

THE GEOPOLITICS OF DOMINATION

Geoffrey Parker

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GEOFFREY PARKER

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PREFACE

The attempts by certain states to achieve and retain a position of dominance over others has been a recurrent feature of world political history. One of the most important expressions of this has been territorial - the urge to secure control over large areas and so to establish empires of overwhelming size and power. In order to reach a deeper understanding of the international scene, both past and present, it is essential to address the question of the nature and causes of this urge to dominate. It has been associated with, among other things, political ambition, religion, militarism and greed. Perhaps above all it has been associated with the rise of the charismatic leader, the 'great man' who has taken his people in pursuit of some real or imagined destiny, and in so doing has set his imprint upon the age.

While these causes of the phenomenon of territorial dominance have deservedly been examined and debated with considerable vigour, specifically geographical aspects of the phenomenon have received far less attention. There has, it is true, been a nod in the direction of the 'geographical background', as though it were the stage set against which the action has taken place. However, little attempt has been made to examine holistically the geopolitical structures of those states which have attained positions of dominance, with a view to discovering what light such structures may be able to shed on the matter. The main purpose of this book is to attempt to rectify this omission.

While the object of study is the phenomenon of territorial dominance as a whole, this book will confine itself to an examination of its occurrence in the European and Mediterranean area - the western ecumene - since the Renaissance. It entails an examination of the geopolitical structures of those particular states which successively have succeeded in achieving a commanding position within it, and have then aspired to become the universal state. The particular states which have been considered as coming into this category are the Ottoman Empire, Spain, Austria, France and Germany. During the

nineteenth century Great Britain achieved a position of overwhelming world dominance, but it was not a territorial one so far as Europe was concerned, so it has not been included in this study. The Russian Empire and the Soviet Union are examined with a view to discovering the incidence of dominant state characteristics which they display, and relating this to both Russian and Soviet international behaviour. The basic question being addressed is this: Is there a specific geopolitics of territorial dominance and, if so, to what extent does it help us to a better understanding of the whole phenomenon?

I acknowledge with gratitude the assistance given me during the writing of this book by the Royal Geographical Society and by the University of Birmingham. From the outset my wife, Brenda, has been an active participant and partner in the enterprise, and both her wide knowledge and her critical eye have made her willingly given advice and assistance invaluable.

Geoffrey Parker
Lichfield

ONE

BIDS FOR SUPREMACY: THE URGE TO EXPANSION AND DOMINATION

'Life is a continuous sequence of dominations,' said the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations in his speech to the Second Session in 1947'. [1] The attempts by some states to achieve and retain positions of dominance have done much to shape the outlines of the world political map. The resistance of others to such domination, and their refusal to accept its consequences, has been a factor of equal importance. The United Nations, like the League of Nations before it, was originally established after a disastrous war in which certain great powers sought to achieve positions of dominance. In essence it represented the refusal of the states of the world to accept such domination, and an assertion, in an admittedly halting and uncertain manner, of their right to freedom and self-determination.

The opposing desires to control and to resist, to dominate and to be free from domination have acted dialectically upon one another throughout modern times. Geopolitically, they have been responsible for what Henrikson referred to as 'the neatly segmented, multicoloured world of the standard political map.' [2] Nowhere is the complexity of this more in evidence than in Europe and the Mediterranean, the western ecumene of the World-Island. [3] While the political map here is a palimpsest, retaining considerable evidences of older and largely superseded political forms, the standard units are now the 'neatly segmented' territorial states. Known, usually quite wrongly, as 'nation-states' or simply as 'nations', their preponderant cultural unity has been used as a basis for political unity and for the centralisation of control over a wide range of activities. As part of the process of control, qualities have been attributed to the state well in excess of those which it actually possesses. In this way popular support, sometimes of a highly emotional character, is gained for its continued existence and for the régime which controls it. This nationalism may then supply the emotional and intellectual foundations for a further enlargement of the state, and thus for the commencement or continuation of an expansionist process. Its

