

4. The Kings

In all the antiquities, the shift from priests to kings is part of a larger centralization process that includes a focus on war, law, and commerce.

There is a factor of scale: you cannot have a little elephant or a big mouse. Family affairs can be handled by parents, and the concerns of several villages by a council of elders, but an empire needs a large staff, to oversee taxation and administer justice. This in turn requires a city, and that city presently becomes a horizon of opportunity for the individual; for women as well as men.

India¹

The Buddha traveled about with a few disciples, being accommodated each night by a householder. But the longer shelter required during the summer rainy season set a precedent, and after the Buddha's death, mendicant Buddhism began to be replaced by monastic Buddhism. Wealth from commerce permitted ever grander accommodations: first a meeting hall where monks would gather twice a month for instruction, and later, a fully residential monastery.

Then Chandragupta Maurya conquered a large territory. With the Mauryas we have a firm chronology of events, and a tradition of law, with Kautilya as its founding figure, and the *Arthashastra* as its text.² The third Maurya ruler, Aśoka, was converted to Buddhism – or rather, Aśoka *took over* Buddhism, seeking out heresies and taking charge generally. *The secular had triumphed.*

China³

An early “Confucius” regretted knowing little about early ritual:

LY 3:9 (0342). The Master said, The ceremonies of Syà: I could discuss them, but Kǐ has not enough evidence. The ceremonies of Yīn: I could discuss them, but Sūng has not enough evidence . . .

But the “Confucius” of a generation later felt confidence, not only in his knowledge of the *past*, but also in his knowledge of the *future*:

LY 2:9 (0317) . . . The Master said, In the Yīn's continuing with the Syà rituals, what they subtracted and added can be known. In the Jōu's continuing with the Yīn rituals, what they subtracted and added can be known. And if someone should carry on after Jōu, even though it were a hundred generations, it can be known.

The 0432 Greek discovery of the Metonic Cycle, which rationalized the calendar, had reached China. *With that shift to the empirical, modernity begins.*

¹See Thapar **A History of India** (1984), 70-82.

²Its early date has been doubted, due to the presence of late linguistic forms, but those forms are present *only in the commentary*, not in passages attributed to Kautilya.

³See Brooks **The Original Analects** (1998), 80 and 114.

The Biblical Version

In the Bible, the shift occurred when the king threatened to take over from the priest. That moment is on record. Priest Samuel, speaking on behalf of the sacred power, had tried to argue the people out of wanting a king:

1Sam 8:10. And Samuel told all the words of Yahweh unto the people that asked of him a king. [11] And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you. He will take your sons, and appoint them unto him, for his chariots and to be his horsemen; and they shall run before his chariots; [12] and he will appoint them unto him for captains of thousands, and captains of fifties; and to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make the instruments of war, and the instruments of his chariots [13][And he will take your daughters to be perfumers, and to be cooks, and to be bakers . . . [18] And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king whom ye shall have chosen you, and Yahweh will not answer you in that day.

But from their merely practical standpoint, the people stood firm:

1Sam 8:19. But the people refused to hearken unto the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay, but we will have a king over us, [20] that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.

The rise of the great powers, and the nearby threat of the warlike Philistines, meant that the Hebrews too would have a king. The priests could only go along. To save face, they added to the record, *making the king Yahweh's own idea*:

1Sam 9:15. Now Yahweh had revealed unto Samuel a day before Saul came, saying, [16] Tomorrow about this time, I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be prince over my people Israel; and he shall save my people out of the hand of the Philistines; for I have looked upon my people because their cry has come unto me . . .

With the king there came indeed a focus on (1) war, (2) law, and (3) commerce, all of which widened the opportunities which had been available to individuals, and correspondingly weakened the power of the clans.

