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Statism in a realm of empires

The neorealist universality claim and the international system of the Mediterranean-Ancient Near East in Late Antiquity

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Neorealism and the universality claim

The discipline of international relations was established to describe, explain and to some extent predict how political actors, such as individuals, states, organisations or multinationals, relate to each other on an international level. While there are many different approaches to the subject, few of them boast a historical pedigree as impressive as the realist tradition. Tracing back their roots to ancient scholars like Thucydides and Machiavelli, realists could convincingly argue that their ideas have been around almost as long as politics itself. However, the second half of the twentieth century introduced a new interpretation of realism, one that remains at the forefront of international relations to this day. Written in 1979, the *Theory of International Politics* by Kenneth Waltz set out to combine the main tenets of what would henceforth be known as classical realism, with a scientific methodology. The aim of his novel "neorealism" was to introduce a systemic approach that could identify the structural factors that mould state-behaviour on an international level. One of the most controversial aspects was the additional claim that the application of neorealism was not restricted to modern and contemporary history, but could instead be applied throughout history.

This claim of universality has been the subject of ample criticism from nearly every corner of the academic debate. Neorealists have been accused of historicism and statism alike, and their theory deemed a product of the environment in which it was conceived, namely the Cold War. Other allegations refer to the fact that neorealists assert to have devised a theory that they claim is universally applicable,

but have so far failed to support this with convincing case-studies from a historical setting preceding the modern Western state-system. Instead, neorealists have demonstrated a proclivity to discuss episodes that stem from the 20th and 21st century in the West. Earlier cases like the Napoleonic Wars are occasionally included in their analyses, but rarely do these venture past the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. As this event marks the acknowledgement of the sovereignty of states in international law, its status as unofficial benchmark for historical cases ties in with the statist preoccupation that neorealists are accused of.

My thesis sets out to deconstruct the universality claim of neorealism, in order to understand the motivations behind such a monumental assertion. This will subsequently allow me to assess the value of applying the neorealist framework to premodern cases. For all of its deficiencies, neorealism has provided a unique and enriching insight into the international system that dominated the 20th century, including the factors that shaped the World Wars and Cold War. As such, I believe the theory deserves to be considered as a viable explanatory tool in universal terms, as it was envisioned by Waltz. This evaluation could not only improve our understanding of international relations in a historical setting less familiar to us, but also help in bridging the gap between the academic disciplines of IR and history. There are many historical subjects that remain woefully underexplored in the IR-discipline, even though they might shed a fascinating new light on different types of interstate interactions. As a case-study that meets the requirements for what I set out to do in the current research, I have opted for the particularly interesting international system of the Mediterranean and Ancient Near East in Late Antiquity.[1] This period was marked by a volatile transition following the collapse of the Roman empire in the 5th century AD, after dominating the region for centuries. Its eastern successor, hence known as the Byzantine empire, would continue to exist for another thousand years. Only a shadow

[1] The Mediterranean and Ancient Near East is a common label used by historians of ancient history to describe the regions bordering the Mediterranean basin and the modern Middle East. See for example chapter 10 in S. Mitchell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire, A.D. 284-641* (Oxford, Wiley Blackwell, 2015), p. 355; See also map 1.1 and 1.2 in the appendix; Late Antiquity refers to the transitionary period between Classical Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Brown defines it as the period spanning 200 to 800 A.D. in his influential work on the subject. In the current thesis, Late Antiquity refers to the historical period from the 4th to the 7th century. in P. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (London, Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1971), Preface.

of its former power, the eastern half was still powerful enough to control regional politics for another few centuries before being curbed by the expanding power of the Arabic peoples from the second half of the 7th century onwards.

While the Germanic kingdoms founded on the remnants of the Western Roman empire and the migrating Slavic and Germanic peoples were no match for the power of the early Byzantine empire, a wholly different situation arose in the East. Here, a nascent Sassanid empire proved to be an opponent that could muster enough power to check Byzantine expansion, and at times even threaten its survival. In what was essentially a bipolar system, numerous conflicts were fought between the two great powers over the centuries, climaxing into what is known the “Last Great War of Antiquity” in the early seventh century. This devasting final war would completely deplete the resources of both empires, paving the way for the invasions of the Arabic peoples that saw the Byzantine empire reduced to its core regions in Anatolia and the Balkans, and resulted in the collapse of the Sassanid empire. Therefore, the Last Great War will serve as the chronological end point of the historical episode I wish to analyse. At a glance, the international system of the Mediterranean - Ancient Near East can be considered as a system dominated by two great powers, resembling the bipolar environment of the Cold War. Below the surface however, there is much more to the behaviour of the entities populating this system that might elude a superficial neorealist analysis. What I would therefore like to discuss is whether the nuanced nature of their interactions can be understood through a neorealist framework, or whether the theory is a child of its environment and indeed too rigidly modern to account for international politics prior to the modern Western state-system? That is what my thesis sets out to examine, through the following research question:

“What does the application of neorealism to the international system of the Mediterranean and the Ancient Near East in Late Antiquity, in particular the position of the Byzantine empire, tell us about its universality claim?”

Before proceeding with the thesis, I want to take the time to explain its layout. The second half of this chapter consists of an introduction to neorealism as it is formulated in Waltz’s seminal *Theory of International Politics.* The second chapter discusses the literature review, in which I discuss a few of the critiques that were

levelled against the universality claim, in order to understand how the universal applicability of neorealism is perceived by both IR-theorists and historians. Chapter three deals with the methodological approach adopted in the thesis. Additionally, I introduce historical context of the case, as well as its geographical and chronological scope. In chapter four I discuss the universality claim in detail. Chapter five is my case-study, where I will apply the theoretical framework of neorealism to assess the universal explanatory power of the theory. The final chapter is the conclusion, where I briefly reiterate the objectives of my thesis, before answering the main research question.

1.2 Theoretical framework of neorealism

The theory of neorealism is founded on the main premises of classical realism, namely an emphasis on the distribution of power in international politics, an anarchic international system and the state as the principal actor. The main difference is the aspiration of neorealists to approach international politics from a scientific point of view, through the identification of structural factors that remain constant throughout history.[2] In a key departure from classical realist thought, neorealists believe that these patterns can be traced back to the nature of the system, rather than a reductionist analysis of unit-level attributes. The underlying idea is that if certain outcomes persist no matter the historical period or culture, then it makes little sense to seek an explanation in the varying nature of unit-level attributes. Instead, they argue, one must look for the causes in the system. This does not necessarily mean that Waltz rejects the influence of unit-level attributes, just that these can never offer a satisfying explanation on their own. Only when the interactions between the system- and unit-level factors are incorporated in the same theory can one comprehensively understand the behaviour of states in an international system.[3] So how does the nature of the system influence international politics?

Anarchy in international relations refers to an international system without a supreme authority that has the power to regulate interactions between states in the system or resolve disputes between them. In this environment, states must rely on

[2] K; Waltz, *International Politics* (London, Addision-Wesley Publishing Company, 1979), p. 66.
[3] Waltz, *International Politics,* p. 68.

their own means to pursue their objectives, the most fundamental of all being survival. All other objectives are secondary, and depend on whether or not their survival is ensured.[4] The opposite of anarchy would be a hierarchical system, which can be found in the domestic society. This kind of system precludes the necessity of self-reliance, as there is a central authority, the government, which regulates the lower tier interactions. Consequently, units tend to specialise their functions, as a hierarchy invites them to interact and become interdependent. This is not the case in the anarchic international system, where states have to be functionally undifferentiated to survive; they cannot depend on others to ensure their survival.[5] The standard of similarity is set by the great powers, who dominate the course of international politics and are the main actors of interest for neorealism. Through the process of socialisation units tend to imitate the successful practices or produce a similar kind of attributes of the great powers. Constant competition subsequently characterises how states are ordered in relation to each other, with great powers being the driving force behind changes in the system.[6] The result of these processes is the formation of a balance-of-power, where states seek to accumulate enough power to ensure their own preservation, and when achieved, secondary or tertiary objectives. This is done in two ways of balancing: internally, states mobilise resources to bolster their own might, while externally, they seek to align themselves with allies to reduce the power of a common enemy. Neorealism predicts that once the balance-of-power is disrupted, states will engage in balancing behaviour to restore it and stem the rise of a potential dominating power. This is done in the ways described above, through socialisation, competition and internal and external balancing.[7]

A balance-of-power can result in various types of great power pole distribution. Waltz argues that a system dominated by two great powers, i.e. a bipolar system, is the most stable prospect. This is specifically the case in comparison to a multipolar system, where three or more great powers dictate international politics. The reason is that in circumstances of multipolarity, there is more room for alliance-shifting and the line between amity and enmity becomes very thin. The uncertainty of the actions of

[4] Waltz, *International Politics,* p. 91-92.
[5] Waltz, *International Politics,* p. 104.
[6] Waltz, *International Politics*, p. 76.
[7] Waltz, *International Politics,* p. 118-121.

others increases and subsequently, the volatility of the system increases. In a bipolar system, both know which state is the main threat to their security, allowing for a sense of accommodation and stability. As neither party has to depend on the resources of others, a great power only has to look out for its own interests, instead of being goaded by other partners in an alliance.[8]

To summarise the main tenets of Waltz's neorealism, it helps to use the guidance provided by *The Logic of Anarchy,* a revisionary work of *Theory of International Politics*. The theory in the latter can be convoluted and difficult to follow at times, which is why a dedicated chapter with all the information compiled and accompanied by useful figures can be invaluable for a full understanding of the complexities of the theory.[9] Waltz's neorealism consists of three levels of analysis, namely the system, structure and the unit.[10] Each one of these levels exerts an influence on the behaviour of the state, which can only be understood through their inter-level interaction. The impact of the system reveals itself on a structural level, which is defined by the ordering principle of the system (anarchy), the functional differentiation of the units (undifferentiated) and the distribution of capabilities across units (resulting in polarity).[11] The third level, which relates to the units, consists of the attributes of the unit, as well as the interactions among them.[12] The attributes basically refer to any type of explanation that is not covered by the system- and structural level, and therefore carries less emphasis in Waltz's work. The only attribute considered part of the neorealist framework is related to the structural distribution of capabilities, being the amalgamate of "size of population and territory, resource endowment, eco-nomic capability, military strength, political stability and competence".[13] In order to understand the precise nature of the universality claim of neorealism, it is crucial to grasp the rigid distinction between the properties of these three levels of analysis, as it is often here that confusion occurs in critique directed at neorealism. I now turn to

[8] Waltz, *International Politics*, p. 168-170.
[9] See chapter three in B. Buzan, C. Jones and R. Little, *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism* (New York, Columbia University Press), p. p. 29-65.
[10] Not to be confused with the three levels of analysis in his earlier work, see K. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: a theoretical analysis* (New York, CUP, 1965).
[11] Buzan, Jones and Little, *Logic of Anarchy*, p. 36; Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 100-101.
[12] Waltz, *International Politics,* p. 18.
[13] Waltz, *International Politics*, p. 131.

the chapter that deals with some of these criticisms, in particular those related to the university claim made by Waltz.