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initial object, whether consciously expressed or not, is to attain some ideal or idealised geographical territory in which the state will be in close conformity with the physical and human environment in which it exists. This entails the attainment of a territory in which there is a large measure of physical unity bounded by clearly defined 'natural' frontiers. Such conditions constitute the physical basis for what is envisaged as a more secure, prosperous and easily-governed state. Its ultimate justification has been expressed as the creation of that particular morphology which God, Nature or Reason was deemed to have ordained for it. Such a morphology may take the form of a homogeneous geographical area, a region of physical unity, an amorphous 'living space' or a shape which can be reduced to a geometrical figure, such as a triangle or a hexagon. Perhaps the most powerful factor of all underlying the search for the ideal morphology has been the myth of a national 'golden age' in which there was fulfilment and glory within a large and impressive homeland. Goblet saw this as 'super-imposing maps of dreamland empires' upon far bleaker contemporary realities,[4] a phenomenon which Kristof called 'the shift towards an idealised past ... when the fatherland and people were true to themselves'.[5] Whether it was space or time which was invoked, the central theme was what Ratzel called the 'Staatsidee,' a philosophical and moral conception of the mission and destiny of the state and the image of what it should become.[6] The nature of the national territory, and the natural environment occupied by the people then become woven into the fabric of the cultural heritage.

Such idealised morphologies can hardly be expected to fit together neatly like the pieces in some providential jigsaw puzzle, and the striving towards them has in practice usually brought states into conflict with one another. The possibility of armed confrontation has rarely deterred states from the pursuit of their territorial ambitions, especially when the prospect of material advantage has also beckoned. Force, or at least the threat of force, has been the method all too regularly employed in attempting to alter the frontiers of the state, and the stronger state is the one which is in the better position to attain its ambitions. While such territorial power politics has constituted the normal pattern of interstate relationships, there has also been a widespread countervailing desire to see the continuation of Henrikson's 'neatly segmented multicoloured world'. The ambition of particular states to promote their own territorial advantage, and in so doing to ride roughshod over the others, has been checked by alliances of the threatened states. Thus the drive towards what is conceived as being the ideal state morphology has had to take into account the ability of other states, either alone or in combination, to set limits to its attainment. In the real world, frontiers have often been truce lines which have fallen

well short of the ideal. When the balance of power has been seen to change, then eventually attempts have been made to redraw the frontiers so as to reflect the new situation. The durability of the multicoloured geopolitical surface at any time thus depends on the extent to which it accords with that 'geophysical and geosocial world'[7] which underlies it. If it does, then geopolitical stability will ensue; if it does not, even after a period of war, then further adjustment becomes necessary until the political surface conforms more closely to the other surfaces.

A major problem in bringing about adjustment is that the geopolitical surface tends to harden rapidly and then to assume the role of a given, a phenomenon as enduring as those natural features which are woven into its polychromatic patterns. The state exists in both space and time, and not only does it aspire towards the ideal morphology but also towards a rock-like permanence. The thought of decline and fall is altogether too painful to be contemplated with equanimity. Far too much has been invested in success by all classes of society for the retreat from greatness to be shrugged off as being part of a normal and inevitable process.

The geopolitical surface consequently possesses two particularly unstable characteristics. One is that since it is in the nature of the state to behave as though it were a permanent phenomenon and to put up considerable resistance to all changes which might be disadvantageous to it, pressures will tend to build up beneath the hardening political surface. These will then periodically erupt and in so doing cause severe damage to the demographic, economic and social surfaces constituting that 'geosocial world' which lies beneath it. The second unstable feature results from this disruption. Taking advantage of the disruption, certain states may then attempt to change the system definitively so as to promote their own particular advantage. Rather than working for peaceful change within the system, they choose to operate outside it and eventually to replace it with one constructed after their own image. In this way what may have started out as being an attempt to secure frontier rectifications and limited territorial gains may be transformed into the establishment of a regional hegemony. In some instances it may not stop there, and the expansionist state may then seek to establish a position of supremacy over a wider area. This constitutes domination, as it is understood in this book, and it is a phenomenon which has been frequently identified and variously explained. To Lord Acton it was a 'law of the modern world that power tends to expand indefinitely' and in so doing to transcend all barriers, abroad and at home, until itself met by superior force.[8] Braudel talked in vaguer terms of that 'hunger for the world' which was characteristic

