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Economics, Political Practices and Identities on the Nile: Convergence and Conflicts ca. 1800 to 1530 BC

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Economics, Political Practices and Identities on the Nile: Convergence and Conflicts ca. 1800 to 1530 BC

Political and economic networks which linked societies from the Levant to Nubia during the 2nd millennium BC were integrated as a world-system, fluctuating from a core-periphery differentiation (ca. 2000 to 1800 BC) to a core-periphery hierarchy (ca. 1530 to 1200 BC) through a disruptive process which took place ca. 1800 to 1530 BC. This paper approaches this disruptive process, probably triggered by a legitimacy crisis in the core area. Disruption resulted in the emergence of a multiple independent cores; and also revealed local cultural features and practices. Despite the difficulties posed by the evidence, an attempt to analyse the relationships these political entities sustained is made.

world-systems; core; periphery; networks; disruption; pulsation

Politische und wirtschaftliche Netzwerke, die im 2. Jahrtausend v. Chr. Gesellschaften von der Levante bis Nubien verbanden, waren als ein Weltsystem integriert, das von einer Zentrum-Peripherie-Differenzierung (ca. 2000 bis 1800 v. Chr.) über einen disruptiven Prozess, der von ca. 1800 bis 1530 v. Chr. stattfand, zu einer Zentrum-Peripherie-Hierarchie schwankte (ca. 1530 bis 1200 v. Chr.). Dieser Artikel beschreibt einen solchen disruptiven Prozess, der wahrscheinlich durch eine Legitimationskrise im zentralen Bereich ausgelöst wurde. Die Störung führte zur Entstehung mehrerer unabhängiger Zentren und zeigte auch lokale kulturelle Merkmale und Praktiken. Trotz der durch die Beweise aufgezeigten Schwierigkeiten wird hier versucht, die Beziehungen zu analysieren, die diese politischen Einheiten unterhalten haben.

Weltsysteme; Zentrum; Peripherie; Netzwerke; Störung; Pulsieren

1 Connecting Northeast Africa and Western Asia: the Nilotic-Levantine world-system (NLws)

A description of the port of Avaris and its wealth is preserved in a well-known passage of the Second Stela of Kamose. Despite certain and reasonable exaggeration (as it is part of the victory discourse of the Theban ruler) this description probably represents a reliable picture of the mid-2nd millennium BC city port and its trade activity. Nowadays, this information is corroborated by archaeological findings.¹ The goods mentioned – moringa-oil, incense, fat, honey, willow, box-wood, sticks and “all their fine woods – all the fine products of Retjenu”² give an approximate idea not only of the relevant role of prestige goods in ancient societies but also of the extent of their exchange networks, which encompassed inner Africa, western Asia and the eastern Mediterranean.

Even though prestige goods do not represent the bulk of goods that were traded, they were required as status markers by pre-state and state elites as they contributed to

1 Herbich and Forstner-Müller 2013, 258–272.

2 Redford 1997, 14, n. 69.

reinforcing social asymmetries. In this vein, their role was central to the configuration of ancient societies.³

I shall begin by considering two related premises: on the one hand, that most early societies – state and stateless – did not exist in absolute isolation;⁴ on the other, that prestige goods were involved in the emergence of long-distance trade.⁵ As a consequence, the connectivity generated through the networks of exchange of goods involved people, technology, information and ideas in a broader sense, widening the spectrum of possible analyses and making the researcher required to explicitly define the scope of the investigation.

Frequently, prestige goods or ‘luxuries’ are defined as the opposite of bulk goods. The demand of prestige goods is usually greater than their supply; and they possess a high relative value inverse in proportion to their volume, which allows them to circulate across long distances.⁶ Another key feature is that they are commonly difficult to obtain in some way.⁷ Bulk goods are defined by the opposite qualities. Their supply is usually greater than the demand for them; and they possess a low relative value, inverse in proportion to their volume.

Nevertheless, this theoretical assumption leaves aside other relevant features when defining the characteristics a good must possess to become a ‘prestige’ good. It also has social and ideological qualities, since its value is not an intrinsic property but a quality assigned by people.⁸ Expensive raw materials (semi-precious stones, fine woods, precious metals) are usually considered prestige goods, along with others (such as people or cattle in some societies). Moreover, objects made of inexpensive or ordinary materials, such as faience, can be transformed into prestige goods by the skilled hands of a gifted artisan.⁹

In this regard, Peter Peregrine pointed out that prestige goods played a relevant role in sustaining social cohesion and reproduction. He followed Jürgen Habermas’s suggestions on the role of ‘legitimation crises’ as catalysts of political collapse to a greater degree than natural catastrophes or troubles in the economy of subsistence.¹⁰ Thus, the ability of the elites to obtain, accumulate and distribute prestige goods allowed for the establishment of diverse forms of connection. These strategies were related not only to exterior social groups but also to domestic social strata, through the establishment of socio-political practices such as patronage, where gift-giving had a relevant role.¹¹ It is hard to discern if the social and ideological dimensions of prestige goods had a greater impact in shaping socio-political bonds than the economical ones. However, it is worth mentioning that those dimensions played at least a significant role – and that they had economic and social repercussions.¹² Thus, these practices have relevant features to be taken into account when analysing intra and intersocial relationships.¹³

There is enough evidence to prove that networks where prestige goods circulated were well-established in northeastern Africa by the late 4th millennium BC and reached as far

3 The role of non-institutional networks and low-value commodities are often neglected in Egyptological studies, *cf.* Moreno García 2014, 249–252.

4 Renfrew 1986, 1; Hall, Kardulias, and Chase-Dunn 2011, 234.

5 A. Sherratt and S. Sherratt 1991, 354–363; Shaw 2003, 323.

6 A. Sherratt and S. Sherratt 1991, 358.

7 Plourde 2009, 266.

8 Simmel 1978, 73.

9 Miniaci 2018, 139–140.

10 Peregrine 1999, 39.

11 In societies with clear social differences but without coercive institutions legally constituted, ‘gift-giving’ practices imply a contractual action between the giver and the recipient, *cf.* Graziano 1975, 25–27; *cf.* also Schneider 1991, 54.

12 Warburton 1997, 57–59.

13 They can vary from the establishment of mostly pacific practices (i.e. marriages, alliances, trade) to violent actions (i.e. tribute, looting, siege, war).

south as Qustul, a Nubian A-Group elite necropolis located on the eastern bank of the Nile north of the Second Cataract, in Lower Nubia.¹⁴ The ‘royal’ Cemetery L, dated as being contemporary to the Naqada IIIA phase in Upper Egypt (roughly before the beginning of the First Dynasty in Egypt), presents us with 33 elite tombs. An impressive quantity of prestige goods – locally made and imported – was found there: Egyptian pottery, stone and faience vessels, metal and ivory objects and a Syro-Palestinian pottery type which was unique in Nubian cemeteries.¹⁵ The Nubian elite buried at Qustul was probably engaged in exchange practices with its northern neighbours in Upper Egypt, just before the emergence of the Egyptian state, a phenomenon signalled by the disputes among different kin groups for the control of the main routes of exchange of those goods.¹⁶ Moreover, even though many variables changed after the irruption of the state, the role of prestige goods continued to be valued by the new state elite not only as status markers but also as part of the strategies mentioned above.¹⁷

Thus, the possible existence of an extensive network of exchanges which linked north-eastern Africa and western Asia can probably be explained as the progressive integration of a world-system which predated the emergence of the Egyptian state and developed through time.¹⁸ Naturally, it has to be proved empirically, a goal which exceeds the scope of this contribution, centred in the process which took place during ca. 1800–1530 BC in the same region, when the well-established interregional networks were disrupted.

In world-systems analysis (WSA), ‘world-systems’ are defined as

intersocietal networks in which interactions (trade, warfare, intermarriage, information, etc.) are important for the reproduction of the internal structures of the composite units and importantly affect changes that occur in these local structures.¹⁹

In this conception of interregional relationships, the “fundamental unit of historical development is the world-system, not the society”²⁰ where the changes which take place in one part of the network have the potential of exerting an effect on others. Christopher Chase-Dunn and Thomas Hall distinguished four main nested networks which bound world-systems: bulk goods networks (BGNs); political/military networks (PMNs); prestige goods networks (PGNs) and information networks (INs).²¹ These networks have

14 Takamiya 2004, 35–62; Gatto 2006, 61–76 and bibliography cited there. Cf. also Andelković 2014, 718.

15 Roy 2011, 155–158.

16 Campagno 2002, 168.

17 During the 3rd millennium BC (Old Kingdom in Egypt, ca. 2800–2200 BC), the Egyptian core was directly involved in controlling trade networks to the south and west, and access to the mines and quarries located in the Sinai and the southern Levant, while Byblos was a trade partner which acted as mediator with other regions of Asia. Preserving and controlling borders was also a relevant point for the core. During the critical period ca. 2200–2000 BC (First Intermediate Period in Egypt), independent local rulers emerged in the Upper Egyptian nomes, whose legitimacy was endorsed by the local god and not by any ruling king (i.e. Ankhtifi of Mo’alla, cf. Lichtheim 1973, 85–86).

18 For a general description of a ‘world-systems perspective,’ see my contribution in this book “World-Systems from ‘the Theory’ to ‘a Perspective:’ On Social Interconnections in Bronze Age Afro-Eurasia.”

19 Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997, 275.

20 Chase-Dunn and Hall 1993, 851.

21 Chase-Dunn and Jorgenson defined these networks in this way: “The largest networks are those in which information travels. Information is light and it travels a long way, even in systems based on down-the-line interaction. These are termed Information Networks (INs). A usually somewhat smaller interaction network is based on the exchange of prestige goods or luxuries that have a high value/weight ratio. Such goods travel far, even in down-the-line systems. These are called Prestige Goods Networks (PGNs). The next largest interaction net is composed of polities that are allying or making war with one another. These are called Political/Military Networks (PMNs). And the smallest networks are those based on a division of labor in the production of basic everyday necessities such as food and raw materials. These are Bulk Goods Networks (BGNs).” Chase-Dunn and Jorgenson 2001, 5.

“different spatial scales and relative intensities, which impinge upon any particular locale” and are linked to the notion of “fall-off” – the relative incidence of distance over the relationships.²² In this vein, ‘systemic relations’ – defined as direct, regular and two-way relationships – are relevant to bounding world-systems. These conditions have to be empirically proven for each relationship and can present a large variety of situations.²³ External circumstances are not dismissed, such as climatic changes and other natural phenomena which can have produced or favoured diverse outcomes.