Chapter Two: Literature review

In this chapter I explore the use and criticism of the universalist claim of neorealism in the available academic literature. The concept is most prominently present in the works of Waltz, who founded the theory of neorealism and perceived its application as universal. According to him, the abstract, systemic approach of the theory means that it is not bound by historical periods or culture. Since the system itself has always remained constant, it is possible to identify the recurring patterns and the events that repeat themselves.[14] An example would be the phenomenon of wars, which have been fought by "(...) tribes, petty principalities, empires, nations, or street gangs" alike.[15] Since neorealism works towards explaining the factors that lead to wars, it does not have to be limited in historical scope. Waltz developed this line of thought first in the seminal *Theory of International Politics* , but has since explored it further in later academic articles.[16] While being a recognised concept in neorealism, it would be an exaggeration to state that all theorists who use the neorealist structural framework as a basis, spend an equal amount of effort addressing the universalist claim as Waltz does.[17]

While the universality claim might not be a central component of all the neorealist theories, it has been the subject of criticism from various corners in the academic debate. Ruggie's main issue with neorealism is the theory's inability to

[14] Waltz, *International Politics*, p. 66.
[15] Waltz, *International Politics*, p. 67.
[16] See for example K. Waltz, "Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory", in: *Journal of International Affairs* (44, 1990), p. 37; K. Waltz, "Structural Realism after the Cold War", in: *International Security* (25, 2000), p. 39.
[17] A notable exception would be Gilpin, who adopted the structural framework of neorealism, but left ample room for classical realist considerations. He stated that: "(..) the fundamental nature of international relations has not changed over the millennia. International relations continue to be a recurring struggle for wealth and power among independent actors in a state of anarchy". In: R. Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge, CUP, 1981), p. 7. This claim is far less present in the works of other neorealists, like Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer, who seemed to be much more concerned with policy-making in contemporary politics. See: S. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (New York, Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 6, 11-16 and J.J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), p. 8.

account for one of the most significant systemic changes of the millennium, namely the transition from the medieval to the modern international system. Yet rather than dismissing the whole premise, he instead suggests the introduction of property rights to the unit-level of analysis.[18] In his rebuttal, Waltz argues that the inclusion of another unit-level feature would unnecessarily open the door to even more specificities, which would result in the opposite of what Ruggie intended, namely a theory that does not possess the level of abstraction needed to be universally applicable.[19] A less compromising position is taken by Robert Cox, who laments the "fixed ahistorical view of the framework" of neorealism, in contrast to a classical realist analysis that treats events in relation to their respective historical context.[20] He traces the cause of this transformation of realism back to the environment of the Cold War, when a system of bipolarity dominated international relations, and an American-led order was considered paramount. Consequently, he argues, neorealists tend to use history as a trove from which to select cases that prove a superficial recurring pattern. In a similar vein to Ruggie's criticism, Cox also iterates that because of this search for continuity, neorealism cannot account for historical changes. [21]

A similar criticism is delivered by Barry Buzan, Charles Jones and Richard Little, who wrote *Logic of Anarchy* in an attempt to revise Waltz's *TIP.* The need for a revision stems from what they refer to as an unnecessarily narrow approach to theory and history. They agree with Ruggie and Cox that neorealism in its current form cannot account for historical change and is therefore not universally applicable. However, unlike Cox, they value the neorealist framework as a basis that needs to be modified in order to accommodate more of history. They label the resulting theory, "structural realism", with a nod to the main difference between classical and neo-realism.[22] With the purpose of proving the universal applicability of structural realism, Buzan et alii opted for premodern cases, mainly on the Greek city-states, the Diadochi and the Roman empire. While I strongly support this decision as it fits the aim of my own thesis,

[18] J.G. Ruggie, "Continuity and Transformation in the World Polity", in R. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 141-143.
[19] K. Waltz, "A Response to my Critics", in R. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 328-330.
[20] R. Cox, "Social Forces, States and World Orders", in R. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 211.
[21] Cox, *States and World* Orders, p. 211-214.
[22] Buzan, Jones and Little, *Logic of Anarchy*, p. 10, 25-26.

the historical context of their case-studies is not treated with the same meticulousness and nuance that characterises the excellent theoretical chapters of *LOA*. For one, the lack of specialised literature on the relevant subject makes me wary of the credibility of the historical evidence used to strengthen their claims. For instance, their analysis of the poleis-system in Ancient Greece relies on the two most unique, and admittedly most famous, poleis of their time: Athens and Sparta.[23] The suggestion that these two examples can represent the whole of the Ancient Greek world plays into the historian's accusation that an IR-theorist refuses to engage with history in a meaningful way, but rather tends to select those cases that fit their framework. I admire the theoretical endeavour of *Logic of Anarchy*, but I do believe that it is possible to make a more compelling case-study to convince historians of the potential of IR.

With this in mind, I now turn to the critique levelled at neorealism from the historical point of view. This is linked to the latter's aversion of the perceived superficial scrutiny that IR-theorists display vis-à-vis historical cases. A notable example is Schroeder, who accuses neorealists of cherry-picking historical cases that fit the theory best, leading him to conclude that: "Whether neo-realist theory can be revised to apply usefully to all of inter- national history (...) is a question best left to others, or at least to another time and place. This essay will close with advising international historians not to adopt the neo-realist paradigm, and theorists not to assume that the facts of international history support one."[24] A strong judgement indeed, but not a very constructive one. It is not particularly difficult to find the holes in a theory, especially one that claims to span the whole of human history. What is more challenging is to evaluate both its strengths and weaknesses and reach some constructive conclusion that could actually help future academics. It seems imprudent to completely dismiss a theory that has taken such a leading role in exploring the power relations in the twentieth century, admittedly mainly in the West. Especially when these conclusions are reached on an insufficient understanding of the theory, leading Waltz to state that "(...) Schroeder ignores the basic injunction that theories be judged by what they claim to explain."[25] It shows that not only IR-theorists can be guilty of lacking understanding

[23] Buzan, Jones and Little, *Logic of Anarchy*, p. 121-127.
[24] P. Schroeder, "Historical Reality vs. Neo-Realist Theory", in: *International Security* (19, 1994), p. 148.
[25] For the more detailed rebuttal, see K. Waltz, "Evaluating Theories", in: *Realism and International Politics* (New York, Routledge, 2008), p. 85-86.

of history, but likewise that historians can fail to understand the nuances of the political theory they want to discuss or use. In recent years an emerging discipline, Historical International Relations, sets out to address this gap by trying to incorporate an approach that takes into account the historical relativity of concepts that are readily used in IR, like for example the idea of the "state". As such, insights from the historical IR discipline are featured in chapter four, where I deconstruct the components of the neorealist universality claim.

While the superficial understanding of history by IR-theorists, and vice versa, is gradually being corrected by the efforts of the Historical IR-discipline, it is clear that there is still a considerable gap that needs to be addressed when it comes to the study of premodern historical cases. This is certainly the case for neorealism, as its deceptively easy-to-use emphasis on structural factors can often be a welcome addition to historical studies. As such, concepts like balance of power, balancing or anarchy periodically emerge outside of its associated framework. In the interest of this thesis, I briefly discuss those examples in Byzantine studies. Blockley for one, concludes his article on Byzantine-Sassanid monetary diplomacy by acknowledging the continuity of its bipolar nature and treating their shared history as a continuous process that erupts in the catastrophic Last Great War. Unfortunately, he does not explore this idea any further.[26] Similarly, and even to a more significant extent, the compilation of academic works on Sasanian Persia by Sauer et alii, features a chapter with the promising section title of *Imperial Power Balances and International Relations.* Yet here too, the authors fail to really engage with the theoretical framework that gives meaning to these concepts: while the balance of power and the shifting dynamics of great power relations are briefly mentioned, they limit the subsequent discussion solely to the unit-level attribute of the military power of the respective powers involved.[27]

[26] R.C. Blockley, "Subsidies and Diplomacy: Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity", in: *Phoenix* (39, 1985), p. 73-74.

[27] E.W. Sauer, J. Nokandeh, K. Pitskhelauri and H.O. Rekavandi, "Innovation and Stagnation: Military Infrastructure and the Shifting Balance of Power between Rome and Persia", in: E.W. Sauer (ed.), *Sasanian Persia, Between Rome and the Steppes of Eurasia* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2017), p. 241-267. For other examples of neorealist elements in Byzantine studies, see also my article on the rule of emperor Phocas and the events leading up to the Last Great War of Antiquity: A. De Vleeschouwer, "The Foreign Policy of Phocas (602-610): a Neorealist Reassessment", in: *Byzantion* (89, 2019), p. 153-200.

Even though this analysis has considerable merit for the study of history, I would like to have seen some more consideration of the anarchical / hierarchical nature of the system, the functional differentiation of the units or instances of balancing. The way these are presented now, is not very useful for the discipline that they wish to accommodate, namely international relations. To me, this underscores the need for works that establish and evaluate the theoretical neorealist basis before applying its concepts to the international system of Late Antiquity.