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of expansionist states[9] and Martin Wight of the aspiration 'to become a universal empire'.[10]

What exactly is the cause of such 'hunger' on the part of certain states, this desire for expansion and universality? O'Sullivan has recently described it quite simply as being the consequence of that 'aggressive spirit' which has always been a fundamental driving force in world affairs. History, he asserts, 'is a striking record of the persistent desire of some people to lord it over others'.[11] But such an 'animus dominandi' relates not only to populations, but to territory as well. Since there is a historical distinction between 'regnum' and 'dominium,' the former implying rule over people and the latter over territory, the territorial imperative has always been a built-in feature of domination. The acquisition of territory, and ipso facto of everything on it, is the ultimate expression of the will to control. Unlike other more specific forms of control it constitutes what Sack has termed an 'open-ended' method of exercising control. Territoriality 'offers a means of asserting control without specifying in detail what is being controlled'.[12]

If it is to be more than simply a Vandal-like whirlwind conquest of brief duration and leaving little legacy, the exercise of such control must be based on something more substantial than either the 'aggressive spirit' or a 'hunger for the world'. To give it durability, it requires both a justification and an organisation to put it into practice. In Wight's words it must 'appeal to some design of international unity and solidarity'.[13] Justification has usually been provided by the state's invocation of noble and universal ideals, what Niebuhr called harnessing 'religious impulses and philosophies as instruments of its purposes'.[14] The object of organisation has been the creation of a centralised and uniform political structure through which control may most effectively be exercised. By placing its firm imprint on its conquests the expanding state aspires to a durability it would otherwise be unlikely to attain. An overall structure of this sort is what constitutes an empire.

The 'maius imperium' was originally the authority bestowed on its officials by the Senate of the Roman Republic for the discharge of certain specific commissions in its name. Its object was the furtherance of the 'res publica,' the general good, but in time the purpose of the authority bestowed tended to become less specific and to encompass broader objectives. Thus, well before the Roman Empire came into being, the imperium had come to possess a territorial sense, and the specific commission of the Senate had given place to the creation of a territorial state within the boundaries of which the exercise of authority was curbed by ever fewer restraints. From the time of Augustus the head of state was also given the title of imperator, the bearer of the authority of the imperium. Later, by assuming the additional title

of dominus, he asserted complete authority over the territory of the empire. 'Regere imperio populos' implied absolute authority over all the people living inside the imperial frontiers. Rome thus assumed the position of hegemonial state of the Mediterranean, so achieving for the first time control of a region which had for long been an economic and cultural unit but, until then, never a political one. The impressive edifice was further extended to become the 'imperium orbis terrarum,' in effect the universal state of the western world. At its maximum territorial extent during the reign of the emperor Trajan it stretched from the north of Europe to the Sahara and from the Atlantic Ocean to Mesopotamia. While it centred on the Mediterranean coastlands, it embraced within its extended frontiers a variety of contrasting geographical environments. With the divine Imperator at its head, it was able to exercise virtually unlimited and 'open ended' control within these vast territories.

Long after its fall, the idea of the universal state continued to be a force in the western ecumene. It was kept alive both in the spiritual form of 'respublica Christiana,' deriving its authority from the Pope in Rome, and the political one of 'renovatio imperii Romanorum' - the reinstatement of the Roman Empire - embarked upon by Charlemagne's German successors. Along with the Byzantine Empire in the east, both sought to legitimise their existence by reference back to the imperium of the universal state of the ancient world. Following the failure to secure the longed-for unity, vernacular versions of imperium and Imperator were adopted by successor states possessing ever more tenuous links with Rome. During the nineteenth century the terms were again reactivated to indicate the ascendancy of the European powers over the rest of the World-Island. Such has been the impact of Europe's bid for world supremacy that the term 'imperialism' has since come to be closely identified with this particular phenomenon rather than with the far longer lineage of the attempts to establish a universal state within the western ecumene itself.