‘Core/periphery’ structures – in both a ‘differentiation’ or a ‘hierarchy’ relationship²⁴ – can be considered when two societies are involved in a ‘systemic relationship’, but again, these structures need to be proved empirically. With regard to ‘semi-peripheral’ areas, they were defined in many different ways such as: (a) regions spatially located between core and peripheral regions; (b) regions spatially located between one or more competing core regions; (c) regions in which mediating activities linking core and peripheral areas take place; and (d) regions in which institutional features are intermediaries in form between those forms found in adjacent core and peripheral areas.²⁵

In short, WSA is a perspective which allows accommodating a wider territorial scene to discriminate long-term sociohistorical change focusing on interconnections between different societies. It has received criticism as well as approval, and it is highly debated in studies related to ancient Eurasia (as noted in Flammini “World-Systems from ‘the Theory’ to ‘a Perspective’”, above). The situation is not the same with regard to the studies related to the intersocietal relationships in northeast Africa. Most Egyptologists and Nubiologists are not fond of these kinds of long-term macro-regional social theories. In fact, an attempt at considering the existence of a world-system in northeast Africa was presented by political scientist David Wilkinson, who proposed a northeastern African (or Egyptian) world-system which included Egypt and Nubia. In his opinion, this world-system merged with the Mesopotamian one by *ca.* 1500 BC to integrate into the so-called ‘Central’ world-system.²⁶

The author was also interested in summarizing the political fluctuations of the Egyptian world-system through a sequence of power configurations, from the least to the most concentrated forms.²⁷ Another contribution which revised long-term evolution of world-

22 Chase-Dunn and Jorgenson 2001, 5.

23 Chase-Dunn and Jorgenson 2001, 55; Flammini 2011, 207.

24 “The comparative world-systems approach [...] distinguishes between core/periphery *differentiation*, in which there is important interaction among societies that have different degrees of population density, and core/periphery *hierarchy* in which some societies are exercising domination or exploitation of other societies. It is not assumed that all world-systems have core/periphery relations. Rather this is turned into a research question to be determined in each case.” Cf. Chase-Dunn, Pasciuti, et al. 2003; Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997, 36–37. I consider that core/periphery ‘differentiation’ may exist without domination, taking into account that asymmetries can be detected in diverse spheres of interaction.

25 Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997, 78.

26 He equated the concept ‘world system’ to ‘civilization’ (Wilkinson 2004, 82), giving to the ‘Central’ world system/civilization a relevant place in world history since “there was a plurality of civilizations/world systems on the globe until the late 19th or early 20th centuries. Now there is only one survivor, Central civilization, whose network expanded to global scale and absorbed all others.” Cf. Wilkinson 1995, 261.

27 Wilkinson 2004, 83–84. The sequence proposed varies from the most dispersed power concentration to the most concentrated, as follows: Nonpolar (the most decentralized, with many mini-states and no great powers); Multipolar, Tripolar, Bipolar (nearer the decentralized end become familiar configurations with two, three, or more great powers); Unipolar (non-hegemonic, where a single great power, lacking the influence to match its capability, rests among a collection of weaker but non-subject, non-tributary states); Hegemonic (or “unipolarity with hegemony,” where a single great power or superpower, with influence to match its capability, oversees a number of subject states which retain internal autonomy); Universal (state/empire. Centralized end, where one state encompasses the whole system). Following the traditional Egyptian periodization, the Middle Kingdom to early New Kingdom sequence of power configuration was presented as follows: Unipolar (mid-11th Dynasty/early 12th Dynasty); Hegemonic (Senwosret I – Amenemhet II); Universal (Senwosret III – Amenemhet III); Hegemonic (until mid-13th

systems which took into account not only Eurasian but also African networks during the Bronze Age was that of ethnologist and historian Philippe Beaujard.²⁸

Actually, the existence of a network of exchanges which could have shaped a world-system in northeast Africa has been recognized despite the fact that deeper analyses of its development deserve more attention if compared to research on ancient Mesopotamia.²⁹ In this regard, I consider the Levant was linked to the northeast African network at least from the 4th millennium BC onwards, thus becoming a relevant part of the system.³⁰ That is one of the reasons behind naming this network a 'Nilotic-Levantine' world-system (NLws). The other is to avoid using the name of any socio-political entity, because 'core-ness' – as well as 'peripherality' – is not necessarily a permanent but rather a historically defined condition to be demonstrated empirically.³¹

Thus, this paper deals with the disruptive situation which took place in the NLws between *ca.* 1800–1530 BC, which was clearly linked to the previous world-system circumstances.³² During that time, the political unity of the core collapsed, and different socio-political entities emerged opening a period characterized by political fragmentation, cultural differentiation and the emergence of diverse elite identities. The circulation of goods along the main axis of exchange and alternative routes also reveals the influential effect the disruption exerted on the different political entities. These characteristics had an impact at local, regional and systemic levels, since they were intertwined and influenced by each other. Our goal is to analyse this process in the *longue durée*, as a phenomenon inserted in a broad territorial scenario.

As mentioned above, detecting different networks of interaction and core/periphery structures will be proposed there where the evidence allows establishing systemic connections.

In this way, the process was influenced by actions taken by the unified core – which coincided with the unified Egyptian state – on their bordering areas in the previous phase (*ca.* 2000–1800 BC, fig. 1).³³

These actions can be summarized as follows: on the one hand, an administrative district of Egyptian character was established in the eastern Delta (at Ezbet Rushdi el-Saghira) during the earlier reigns of the 12th Dynasty where, sometime later, during the reign of Amenemhet III, a settlement of Egyptian-Levantine traits was placed in nearby

Dynasty); Unipolar (13th Dynasty); Bipolar (13th Dynasty/Hyksos 15th Dynasty); Unipolar (Hyksos 15th Dynasty); Tripolar (Hyksos 15th Dynasty, Thebes 17th Dynasty, Kush); Unipolar (18th Dynasty). Despite the fact that the definition of each link of the sequence as reflecting mostly core political changeability can be a matter of discussion, the proposal remains useful as an attempt of summarizing the political fluctuations during a long period of time. Nevertheless, the sequence seems not to be as simple as presented.

28 Beaujard 2011, 7–26.

29 Conclusions such as “Nubian cultures were not static entities but changed and developed in response to outside influences and contacts” (Forstner-Müller and Rose 2012a, 8) reveal the impact of what in other words could be called the ‘systemic’ character of a world-system. With regard to studies on ancient Uruk from a world-system point of view and its review, *cf.* Algaze 1993; Stein 1999.

30 This region was not *exclusively* linked to the Northeast African network, but the scope of the current analysis stresses the relationships with Northeast Africa.

31 *Cf.* Flammini 2011, 207. André Gunder Frank proposed the existence of a unified global world-system which started 5000 years ago and continues developing today (Frank and Gills 1992).

32 As the world-system is the unit of analysis, I preferred to avoid using the traditional historical periods’ classifications. Anyway, a correlation with them can be established, which roughly corresponds to the Egyptian Second Intermediate Period (*ca.* 1800–1530 BC, 13th to 17th Dynasties, *cf.* Grimal 1988, 226; Ryholt 1997, 184); the Levantine Middle Bronze Age (MBI-III or MBIIA-C, *ca.* 1900–1530 BC, *cf.* Bietak 2002, 29–42; and Nubian Classic Kerma (CK, *ca.* 1750–1550 BC, *cf.* Bonnet 1991, 113). I consider the process that led to fragmentation in Egypt started *ca.* 1800 BC, including the 13th Dynasty into the Second Intermediate Period (Grimal 1988, 226; Ryholt 1997, 184).

33 Middle Kingdom in Egypt, *ca.* 2000–1800 BC.

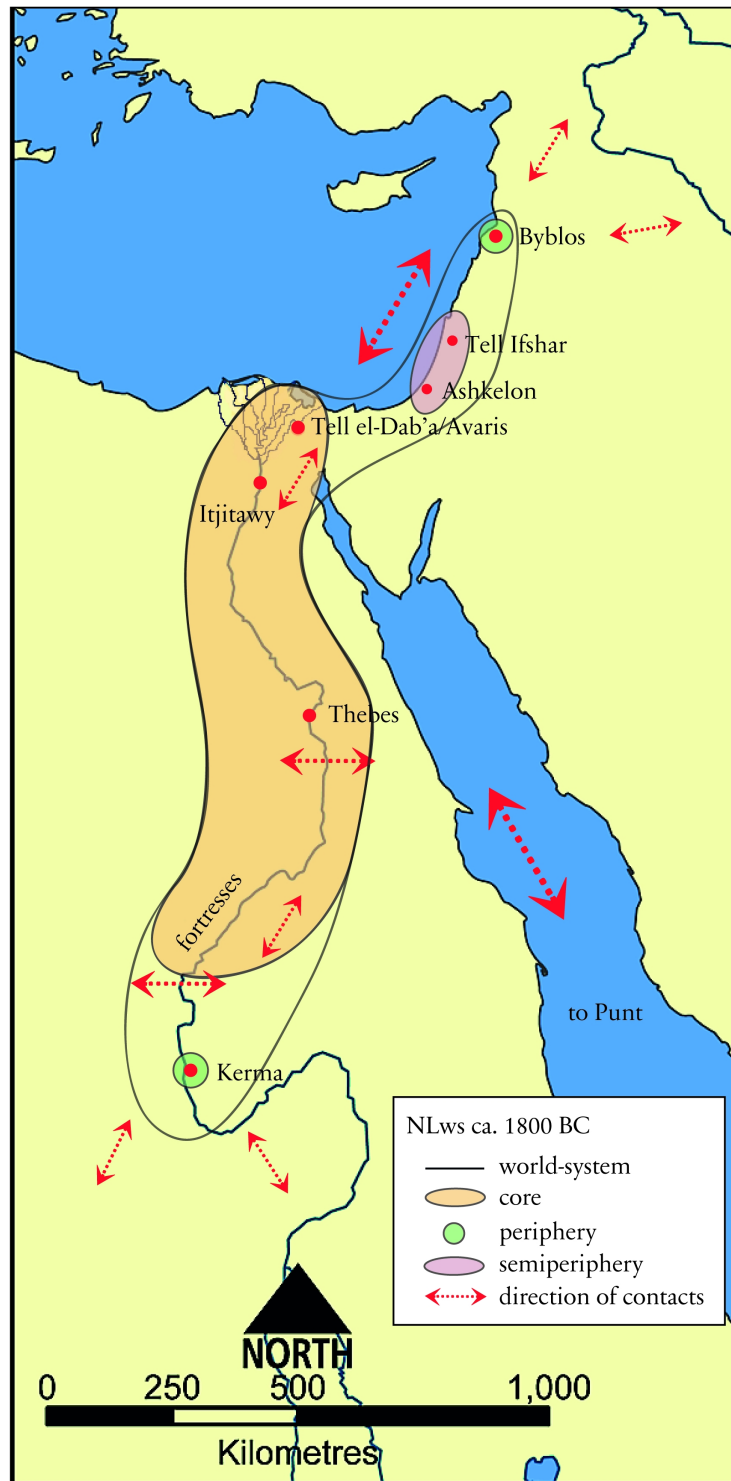


Fig. 1 | NLWs integration phase c. 2000–1800 BC.

Tell el-Dab'a/Avaris. On the other, a chain of interconnected fortresses was built in the Second Cataract region (Lower Nubia), from the beginning of the dynasty to the reign of Amenemhet III's predecessor, Senwosret III, who erected two border stelae at Semna. These fortresses – initially ruled from Egyptian Thebes (in the North) and later from Cushite Kerma (in the South) – were of substantial importance in the development of the southern portion of the world-system during the period under analysis.

It is probable that a legitimacy crisis in the core – a political factor – triggered its collapse and led to the regionalization of the world-system, characterized by the emergence of multiple competing cores (*ca.* 1800–1530 BC, cf. tentative situation *ca.* 1650 BC in fig. 2). Progressively, the cores located at Upper Egypt reunited under the Theban rule, roughly from *ca.* 1600 BC onwards (fig. 3).

Nevertheless, the tension caused among them probably produced the alteration of the network of exchanges to a point that violent practices were the way of re-establishing the flow. Thus, war defined the new order, characterized by the expansion of the reunited core. These long-term and large-scale phenomena are described as a world-system's '*pulsation*' (fig. 4),³⁴ which evolved from a core-periphery differentiation (*ca.* 2000–1800 BC) into a regionalized world-system with multiple competing cores (*ca.* 1800–1530 BC),³⁵ and then to a core-periphery hierarchy (*ca.* 1530–1200 BC, not analysed herein).