Chapter Three: Methodology & methods

The methodological strategy followed in this thesis is a "theory-testing single case-study". In the *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research*, this approach is defined as "(...) the process of ascertaining whether the empirical evidence in a case or in a sample of cases either supports or does not support a given theory".[28] With this definition in mind, I set out to test the university claim of neorealism against a case-study that hails from a historical setting that does not correspond with the more familiar environment of neorealist studies, i.e. the twentieth century, or even post the Treaty of Westphalia. The theoretical statement at the basis of this methodological approach, is usually an "X results in Y"- format, in which X represents a sequence of conditions that need to be present for the outcome Y to be made possible.[29] The issue with the objective of my thesis is that the university claim, in itself, is not a theory; it merely refers to the assertion of neorealists that their framework can be universally applied. In order to create a viable process that logically determines what needs to be proven, it is necessary to establish what exactly constitutes this universality claim. As mentioned in the chapter on the theory, Waltz alleges the universality of its theory, because it seeks to uncover and explain processes that are primarily structural, resulting from the constant anarchic nature of the system. He succinctly summarises his position as follows: "Balance-of-power politics prevail wherever two, and only two, requirements are met: that the order be anarchic and that it be populated by units wishing to survive."[30] This is a particularly interesting passage, because it relates to

[28] T. Hak and J. Dul, "Theory-Testing with Cases", in: A.J. Mills, G. Durepos and E. Wiebe (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research* (2010), p. 937.
[29] Hak and Dul, *Theory-Testing,* p. 938.
[30] Waltz, *International Politics,* p. 121.

the three levels of analysis that constitute Waltz's neorealism, namely the system, structure and units, while simultaneously explaining what exactly is meant by the universality claim. As long as the system is anarchic in nature and the units primarily strive for survival, it has to follow that the international politics of the system take place in a way that can be explained by neorealism. This in itself already amounts to a theoretical statement, in which the X represents the nature of the system and drive of the units, and Y balance-of-power politics. It is nevertheless not the statement that I want to test, as this already accepts the universality claim and instead looks at the theory itself. What I am interested in, is whether those components constituting the claim can be applied to my case in question; if this is possible (X), then it follows that neorealists can convincingly claim that their theory is universally applicable, not just to the historical cases they tend to select (Y).

While process-tracing is central to resolving the question at hand, it can only be comprehensively done if equal time is spent on concept-tracing. The first step in solving this puzzle is to establish whether the concepts used by neorealists are inherent to modern history or if they can also be used to describe pre-modern historical processes in a similarly effective way. The concepts in question that I discuss in the next chapter are "the international system", "balance-of-power", and "the state". They each represent one of the levels of analysis used by Waltz to define the core of neorealist thought, respectively, the system-, the structure- and the unit-level. The issue with these concepts is that, even though they continue to be the bedrock of neorealist theory, and various other IR-schools of thought in general, they are still ill-defined. As illustrated in the next chapter, the definitions provided by Waltz are ambiguous and open to interpretation. In short; their properties are not clearly delineated. It is entirely possible that this was his intention, as a clear definition might perhaps stifle his claim of universal application. On the other hand, according to Berenskoetter, this is not just a deficit in neorealism, as many concepts that are ubiquitously used in IR, lack a concrete definition. However, realism and neorealism have relied more than any other school of thought on empirical knowledge processed from a "sense of history and the experience of politics".[31] This complicates the question

[31] F. Berenskoetter, "Approaches to Concept Analysis", in: *Millennium, Journal of International Studies* (45, 2017), p. 155-156.

of the universality claim of neorealism, as their historical and political experience is mainly related to modern history. Consequently, it is left to me and other theorists to trace the meaning and scope of these concepts in order to evaluate if they are inherently modern in nature, or open enough to transpose to other periods of history.

Having discussed the process- and concept-tracing approach of my methodology, it is now time to turn to the single case that is used in this thesis to test the theory. I have opted for a single case instead of multiple cases, because the latter would not necessarily result in an added value in this thesis. One well-chosen case will give us the same kind of insight into the potential of neorealism to be applied universally as multiple could. Even more, the limited format of this thesis allows for either one case to be adequately explored, or for multiple to be discussed in a superficial fashion. As such, the choice for a single case-study seems logical to me. The main criteria for my case-selection are my knowledge and experience on a case, as well as its ability to challenge some assertions made in the theory. The choice of international system for this case is the region comprising the Mediterranean and Ancient Near East, for reasons further discussed in 4.1. In addition, the first criterion compels me to choose as a case related to the Byzantine empire in Late Antiquity, a culture and period I am acquainted with through former studies. Some knowledge of the historical context reveals what could be a very interesting subject for neorealist theory: an international system dominated by the bipolar power dynamics of the Byzantines and their eastern neighbours, the Sassanids; a weakening former unipolar power that attempts to block other entities from becoming too powerful; a wealth of (mainly) Byzantine sources that shed light on the diplomatic procedures of the time. Even so, as mentioned in the literature review, neorealist analyses have only been scantily used in Byzantine studies. The question central to this thesis is whether this is solely due to the unfamiliarity of theorists with the subject, or a sign of a more general shunning of pre-modern case-studies.

When deciding which episode from Byzantine history lends itself best to theory-testing, I look for a case that at first sight seems to agree with neorealism, to accommodate the theory at least superficially, but also contain certain aspects that seem to challenge its premise. For these reasons I have opted to discuss the circumstances surrounding the so-called “Eternal Peace Treaty” of 532, between the

Byzantine and Sassanid empires. Signed in 532, the agreement ended a five-year long war over territory in the Caucasus, but would only last until 540, rendering the aspirational name of the treaty rather comical. The eight years of peace did result in some level of amiability and even cooperation. I understand that neorealism is most effective when applied to longer periods to identify and explain recurring patterns, but I argue that the period leading up to, and the consequences of, the peace treaty are paradigmatic of the nature of their relationship. On the surface, their behaviour resembles that of two great powers vying for regional domination to ensure their own survival, and engaging in both internal and external balancing to achieve these goals. However, in the three plus centuries of their coexistence, neither succeeded in subduing the other or to even alter the balance of power in a significant way. While it might be the case that a constant equality in military strength inhibited them from attaining complete domination, other factors shed a different light. Multiple instances seem to indicate a relationship that went deeper than just merely power competition; the narrative in the sources implying a sense of kinship. While neorealism does not necessarily reject temporary alignment of interests, the consistency of the stability of their relationship is not easily explained. In addition, the Eternal Peace Treaty further demonstrates how the rest of the international system was affected by the exploits of the predominant great powers, , resulting in interesting balancing behaviour. More on this in the case-study.

Chapter Four: The deconstruction of the universality claim

The universality claim of Waltz is based on a set of requirements that each correspond to a different level of analysis. If these conditions are fulfilled, which neorealists believe is the case no matter the historical context, then it follows that their claim is a legitimate one. In this chapter, I wish to examine this assertion by using the method of concept-tracing on its components, these being the international system, the state and balance-of-power politics. Specifically, I define these concepts in the historical context of the Late Antiquity in the Mediterranean and Ancient Near East to understand their meaning in an environment that appears to be less familiar to the usual neorealist analysis, as well as to pave the way for my case-study in chapter five.

4.1 The international system

One of the main requirements for balance-of-power politics is that the ordering principle of the system is anarchic. To Waltz, this is easily enough proven: the only way the ordering principle of a system would change from an anarchy to a hierarchy, is when one unit would be so overwhelmingly powerful that it controls the system and subsequently regulates the interactions of lower-tier units within that system. This can never be the case, as the current balance-of-power would prevent such an astronomical rise to power and other powers would balance against the potential hegemon.[32] His conclusion is therefore that anarchy will persist indefinitely and units will continue to have to rely on themselves to achieve their objectives. Nothing in his work indicates that this position cannot be retroactively applied to past history. On the contrary, the following excerpt appears to affirm this belief: “The enduring anarchic character of international politics accounts for the striking sameness in the quality of international life through the millennia, a statement that will meet with wide assent.”[33] As demonstrated by Ruggie in his exposition on the system of feudal Europe in the Middle Ages however, this statement has not received academic-wide assent. While it is true that certain systems can be labelled as predominantly anarchic or hierarchic, in my opinion this is not the first question that should be asked. When looking to apply neorealism to pre-modern society, one must instead ask if there can be multiple international systems coexisting at the same time and, if so, how does one distinguish between them?

Waltz does not offer a clear definition of the international system, at least not in empirical terms. Within the theoretical realm, a system is defined by the interaction of units.[34] This tells us that any environment in which units interact, can be called a system. While the open and rather vague definition could accommodate a lot of different scenarios, this does not appear to be the interpretation in the remainder of *Theory of International Politics.* When discussing the stable nature of a bipolar system,

[32] Waltz, *International Politics*, p. 66, 111.
[33] Waltz, *International Politics*, p. 66.
[34] Waltz, *International Politics,* p. 40.

Waltz considers the Cold War. This is problematic, as it confers an inherently modern outlook to his interpretation. For example, one of the reasons that he claims a bipolar world order is the most stable, is because there can be no conflict in the world in which either the United States or the Soviet Union are not involved. As such, conflicts are to a certain degree regulated by a desire of the great powers to not let them spiral into wars with disastrous consequences.[35] This implies the potential of both great powers to project that power on a global level. That is a far-cry from what would constitute a bipolar system in pre-modern times, as great powers did not have access to the advanced technology of post-World War II weaponry, and were subsequently restricted to their regional theatre. While this does not necessarily render the universality claim void, it does raise the question of Waltz's modern bias. It seems to me that one would need to concede that when applying neorealism to premodern history, a distinction has to be made between the different international systems that coexisted in a global environment. This brings us to the question of how these should be demarcated and what the consequences of this would be.

The definition of an international system that makes the most sense to me is provided by Bull and Watson, who describe it as "(...) a system, in the sense that the behaviour of each is a necessary factor in the calculations of the others".[36] It is an appropriate definition for the objective of this thesis, as it is not unnecessarily complicated, and accommodates the rationale of balance-of-power politics. Buzan and Little point out that the interactions that constitute a system can be divided in four sectors, each with a different level of intensity: military, political, economic and socio-cultural. Deciding on how far an international system extends itself, depends on the choice of sector discussed; a system based on the criteria of military-political interaction will be much smaller than an economic system, where trade routes vastly expand the geographical capacity for interactions.[37] Buzan and Little rightly indicate that realists are mainly interested in the military-political element of international politics, so this will be my main criterion for deciding on an international system that captures the international system of the early Byzantine empire.