Lichtheim defined imperialism as 'the relationship of a hegemonial state to peoples or nations under its control'.^[15] There are many different degrees of control, ranging from the Procrustean, seeking to impose absolute uniformity, to a loose 'primus inter pares' situation which may be relatively benign and tolerant by comparison. All, however, have the effect of removing rights and freedoms from the subject peoples and vesting them instead in the controlling power. The degree of control exercised will depend on the relationship of the process of expansion to the characteristics of the area in which it is taking place. The nature and strength of the expanding power will influence the extent to which it is able to sustain the process of expansion. The physical and human characteristics of the area will then either impede or

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stimulate the process. If process and territory sustain and stimulate one another then the expansion is likely to be successful and swift; if they do not it may be difficult and protracted. According to Modelski, the acquiescence and even the active support of the subject people is an essential prerequisite for the maintenance of supremacy. 'Global power', he said, 'carried by a ruling nation cannot in the long run be supported solely by the people of that nation...In its relations with other peoples such power must satisfy them and give them an interest in the continuance and stability of the whole'. [16] Grenier, as quoted by Braudel, went even further than that by asserting that 'to be conquered a people must have acquiesced in its own defeat'. [17] By so doing, and at the same time accepting implicitly their own inferiority, the conquered people become the unwitting agents in the transformation of a hegemony into an empire.

Throughout the Europe-Mediterranean region, according to Stoianovich, there has been 'a force that was inimical to the very principle of universal monarchy, namely a strong tradition of opposition to territorial bigness, and to power without limits'. [18] This has led to considerable ambivalence on the matter of the optimum size of political structures, and of how all-embracing they should be. On the one hand there was the aspiration to the re-creation of an 'imperium orbis terrarum' in some form appropriate to the times. The Renaissance then gave birth to the idea of a united Europe founded upon the system of fairly equal and balanced territorial states. One of the more notable of such schemes was the Duc de Sully's 'grand dessein.' By the nineteenth century, with the sovereign states in the ascendant and the notion of a united Europe having been reduced, in Bismarck's phrase, to 'une fiction insoutenable' there still remained an aspiration towards an all-embracing structure which would curb the drift towards international anarchy. Originally taking the form of the 'Congress System', this soon became transformed into a 'concert' of the great powers designed to oversee the affairs of the continent. In the late nineteenth century, despite the growing rivalries of the great powers busily engaged in acquiring for themselves vast overseas empires, there remained an underlying desire for Europe to become something more than a fiction or a geographical expression. Especially following the completion of what Lord Bryce called the 'World-Process', [19] and the new perception of the totality of the globe which this produced, there was a belief that the 'civilised' countries, the torchbearers of progress in the world, should draw together in their own best interests, and especially in the task of illuminating that 'dark Egyptian night' which was believed to characterise most of the rest of the globe. Ironically, right on the eve of World War I, W.M. Ramsey had spoken of Europe's 'Imperial Peace' stretching back through the Middle Ages to Rome, and looked for-

ward to its re-establishment in a contemporary form in the not too distant future.[20]

Alongside this will to unity there remained widespread fears of its possible adverse consequences. To Acton it presented itself as the 'phantom of universal empire'. In his opinion 'the ancient belief in a supreme authority' could only be achieved 'at the expense of the equipoise of nations'. [21] As with the aspiration towards it, the fear of it also derived from Rome; not from the 'res publica' of Cicero but from the imperium of Caesar. Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon into Italia and his assumption of dictatorial powers was the prelude to Rome's occupation of the position of 'imperium orbis terrarum.' The fears of such 'caesarism' have focused on a succession of would-be European conquerors, but more sinisterly they invoke such awesome figures as Attila, Genghis Khan and Timur Lenk (Tamburlaine). The dread of the conquest of Europe from outside, and in particular from the inaccessible and mysterious depths of Asia, has always been a very real one. Too many Asiatic conquerors have been observed to begin their careers as popular heroes and to end them as bloodsoaked tyrants. European fears arising from the phenomenon of the world conqueror were clearly iterated by Marlowe when he made the fierce Tamburlaine proclaim:

The God of War resigns his rounge to me,
 Meaning to make me Generall of the world;
 Jove, viewing me in armes lookes pale and wan,
 Fearing my power should pull him from his throne.[22]