1. War

The great revolution in warfare was the coming of the light horse-drawn war chariot. It was invented in Anatolia, but proved to be effective as far away as India and China, where it achieved what can only be called transformative conquests. It was a mobile archery platform. In attack, it was a shock weapon; when the foe fled, the chariot and its archer could pursue and continue to kill. None of this, let it be noted, has anything to do with Yahweh, or any other god. It is all stuff that people invented by themselves.

The chariot with its light spoked wheels was a work of art, and so was the training of the horses which would draw it. There exists a manual of horse training by Kikkuli of Mitanni, written in Hurrian, but so esteemed that it was translated into both Hittite and Akkadian. It gives day-by-day instructions for the seven-month training period.

Here is the fifth day:⁴

Pace two leagues, run twenty furlongs out and thirty furlongs home. Put rugs on. After sweating, give one pail of salted water and one pail of malt-water. Take to river and wash down. Swim horses. Take to stable and give further pail of malted water and pail of salted water. Wash and swim again. Give handful grass. Wash and swim again. Feed at night one bushel boiled grain with chaff.⁵

Among the first rulers to employ the chariot force, if still on a small scale, was Anitta of Kanesh, in his siege of Salatiwara, c01750.

A century later, about 1650, the Hyksos, from Syria and Palestine, using chariots, conquered Egypt, and ruled it from their capital Avaris. Here is an Egyptian warrior, Ahmose son of Eben, of the deeds of Thutmose I in expelling the Hyksos from Avaris, about 01550, and pursuing them into Canaan:⁶

Then Avaris was despoiled. Then I carried off spoil from there: one man, three women, a total of four persons. Then his majesty gave them to me to be slaves. Then Sharuhem was besieged for three years. Then his majesty despoiled it. Thereupon I carried off spoil from there: two women and a hand. Then the Gold of Valor was given to me, and my spoil was given to me to be slaves.

Thus were the Hyksos driven from Egypt. And now, Egypt too had chariots.

From his capital Amarna, Akhenaten (01352-01336) ruled the towns of Palestine. The towns beg for chariots to protect them from the marauding Habiru or 'Apiru.⁷ It never comes. As long as those towns do not rebel, Akhenaten does not greatly care who rules any one of them.

The highly mobile 'Apiru were the other side of the military revolution. Against them, the towns found no defense. The Amarna letters⁸ complain:

Amarna #288. The land of the king is lost; in its entirety it is taken from me; there is war against me, as far as the lands of Seir (and) as far as Gath-carmel . . . I have become like an 'Apiru . . . for there is war against me . . . the 'Apiru capture the cities of the king . . . Behold Zimreda, the townsmen of Lachish have smitten him, slaves who had become 'Apiru.

Amarna #289 . . . They have taken it, the town of Rubutu. And now as for Jerusalem – behold, this land belongs to the king, or why like the town of Gaza is it loyal to the king? . . . Behold the land of the town of Gath-Carmel . . . and the men of Gath have a garrison in Beth-Shan. Or shall we do like Lab'ayu, who gave the land of Shechem to the 'Apiru?

Such were the ravages of the 'Apiru, and the appeals of the several towns.

⁴Quoted from Drews **Coming** 91.

⁵Remarks Drews, “by the end of the seven-month program, the horses were capable of trotting long distances without tiring, and of pulling a chariot at top speed for a distance of slightly over a mile.”

⁶ANET 233-234. Sharuhem is mentioned in Joshua 19:6 as in the land of Simeon.

⁷Not “Hebrews.” To repeat an earlier note (p13), *habiru* or *'apiru* is cognate with Akkadian *habiru* or *hapiru* “fugitive, outlaw.”

⁸For others, see ANET 483-490; for a complete translation, see Moran **Amarna**.

The elite infantry strike force did not come to an end with Amarna times. An earlier version of the story of Lot⁹ shows Abram using such a force:

Gen 14:12. And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed. [13] And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew: now he dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, the Amorite, brother of Esheol, and brother of Aner, and these were confederate with Abram. [14] And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued as far as Dan. [15] And he divided himself against them by night, he and his servants, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus. [16] And he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also . . .