[35] Waltz, *International Politics*, p. 170.
[36] H. Bull and A. Watson, *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 1.
[37] B. Buzan and R. Little , *International Systems in World History, remaking the study of international relations* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 92-94.

With this in mind, I suggest treating the combined regions of the Mediterranean and the Ancient Near East as a single international system, as the Roman empire spread out over both of these regions at the height of its power. The political ambitions of the early Byzantine empire still covered the whole of the Mediterranean and part of the Ancient Near East, as the successor of Rome and self-proclaimed rightful owner of all the former Roman territories,. This deep-rooted belief is often referred to as the *Orbis Romanus,* which will be further discussed in the case-study.[38] I am aware that this choice of international system is created from the position of the early Byzantine empire, as the Sassanid empire operated in a different system, one that extended much further to the east. However, it would make little sense to include the outer eastern frontiers of the Sassanid realm into the same system, as Bull and Watson's definition would then no longer apply to the Byzantines. Choosing an international system is in this capacity is necessarily subjective, and one of the key concessions that has to be made in order to accommodate pre-modern history to what appears to be an inherently modern outlook of neorealism. The demarcation of an international system is conceived in a fluid manner, where entities in one system would be aware of the existence of units in other systems, but not to the extent that their actions would be incorporated in the former's calculations. The international system of the early Byzantine empire was bordered by entities on the fringes, ranging from the Franks in North Europe, to the nomadic peoples and the Turkish Khaganate in the steppes, to the peoples inhabiting the Arabian peninsula. While interaction with these entities was definitely not as intense as between, for example, the Byzantines and the Sassanids, I still include them in the same international system. The reason for this decision is that the behaviour of the peoples on the fringes led to balancing acts by the Byzantine empire, but any unit beyond these fringes cannot be considered as part of the same system due to the lack of interaction that is needed for balancing.

Would this be a satisfying solution to the system-conundrum? Not really, because turmoil from outside of the system could still reverberate and have notable effects on the units within. As we will see in the section on balance-of-power, it is

[38] E. Chryos, "Byzantine Diplomacy, AD 300-800: Means and Ends", in: J. Shepard and S. Franklin (eds.), *Byzantine Diplomacy* (Aldershot, Variorum, 1992), p. 25.

particularly difficult to accommodate the nomadic peoples in this understanding of the pre-modern world. It is however the best one can do to reach a resemblance to the balance-of-power politics that neorealists seek to explain, in a historical time where global awareness was not a given. The second question that needs to be addressed is how the creation of these subsystems affect the ordering principles of anarchy and hierarchy. Is it possible that the regional limitation of these subsystems can result in a predominantly hierarchical order, consequently nullifying the universalist claim of neorealism?

According to Waltz, systems are either predominantly anarchical or hierarchical, respectively shaping the function and nature of units accordingly. While domestic systems are hierarchical, an international system is logically anarchical, as it would take one unit to become so inconceivably strong that it can effectively transform the system into the former. This statement has come under fire by mainly the English School, whose concept of an international society includes a certain hierarchy between states that is based on their respective capabilities. Watson envisions the nature of an international system as a set of units that fall somewhere on the spectrum between absolute independence (anarchy) and absolute empire (hierarchy).[39] This idea is applied to the international systems of ancient and classical history by Buzan and Jones, who argue that the most influential units of the time, namely empires, were seen as sources of legitimate rule by other, smaller units in the system, making it acceptable for the latter to bandwagon and follow the lead of the empires.[40] In other words, the domination of imperial rule would have introduced a significant element of hierarchy into a pre-modern system.

Kaufman, Little and Wohlforth also subscribe to the idea of a mixed anarchic and hierarchic system. According to them, the most emblematic case of an empire that absolutely dominated its system, is the Roman empire. Yet they concede that even in this case, the system still contained elements of anarchy, as the Pictish and Germanic peoples, and the Parthian empire continued to elude the sway of Rome. Their point of

[39] A. Watson, “Systems of States”, in: *Review of International Studies* (16, 1990), p. 103-104; For an overview of the different degrees of hierarchy, see A. Watson, *The Evolution of International Society, A Comparative Historical Analysis* (London, Routledge, 1992).
[40] Buzan and Little, *International Systems*, p. 231-232.

contention is that this system would therefore be called anarchic by neorealists, because there would still be some units in the system seeking self-preservation, leading to a balance-of-power. Kaufman, Little and Wohlforth instead argue that it would be ridiculous to continue calling this system "simply" anarchic, since an ever-expanding empire will always encounter other units to balance against until it presumably reaches a global extent. They therefore assert that an international system dominated for the most part by a single entity should be considered as a hierarchical system.[41] While I understand their reasoning, I would argue that there is still a considerable difference between an anarchic system that is unipolar in its distribution of capabilities, and a completely hierarchic system. A hierarchy would mean that a central authority controls the interaction of the other units in the system, making any need for self-help among the units obsolete; they could instead specialise and become interdependent. This was not the case in the international system of the Roman empire, where others like the Parthians still managed to survive autonomously. This being said, the unipolar Roman system clearly exhibited strong hierarchical elements. An example of this would be the Roman interaction with the foederati peoples, who became an extension of the empire, while still retaining some degree of autonomy.[42]

While Waltz does accept the possibility of a mixed systems, he contends that it will always be predominantly anarchic and that the hierarchical influence is mainly visible on a unit-level of analysis, therefore falling outside of the scope of his theory. [43] I do not believe this to be true, as my case-study will demonstrate that the presence of hierarchical elements also appeared to have influenced the behaviour of the units in a pre-modern system. In addition, these structural consequences were also tied to the nature and function of the units, to which I now turn.

[41] S. Kaufman, Richard Little and W.C. Wohlforth, *The Balance of Power in World History* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 6-7.
[42] Jones defines *foederati* as follows in his institutional overview of the Roman empire: "(…) contingents furnished under treaties by tribes in alliance with the empire and serving under their own tribal leaders (…) Such allied tribes could form buffer states against enemies farther afield and act as a curb on recalcitrant neighbours on the frontier itself: at the least treaties bound them to refrain from raiding the provinces." in: A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284-60: A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey, Vol II* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1964), p. 611.
[43] Waltz, *International Politics,* p. 115-116.

4.2 The state

While they are far from the only international actors interacting in an international system, states are considered to be the main units of interest in neorealism, as they define the structures and create the rules of interaction.[44] The state has featured prominently as the unit of choice in the discipline of IR. In this capacity, it has been treated as an immutable concept that can be traced back throughout Western history, most prominently in neorealism. This tendency has been challenged by historical IR-theorists, who reject the notion as an ahistoricism. Osiander, for example, demonstrates how the idea of the state has evolved drastically throughout history, adding that it is impossible to maintain the idea of a universal application of neorealism, when failing to recognise the historical relativism of one of the key-concepts of the theory.[45] In the interest of my thesis, I use this section to explore how the theoretically immutable neorealist interpretation of the state contrasts with historical reality, and what this means for one of the requirements needed for the universality claim, namely the state's drive for self-preservation.

In Waltz's approach to international politics, the unit-level of analysis comprises the attributes and the interactions between the units. This covers a massive array of different factors, ranging from domestic politics, to the type of governance, to the wars fought between states. At the same time, the unit-level of analysis barely receives any attention in *TIP*, as neorealists prefer to emphasise structural factors. This leads Buzan, Jones and Little to accuse Waltz of ill-defining this level of analysis, using it as "a catch-all for everything that falls outside his definition of structure".[46] As a result, the concept of the state lacks a clear definition, complicating the task of evaluating its historical application. From the structural level of analysis we can infer that Waltz considers the units as functionally undifferentiated, performing the same tasks and having the same responsibilities as the other units in the system.[47] This refers to the process of socialisation as a direct consequence of the anarchic system, where states are motivated to follow the most successful practice on the international stage.

[44] Waltz, *International Politics,* p.93-94.
[45]A. Osiander, *Before the State, Systemic Political Change in the West from the Greeks to the French Revolution* (Oxford, Oxford University Press), p. 10-11, 495-496.
[46] Buzan, Jones and Little, *Logic of Anarchy,* p. 47.
[47] Waltz, *International Politics*, p. 96-97.

Additionally, it is clear from the wording in *TIP* that the functions of a state are tied to its rights as a sovereign entity.[48] As will become clear from the following discussion, this understanding of the state betrays a modern, post-Westphalian outlook on political governance.

Gilpin challenges the neorealist notion that history has only known like-units coexisting concurrently due to processes of socialisation and competition. Instead, he argues that while the state has indeed been the main actor in international interactions throughout history, the nature and functions of these states have changed accordingly. And as the international system itself is affected by this change, he suggests it is instrumental for a historical analysis of international politics to define the attributes of the state in relation to the historical period or international system it interacted in.[49] Buzan and Little have likewise identified numerous variations of units throughout history, one of them being the empire, a political structure that has persisted throughout most of history. While this is the case, its premodern variant did not conform to the modern definition of a state: instead, these empires can best be portrayed as a set of concentric circles where the inner circle represents the core region, and the outer circles merely zones of influence without real borders. The subordinate political entities that make up this patchwork, become increasingly more autonomous the closer they are situated to the outer frontier.[50] An empire's dominion over its territory was not linked to the idea of sovereignty as recorded in the Treaty of Westphalia, but rather to the degree of control that the core region could enforce on its imperial hinterland.

