and Persia (Shapur II) over Mesopotamia, Armenia and Caucasian Georgia: AD 358-363

Byzantium (Theodosius II) and Persia (Bahram V) over freedom of religion: AD 422

Byzantium (Theodosius II) and Persia (Yazdegerd II) over Mesopotamia: AD 440

Byzantium (Anastasius I) and Persia (Kavadh I): AD 506

“Eternal Peace”: Byzantium (Justinian I) and Persia (Kavadh I, Chosroes I) over returns of forts and a subsidy to Persia: AD 532

“Fifty Years Peace” of Dara: Byzantium (Justinian I) and Persia (Chosroes I) over Lazica and a subsidy to Persia: AD 562

Byzantium (Maurice) and Persia (Chosroes II) over Armenia, Mesopotamia, and the subsidy to Persia: AD 591

Byzantium (Heraclius) and Persia (Kavadh II, Shahrbaraz) over Asia Minor, Syria, Judea, Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Caucasus, war trophies and a war indemnity from Persia: AD 628-629

4. Interventions in Civil Wars

Parthia (Pacorus I) in Liberators’ civil war in Rome (Liberatores--Brutus, Cassius--vs. Second Triumvirs--Antony, Octavian): 42 BC

Rome (Tiberius, Lucius Vitellius) in Parthian civil war (Tiridates III vs. Artabanus III): c. AD 36

Byzantium (Maurice) in Persian civil war (Chosroes II vs. Bahram VI): AD 591

Byzantium (Heraclius) in Persian civil war (Shahrbaraz vs. Ardashir III): AD 591

5. Protectorates and Vassalships

Parthia (Phraates IV) sends royal-family hostages to Rome (Augustus): 32 BC

Rome (Augustus) installs a client (Vonones I) to rule Parthia: AD 8-12

Rome (Trajan) installs a client (Parthamaspates) as king of Parthia: AD 116-117

Byzantium (Maurice) installs a client (Chosroes II) as Persian emperor: AD 591

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The Roman/Byzantine—Parthian/Persian relationship displays a variety of important political transactions: warmaking and peacemaking, conquest and redress, hierarchy and equality, extortion and exchange, demands and concessions, negotiations and snubs, demarcations and redemarcations. The continuity, intensity, and reiteration of such transactions is so clear and consistent that that interstate relationship can serve as a paradigm or archetype for estimating the existence and depth of a political relationship between the members of pairs of states over some comparable period, and for locating a time-boundary for the beginning (or indeed the end) of such a political relationship.

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While Rome vs. Persia can be seen as archetypal for a bipolar period in a states system, the Eastern Zhou era (770 BC-221 BC), both in its Spring and Autumn subperiod (770-476 BC) and its Warring States subperiod (476 BC-221 BC), can be seen as equally archetypal for a (frequently) multipolar period that was occasionally bipolar, but also tripolar and more often multipolar. Formations more complex than those of the Roman-Persian bipolar pair emerged; and an extracivilizational state that projected its power into the system would have in the process had to cope with such formations, which we shall accordingly inspect.

6. Far Eastern Power Structures During Eastern Zhou

“Snapshots” of power structures in the Far Eastern system have been taken at 25-year intervals from 750 BC to 225 BC during the Eastern Zhou. These power-structure “moments” begin with nonpolarity and end with the hegemony of Qin; between, there are two unipolar moments, four tripolar moments, four bipolar moments and eight moments of multipolarity. In the bipolar moments of 675 and 650 BC the superpowers were Chu and Qi; in those of 575 and 550 BC the superpowers were Chu and Jin. In the tripolar moments of 450 and 425, and again in those of 325 and 300 the superpowers were Qin, Qi and Chu. .In the unipolar moments of 275 and 250 Qin was the hyperpower. (Wilkinson, 1999)

Over the period 722 BC-221 BC, a collection of perhaps 170 states in the system (Walker,20) shrank and shrank until toward the end, seven survivors were step by step reduced to one (Qin). The shrinkage was caused by conquests and annexations, carried on increasingly by superpowers and hyperpowers: Chu, Qi and Jin each absorbed more states than did middling powers like Lu, Sung, (old) Wei, Wu or Yen (Walker, 27); Qin conquered Chu, Qi, and the three states into which Jin broke at the endyear of Spring and Autumn.

7. Protectorates, Leagues, Polarization And Alliance Wars

A waystation on the road to annexation was the protectorate, whereby one great power defended one or several smaller powers from the threat of absorption by some other great power. There grew up around Qi, Jin, Chu and Qin “leagues” of states, which at various times recognized a great-power ruler as a “hegemon” or commander-in-chief of a multistate military force. Over time, there developed a polarization between northern and southern groups of states, the northern states first tending to be led by Qi and then by Jin, the southern states by Chu

Thus Duke Huan of Qi (hegemon 667-643 BC) led four to eight states, intervened in their internal power struggles, drove off invaders, and blocked the northward expansion of Chu. Duke Wen of Jin (hegemon 636-628 BC) organized an alliance that again blocked the expansion of Chu.

8. Bandwagoning And Balancing

The practices of balancing and bandwagoning are specific to multistste systems.

Between 678 BC and 546 BC, the state of Zheng, in a central position between the northern and southern states, shifted its allegiances fourteen times, generally realigning with a rising power (Walker, 50-52); Zheng habitually bandwagoned.

On the other hand, while the state of Qin eventually became supreme power and sole survivor of the states of the Eastern Zhou era, before its final rise its diplomilitary activities focused upon preventing either Jin or Chu and their leagues from gaining full ascendancy (Walker 52); Qin habitually balanced

9. Conferencing

Permanent legations were nonexistent in the Eastern Zhou era, but diplomatic missions between Eastern Zhou states were frequent. The Dukes of Lu and their officers were frequent travelers to meet rulers of other states halfway, or to visit them in their capitals. Diplomatic notes with proposals were sent; intelligence was exchanged; military instruction was offered. Missions led to bilateral treaties and to alliance meetings for war planning in defense and attack. (Walker, 15-16, 79-85).

In 579 BC, Hua Yuan of Sung appears to have brokered a peace treaty and alliance between the bipolar superpowers and rival alliance-hegemons Jin and Chu. Going farther, in 546 BC, Xiang Shu of Sung persuaded 14 large states to attend a peace conference with the objective of peace, disarmament and a league of all states. There did emerge a document decrying war, and there was in fact a noticeable diminution in warfare for about 34 years (Choyun Hsu 56-57; Keishiro Iriye, Recueil des Cours 1967, 52-53).

10. Power Projection Into Multistate Systems

Let us assume the existence of an ongoing multistate system such as that of eastern Zhou, with annexations, protectorates, leagues, polarizations, alliance wars, bandwagoners, balancers, intensive diplomacy, conferencing, and perhaps utopian dreaming. Given then a state at one time external to the multistate system that seeks to project its power and inject itself into the system, we must look for evidence that it has in fact been brought into the above characteristic institutions and practices of multistate systems.

Two states that in fact provide just such evidence of self-injection into the eastern Zhou system are Wu and Yue. Wu lay to the east of the system, was brought into it by Jin as an ally against Chu, and became a great power in the system; Yue lay to the south of Wu and was brought into the system as an ally of Chu against Wu, destroyed Wu, and briefly replaced it as a great power. Both Wu and Yue were brought into the preexisting hostile polarized alliance structures of the Eastern Zhou system.

So when inquiring when and whether an outside state has entered a multistate system, it is to its concrete participation in the alliance structures, the war system, the bandwagoning and balancing and conferencing of the system that we should look for a determination.