To make these concepts operational, the information provided by all kinds of evidence should be considered, despite the controversies that analysis may produce.³⁶ I am aware that several of the hypotheses presented here remain highly speculative and debatable, in part due to the nature and complexity of the evidence.³⁷ Nevertheless, I consider that a revised world-systems perspective provides theoretical tools for understanding large-scale and long-term processes of socio-historical change.

2 The path to integration: towards the world-system core-periphery differentiation (*ca.* 2000–1800 BC)

The processes of disruption and reordering that took place on the core area made a relevant impact on the system as a whole. Therefore, I shall refer first to the world-system's previous situation (*ca.* 2000–1800 BC), emphasizing the analysis of the core whence the disruptive process started.

Once the late 3rd millennium BC critical situation was gradually overcome and the Egyptian state politically reunited by the mid-11th Dynasty, the 12th Dynasty kings initiated a long process aimed not only at integrating the territory but also at improving the interconnections among the regions that provided directly and/or acted as intermediaries in the supply of diverse goods.

In world-system terms, the reunion of the Egyptian state at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC meant that 'coreness' shifted to the unified Nilotic kingdom. Many products coming from Africa (incense, myrrh, ebony, ivory, gold, animal skins, and semi-precious stones such as amethyst and turquoise) were manufactured in Egypt to produce textiles, jewellery, fine pottery, ointments and perfumes. Unfortunately, several of these products deteriorated and did not withstand the passing of time, but in some cases the containers which served as vessels did, providing information not only on chronological matters but also on their possible places of origin.

From Asia, cedar wood, resins, moringa-oil, honey, wine, metals and semi-precious stones such as lapis-lazuli arrived in Egypt, keeping the network running. Although it is not central to our argument in the definition of core/periphery structures, a regional division of labor is another feature to be mentioned in this case, since Egypt produced mainly manufactured products – an aspect commonly attributed to cores – while the

34 '*Pulsation*' is defined as the enlargement or reduction of the spatial scale of a world-system. Cf. Chase-Dunn and Hall 1995, 116.

35 Kohl characterized a regionalized world-system as "a patchwork of overlapping, geographically disparate core regions or *foci* of cultural development, each of which primarily exploited its own immediate hinterland." Kohl 1987, 16.

36 Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997, 40.

37 A summary in Bourriau 2003, 172–173.

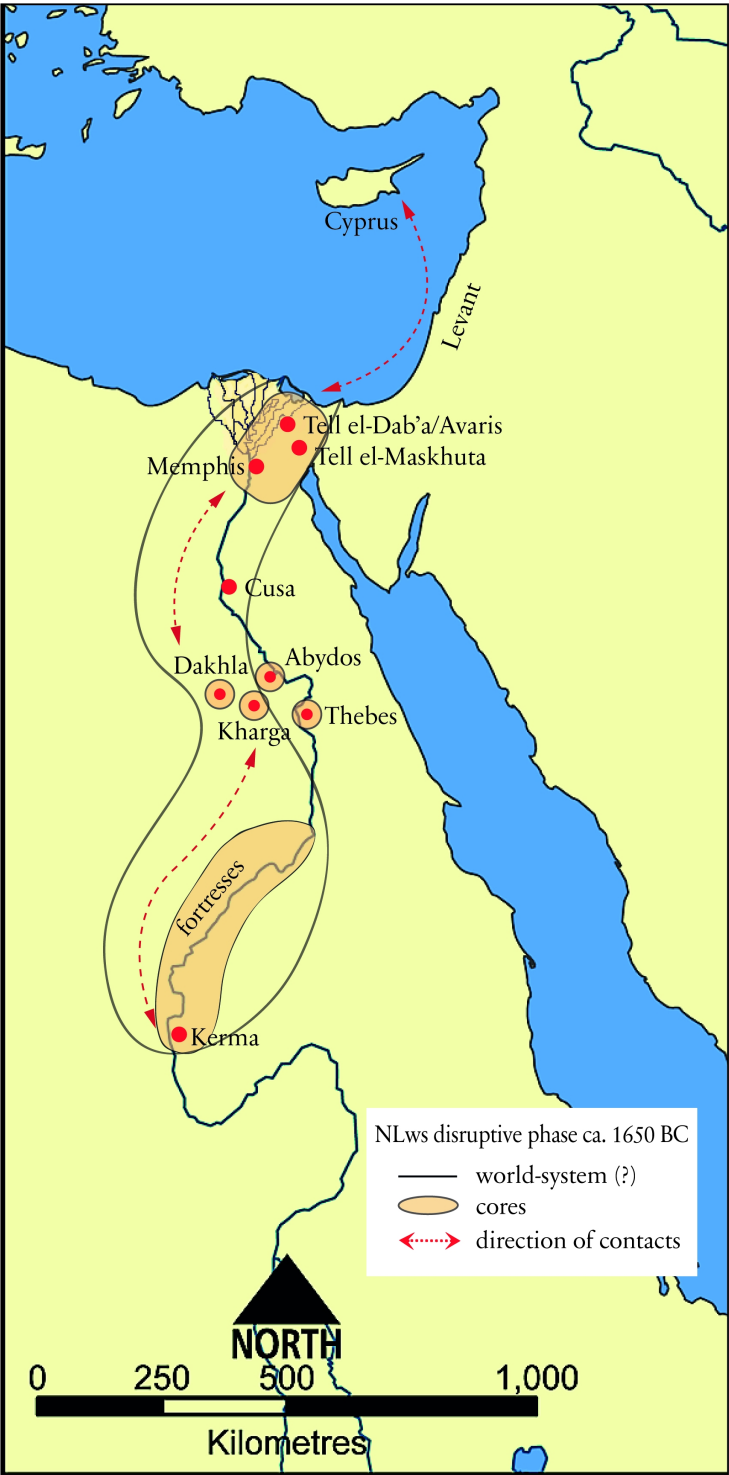


Fig. 2 | NLws disruptive phase ca. 1650 BC (tentative).

Nubian and Levantine societies mainly exported raw materials – an aspect commonly attributed to peripheries.³⁸

38 Flammini 2011, 210.

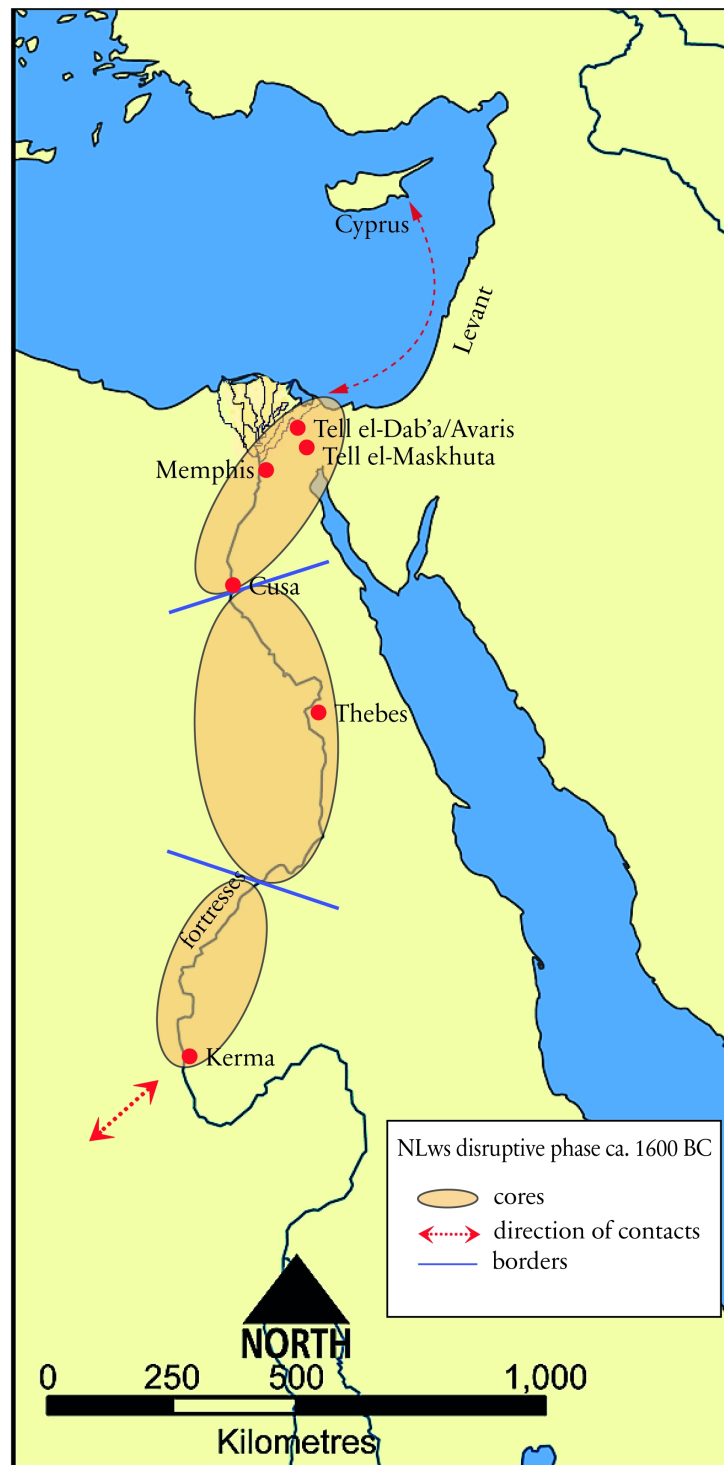


Fig. 3 | NLws disruptive phase ca. 1600 BC (tentative).

From the sources, four key actions of the 12th Dynasty can be recreated on the Nilotic axis, two of them on the bordering areas as mentioned above: (a) the foundation of a new capital (Itjtawy) at the beginning of the 12th Dynasty (Amenemhet I) in the

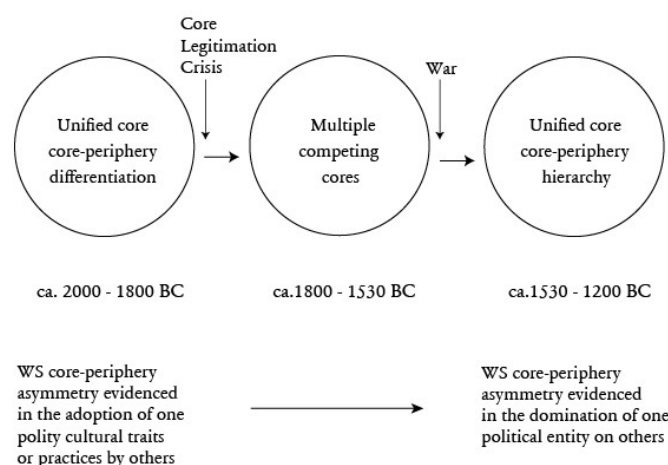


Fig. 4 | NLWs 'pulsation' during the 2nd millennium BC.

Fayyum area near modern el-Lisht;³⁹ (b) the foundation of a *hwt*-domain⁴⁰ in the eastern Delta (at Ezbet Rushdi es-Saghira, Amenemhet I) close to the location (1 km) where a settlement with Egyptian-Levantine cultural traits was later established at Tell el-Dab'a (during Amenemhet III's reign); (c) the founding of a chain of fortresses extending from Aswan to Semna in Lower Nubia, managed from Thebes (from Senwosret I to Senwosret III); and (d) the improvement of the Fayyum area (Senwosret II, Amenemhet III).