The principal European fears have thus not been of the idea of universal empire per se. At its best this idea has been identified with progress and prosperity and with that 'Imperial Peace' of which Ramsey spoke. The fear rather has been of the nature of the putative conquerors themselves and the likely adverse consequences of this for Europe. A widespread perception, usually supported by much empirical evidence, has been that expanding states rarely bode well for those unfortunate enough to lie in their paths. The central problem in the past, observed Louis Janz, has been that the growth of large states has been associated less with the creation of European unity than with such terms as expansion, annexation, conquest, Anschluss, penetration, occupation and protectorate. One might add with Marlowe, that it has been also associated with 'armes', 'war', 'griesly death' and, ultimately, 'the bankes of Styx'. All the terms used to describe political entities, said Janz, 'contain one common factor that has characterised the international relationships of European states during the past thousand years: the bid for supremacy, whether made or achieved by force'. [23]

The principal underlying cause of the European and World wars of modern times has been the refusal of the

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international community to accept the legitimacy of such bids for supremacy. Any acceptance of the emergence of a new 'Imperator Caesar Augustus,' whether in the form of a Charles V, Louis XIV, Napoleon or Mussolini, has not been forthcoming. In the end the putative 'Generall of the World' has been removed from the scene and Acton's 'equipoise of nations' has been, at least for a time, restored. The resistance to domination has generally taken the form of ad hoc alliances of relatively less powerful states which have raised their banners in the name of freedom against tyranny. In such circumstances some small states have gained a power and recognition well beyond their relatively modest size, and national Davids have successfully beaten off the imperial Goliaths. By taking up the cudgels against the imposition of universalism by force, they have become the champions of the existence of a polychromatic Europe. The establishment of the sovereign state of Switzerland in the fastnesses of the Alps was an early example of the defiance of seemingly overwhelming power by a small band of medieval freedom-fighters. The Oath of the Rutli and the legend of William Tell are affirmations of the deep desire of the inhabitants of 'Das Haus der Freiheit' as Schiller called the Alps, to be free from the constraints of the universal state which enveloped them.

Between the disintegration of the limited universal states of the Middle Ages and the middle of the twentieth century, five states can be identified as having engaged in serious bids for supremacy over the western ecumene. These are the Ottoman Turks, Spain, Austria, France and Germany.[24] Although not one of them actually became an universal state, each of them attained a dominating position and mounted a powerful challenge to the continuation of the existing order. On each occasion this order was profoundly shaken and radical changes were brought about to the balance of power within it.

These five states had many similarities as historical phenomena. Consciously or unconsciously they took from Rome the concepts of 'imperium' and 'dominium' and used them to justify and to legitimise their territorial expansion. Vernacular forms of Caesar, Imperator, Dux and Dominus were used to express supreme power and such Roman symbolism as the eagle, the orb, the fasces and the triumphal arch became a part of the iconography. Their object was not to achieve the 'renovatio imperii Romanorum' in its medieval sense, but to use Roman concepts and symbols as instruments of their purposes. Their common lineage was both spatial and historical. Spatially, their principal area of operation was the western ecumene, while historically they sought to emulate the unique achievement of its only really successful universal state.

Yet in spirit these dominant states were very different both from Rome itself and from one another. Rome was always more the model than the mentor for subsequent imperial-

isms.[25] Their *raison d'être* were a variety of Niebuhr's 'religious impulses and philosophies' and they included Christianity, Islam, Nature, Reason and racial superiority. In spatial terms not one of them actually attained the frontiers of the Roman Empire nor, on close scrutiny, did their morphologies bear very much resemblance to it. The territories which they succeeded at different times in conquering during their successive bids for supremacy stretched from Scandinavia to the Russian steppes and deeper into the Middle East than the Romans had ever successfully penetrated. However, the one common object of this heterogeneous band of conquerors was the achievement of dominance over the lands of the western *ecumene*.