While this might call into question to what extent an empire could be considered a single unit, this is not problematic for the current thesis, as both the Byzantine and Sassanid empires were known to be highly centralised units with a high level of administrative control over their territories. What I am mostly interested in, is a different attribute of empires, which relates to their international status. While the empires discussed here were powerful in their own right, they also benefitted from what Buzan

[48] *"To say that a state is sovereign means that it decides for itself how it will cope with its internal and external problems, including whether or not to seek assistance from others (…)"*, in Waltz, *International Politics*, p. 96.
[49] Gilpin, *War and Change*, p. 26-27.
[50] Buzan and Little, *International Systems,* p. 177-178.

and Little call “imperial legitimacy”: “Because empires were widely accepted, and provided useful services, other units might quite readily bandwagon with a rising empire, accepting a vassal status, rather than always resisting it in favour of independence.”[51] The concept of imperial legitimacy can, in my eyes, be equated to what Gilpin calls a hierarchy of prestige. This idea posits that lesser states are more willing to follow the basic rules and conventions that have been established by a great power. While the prestige is mainly derived from the material power that the latter can utilise, it is also because the smaller states accept the legitimacy of the existing order.[52]

The Byzantines anticipated this reflex quite cunningly: the international system that followed the collapse of the Western Roman empire was populated by migrating peoples roaming in search of lands to settle; while these had proven to be the downfall of much of the Roman empire, their military might could also be used in imperial services by drawing the migrating peoples into an order that was centred on, and dictated by, Constantinople. An astute example of this practice were the official ranks that were granted to the leaders of the migrations, with a matching stipend, to effectively manipulate them into doing the imperial bidding. Exploiting the prestige afforded by its status in the system was what allowed the Byzantine empire to survive for much longer than its military and economic power warranted.[53] A similar instance of imperial legitimacy transpired on the Byzantine frontier bordering the Arabian desert. To counter the raiding parties launched by nomads, Constantinople settled a number of nomadic peoples on their own lands. Here too the Arabic *foederati,* most notably the Ghassanids, entered a relationship with the Byzantines in which they provided the military support needed to protect the borders against incursions from beyond, in exchange for imperial concessions like official positions for the leaders, and

[51] The complex administration of the early Byzantine empire was able to extract resources to an extent that would only be matched by other European states at the end of the Middle Ages. For more information, in: A. E. Laiou, “Writing the Economic History of Byzantium”, in A. E. Laiou (ed.), *The Economic History of Byzantium*, p. 3; Buzan and Little, *International Systems,* p. 231-232.
[52] Gilpin, *War and Change*, p. 30.
[53] One of the most prominent individuals to hold an imperial rank was Attila, leader of the Huns. In A.D. Lee, “Treaty-making in Late Antiquity”, in P. de Souza and J. France (eds.), *War and Peace in Ancient and Medieval History* (Cambridge, CUP, 2008), p. 112; E. Chrysos, “Byzantine Diplomacy, AD 300-800: Means and Ends”, in: eds. Shepard (J.) and S. Franklin (S.). *Byzantine Diplomacy*. Aldershot, Variorum, 1992, p. 34-35.

legitimacy.[54] On the one hand, this materialised into a process of socialisation, where numerous settled peoples would take on Roman institutions and customs to reflect the successful practice of the Byzantine empire, becoming like units in terms of internal attributes.[55] At the same time, the level of interdependence grew, as Constantinople made use of their military power in exchange for legitimation, grants of land and financial aid.[56]

Another type of unit that refuses to conform to a modern understanding of the state, is the nomad. This refers to the pastoral peoples that were either completely nomadic or semi-sedentary. Due to the early adoption of horsemanship, their mobility allowed them to cover the huge swaths of land that were more difficult to penetrate for sedentary civilisations, most notably the steppes. Another consequence of their mobility was their military prowess, making them a feared opponent throughout pre-modern history and threatening the survival of even the most powerful units in the system.[57] In addition, the mobility of the nomads also meant that they were not bound to any territorial confines. As will be discussed in the next section, this complicates our understanding of pre-modern balance-of-power politics. The extreme variety between the composition of an empire and a nomadic society makes it difficult to argue that an anarchic system always comprises functionally undifferentiated units. Instead, it appears that it was possible for differentiated units to coexist for an extended period without either a need for socialisation or for competition to eliminate the “weaker” form of governance. empires and nomads have lived side by side for millennia, and under the right circumstances, one proved to be stronger than the other. In conclusion, it appears that here too the neorealist understanding of the state suffers from an inherently modern outlook. The question now is what this means for balance-of-power politics in a pre-modern system, as well as the neorealist universality claim in general.

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[54] A.D. Lee, *Information and Frontiers, Roman Foreign Relations in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, CUP, 1993), p. 52-53.
[55] The emulation of the state model of the Byzantines by their neighbours is known as *imitatio imperii*, see: Chryos, *Byzantine Diplomacy,* p. 32-34.
[56] Chrysos, *Byzantine Diplomacy*, p. 33; The defence of the eastern frontier likewise depended largely on the military support provided by allied peoples, mainly the Ghassanids. In: A.D. Lee, *Information and Frontiers, Roman Foreign Relations in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 52-53.
[57] Buzan and Little*, International Systems*, p. 185-188.

4.3 Balance-of-power politics

The idea underwriting the universality claim in Waltz's neorealism is that balance-of-power politics will always take place when the international system in question is anarchic in nature, and the interacting units seek self-preservation. But what exactly are balance-of-power politics? Due to the anarchic nature of the system, units will seek to survive by accumulating more power at the expense of another. Whenever one or more powers rise to prominence, counteractions are initiated by other rivals to prevent this from happening. This is called balancing, and it can be pursued both internally and externally. More often than not, balancing behaviour will inevitably lead to war, and a new balance will be reached. In summary, the balance-of-power is the result of the actions of the units to either change or prevent a change of their position in an international system. If units would fail to balance against a rising great power, world hegemony would be achieved at some point, and the system would be transformed into a hierarchy. Instead, anarchy endures and will continue to do so.[58]

The previous sections of this chapter have demonstrated that historical reality is more complex than this assertion would lead us to believe. The question that is addressed here is whether the findings in regards to the system and the units have precluded balance-of-power politics from taking place in pre-modern systems, specifically in the Mediterranean and Ancient Near East in Late Antiquity. Did balancing take place in this system, or was a unit's rise to power left unchecked by its rivals? This is what I will explore in my case-study, based on the conclusions reached in the previous sections. Before proceeding to the next chapter however, I wish to touch upon some preliminary issues with balance-of-power politics in the historical context in question.

The subjective delineation of an international system has proven to be problematic when discussing the nature of its ordering principle. Here too, it complicates matters as balance-of-power politics imply a need for awareness of all the actors involved, in order to effectively check a rising power. While it is justified to cluster a few states together in one system based on the intensity of their military -

[58] See the theoretical overview in 1.2.

political interactions, this often leaves out an entity that proves to be an important factor in changing power balances at a later stage. The unit-type that has historically played this role to a devastating effect, are the nomadic peoples. Mobile and adept in horsemanship, they often appeared in a regional system without much warning, upsetting the entire balance in the process. For this reason, Buzan and Little do not consider them to be part of balance-of-power politics, since they do not represent power-projections from sedentary states, but are power-projections themselves.[59]

In addition, the variety of units populating this system further indicates that balance-of-power politics did not follow a similar course as would be expected in a modern state-system where functionally undifferentiated units rely on self-help to guarantee their survival. The international system of Late Antiquity was one of distinctly different kinds of interactions, depending on the type of unit that was involved: in the Balkan-provinces, the migratory peoples were drawn into a predominantly hierarchical relationship that rested on the imperial legitimacy that the Byzantines used as a tool of socialisation and control. In the west, the Germanic kingdoms similarly took on a similarly subordinate role when engaging with Constantinople, which will be further discussed in my case-study. Meanwhile, the Byzantine-Sassanid relationship presented a different image: comprising two like units of equal strength, the Byzantine and Sassanid rivalry has some semblance of the bipolar environment of the Cold War. Here too, these great powers vied for opportunities to gain power at the expense of the other, while simultaneously checking their every move. The next chapter is primarily an evaluation of how balance-of-power politics transpired in a bipolar international system of mixed anarchic and hierarchic properties, that comprised functionally differentiated units. The result is a fascinating insight into pre-modern international politics and the importance of legitimacy and prestige.

[59] Buzan and Little, *International Systems*, p. 229-230.

Chapter Five: the Eternal Peace treaty of 532

5.1 The Sun in the East and the Moon in the West

Ever since the Sassanid royal house seized the throne of the Parthian empire in the third century A.D., relations with the Byzantine empire were characterised by numerous major conflicts, interspersed with periods of contentious peace. As the two great powers of the region, the Sassanids and Byzantines rivalled each other in terms of resources and influence, constantly seeking opportunities to gain territory and power at the expense of the other.[60] At first sight, this is a dynamic that one would expect from a bipolar distribution of power in an anarchic system. It is nonetheless only one side of the coin, as is made clear by contemporary sources. The language used by statesmen and ambassadors betrays a sense of mutual respect and even an acceptance of the other's existence. The Byzantine chronicler John Malalas relates how the accession of Justinian I to the Byzantine throne in 527 was greeted by his Sassanid counterpart, who likened their relationship to the one shared by the moon and the sun in the same celestial sphere.[61] Other instances of kinship between the two great powers have been recorded, but particularly interesting are those sources that relay a sense of duality in the preservation of order in an otherwise chaotic system. In other words, a Byzantine-Sassanid order. This has been conveyed in the most clear way by the Sassanid *shahanshah* Khusro II in 590, when he pleaded the Byzantine emperor Maurice to aid him in winning his throne back, after a usurper had seized it: "God effected that the whole world should be illumined from the very beginning by two eyes, namely by the most powerful kingdom of the Romans and by the most prudent sceptre of the Persian state. For by these greatest powers the disobedient and bellicose tribes are winnowed and man's course is continually regulated and guided."[62] He then argues that without his legitimate rule over the Sassanid empire, it would soon fall into chaos and therefore be unable to hold the "fierce, malevolent tribes" at bay, which would also result in the downfall of the Byzantine empire on the longer term.[63]

[60] Blockley, *Subsidies and Diplomacy*, p. 73.
[61] John Malalas, 449.19-20. in: E. Jeffreys, M. Jeffreys, R. Scott et al. (trs.), *The Chronicle of John Malalas, A Translation* (Melbourne, Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1986).
[62] Theophylact Simocatta, IV.11.1-3, in: M. Whitby and M. Whitby (trs.), *The History of Theophylact Simocatta* (Oxford, OUP, 1986).
[63] Theophylact, IV.11.7.

Upon hearing this, the Byzantine emperor agreed to provide Khusro II with the necessary troops against the advice of his senate, who had much rather seen the rivalling empire fall into disarray.