As mentioned above, in a world-systems approach, the unit of analysis is the world-system itself. Thus, the definition of systemic relationships as direct, regular and two-way allows distinguishing a core area, a semiperiphery and two peripheries *ca.* 2000–1800 BC in the NLWs. During that specific period, the core coincided with the extension of the united Egyptian state, which established different practices on its bordering zones ('linking zones,' the eastern Delta and Lower Nubia) with the purpose of controlling the exchanges, the flux of people and also of giving support to the expeditions sent to the deserts in search of raw materials and other goods.⁴¹ Those bordering installations were controlled from its main two nuclei, Itjtawy and Thebes respectively.⁴² The peripheries of the system were detected at Byblos and Kerma. In both cases, there was no domination

39 The kings of the 11th Dynasty remained at Thebes.

40 Moreno García stated that the Stela of Senwosret III found there revealed that these establishments were built in strategic frontier areas with the aim of controlling borders (Moreno García 1999, 187).

41 Even though my approach is centred on the Nilotic-Levantine axis because systemic relations with other societies are evidenced there, the core obtained goods through other procedures, mainly through the sending of seasonal expeditions to diverse uninhabited locations in the eastern and western deserts. There, it kept seasonal settlements or encampments, *cf.* Shaw 1994, 108–119. The activities in the oases during this phase are not well documented, but there are indications of the presence of the Egyptian state, *cf.* Castel and Tallet 2001 (Bahariya); Marchand and Soukiassian 2010 (Dakhla); J. C. Darnell 2016 (Kharga). In the case of the maritime expeditions to the Land of Punt, the ships were built in Coptos, carried through the desert and then assembled in Mersa Gawasis, the port of departure of those expeditions. Even though there is information on the point of departure of the expeditions and on the goods obtained from the exchange, there have been no excavations at the possible port of arrival and information regarding their relationships with the Puntites, *cf.* Fattovich and Bard 2006, 1–3. Thus, it is not possible to advance from a world-system perspective in the analysis of this relationship, *cf.* Flammini 2011, 208.

42 The control of the north-eastern Delta settlements from Itjtawy is sustained by the finding at Ezbet Rushdi of a sealing mentioning the *h3tj-ε hwt-w'rt Imny-snb-nfr*, 'the high official of Avaris, Amenyseneb-nefer', dated to the phase G or early F of the general stratigraphy of Tell el-Dab'a (mid-13th Dynasty), *cf.* Czerny 2001, 13–26. With regard to the fortresses, the Semna Dispatches were found at Thebes, *cf.* Smither 1945, 4.

of any kind exerted by the core but the adoption of core practices, which were framed by a systemic bond, evidenced the establishment of asymmetrical relationships.⁴³

The long process of integration started at the very beginning of the 12th Dynasty. The advance on the eastern Delta was materialized through the establishment of a settlement of Egyptian character (a *ḥwt*, at Ezbet Rushdi es-Saghira, Tell el-Dab'a Area R/I). The site was placed at the easternmost border of Egypt, on the Pelusiac branch of the Nile. The stela of Senwosret III (recovered from the site) mentions that it was founded near a former settlement built by a king named Khety, who can probably be identified with one of the Herakleopolitan 10th Dynasty kings of the same name.⁴⁴ This may demonstrate that earlier kings had a certain interest in making their presence felt in bordering areas. Evidence of possible – although scattered – contacts with the Levant can be sustained by the finding at Rushdi of monochrome painted wares originating in the northern Levant and two storage jar rims whose place of origin in the southern Levant was established.⁴⁵

As mentioned above, it is likely that the establishment of a settlement with strong Levantine-Egyptian traits 1 km away from Rushdi (in Tell el-Dab'a Area F/I, phases H and G, *ca.* 1850 BC) took place under Amenemhet III's rule. This decision should be considered part of a process of integration managed by the kings of Egypt with the aim of reaching several specific goals: firstly, the strengthening of the exchange with the Levant through the maritime route; secondly, the exploitation of the copper and turquoise mines located in the Sinai and finally, to benefit from the knowledge of the tin-bronze technology that their inhabitants possessed, and which they probably introduced into Egypt.⁴⁶

The settlement also had the characteristics of many locations established in bordering areas, such as the presence of mixed cultural traits, mainly Egyptian and Levantine traditions from the very early occupation levels.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, it is extremely difficult to establish conclusive arguments with regard to ethnic matters, because the adoption and display of foreign cultural elements does not imply an automatic embracing of their original sense. Probably, the inhabitants of the site gave the adopted elements a new significance.⁴⁸ For the same reason it is extremely difficult to determine their place of origin despite the efforts devoted to pursuing such goals.⁴⁹

Despite the fact that there is not full agreement on the matter, Tell el-Dab'a/Avaris is nowadays considered to be the place of origin of both the 14th and 15th dynasties, when in a politically fragmented scenario, the local elites followed their own paths to independence expanding the exchange networks into Asia as well as favouring the contacts with Cyprus. Over time, Tell el-Dab'a/Avaris became one of the most important harbours in antiquity.⁵⁰ It is possible that the port of connection with Asia at that time was Byblos, which played an intermediary role during the second quarter of the 2nd millennium BC.⁵¹

43 Flammini 2011, 214.

44 The Stela is dated to year 5 of King Senwosret III (*c.* 1868 BC), *cf.* Bietak 1997, 127; Bietak 2002, 29.

45 These rims came from the Southern and Central Carmel Coastal Plains of Israel Marcus 2013, 184.

46 Marcus 2007, 137–190; Shaw 1994, 108–119; Forstner-Müller 2010, 129.

47 An extensive bibliography exists on this topic. *Cf.* Bietak 1996; Bietak 1997; Bietak 2010a.

48 The rulers of the 14th and 15th dynasties could have “deliberately chosen, or adapted, those Egyptian practices which resembled administrative structures from their homeland.” Shirley 2013, 539.

49 *Cf.* Bietak 1997, 111–115; Bietak 2010a, 139–164. *Cf.* also Bader 2013, 276–277.

50 Despite the difficulties in dating, two harbour basins were reported to be found in Avaris. One of them dated back to the Hyksos period (Harbour 2); the other (Harbour 1) was proposed to be the location of Peru-nefer, the 18th Dynasty harbour (*cf.* Bietak 2005, 13–17; Bietak 2009, 1–3; Bietak 2010b, 16–17) but recently this identification has been thrown into doubt (*cf.* Forstner-Müller 2014, 32–35).

51 Flammini 2010, 154–168.

One of the usual critiques of world-systems approaches refers to the difficulties in determining the territorial extent of cores and peripheries.⁵² I consider that a relative position in a world-system should be established through the detection of systemic relations based on the evidence. In this vein, the relationship between Egypt and the Levantine centres would seem to change from the early 12th Dynasty reigns to the later ones. The Inscription of Mit Rahina (Amenemhet II) reveals the different methods the Egyptian central administration applied to obtain goods from abroad⁵³: it mentions the dispatch of maritime expeditions to the Levant with the goal of plundering sites in order to obtain booty;⁵⁴ the arrival of the ‘children of the rulers’ (*msw ḥq3w*) of Africa and Asia “with their heads inclined” to present goods to the Egyptian king as *b3kw*;⁵⁵ as well as the dispatch of pacific and seasonal expeditions to the Sinai to obtain turquoise.⁵⁶

The relationship with northern Levantine polities in general and with Byblos in particular, also seemed to shift during the late 12th Dynasty. Byblos played a significant part in the world-system particularly under the rule of the 12th and 13th dynasties. It not only became Egypt’s partner, acting as intermediary in the exchange with other locations, but also its elite received a differentiated treatment by the Egyptian rulers. In this way, the evidence found at Byblos is unique. Nevertheless, the relationship of the Egyptian state with Byblos and other northern Levantine centres would seem to have been rather different before Amenemhet III’s reign, as the inscription of Khnumhotep III reveals. The source states that the Egyptian king – probably Senwosret III – played the role of mediator in a dispute between the rulers of Ullaza and Byblos.⁵⁷ An important fact is that the Egyptian naval expedition sent to Byblos asked the ruler of the city permission to moor the ships in the harbour.⁵⁸

As stated above, the relationship seemed to shift during Amenemhet III’s reign towards the establishment of a privileged bond with the Byblite elite. Furthermore, Manfred Bietak had stressed the links with Byblos in order to find an explanation for the origin of the inhabitants of Tell el-Dab’a/Avaris.⁵⁹ The evidence found at Byblos revealed that Egyptian practices and cultural traits were adopted by the local elite probably as status markers in local processes of social differentiation.⁶⁰ Precisely this asymmetrical adoption of Egyptian cultural traits allows considering Byblos as part of the periphery of the system, while the basic bond was the partnership in exchange matters.⁶¹ The finding of imported Egyptian prestige goods in the tombs of the Byblite rulers also revealed the close link between the two elites.

Other northern Levantine cities provided evidence of materials originating in Egypt, although incomparable to what was found at Byblos. The objects consist mainly of 12th Dynasty royal statues, which were found at Ras Shamra/Ugarit; Aleppo/Halab, Hazor, and Qatna. One important aspect of the ensuing debates is that they did not throw doubt on the importance of the Egyptian connection, but rather, the discussions centred on the possible date of arrival, stressing that the importance would be quite different if

52 For instance, Colin Renfrew not only referred to his concerns about the application of world-systems theory concepts without adaptations to take account of pre-modern societies, but also to the references to continental scales in world-systems approaches (Renfrew 1986, 6).

53 Cf. Marcus 2007, 137–176.

54 Altenmüller and Moussa 1991, 12.

55 Altenmüller and Moussa 1991, 9–11. In this context, *b3kw* probably refers to ‘gift-givings’ as contributions presented to a higher status ruler without existing domination (on *b3kw* as ‘contribution’, cf. Galán 2002, 33–34). Cf. also Warburton 1997, 237–257.

56 Altenmüller and Moussa 1991, 10.

57 Allen 2008, 36; Flammini 2010, 158–159.

58 Allen 2008, 34.

59 Bietak 2010a, 142.

60 Flammini 2010, 161–164.

61 Flammini 2010, 161.

plundered Egyptian objects arrived during the Hyksos rule or whether they were actually gifts presented during the 12th Dynasty. Conclusions on their role and significance differ depending on the adopted date. The hypothesis regarding a dispatch during the Hyksos period, sustained long ago by James Weinstein and Wolfgang Helck, has recently been revived based on new evidence coming from Qatna and Avaris.⁶²

This fact allows considering that, in world-system terms, the political network extended from the core to reach the northern Levantine coastal city of Byblos during the integration process.

Southern Levantine settlements also benefited from the progressive integration of the exchange networks, and this motif is relevant to considering the region as part of the NLws, with its own characteristics. Documents originating in Egypt revealed actions by the Egyptian state in the Levant, including its southern area: the aforementioned Inscription of Mit Rahina, the Stela of Khusobek;⁶³ the Sinai inscriptions; the Tale of Sinuhe; and the Execration Texts.⁶⁴ These documents reveal the interest and knowledge the Egyptians had of the neighbouring societies established to the East during this phase of integration.