'What is surprising', said Gould, 'is not the uniqueness of patterns of spatial organisation...but their extraordinary similarity... There are, perhaps, deep structures of human behaviour underlying these repetitive patterns'.[26] In order to test the validity of this in the area of state behaviour, an examination will be made of the geopolitical structures of the five states which have aspired to reach a dominant position. The main object of this will be to seek these 'repetitive patterns' and so to identify those spatial characteristics which have underlain the bids for supremacy.

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2. A.K. Henrikson, 'The Geographical "Mental Maps" of American Foreign Policy Makers', *International Political Science Review: Politics and Geography*, vol. 1, no.4, 1980.
3. 'World-Island' was a term first used by Halford Mackinder to describe the single land-mass made up by Europe, Asia and Africa, See H.J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality; A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Constable, London, 1919), pp. 81ff. The term '*ecumene*' was coined by Derwent Whittlesey and he defined it as being 'the most populous region of a state, particularly that part most closely knit by communication lines'. See D. Whittlesey, *The Earth and the State: A Study in Political Geography* (Holt, New York, 1939), p. 597. The word is derived from the Greek *oikoumene*, meaning the whole of the inhabited world. Arnold Toynbee talked of 'the old world *Oikoumene*' as meaning the Mediterranean-Middle Eastern region which he saw as having possessed a fundamental historical unity. The use of 'western *ecumene*' in this book is an adaptation of this concept to the modern world scene, and is chosen in place of the clumsier 'Europe-Mediterranean region'. Roughly bounded by the Urals-Caspian line in the east and by the Sahara and its Middle-Eastern extension in the south, it stands in distinction

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to the other 'ecumenes' of the World-Island: the 'eastern ecumene' centring on China and the Far East, and the 'southern ecumene' consisting mainly of the Indian sub-continent.

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5. L.K.D. Kristof, 'The Russian Image of Russia: An Applied Study in Geopolitical Methodology' in C.A. Fisher, *Essays in Political Geography* (Methuen, London, 1968).

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12. D.R. Sack, *Conceptions of Space in Social Thought* (Macmillan, London, 1980), p.199.

13. M. Wight, *Power Politics*, p.37.

14. R. Niebuhr, *Nations and Empires* (Faber & Faber, London, 1959), p.127.

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19. J. Bryce, 'The Relations of the Advanced and the Backward Races of Mankind', *Romanes Lecture* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1902).

20. W.M. Ramsey, 'The Imperial Peace', *Romanes Lecture* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1913).

21. Lord Acton, *Lectures in Modern History*, p. 50.

22. C. Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great*, Part 1, Act V, sc.i.

23. L. Janz, 'The Enlargement of the European Community', *European Community*, No. 1, 1973 (Office of the European Community, London, 1973).

24. A sixth state - Italy during the Fascist period - also sought to achieve a dominant position in the western ecumene. The principal object of its foreign policy was to become the leading power in the Mediterranean region. While

it possessed many of the geopolitical characteristics of a dominant state during the first half of the twentieth century, as a result of its near total lack of success in attaining its expansionist ambitions, it would have been quite unrealistic to have included it here.

25. As a result of both geography and ideology, Fascist Italy came closer to certain aspects of the Roman Empire than any of the five states examined. Fascism took its name from the *fasces*, the bundle of sticks with an axe, which was the symbol of Roman authority and of its *imperium*. Its national territory included *Italia*, that part of the Italian peninsula south of the Rubicon river which had been the centre of the Roman Empire, and the city of Rome was its national capital. Civic buildings in the Roman imperial style were constructed in Rome and elsewhere and grand processional avenues were laid out. The reactivation of the term *Mare Nostrum* as *Mare Nostro* was meant to show to the world that the Mediterranean was now considered to be an Italian sea, and that it was intended to embark upon the re-creation of the Roman Empire in a modern form. This ambition was forcefully expressed in cartographic terms in the gigantic mosaic maps of the growth of the Roman Empire which were erected in the *Via dei Fori Imperiali*. However, by the early 1940s it was only with considerable support from her ally, Germany, that Italy was able to maintain even a semblance of regional hegemony in the eastern Mediterranean, and this was soon to crumble in the face of Anglo-American maritime power.

26. D. Gregory, *Ideology, Science and Human Geography* (Hutchinson, London, 1978), p.104.