This is not the only example of an instance in which one party implored the other to not seek their destruction, as they needed each other's existence, and even strength, to maintain order in the world.[64] While it might be that these were rhetorical devices employed in times that one side wanted to secure a beneficial outcome to diplomatic talks, the fact is that assertions like these are highly unusual in bipolar environments. It is almost unthinkable that the United States would aid the Soviet Union in times that the latter was struggling, and vice versa. In a neorealist perception of a bipolar world order, the one major threat to one great power is the other. Any opportunity that might nullify this threat is eagerly seized upon, as proven by the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the subsequent incorporation of Eastern European states in the North-Atlantic Treaty Organization. With this in mind, I now examine whether the expressed commitments of mutual support in the interest of survival and order were merely diplomatic formalities, or whether this sentiment was also reflected in the balancing behaviour of the two great powers in question. The chosen case is the Eternal Peace treaty of 532, a benchmark in Byzantine-Sassanid relations.

5.2 The Eternal Peace treaty of 532

One of the main focal points of the Byzantine-Sassanid competition has always been the regions of the Caucasus and Armenia. Both great powers coveted these lands that were abundant in gold ore and contained a much-needed reserve of manpower to serve in their respective militaries.[65] In practice, this meant that these regions were subject to frequent shifts in power, with regional subjects moving from one sphere of influence to the other, depending on who was winning the current conflict. Yet despite the many conquests and raids, some degree of balance always returned at the end of the wars, with concessions being made to accommodate the

[64] For more examples, see M. Whitby, "Byzantine diplomacy: good faith, trust and co-operation in international relations in Late Antiquity", in: P. de Sousa and J. France (eds.), *War and Peace in Ancient and Medieval History* (Cambridge, CUP, 2011), p. 125-128.
[65] B. Dignas and E. Engelbert, *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity, Neighbours and Rivals* (Cambridge CUP, 2007), p. 174-176.

interests of both powers. The awareness of this need for balance is reflected well in the actions of Byzantine emperor Tiberius II, who decided to return his recent conquests in the region to the Sassanids in order to reach a peace agreement.[66]

Local disputes in the Armenian and Caucasian region were also the cause for war in 526, when the Iberian subjects of the Sassanid empire pleaded the Byzantines to intervene, when they were forced to convert to the state-religion of Zoroastrianism. The Byzantines seized the opportunity and invaded the Sassanid lands. The following war dragged on for many years with both sides conquering and losing territory, until a major battle was fought outside of the Byzantine fortress of Dara. This stronghold was situated right at the border, and had been a thorn in the sides of the Sassanids ever since its foundation at the beginning of the sixth century. When the two armies met before its walls in 530, the Sassanids were defeated and forced to initiate peace talks.[67] While this set of conditions was accepted by Justinian I, the Sassanids were no longer interested in peace, possibly because the Byzantines were distracted elsewhere by an uprising that demanded their attention and military resources. The hostilities were resumed and several more battles were fought in Mesopotamia and Armenia. In 532, a new *shahanshah* had ascended the Sassanid throne, and once again peace talks were held.[68]

The following terms were accepted, as recorded by the Byzantine historiographer Procopius: the territorial gains made by both sides in the war had to be returned; the Byzantine force at Dara was moved further land inwards so that it was no longer considered to be an immediate threat to the Sassanid border; and finally, a lump sum of gold was to be paid to contribute to the Sassanid defence of the Caspian Gates, i.e. the mountain passes running through the Caucasus and connecting the Armenian regions and the northern steppes.[69] The Eternal Peace would last until 540, when hostilities once more erupted between the two great powers, this time prompted

[66] Menander Protector, *Fragment* 20.2, in: R.C. Blockley, *The history of Menander the Guardsman* (Liverpool, Francis Cairns, 1985), p. 187.
[67] S. Mitchell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire, AD 284 - 641* (Wiley Blackwell, 2015), p. 140-141.
[68] G. Greatrex and S.N.C. Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars, Part II, AD 363-630* (London, Routledge, 2002), p. 91-96.
[69] Procopius, I.22, in: H.B. Dewing (tr.), *History of the Wars* (London, William Heinemann, 1914).

by the western expansion of the Byzantine empire, also known as the *renovatio imperii.* What is striking about this war and the peace agreement is that it really demonstrates the paradox of enmity and amity in the Byzantine-Sassanid relationship: on the one hand we have this clear example of a war fought to check the increasing influence of the Byzantines in the region, which is reflected in the demands to return all conquests to the former owner. Yet on the other hand, there is the demand of the Sassanids to share the burden of the defence of the northern mountain passes, which seems like a strange demand to make of one's arch rival in a system of self-help. The next section further explores this aspect of the treaty, which reveals the different layers of the Byzantine-Sassanid relationship, reflecting the "us vs. them" mentality in 5.1. This is followed by a discussion of the event that caused the breakdown of the treaty in 532, namely the *renovatio imperii.* While on the one hand confirming the neorealist motivations behind the war initiated in 540 by the Sassanids, it also provides a deeper insight into the broader international politics of the Mediterranean - Ancient Near Eastern system in Late Antiquity, and the importance of imperial legitimacy therein.

5.3 The defence of the Caspian Gates

The Sassanid demand to contribute to the defence of the passages running through the Caucasian mountain ranges was not a new one. It was first discussed in 363, but since the Byzantines could not spare the military resources at the time, the Sassanids were the ones to build the fortresses and garrison them with troops.[70] From that point onwards, the maintenance of the Caspian Gates would become a point of contention in their relations. On numerous occasions the issue was brought up in diplomatic talks, mainly by the Sassanids, who were bearing the brunt of guarding the mountain passes. The Byzantines did pay for it at times, but it was done in an irregular manner: at least once it took the form of a yearly subsidy, but more often it was a lump sum that was agreed upon in order to end a conflict.[71] On one such occasion, the Sassanids demanded that the former would either contribute financially or supply men

[70] Blockley, *Subsidies and Diplomacy*, p. 63-65.
[71] On other occasions, the Byzantines contributed lump sums of gold to the defense of the Caspian Gates, usually as part of a treaty concluding a war. See P. Spring, *Great Walls and Linear Barriers* (Barnsley, Pen & Sword Military, 2015), p. 199-200.

to help garrison one of their fortresses.[72] It is remarkable that, in a bipolar system, one great power would go as far as to invite the other to station troops on its territory, and even express an explicit desire to do so. It is strange that two rivals would share something as essential to their security as defense. For example, it is rather inconceivable that the United States would make a similar demand to the Soviet Union during the Cold War, as keeping the opposition's military out of one's territory was considered to be an objective of vital state-interest. But once again, the limitations of a pre-modern international system affect the balancing: while the United States and the Soviet Union were aware of their global surroundings and could be certain that there was no unknown factor lurking beyond the system to topple their power, and as such only had to fear each other, this was not the case in Late Antiquity. Here, information on the wider global environment was limited, and the threat of an unexpected invasion of "barbarians" was real and feared.

The latter are mentioned in the sources under names like the Massagetae, Huns or Scythians, which all refer to the patchwork of nomadic peoples roaming the Eurasian steppes in Late Antiquity. Their mobility made them unpredictable foes, and their military prowess a threat to the survival of sedentary empires. The Byzantines had experienced this danger in the form of Attila, who swept through Eastern and Central Europe in the fifth century and established an empire that imploded after his death. The Sassanids would briefly be subjugated a century later at the hands of the Hunnic Hephthalites. It would therefore be an understatement to claim that both empires were well-aware of the threat that nomadic peoples could pose. So could the defence of the Caspian Gates be explained in neorealist terms as an alignment of the interests of the Byzantines and the Sassanids to balance against a third great power, namely the nomads? Perhaps, but only on a very superficial level: when Waltz refers to external balancing, this is meant as a temporary manoeuvre against a real and immediate threat. It is unheard of that this arrangement would span centuries, as it did with the Byzantines and the Sassanids. Secondly, the enemy they balanced against was not one entity, but rather the idea of "barbarians". During most of the period I am discussing, the nomads comprised different peoples with their own interactions and

[72] The fortress Virapakh had been founded by the Sassanids in 363. See: Blockley, *Subsidies and Diplomacy*, p. 64-66.

behaviour. For these reasons, it is difficult to treat the nomads as one entity and incorporate them as such into the balance-of-power politics of the international system of Late Antiquity. Balancing was done to some extent in regards to some of the nomadic peoples, but the defence of the Caspian Gates was not established for this reason. Instead, it was another example of the Byzantine-Sassanid outlook on the world, which posits them as the keepers of order vis-à-vis the “barbarians”.

The result appears to be that their balancing against the nomads of the Eurasian steppes overrode any individual interests that either great power might have had. With this in mind, let us return to the conditions set out by the Sassanids prior to conclusion of the Eternal Peace treaty in 532. During the negotiations, their diplomat remarked that Kavad I, the Sassanid *shahanshah* at the time, had expressed his displeasure with the Byzantines, because the latter had not contributed to the maintenance of the fortifications at the Caspian Gates. He added that were it not for the Sassanids guarding these passages, the “barbarians” would have come south and ravaged the lands of the empires. Due to the failure to adhere to a past agreement to share the burden, the Sassanids now found themselves at a disadvantage. Not only were they forced to keep a considerable force at the Caspian Gates, they also had to refurbish another army to protect their borders from the Byzantines garrisoned at Dara. Because of this injustice, the Sassanids demanded that they would either contribute to their garrison up north or dismantle to fortress of Dara, while emphasising that the former would be preferable.[73] This is very peculiar demand, considering that they could also have demanded both of those things, in order to guarantee a stable and lasting peace. Yet, this does offer some additional insight into the Byzantine-Sassanid relationship: it appears that the condition of war between the two great powers was accepted as something inevitable and even “normal”. That is, as long as it was fought on equal terms and if some kind of agreement was afterwards concluded that accommodated both sides to some extent. If this were not the case, a neorealist approach might expect that the Sassanids would reach out to nomadic peoples to balance against the expanding Byzantine influence in the region, as curtailing it would benefit all regional powers. Instead, the Sassanids confronted the Byzantines on their own, as they had done so many times before, and demanded that the war was fought

[73] Procopius, I.16.

on equal terms, while reminding the latter of the responsibility they shared to keep out the “barbarians”. Whitby also commented on this unique aspect of their relationship, noting that: “The ability of the two empires to specify the permitted arena for warfare reflects the maturity of their relations (...)”.[74]

More than just an remarkable aspect of their relationship, the shared fear of the nomadic powers appears to have been a cornerstone of the Byzantine-Sassanid interactions. The distinction in the way the imperial powers regarded themselves and the “barbarians” surrounding them, eschewed their balancing behaviour in favour of the preservation of an imperial order in the system. It is further interesting to note that, once the moderation in the Byzantine-Sassanid rivalry was breached in the devastating Last Great War of Antiquity, it would not take half a century before the Arabic nomadic peoples overran nearly the entire Ancient Near East. The next and final section of this thesis deals with the interactions of the Byzantine empire with a different sort of “barbarian”, namely the Germanic kingdoms that had been founded on the remains of the Western Roman empire. While being more acknowledged than the nomadic peoples, here too we will see how international status affected balancing behaviour.