Material evidence also provides information on the relationships. Calibrated radio-carbon studies made on the Egyptian pottery found at Tell Ifshar provided a certain date, being established at the end of the reign of Senwosret III (mid-19th century BC). The findings at Ashqelon were dated to the beginning of the 13th Dynasty while a Middle Kingdom goblet found at Sidon was dated to the late 20th until the first half of the 19th century BC.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the Egyptian remains found at Ashqelon – even the seals – and Tell Ifshar were not linked to prestige goods, but to basic commodities.⁶⁶

A relevant approach to the characteristics urbanism adopted in the Southern Levant during the Middle Bronze was addressed by David Ilan.⁶⁷ His contribution focused on explaining long-term change in the region evaluating both exogenous and endogenous processes, emphasising the development and increased complexity reached by the local society. With regard to the external influences from the south, he stressed the role of Tell el-Dab'a/Avaris and the relevance of the political and economic interaction (mainly during MB II and III, *ca.* 1800–1500 BC). To the north, he highlighted the relationship with Hazor, which connected those southern Levantine sites with the Assyrian networks of exchange (mainly during the MB I, *ca.* 2000–1800 BC).

Recently, Susan Cohen has also approached the subject. She summarized the characteristics of the relationship between the Egyptian core and the Southern Levant, concluding that it was not very significant for the former.

Nevertheless, she pointed out that

it may very well have held great significance for Palestinian development. The external influence derived from this relationship may have spurred further growth in the region, particularly in local systems, while simultaneously, Palestine was also free to develop those systems and networks that provide the backbone of a stable urban society without excessive interference from the Egyptian power.⁶⁸

62 Ahrens 2011, 21–22. For a dating during the 12th Dynasty, *cf.* Scandone Matthiae 2000, 187–193.

63 The official served during the reign of Senwosret III, being *Seqmem* – identified with the southern Levantine site of Shechem – and the Retjenu mentioned there. On the stela, *cf.* Baines 1987, 43–61.

64 The studies of these documents are innumerable; the following are illustrative: Sinai Inscriptions, *cf.* Černý 1955; Tale of Sinuhe, *cf.* Parkinson 1999; Execration Texts, *cf.* Sethe 1926; Posener and Walle 1940.

65 *Cf.* Marcus 2013, 190.

66 Cohen 2012, 6.

67 Ilan 1999, 297–315.

68 Cohen 2012, 6.

Her studies have also revealed an increase in the overall number of settlements from the coastal fringe to the inner territory, related to the main stream of the exchanges between Egypt and other regions during the Middle Bronze Age,⁶⁹ which coincided with the integration phase of the world-system.

These approaches, even though they did not explicitly apply a world-systems approach (although referring to core/periphery structures), are in line with the idea of ‘systemness’: Southern Levantine sites benefited from their intermediate position between the African core and the northern periphery in this world-system.⁷⁰ Thus, the southern Levantine coastal sites, located between the Egyptian core and the northern Levant, could have operated as ‘semi-peripheries’ of the system during this integration phase.

On the other side of the world-system, a gradual advance of the core on the southern territory was marked by the foundation of a chain of fortresses along the Nile from Aswan to Semna, in Lower Nubia; these were finished during the reign of Senwosret III (when the 12th Dynasty was at its height in internal and external control – but also more threatened than ever, as the wealth attracted neighbours from North and South to incursions). The goals with regard to this advance on the southern Nilotic axis were similar to those delimited for the northeastern border to control: firstly, the movement of the local population, entering or leaving Egypt; secondly, the flow of exchanges with the south, channelled through the fortresses and, finally, the supply of the expeditions sent to the western and eastern deserts.⁷¹ The way Egypt occupied those buildings seemed to shift from a rotary pattern to a permanent pattern from the 12th to the 13th dynasties.⁷² With regard to the relationships with the local Nubian C-Group and the slightly related Pan-Graves (Medja) people, there was no evidence of conflict, but probably a collaborative relationship based on the exchange of goods (and services).⁷³

The Egyptian rulers were clearly committed to maintaining the border at Semna. Senwosret III erected two border stelae there, dated to his regnal years 8 (First Stela, Berlin 14753) and 16 (Second Stela, Berlin 1157).⁷⁴ The First Stela starts by mentioning the establishment of the frontier, even before the king’s titulary. The goal was clearly to prevent the Nubians “travelling downstream [into Egypt or Egyptian held territory] by water and by land with a ship or with all cattle”⁷⁵ except to trade with the Egyptians at their fortress in Mirgissa. The hieroglyph for ‘west’ can be seen in the lunette, while in the lower part of the stela three bound kneeling Nubians form a row.⁷⁶

The Second Stela (year 16) also reveals the same goal from the beginning, after mentioning the complete titulary of Senwosret III: “Year 16, third month of winter: the king made his southern boundary at *Hh* (Semna).”⁷⁷

Despite their fragmentary state, other Egyptian documents, in particular the Semna Despatches, give information on the relationships between the Egyptians and the local people. Dated to Amenemhet III’s reign, Despatches n° 1 and 6 reveal that Nubians (*Nḥsyw*) arrived at the fortress of Semna to ‘trade’ local products and received subsistence

69 Cohen 2012, 6.

70 In recent papers Cohen adopted a core/periphery framework to explain urban development in the Southern Levant through its relationships with Egypt. She attributed the secondary role of the southern Levantine sites to the interest of Egypt in the Nubian periphery (Cohen 2015, 256). On Cohen’s views, cf. Ilan 2018.

71 Shaw 2003, 318.

72 Smith 1995, 176.

73 Hafsaas-Isakos 2008, 390–392. Laszlo Török proposes that the C-Group elite which lived in Lower Nubia probably maintained its position controlling C-Group communities “at a village level and/or within the framework of family/clan structures,” cf. Török 2009, 94.

74 A copy of the Second Stela was found at Uronarti, Lichtheim 1973, 118.

75 Smith 1995, 40.

76 Vogel 2011, 327.

77 Lichtheim 1973, 119.

goods (bread and beer) from the Egyptians in exchange. Despatch n° 3, mentions that Medja people were found in the desert by a patrol from the fortress and taken off to Mirgissa; and Despatch n° 5 referred to the arrival of Medja people – men and women – at Elephantine, asking to be allowed to enter into the Egyptian state to serve as workers, but they were rejected and expelled to the desert whence they had come.⁷⁸

These documents reveal the social and economic relationships between the Egyptian state and the societies that inhabited Lower Nubia as executed at the Second Cataract forts. Brigitte Gratien considered that the forts changed from being primarily military to serving trade during the 13th Dynasty due to the increase of exchange.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the ‘military’ character of the fortresses is a matter of discussion;⁸⁰ that they were expressly integrated into a system of controlling trading activities and movements of people along the southern border of the world-system core cannot be doubted, for Senwosret III expressly confirms this.

The value of the evidence found at Kerma – which remained an independent nucleus in Upper Nubia – is restricted because there are no local textual sources and the assumptions rely on the material culture alone, while the Egyptians left both written and monumental sources. Anyway, a complex exchange system based on the use of sealings and counter-sealings was detected in the city, probably transferred to Kerma from the fortresses located in Lower Nubia. This material demonstrates the existence of a shared logic of exchange practices between partners.⁸¹ Nevertheless, the finding of Egyptian pottery and sealings in a different context – the Kerman necropolis – suggests their use as status markers by the local elite, probably as part of an internal process of social differentiation.⁸² Thus, the adoption of core-originated traits (sealing system, pottery, seals) allows considering Kerma the southern periphery during this phase of integration.⁸³

Other relevant information is provided by the known distribution of Nubian pottery in Egypt. It also reveals a pattern which coincides with the political situation during that period in the region. There is no evidence of Nubian pottery in the Nile Valley during Middle Kerma, when the Egyptian state controlled the fortresses (12th Dynasty to early 13th Dynasty). Nevertheless, the Nubians controlled the prestige goods exchange coming from Sub-Saharan Africa, and their presence was documented in the western deserts as far as the Egyptian oases in the Western desert. This situation changed when the Egyptian state collapsed and the Nubians took control of the fortresses and the Nile route.⁸⁴

In short, during *ca.* 2000–1800 BC a process of integration took place in the NLws. A prestige goods network can be proposed, which stretched from the Northern Levant to Upper Nubia – extending beyond this world-system – and where the main axis of exchange was the Nile. Those relationships can be evidenced mainly in two sites: Byblos in the northern Levant and Kerma in Upper Nubia. A world-system which encompassed Byblos to Kerma was established, where political and economic networks can be detected. On the one hand, relations between Byblos and Egypt were probably a form of economic

78 Smither 1945, 3–10.

79 Gratien 2006, 124.

80 Cf. Török 2009, 87.

81 Flammini 2011, 213.

82 The presence of imported Egyptian pottery at graves in Kerma can be traced from the 5th Dynasty to the early 13th Dynasty. While Upper Egyptian pottery (Marl A2 and A3 fabrics) is usually present through the complete sequence, an increase of Lower Egyptian ceramics (Marl C fabric) is evidenced from the mid-12th Dynasty to early 13th Dynasty, when the sequence ends. The main type is represented by the ovoid/globular jar which probably imitated Egyptian cosmetic vessels made of calcite, and could have contained some aromatic cream or oil. Other types found are tableware (water jars, potstands). The increase of the contacts represented by a correlative increase of Egyptian pottery in Kerman graves coincided with the building of the Second Cataract forts, cf. Bourriau 2004, 3–13.

83 Flammini 2011, 212–213.

84 Gratien 2006, 129–130.

partnership with the Byblite ruling elite, which was Egyptianized, adopting several cultural Egyptian traits; on the other, Kerma and Egypt were also economic partners, with the Kermans adopted the sealing system from the Egyptian forts, and in the elite burials Egyptian goods were found.

Thus, Byblos and Kerma could be defined as peripheries since asymmetrical relationships were established with the Egyptian state at one or more levels of interaction, despite the fact that these relationships did not imply domination of any kind (but rather discrete core-periphery differentiation).⁸⁵ For the same reason, the Egyptian state can be defined as a core area during this phase. At the same time, other locations placed in the southern Levant were gradually incorporated into this network of exchanges, themselves benefiting from the exchange between Egypt and the northern Levant. This area can be classified as a semiperiphery of the world-system during this phase.

3 The path to disruption: the world-system's regionalization and the emergence of multiple competing cores (*ca.* 1800–1530 BC)

This integrated world-system, extending from Byblos to Kerma, was disrupted from *ca.* 1800 BC onwards. For a long time, the considered fact that indicated the disunity of Egypt was the possible abandonment of Itjtawy and the establishment of the 13th Dynasty kings at Thebes (*ca.* 1685 BC). In this context, the Hyksos 'invasion' was considered the cause of disruption in a weakened Egypt, but the external reasons seem to be more a consequence than a cause of such disorder. I follow Kim Ryholt's proposal of establishing the initial period of political turmoil some time earlier, at the end of the 12th Dynasty, roughly *ca.* 1800 BC.⁸⁶

Today therefore, an internal process related to a 'legitimation crisis' in the core area is a hypothesis considered to be more reliable to explain the collapse of the unified Egyptian state, since political reasons related to legitimacy and succession problems could have exerted an impact on the origin and development of the increasing political fragmentation.

In fact, the 13th Dynasty revealed an astonishing number of kings – more than 57 – many of them of non-royal origin.⁸⁷ The reign of the female king Sobekneferu at the end of the 12th Dynasty and the use of *filiative nomina* by the early 13th Dynasty kings serve as proof of this possible situation.⁸⁸ Stephen Quirke has proposed that during the 13th Dynasty kingship 'circulated' among a few local rulers, who considered themselves suitable for (briefly) taking a seat on the Egyptian throne,⁸⁹ while some kind of 'co-operation'

85 Flammini 2011, 214.

86 *Cf.* n. 32.

87 Ryholt 1997, 72.

88 Ryholt 1997, 207. On Sobekneferu, *cf.* Callender 1998, 227–236. With regard to succession problems, a recent explanation of the succession of the last kings of the 12th Dynasty, offered by Josef Wegner and Kevin Cahail, might shed light on these matters (Wegner and Cahail 2014, 23). It has been suggested that there were no substantial changes in the royal lines between the 12th and the 13th dynasties (Ryholt 1997, 214) with a hypothetical sequence for the royal succession during the late 12th/early 13th Dynasties in agreement with that general idea. It maintains that Amenemhet III would have fathered two daughters, Neferuptah and Sobekneferu. It is probable that the chosen successor, Neferuptah, died before ascending the throne, and that Amenemhet III chose a new coregent and successor of non-royal lineage, Amenemhet IV. This last king reigned for nine years, and after his death, Sobekneferu seized the throne in place of the two sons of Amenemhet IV. Once she died, these sons claimed the throne and became the two first kings of the 13th Dynasty, Sobekhotep I and Sonbef. Their funerary complexes were recently identified in Abydos near the mortuary complex of the powerful late 12th Dynasty king Senwosret III, probably as a means of reinforcing their legitimacy.

89 Quirke 1991, 137–139.

among otherwise competing groups has also been proposed.⁹⁰ Probably, this scenario contributed to the emergence of the 14th Dynasty in Tell el-Dab'a/Avaris. Its coexistence with the early 13th Dynasty seemed to be pacific, even cooperating in exchange matters.⁹¹ Nevertheless, a new independent core was emerging in the area.⁹²

Even though political facts do not exactly correlate with archaeological remains, the material evidence coming from cemeteries dated to the disruptive period reveal a break in material culture after the first half of the 13th Dynasty, evidenced in the Memphis/Fayyum, Middle Egyptian and Upper Egyptian (Thebes) areas, among others.⁹³ Thus, material culture reveals that the collapse of the unified core left local cultural variations in plain sight, which increased during the disruptive process.

The traditional relative and absolute chronologies of the period as well as the extent of exchanges during the first part of the process were substantially put into question by the new findings made at Tell el-Dab'a/Avaris (Area R/III) and Edfu, having consequences on the historical comprehension of the period. These findings – mainly sealings – reveal that the Hyksos king Khayan, presumably Apepi's predecessor, should be placed in the early 15th Dynasty. It is likely that he was contemporaneous to mid-13th Dynasty king Sobekhotep IV.⁹⁴ In both cases, the sealings secured boxes or bags, and were probably part of a circuit of exchange of goods. Thus, until *ca.* 1700 BC – in rough terms – the political scenario seemed to be occupied by the uneasy coexistence of the 13th Dynasty established at Itjtawy and the 14th Dynasty (and probably the very early 15th Dynasty) located in Tell el-Dab'a/Avaris.⁹⁵ A point of discussion is the reasons why (and indeed whether) the 13th Dynasty kings had to move to Thebes, leaving Itjtawy (in the Fayyum area), which lay a good distance from both Memphis and Avaris, where the Hyksos kings had established their capital. The argument was originally based on the absence of remains of this dynasty after Merneferia Aya's reign (*ca.* 1695–1685 BC) in the north and the south of Egypt, but in the meantime strong arguments which tend to question this conclusion have emerged, allowing that the 13th Dynasty remained in the north, but probably subordinated to the Hyksos.⁹⁶

This brings us to another point of relevance: understanding how the Hyksos extended their control over part of the territory of Egypt. Even though the Hyksos did not produce longer narratives, there is a certain amount of textual evidence coming from the Egyptian side as well as material remains which allow proposing that the Hyksos established

90 Khótay 2013, 484.

91 Kim Ryholt argued for a parallel beginning of the 13th and the 14th Dynasties (Ryholt 1997, 75); while others maintained that the rise of the 14th Dynasty took place later, during the mid-13th Dynasty (cf. Beckerath 1964, 72; Grajetzki 2006, 73; Bietak 2010a, 140, fig. 1).

92 The name of the best known 14th Dynasty ruler was Neḥsy (i.e. "Nubian" in the Egyptian language), and one explanation for the presence of a Nubian in Avaris was a marriage between his father and a Nubian princess (Ryholt 1997, 253). Regardless of the reason, such a name confirms the strong bonds existent among people of different cultural backgrounds and the multicultural layout of bordering locations in the world-system.

93 Bourriau 2010, 11. Changes in the ceramic material were evidenced at Dra Abu el-Naga cemetery. Two phases were discerned: one, where a local style coexisted associated to the 12th Dynasty style; the other, where a complete change in shapes and pottery production is evidenced (17th Dynasty), cf. Seiler 2010, 52.

94 Cf. Moeller, Marouard, and Ayers 2011, 87–121; for the sealings of Khayan in contexts related to the early 15th Dynasty in Tell el-Dab'a, Area R/III, cf. Forstner-Müller and Rose 2012b, 55–66; Reali 2012, 67–73.

95 Most of the names of the 14th Dynasty rulers and treasurers were of West-Semitic origin, a few others Egyptian, and one Nubian (Neḥsy) (Ryholt 1997, 99–102). The new findings seem to give Ryholt's assigning of the material remains of Tell el-Dab'a phases G/4=d/1 and G/1-3=c G/1-4 (Area F/I, the 'mansion of dignitaries') to the 14th Dynasty further support. Cf. Ryholt 1997, 104. M. Bietak (Bietak 1997, 90) considered that the 14th Dynasty was contemporary to the late 13th Dynasty.

96 M. Marée (Marée 2010, XIII) supported this explanation based on the information provided by the Stela of Horemkhawef from Hierakonpolis.

personal practices of subordination with specific local rulers rather than attempting an extended territorial domination. Furthermore, the possibility that the Hyksos controlled territory as far south as Gebelein (i.e., south of 17th Dynasty Thebes), once considered a fact, has been thrown into doubt.⁹⁷ However, the delivery of *b3kw* mentioned in the Carnarvon Tablet suggests that even if the south was not occupied by the Hyksos, the Hyksos might as well have imposed some kind of ‘toll’ or tribute to be paid by the southern polity, being the frontier located at Cusae.⁹⁸

The Second Stela of Kamose suggests that the claims of the Hyksos ruler Apepi to rule over Upper Egyptian territory were made by subordinating the Theban ruler and not through a military advance on Thebes. Besides, the fact that Apepi called the ruler of Kush “my son” probably mirrors the way the Hyksos displayed their inter-elite relationships: through ‘patronage bonds’.⁹⁹ This sociopolitical practice is characterized by its personal, asymmetrical and informal character, as well as expressed in sources through the use of kinship and household related terminology: father, brother, son, servant, and lord.¹⁰⁰ The widely attested title ‘king’s son’ on scarabs probably reflected this kind of social bond, as well as the distribution of prestige items such as weaponry in the eastern Delta and the southern Levant.¹⁰¹

Scarabs and Egyptian-style Tell el-Yahudiyeh ware – originating from the southern Levant, but imported and copied at Tell el-Dab’a/Avaris, see below – found in southern Levantine sites probably revealed the relationships with the Hyksos¹⁰² instead of proving its origin as Daphna Ben-Tor had suggested.¹⁰³ Findings made at Tell el-Dab’a/Avaris revealed that the exchange with the Levant reached its peak by the time of the 14th Dynasty (ca. 1700 BC); although it subsequently declined, the contact did not disappear, but gradually diminished in favour of Cyprus.¹⁰⁴ During the late Hyksos period, the imports from the Levant were almost non-existent, Cyprus being the main partner.¹⁰⁵ This fact reinforces the idea of the expansion of the network of exchanges from Avaris towards the Eastern Mediterranean.

Thus, a possible explanation for the material evidence found in the southern Levant which revealed strong connections with the core located at the eastern Delta could be the existence of political links with southern Levantine local rulers.¹⁰⁶ This hypothesis has been proposed and discussed by several scholars.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, it is hard to differentiate whether those relationships represented some kind of subordinated bond – i.e.

97 Polz 2006, 246.

98 Redford 1997, 13–14.

99 Flammini 2011–2012, 72–73. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that the Kerma ruler was effectively subordinated to the Hyksos ruler. Apepi’s statement can be understood as an expression of the way the Hyksos ruler conceived the political relationships. Other evidences also pointed to the establishment of patronage bonds, as Nehemen’s dagger (Saqqara, Cairo JE 52768), for a discussion cf. Flammini 2015, 233–245.

100 Westbrook 2005, 211–212.

101 Philip 2006, 233. Probably the local rulers established in the Bahariya oasis were co-opted in a similar way. In referring the situation, cf. Colin 2005.

102 Bietak 2010a, 150 and n. 89; Shirley 2013, 544.

103 Cf. Ben-Tor 2010 and bibliography cited there.

104 Bietak 2010a, 16–17.

105 Forstner-Müller 2010, 129. R. Merrillees pointed out that the greatest concentration of Cypriot ware in Tell el-Dab’a/Avaris took place between ca. 1625–1560 BC (Merrillees 2009, 457). Tell el-Dab’a/Avaris also provided a locally made wheel-thrown Tell el-Yahudiyeh ware with alien features attributed to a Cypriot tradition (Maguire 2009, 21–40). On Cypriot pottery in Tell el-Dab’a, cf. also Maguire 1995. Besides, Cypriote pottery was distributed along coastal sites of the Levant (Maguire 1990). Cf. also the review of Maguire 2009 by R. S. Merrillees (Merrillees 2009).

106 For a discussion on this topic, cf. Bietak 2010a, 152–153.

107 Cf. Ben-Tor 2010, 94, and bibliography cited there. For a different opinion on the subject, cf. Ryholt 1997, 323–325.

patronage, 'client-patron relationships' as suggested by Graham Philip following Amélie Kuhrt¹⁰⁸ – or elite emulation processes where the local rulers were independent from the eastern Delta core. The difference is the relative autonomy those local rulers could have exerted in each case, disregarding any kind of territorial control.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, the aforementioned statues of ancient Egyptian kings which appeared in different sites in the northern Levant could have been part of a relationship with similar characteristics – assuming they were sent during the Hyksos period.

Thus, a political network was probably established with the Levant, although it is not possible to define its particular traits, while the exchanges network expanded to include Cyprus, and the Levant in a lesser extent.

Nevertheless, the Hyksos not only expanded their networks in that direction: the relation of the impressive evidence recovered from Tell el-Maskhuta (Wadi Tumilat) to them also reveals the possible connection with routes leading to southern Arabia.¹¹⁰ John Holladay stressed the role of the site in this regard, and clearly suggested that Maskhuta was an Asiatic post related to the eastern Delta core ruled by the Hyksos, established with the aim of trading with "South Arabia via the overland caravan routes through the Sinai and down the Arabian coast."¹¹¹

Unfortunately, to discriminate between core/peripheries structures with regard to the eastern Delta core is highly hypothetical due to the nature of the evidence, and it deserves further research. Nevertheless, political and exchange networks can be delineated on the region extended towards the east (the Levant) and the north (the eastern Mediterranean).