5.4 The renovatio imperii

The idea behind *the renovatio imperii* is related to the Byzantine ideology of the *Orbis Romanus,* namely the idea that the former Roman lands still belonged to their Byzantine successors, even if these were currently occupied by Germanic kingdoms. Consequently, the latter were merely considered as subjects to the imperial crown, expected to follow and obey the Byzantine order imposed on the region.[75] Under rule of the emperor Justinian I in the sixth century, this ideology was translated into a series of conquests aimed to wrest control from the Germanic peoples and to effectively re-establish Byzantine control over the Mediterranean. The Eternal Peace treaty marked the beginning of this massive westwards expansion, as the peace with the Sassanids freed up substantial military resources that were previously tied up in the conflicts on the eastern frontier.

[74] Whitby, *Byzantine Diplomacy*, p. 137.
[75] Chrysos, *Byzantine Diplomacy*, p. 32-33.

The first thing that has to be examined is how the Germanic kingdoms considered their own place in a Byzantine-dominated *Orbis Romanus.* There were three main successor-states that had formed along the Mediterranean in the wake of the collapse of the Western Roman empire and interacted with the Byzantines on a regular basis: the Ostrogoths in Dalmatia and Italy; the Visigoths in what is now the south of France and the coast of Spain; and finally, the Vandals in Northern Africa.[76] As mentioned before, the Byzantines actively encouraged their *foederati* to take on Roman customs and institutions, in order to draw them into an international system that played by their rules. This appears to have been a successful strategy, even with the successor-states, which were nominally autonomous entities. Contemporary correspondence between members of the Germanic royal houses and the imperial court indicate an obedience expressed by the former, introducing themselves as delegates of Constantinople, instead of rulers of an independent kingdom.[77] It is clear that the relations between units as distinctly different as empire and kingdom contained strong elements of a hierarchy, at the very least in their communication. The *renovatio imperii* further demonstrates how this also had a profound impact on balancing behaviour in a pre-modern international system.

The Vandal, Visigothic and Ostrogothic kingdoms comprised most of the western basin of the Mediterranean and were allied by way of marriages. While they did position themselves as subservient to the emperor in the east, that did not mean that the Byzantines were happy to allow these new powers to burgeon on previously Roman-owned lands. In the wake of the treaty of 532, Justinian I had the chance to intervene in the Vandal kingdom in Northern Africa, when the local king was deposed by a pretender, named Gelimer. Under the pretext of supporting the deposed ruler, the Byzantines dispatched a relatively small force that conquered the region by 535. Around the same time, in the Ostrogothic kingdom of Italy, a similar scenario took place: the ruler by the name of Amalasuentha had been likewise murdered by a

[76] See map 2 in the appendix.

[77] G. Scheibelreiter, “Vester est populus meus, Byzantinische Reichsideologie und germanisches Selbstverständnis”, in: E; Chrysos and A. Schwarcz (eds.), *Das Reich und die Barbaren* (Vienna, Böhlau Verlag, 1989), p. 207; J. Moorhead, “The Byzantines in the West in the sixth century”, in: P. Fouracre (ed.), *The New Cambridge Medieval History* (Cambridge, CUP, 2005), p. 119.

pretender who had taken the throne for himself. This provided a *casus belli* to the Byzantines, one that was further supplemented by the allegation that Italy did not belong to the Ostrogoths, but should have been returned to the imperial crown. After all, the Ostrogoths had initially been sent by Constantinople to expel the previous Germanic ruler.[78] The Gothic war lasted much longer than the Vandal campaign and ravaged most of Italy, but by 565 the Byzantines could once more call themselves rulers over the heartland of the Roman empire. Finally, a third campaign was initiated in 552, when a small Byzantine force was sent to conquer the coastal region of Spain, when a Visigothic rebel reached out and appealed for an intervention against the kingdom.[79] This concluded the series of conquests that once more transformed the Mediterranean into a *Mare Nostrum*.[80]

An interesting observation on the course of the *renovation imperii* is voiced by Moorhead, who notes how puzzling it is that none of the Germanic kingdoms seem to have aided each other when the Byzantines invaded, in spite of their mutual alliances.[81] Instead of balancing together against the expanding power of Constantinople over the Mediterranean, each of the kingdoms appeared to have faced the Byzantines on its own, and were subsequently defeated by the latter's superior military. Two remarks can be made in this regards: for one, the Visigoths did send a forces to Northern Africa, but this was in 544, nine years after the Vandals had been defeated. While it may not have been an attempt to aid their former allies, it is possible that this invasion prompted a Byzantine response in 552, when they landed in Spain. Secondly, when the Byzantines invaded Italy, the Ostrogoths reached out to the Sassanids to persuade them to break the treaty of 532 and declare war on their rivals. According to Procopius, the Ostrogothic diplomats argued that it would be in the best interests of both parties to combine their forces to check the Byzantine expansion, before the latter would become so powerful that even the Sassanids would not stand a chance in future conflicts.[82] This account confirms that attempts at balancing did take place, and quite successfully so: the Sassanids broke the Eternal Peace treaty in 540,

[78] F. Wozniak, "East Rome, Ravenna and Western Illyricum: 454-536 A.D.", in: *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* (30, 1981), p. 363.
[79] For the full overview of the campaigns, see: Moorhead, *Byzantines in the West,* p. 123-129.
[80] See map 3 in the appendix.
[81] Moorhead, *Byzantines in the West*, p. 129.
[82] Procopius, II.2-3.

ravaged the Byzantine provinces in the Near East, before eventually being countered by forces transferred back from the Byzantine campaign in the West.[83] Their intervention in the east had managed to prolong the conquest of Italy, but eventually the Ostrogoths were subdued.

Just like the defence of the Caspian Gates, the *renovatio imperii* likewise sketches a nuanced picture of balancing behaviour in Late Antiquity. A clear example of balancing took place when the Sassanids decided to intervene on behalf of the Ostrogoths, in order to restore the balance of power with the Byzantines. On the other hand, it is worth noting how no coalition was formed among the parties whose interests seemed to be aligned the most, namely the Germanic kingdoms in the west. I argue that this inaction can once more be traced back to the hierarchical elements in the system, and the status of an imperial power like the Byzantine empire. Even though the Vandal, Visigothic and Ostrogothic kingdoms were autonomous entities, the legitimacy conferred upon them by the nominal support of the imperial crown meant that it would be in their best interest to bandwagon Constantinople. When their survival was no longer in the interest of the Byzantine empire, i.e. when the latter had freed up enough resources to establish its hegemony over the region once more, bandwagoning became an unsustainable reaction that resulted in heavy losses. Another consequence of the partially hierarchical relationship crystallised in the domestic realm: due to the position of authority held by the Byzantine empire in the international system, a convenient *casus belli* could be found in the deposition or assassination of characters close to the imperial crown, as well as a right to intervene in domestic politics when appealed to. While this does not necessarily go against neorealist thought, it does show how misplaced the concepts of sovereignty and territorial integrity are in a realm of empires. Only once the Germanic kingdoms grew more accustomed to their autonomy and became more powerful towards the end of the sixth century, did they begin to reject a Byzantine-dominated *Orbis Romanus*.[84]

[83] Greatrex, *The Roman Eastern Frontier,* p. 106-111; For a comprehensive discussion of the motivations of the Sassanids to break the Eternal Treaty of 532, see: H. Börm, “Der Perserkönig im Imperium Romanum, Chosroes I und der sasanidische Einfall in das Oströmische Reich 540 n. Chr.”, in: *Chiron* (36, 2006), p. 299-328.
[84] Scheibelreiter, *Byzantinische Reichsideologie,* p. 215.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

In writing this thesis, I had the intent to challenge neorealists on their assertion that neorealism could be applied throughout history to explain certain aspects of international politics, in particular the behaviour of the states. This included a deconstructive analysis of the different components constituting this universality claim to reflect the historical reality of my case, followed by the case-study itself. So in light of my findings, what does the application of neorealism to the international system of the Mediterranean and Ancient Near East in Late Antiquity tell us about its universality claim?

Based on the difficulty with which the neorealist framework was adapted to fit a pre-modern application, one might conclude that academic suspicions towards such a grandiose statement was justified, and that neorealism has no place outside of modern politics. I would not go that far. Certainly, it has become clear that the framework and concepts used in neorealism are irrefutably modern, and that many issues arise when this is transposed to a different era where the same concepts struggle to find meaning. In addition, my case-study has demonstrated that pre-modern international politics were more nuanced than a neorealist theory can account for. Yet, we cannot allow ourselves to fall for the same pitfall besetting other critics who failed to understand the exact nature of Waltz's universality claim. Neorealism has never been about comprehensively capturing the nuances of international politics. In the words of Waltz: "Structures never tell us all that we want to know. Instead they tell us a small number of big and important things. They focus our attention on those components and forces that usually continue for long periods".[85]

These "things" can be summarised by the set of conditions that has been the guiding theme throughout this thesis, namely that "(…) balance-of-power politics prevail wherever two, and only two, requirements are met: that the order be anarchic and that it be populated by units wishing to survive."[86] Being the essence of the universality claim, the only question of importance in this thesis is whether this

[85] K. Waltz, "Response to my Critics", in R. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 329.
[86] Waltz, *International Politics,* p. 121.

sequence holds up in the distinctly different environment of Late Antiquity. With the premise of neorealism in mind, the answer would be a superficial yes: the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean were part of an international system that was bipolarly dominated by two great powers, surrounded by minor units that for the most part followed their lead. As such, the great powers engaged in balancing behaviour to keep the other from expanding its power and influence. There was no authority above them that regulated their behaviour, prompting both to think in terms of their own survival.

Does it matter then that within these patterns aberrations are noticeable in regards to the additional layers of kinship and a fear of the “barbarians” in the Byzantine-Sassanid relationship? It does and it does not; this depends on how descriptive one wants a theory of explanation to be. Neorealism can tell us that in an anarchic system great powers will generally balance against each other, no matter the historical period. This much appears to be true. Yet if one wanted to take a closer look at the international politics of a certain historical period, then this theory will fall short of providing a satisfying explanation. As such, it is unable to account for the fact that the Byzantines and Sassanids shared a century-long mutual defence in the Caucasus, which completely goes against the idea of self-help and autonomy. In the same way, it cannot convincingly argue why the semi-powerful Germanic kingdoms would fail to balance against the expanding Byzantine influence in the Mediterranean, but rather appealed to the only other empire to intervene in the conflict. As a result, the Byzantine empire was able to dispatch a relatively low number of troops to conquer a disproportionately large area across the Mediterranean. Neorealism cannot explain this, because it does not take into account concepts like prestige or imperial legitimacy. These are all relegated to the catch-all that is the additional unit-level of analysis, which falls outside of its scope.

This brings me to the main issue with neorealism and its historical appliance. It is my belief that a neorealist explanation of pre-modern international politics would benefit immensely from the acknowledgement of a strong hierarchical element in the international system, and its considerable impact on the behaviour of the units. The reason behind this is that I am convinced that the causes for many of the previously discussed anomalies can be found in the nature of the system, which would negate the need to refer these issues to an additional theory on the unit-level of analysis.

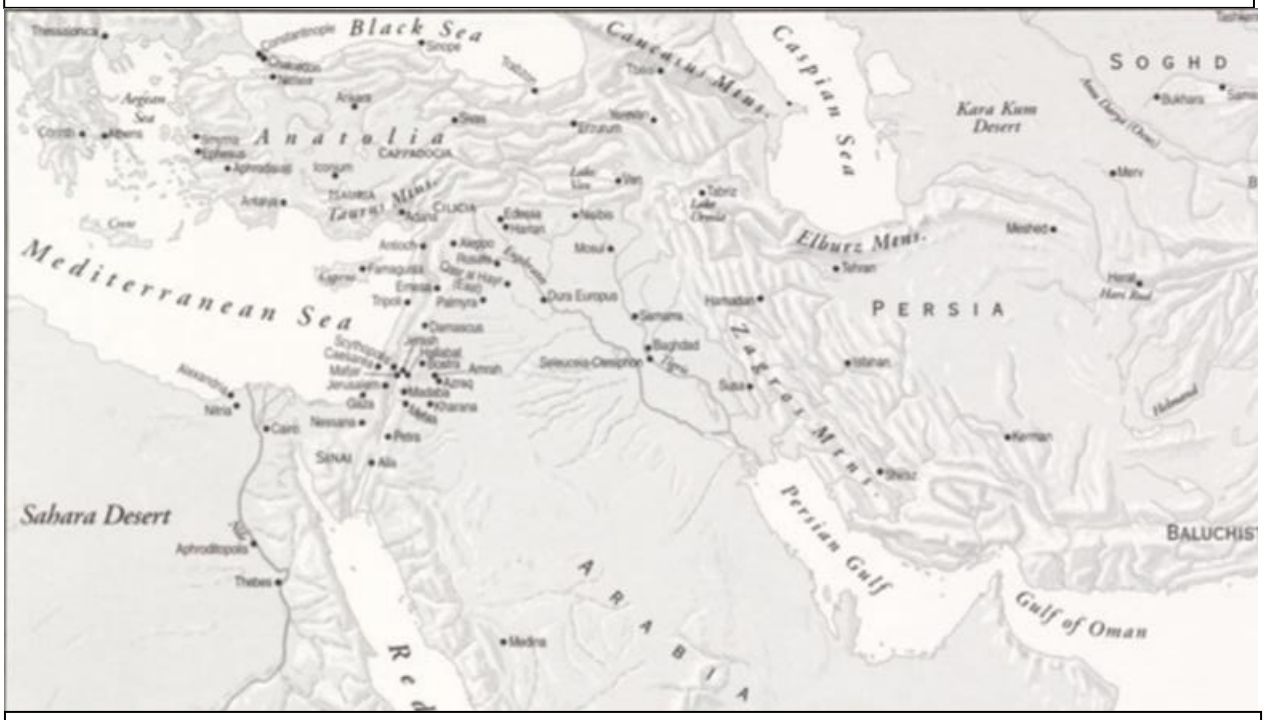
Therefore, it seems unnecessarily obdurate to ignore any nuance in the ordering principle of the system, especially when this is the aspect that distinguishes neorealism the most from other political theories. I do not argue that the international system in question was predominantly hierarchical, as this would undermine the universality claim, but merely that there is no conceivable reason to outrightly reject the presence and consequences of a hierarchical component. On the contrary, the inclusion of varying degrees of hierarchy might even account for change in international politics, which would address one of neorealism's harshest returning criticisms. With this belief, I align myself with Buzan, Little and Richards, who hoped to reach more with the theory, "(…) without compromising the basic distinction between structure and unit levels".[87]

The final thing that I would like to touch on before finishing this thesis, is the limitations of its format. I am not under the illusion that I have treated the historical context of my case-study with the scrutiny, and eye for attention and detail that it deserves. Only an academic work at least ten times the size of this thesis could do a subject of this extent justice. While I have barely scratched the surface, I do hope to have provided some insight into the treasure trove of information that is the international system of the Mediterranean and Ancient Near East in Late Antiquity; as well as the potential of applying IR-theories to pre-modern history to improve our understanding of international relations in a historical context that has remained unfamiliar to modern political theorists.

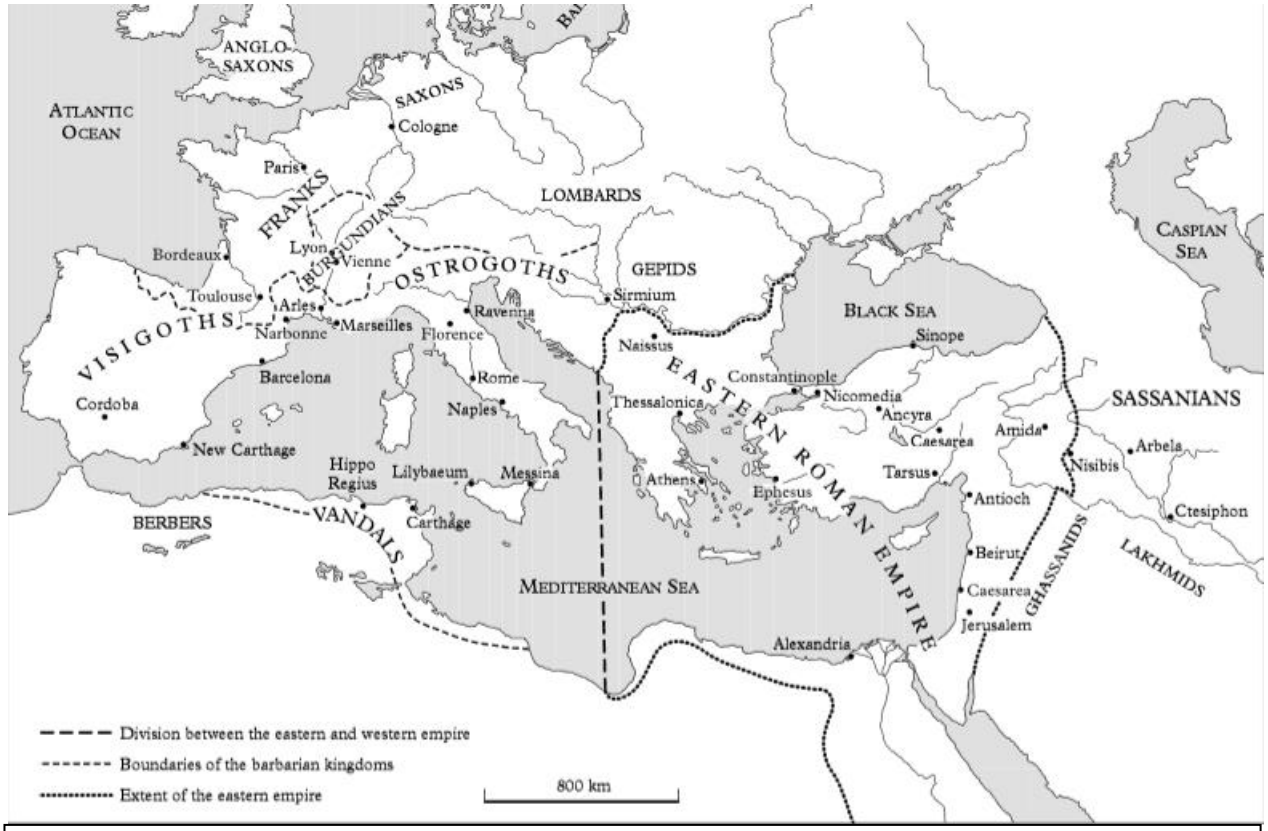
[87] Buzan, Little and Richards, *Logic of Anarchy,* p. 27.

Appendix: Maps of the Mediterranean – Ancient Near East

Map 1.1 “The Mediterranean in Late Antiquity”, in: G.W. Bowersock, P. Brown and O. Grabar, *Late Antiquity, A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1999), x.



Map 1.2 “The Ancient Near East in Late Antiquity”, in: G.W. Bowersock, P. Brown and O. Grabar, *Late Antiquity, A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1999), x.



Map 2. “The Roman Empire and the barbarian kingdoms around 525”, in: S. Mitchell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire, AD 284 – 641.* (Wiley Blackwell, 2015), p. 135.

Map 3. “The new Mediterranean empire of Justinian”, in: S. Mitchell, *A History of the Later Roman Empire, AD 284 – 641.* (Wiley Blackwell, 2015), p. 158.

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