The exchange of goods between Avaris and Upper Egypt was probably maintained during part of the period, as the aforementioned evidence found at Edfu reveals.¹¹² Moreover, other evidence also points in the same direction.

The already mentioned Tell el-Yahudiyeh ware is a relevant marker for analysing the running of the prestige goods exchange network during this period. It was related to prestige, and probably contained some kind of ointment, oil or perfume, and was mainly found in temples and tombs. Early Levantine Tell el-Yahudiyeh ware was imported and copied in Egypt – Tell el-Dab'a, str. F, *ca.* 1700 BC – and was found as far off as Kerma, while a few examples were recovered from Upper Egypt. It is relevant to mention that Tell el-Yahudiyeh piriform type 2, (Tell el-Dab'a, str. E/1 to D/3, dated *ca.* 1620–1580 BC) was well represented in the eastern Delta, and to a lesser extent in Cyprus and the Levant, Middle Egypt and Nubia. The exception was the Thebaid.¹¹³ Its distribution reinforces the argument related to the isolation of the Theban area in particular from the circuit of prestige goods managed from Avaris under the Hyksos.¹¹⁴

Besides integrating – and probably managing – already existent and new networks, the elite who ruled that eastern Delta core promoted ways of reinforcing their own identity: the Hyksos rulers adopted several Egyptian features while at the same time maintaining others related to the Levantine cultural sphere. In fact, they built a new identity as rulers, as part of a process of differentiation among competing elites on the Nile. Even though they adopted several Egyptian traits (titles, epithets, script, language, gods and other Egyptian cultural features) other elements showed their need to distinguish themselves: the use of the title *heqa khasut* ('ruler of the foreign lands') at least during the first reigns of the dynasty was rather offensive as it generally referred to foreigners

108 Philip 2006, 233.

109 Ryholt 1997, 130–131.

110 Holladay 1997, 183–209.

111 Holladay 1997, 209.

112 Moeller, Marouard, and Ayers 2011, 109.

113 Bietak 1997, 94; Colin 2005, 44.

114 Moreno García 2009, 296–297; Colin 2005, 44–45; Bietak 2010a.

rather than rulers of Egypt; the adoption of the generally reviled Egyptian god Seth as ‘lord of Avaris,’ who acquired the qualities of the Levantine god Baal;¹¹⁵ and the absence of attempts at legitimizing themselves through the precedent of relations with earlier Egyptian kings also made them quite unique. In fact, the non-existence of original newly commissioned three-dimensional representations of the Hyksos kings, while inscribing their names and titles on usurped royal Egyptian statuary are also remarkable features in that regard.¹¹⁶

Other references point to a diverse way of organizing the administration (no title of vizier is attested, just ‘treasurer’ and ‘king’s son’).¹¹⁷ Furthermore, the ‘department of the sealed things’ is the best represented bureau, and the relationship between this department and its officials with trade cannot be underestimated.

In short, a new core area nucleated around Avaris was formed in the northeastern area of the former core, probably reaching Cusae to the south. Economic links could have shifted from the Levant to Cyprus.

While the 15th Dynasty was well-established in the north, the situation in Upper Egypt followed its own path to political fragmentation, which seemed to increase *ca.* 1650 BC (fig. 2). Several competing independent cores emerged there. Later, those cores merged into one: the Theban core which fought against the eastern Delta core ruled by the Hyksos.

The existence of an independent dynasty located in Abydos was proposed long ago, first by D. Franke and later by K. Ryholt based on the information provided by the Turin King-List, which attests a group of rulers after the summation of the 16th Dynasty, whose *prenomina* are preserved: Woser[...]re (two rulers); [...]hebre (two rulers); [...]webenre.¹¹⁸ Another eleven names are lost.¹¹⁹ The Abydos dynasty was probably contemporary to the Theban 16th Dynasty (*ca.* 1650–1580 BC). Nowadays, the discovery of the tomb of a king named Woseribre Senebkay in south Abydos gave this hypothesis a new impetus. This ruler adopted Egyptian titles (‘Lord of the Two Lands’ and ‘Dual King’), and probably was one of the first two kings of the ‘Abydos dynasty’ mentioned in the Turin King-list.¹²⁰ Another feature of interest is the reuse of part of an earlier royal burial. Even though the tomb was reportedly robbed in earlier times, Josef Wegner has revealed that Senebkay reused not only the 60-ton quartzite royal sarcophagus chamber which belonged to the first 13th Dynasty king Sobekhotep I (Abydos, tomb S10) but also cedar planks coming from his coffin to make the canopic chest.¹²¹ Despite the fact that the information is not sufficient to sustain further conclusions, these traces probably reveal not only the ruler’s search for legitimacy but also the isolation of this elite expressed in the difficulties in obtaining prestige materials.

In marginal areas, other centres arose. During the last decade, in the main oases located to the west of Thebes, an impressive amount of new findings have appeared. Dakhla, Kharga and the routes which connected them with the Thebaid as well as other locations to the south and southwest defined an area criss-crossed by an extensive network of routes which had been in use for a long time before the world-system fragmented. A study of the pottery found at Balat/Ayn Asil (the main settlement in Dakhla oasis)¹²² revealed that the site was not only occupied from the 6th to the 11th Dynasty but also following a hiatus from *ca.* 1700 to 1600 BC, and then re-occupied by the late 17th Dynasty (*ca.* 1580–1540

115 Goldwasser 2006, 132.

116 On the Hyksos images, cf. Arnold 2010, 206–213.

117 Quirke 2007, 133; Shirley 2013, 533.

118 Ryholt 1997, 165.

119 Franke 1988, 259; Ryholt 1997, 163–166. Ryholt (Ryholt 1997, 165) suggested that this dynasty could have ruled from Abydos or Thinis.

120 Cf. Wegner 2014, 40.

121 Wegner 2014, 40.

122 It also comprises the necropolis of Qila al-Dabba, cf. Marchand 2012, 407.

BC).¹²³ The pottery found during the occupation lasting from *ca.* 1700–1600 BC revealed domestic types for storing and cooking food (bread-moulds, cooking pots, small vases for ladling, bowls, hemispherical cups, storage jars, necked jars, covers and stoppers). Only one imported jar from the Levant was found (Canaanite jar), while most of the fabrics were local. Sylvie Marchand stated that bread moulds, storage jars and pots for preparing food presented incised marks made before firing, composed by geometric designs, hieroglyphic signs or signs derived from hieratic, suggesting that they were identification marks, probably signifying that the product was destined to an individual or to a group of individuals.¹²⁴ Even though she explicitly excluded “the notion of an elaborated ‘medium to long’ distance exchange system”¹²⁵ for the site, I consider that it could have a role during the disruptive phase if considering the evidence found at the neighbouring Kharga oasis.

There, the impressive settlement of Umm Mawagir (‘The Mother of Bread Moulds’) was discovered in 2005 and has been excavated since 2008. It is the largest site located in Kharga, and its activity spans from the late 12th/early 13th dynasties through the early 17th dynasty, with a final phase of occupation from the late 17th/early 18th dynasties,¹²⁶ being contemporary to the aforementioned settlement of Ayn Asil, in the Dakhla oasis.

Both sites seemed to be devoted mainly to the production of food, particularly bread. Umm Mawagir was probably connected to the Nile valley through the well-known Girga Road, the early 12th Dynasty and the late 17th Dynasty being the moments where the road evidenced most dense traffic.¹²⁷ Preliminary conclusions on the material finds reveal that a Nubian tradition coexisted with an Egyptian one, evidenced through different cuisines. Nevertheless, Nubian-Egyptian hybridization took place at the site. In the Egyptian Nile Valley, the most representative Nubian tradition is reported to be Pan-Grave, while Kerma and C-Group assemblages were represented to a comparatively lesser degree.¹²⁸ To John Darnell, a “Khargan/Dakhlan state” emerged at the oases, and it has to be added to the other three polities which commonly defined the disruptive period.¹²⁹ This independent political entity was later related to the late 17th Dynasty, probably through temporary activities such as expeditions organized from the Nile Valley and not as a permanent occupation.¹³⁰ Despite the fact that such a preliminary qualification of these nuclei as a ‘state’ deserves further explanation and researching, Darnell is correct in saying that the common image of a homogeneous partition in three political entities during the whole period should be revised.

During the former process of integration (*ca.* 2000–1800 BC), the Egyptians controlled the western routes probably through patrols; while the presence of the Theban polity seemed irrelevant, reduced to the Qena Bend, during most of the disruptive phase. Thebes only controlled the Girga Road by the late 17th Dynasty while also advancing on the major southern western oases.¹³¹ It is possible that it controlled the area through patrols as well. The Abu Ballas Trail which departed from Balat to the Gebel Ouenat to the southwest – nearly 700 km distant from the Nile Valley and extensively used during earlier times – was travelled by small groups over a limited section of the trail, no more than 130 km from

123 Marchand 2012, 409.

124 Marchand 2012, 409.

125 Marchand 2012, 411.

126 Manassa 2012, 129. The excavation was conducted by the Yale Egyptological Institute in Egypt.

127 A recent inscription found at Gebel Ouenat which mentions a certain Mentuhotep reveals that during the late Old Kingdom/First Intermediate Period the Abu Ballas trail was in use as an alternative route to Sub-Saharan Africa from where prestige goods such as incense, ivory, valuable oils and skins were imported into the Nile Valley through the Dakhla oasis. *Cf.* Förster 2013, 330.

128 Manassa 2012, 144.

129 Manassa 2012, 145.

130 *Cf.* Förster 2013, 322, and bibliography cited there.

131 On the Girga Road, *cf.* J. C. Darnell and D. Darnell 2009; on the oasis (esp. Dakhla) from the end of the disruptive phase onwards, *cf.* Marchand and Tallet 1999.

Balat.¹³² This fact also points to a relevant regionalization and political fragmentation during the disruptive process.

To summarize, the disruptive period in those marginal areas (oases) can be divided into a first phase (roughly *ca.* 1700–1600 BC) where an industry related to bread production with strong local particularities took place and minimal contacts with the Theban region were kept; and a second one (*ca.* 1580 BC onwards) where the advance of the Theban 17th Dynasty is evidenced. The control of the routes to the west was critical to these rulers in order to overcome their isolation and benefit from goods as well as manpower.

One could ask who benefited from such an impressive bread production during *ca.* 1700–1600 BC. A tentative and very preliminary hypothesis can be proposed: if the oases routes were used as an alternative route from the north to the south instead of the Nile route,¹³³ those independent nuclei could have functioned as posts for the expeditions. In world-systems terms, they could be considered independent semiperipheries located between two independent cores (one centred at Avaris and the other at Kerma, which during that time controlled the Second Cataract forts). As stated above, by the late 17th Dynasty, both nuclei fell under the Theban expanded core. The Second Stela of Kamose refers to the role the western oases had during those times of conflict: the letter sent by Apepi, the ruler of Avaris, to the Nubian ruler was intercepted there.¹³⁴ The advance of the Theban core on those routes could have provoked the interruption of the flow of goods between north and south, leading to the final war between the cores which meant the reestablishment of that circuit (fig. 3).

With regard to the particular characteristics of the Theban core, it remained of Upper Egyptian character and identity while developing certain local traits. During the early 13th Dynasty, the Egyptian administration was headed by a vizier, while some changes were evidenced in the lower echelons of the administration. The highly ranking officials formed influential families whose offices were hereditary. During the late phase of the period, military and religious titles became more prominent, as temples acquired a central role, as well as new people not directly related to the court adopted ranking titles.¹³⁵ In the same vein, the wider use of the title ‘royal sealer’ could expose a decentralization of power.¹³⁶ The material culture reveals an impoverishment in resources: coffins were made of sycamore wood instead of the prestigious cedar-wood; pottery acquired local forms and was made of local clay, while Lower Egyptian Marl C is not registered, a fact which can be explained through by the isolation of the Theban core from trade routes.¹³⁷ Other features of the Theban society also pointed to regionalism. Certain collective uses of cultic areas can be interpreted as the establishment of socially cohesive bonds, as well as elements which allowed distinguishing between those who belonged to the society and those who did not.¹³⁸ Thus, the isolation of the polity is revealed by the appearance of a local collection of spells related to the afterlife (the Book of the Dead), whose local character can be related to the lack of access to Memphis, its scribes and libraries, which were under Hyksos control.

That the Theban rulers gradually rebuilt their power and finally defeated the Hyksos remains a nearly indisputable working hypothesis. Nevertheless, the reunification of the Egyptian state which followed the Hyksos defeat was, however, a very long process, which

132 Förster 2013, 321.

133 Török 2009, 107–108.

134 A discussion in Colin 2005, 35–47.

135 Moreno García 2009, 9–10.

136 Grajetzki 2010, 309.

137 Bourriau 2003, 193.

138 Elements as ‘magical provisions,’ *cf.* Seiler 2010, 40.

continued well into the first reigns of the 18th Dynasty. It is likely that the consolidation of the Theban supremacy as the springboard for reunification rested upon diverse bases, which together formed a foundation: (a) strong reinforcement of the local social bonds; (b) regaining control of the fortress of Buhen, securing Theban hegemony far south of Aswan, and allowing the access to the gold mines; (c) expansion towards the west (Girga Road and oases) during the 17th Dynasty and; (d) the close relationship with certain Nubian social groups (Pan-Graves/Medja and C-Group people), who were incorporated as allies and even as mercenaries in the Egyptian armies.

Most important for the late 17th Dynasty kings was, however, the southern expansion. They were involved in hostilities not only with the Hyksos but also with their neighbours located to the south. Egyptian pottery types – bowls, dishes, beakers and large and small jars, whose parallels can be traced at Thebes at Ballas – appeared at Kerma towards the end of the disruptive process (late 17th Dynasty/early 18th Dynasty) probably as a result of the actions Thebans took there.¹³⁹

Nevertheless, during the disruptive world-system phase, Kerma should be considered another competing core in the regionalized world-system. Moreover, as the power of the 12th Dynasty collapsed, Kerma expanded its area of influence to the north, taking control of the Second Cataract forts located in Lower Nubia.¹⁴⁰ Unfortunately, several aspects of its social development are difficult to grasp as no local written evidence has been found. The material evidence reveals contacts with the other cores at different levels. Kerman rulers maintained exchange contacts both with both the Thebans and the Hyksos, evidenced through sealings, scarabs, and the already mentioned Tell el-Yahudiyeh ware.¹⁴¹ At a certain point, the competition to control the flow of goods probably led to an advance further north. Information on a raid on Thebes was preserved in the tomb of Sobeknakht at El Kab during the 17th Dynasty.¹⁴² Probably the Kushites plundered the city and carried Egyptian statues, statuettes and luxury goods which later appeared in their temples and tombs.¹⁴³

As a matter of fact, the Kerman elite used Egyptian objects as status markers, but also kept a local identity, evidenced through the building of huge *tumuli*, the existence of human sacrifices and the use of beds for the deceased. This adoption of Egyptian traits to enhance status and their adjustment to local meanings is well resumed by Stuart T. Smith:

The Kermans very deliberately chose specific motifs, practices, and technologies for their own purposes, sometimes modifying or blending them with native motifs and technologies to suit Kerman cultural norms. This broad borrowing and modification of Egyptian objects, motifs, architectural styles, ideology, and practices enhanced the growing power of the Kerman ruler and elites. Contact with Egypt gave them a powerful set of administrative, economic, and iconographic/ideological tools to effect the strong centralization present in the Classic Kerma period.¹⁴⁴

Probably, warlike activities increased along the Nile Valley towards the late disruptive period, and the rulers of Kerma were also engaged in aggressive actions with the goal of ensure control over Lower Nubia. Henriette Hafsaas-Tsakos proposed that an alliance between the Nubian C-Group and the Thebans could have been established, and that

139 Bourriau 2004, 3–13.

140 Smith 2003, 80.

141 Török 2009, 107.

142 Davies 2003, 52–54.

143 Török 2009, 110.

144 Smith 2003, 83.

this alliance allowed the Thebans to take control of the Lower Nubian forts.¹⁴⁵ The final conquest of Nubia and its ‘colonization’ took place after the end of the war between the Hyksos and the Thebans,¹⁴⁶ during a new world-system reordering phase.

As a matter of fact, the war against the Hyksos and the victory of the Thebans closed several long trends in the world-system development and opened others, while taking the practices related to the control of the exchange routes to another level. The world-system regionalisation signed by the emergence of multiple cores – one of them with foreign (Asiatic) traits – left so many different imprints that it must be considered a landmark event which certainly influenced the new reordering of the world-system. Closely related to this was the reciprocal and mutual endeavour to compete for the concentration of power and the control of the trade routes, as illustrated by the results ensuing from the collapse of the unified state and the emergence of local rivalries – which was hardly an exception in the long history of the Egyptian state.¹⁴⁷

Above all, the appearance of an independent dynasty with a clearly different and unique identity in the Eastern Delta was a significant event for the Egyptians, to be remembered by subsequent generations.¹⁴⁸ We are not able to measure the impact in its entirety, but it exerted a lasting influence at different levels and spheres: ideological, economic, social and political. Indeed, it delineated a threshold which unsettled the basic paradigms of the Egyptian *Weltanschauung*: for the first time, the feared *isfet* (“chaos, evil”) was able to enter the realm of *maat* (“harmony, order, justice”) in the form of a foreign dynasty, which partially adopted features of Egyptian royalty and claimed the rule over the whole land. But it also allowed the introduction of new technologies which played a relevant role in the advance of the newly united Egyptian state: horse breeding, war chariots, and new weaponry (the composite bow; the short sword with cast ledged handle, the scimitar, the pair of javelins),¹⁴⁹ as well as tin-bronze technology aided Egypt in its subsequent expansion against more powerful foes to the northeast.

During the reordering phase,¹⁵⁰ a new way of organizing the Egyptian military can be evidenced.¹⁵¹ In the same vein, the advance over Nubia and the Levant revealed innovations with regard to the control of the provision of goods and manpower; the temples started to play an extremely relevant role in social and political life, and a new royal ideology arose.¹⁵² This new phase was qualified as the Egyptian ‘mature state’¹⁵³ and usually the qualification of ‘empire’ was applied to describe the expansive character of the unified core during this phase.

The reordering and unification of the core under Theban rule implied the restoration of the flow of goods from northeast Africa to the Levant and vice-versa. During the 18th Dynasty, the main nuclei were first established at Thebes, Memphis and Avaris, now ruled by the Egyptians. The core expanded, overrunning the former peripheries and beyond, controlling them in a different way: through an extensive territorial, political and economic intervention in Nubia, and through the subordination of the local rulers in the Levant. In a way, the situation shifted from a core-periphery differentiation during the early 2nd millennium BC to a core-periphery hierarchy from the mid-2nd millennium onwards. The Levant became the stage of disputes among the chief powers of the time: Egypt and Mittani at first, and Egypt and Hatti later, mainly for the control of trade routes.

145 Hafsaas-Tsakos 2009, 64.

146 Bonnet and Valbelle 2010, 359–365.

147 Cf. Moreno García 2010, 5–41 (emphasis in the Old Kingdom).

148 On ‘trauma’ cf. Assmann 1997, 28.

149 Bietak 2010a, 170.

150 It will be approached in depth in a future contribution.

151 Spalinger 2005, 70–78.

152 Popko 2013, 1–13.

153 Kemp 2006, 247.

This phase ended with a new and extreme disruption in the area, which is described as the collapse of the Late Bronze age.

4 Conclusions

An initial disruptive process took place during the late III millennium BC as the Egyptian Old Kingdom collapsed. After a prolonged process of integration during the early Middle Kingdom, the NLws functioned from Byblos to Kerma by the late 12th Dynasty. A core area could be identified, roughly corresponding to the extension of the unified Egyptian state, which operated on its bordering areas (the north-eastern Delta and Lower Nubia) to pursue diverse goals: the control of trade and the flux of people, as well as the dispatch of expeditions to quarries and mines located in the deserts. Political and prestige goods networks can be distinguished: a core/periphery differentiation is proposed, where the core exerted a cultural influence on the peripheries through the adoption of core practices. The northern Levantine city of Byblos acted as a periphery of the system along with Kerma, the nucleus located in Upper Nubia. The southern Levantine coastal cities could be acted as semiperipheries during this phase of integration.

A process of disruption took place in the core *ca.* 1800 BC, affecting the system as a whole. A regionalization of the world-system, characterized by the emergence of several competing cores took place from *ca.* 1800–1530 BC. Political fragmentation initiated with the probable coeval of the 13th Dynasty at Itjtawy and the 14th Dynasty (and the very early 15th Dynasty) at Tell el-Dab'a/Avaris in a pacific and complementary way.

Fragmentation increased roughly *ca.* 1650 BC, when after the emergence of the eastern Delta core – ruled by the Hyksos – several independent and competing cores arose in Upper Egypt and Nubia. These cores exerted some influence over the territory of the original core (Egypt). The core established in the eastern Delta probably extended its control over part of the territory by controlling smaller polities through personal subordination practices as patronage. It also marked its southern border with the Theban core by imposing some sort of tribute or taxes. Political networks extending towards the Levant are difficult to define, while exchange networks clearly incorporated Cyprus. The main axis of exchange – the Nile – was probably abandoned and the exchanges between Avaris and Kerma took place through the alternative oases route. By that time, Kerma had expanded its control over the Second Cataract forts. In the western oases, two independent nuclei emerged, while the Thebaid was isolated from this network of exchanges. Probably, those nuclei acted as a semiperiphery between the northern and southern independent cores during the regionalisation of the world-system.

Later, a process of convergence took place, probably led by the expansion of the Theban core on neighbouring regions, which finally reduced the fragmentation into the three well-known polities of the period centred in Avaris, Thebes and Kerma. Other related phenomena such as cultural regionalism and the multiplicity of elite identities – which probably remained as subsumed features when the central power was strong and united – emerged and were strengthened once the unified state became weakened or inexistent. The extreme tension generated by the competition among those independent cores and the expansion of the Theban core to the western oases and Lower Nubia, probably led to the interruption of the network of exchanges both along the Nile axis and on the alternative desert routes during the late phase of the disruptive period. Thus, war was not only a consequence but a way of re-establishing the flow of exchanges, by 'normalizing' the routes which connected territories and societies from Nubia to the Levant. Thus, hostilities ended the disruptive period and allowed the reunion of the Egyptian state, surmounting the political fragmentation and elite diversity while subsuming cultural regionalism under the great umbrella of the reunified state.

I consider that the force of the exchanges network played a significant role: the reunification of the Egyptian state and the re-establishment of the world-system are proof of this event, opening a door to new ways of world-system integration.

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