With this personal force, "born in his house" and thus entirely loyal to him, Abram defeated and despoiled an opposing army. Much later, we have David:

1 Sam 27:2. And David arose, and passed over, he and the six hundred men that were with him, unto Achish the son of Maach, king of Gath. [3] And David dwelt with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household . . . [5] And David said unto Achish. If now I have found favor in thine eyes, let them give me a place in one of the cities in the country . . . [6] Then Achish gave him Ziklag that day . . . [8] And David and his men went up and made a raid upon the Geshurites, and the Girzites, and the Amalekites . . . [9] And David smote the land, and saved neither man nor woman alive, and took away the sheep, and the oxen, and the asses, and the camels, and the apparel, and he returned, and came unto Achish. [10] And Achish said, Against whom have ye made a raid today? And David said, Against the South of Judah . . .

In the time of his kingship, David's power still rested on his "mighty men:"

2 Sam 23:8. These are the names of the mighty men whom David had: Joshebbasshebeth a Tah-chemonite, chief of the captains; the same was Adino Eznite, against eight hundred slain at one time. [9] And after him was Eleazar the son of Dodai the son of an Ahohite, one of the three mighty men with David, when they defied the Philistines that were there gathered together to battle, and the men of Israel were gone away. [10] He arose, and smote the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand clave unto the sword; and Yahweh wrought a great victory that day . . .

Notice the local affiliations: Eznites, Ahohites. These men had no powerful kinfolk in the land, and relied on David for their position. So also with the Janissaries of the Ottomans, or the Swiss Guards of Pope Julius II.

The importance of these elite special forces still continues in our own time. A commando group can do things which less trained troops cannot. And in the civilian sector, the armed gang becomes something like the default ruler of neighborhoods or cities: wherever there is a failed government, or none at all.

⁹For the famously problematical Gen 14, see §11.

2. Law

Fairness is perhaps the most deeply rooted of all human ethical instincts. People should get what they have coming: not more, not less.¹⁰ The early Near Eastern lawcodes are *guides for judges*. They assure uniformity of practice – number of witnesses,¹¹ severity of punishments – across the ruler’s domain.

In c01850, the Sumerian king **Lipit-Ishtar** put together the oldest known lawcode.¹² It is only partly preserved. Two of its provisions were:

9. If a man entered the orchard of [another] man [and] was seized there for stealing, he shall pay ten shekels of silver.
10. If a man cut down a tree in the garden of [another] man, he shall pay one half mina of silver.

Hammurabi of Babylon (01792-01759) modeled his own code on that of Lipit-Ishtar. It was publicly posted.¹³ The earliest Biblical code, the one in Exodus 21-23, included some Hammurabi rules, sometimes *in the same order*:

Ham	Exod	Content (Omitting Differences of Detail)
3, 4	23:1	False witness
8	22:1, 3b, 4	Stealing ox or sheep
9-10	22:9	Something lost is found in a man’s possession
14	21:16	Stealing a man; death penalty
21	21:16	Housebreaker may be killed
37	22:5	Animal feeds on neighbor’s field; pay the damage
117	21:2	Limited term of service for bought slaves
125	22:7f	Loss of money on deposit; restitution required
126	22:9	False claim of loss; must pay double
171	21:11	Slave concubine may go free if not provided for
195	21:15	Penalty for smiting a father
199	21:23-25	Penalty for injuring a slave
206	21:18f	Penalty for accidentally injuring another
209-214	21:22	Penalty for causing miscarriage
245-246	22:14f	Injury to borrowed animal must be made good
250	21:28	Ox gores someone to death; no claim on owner
251	21:29-31	If ox was known to gore, owner is liable
267	22:12	If sheep is lost through carelessness, shepherd must pay

This is from Driver **Exodus** 420f. In §23, we will look in on the Exodus “Covenant Code,” to see in detail how it handles those precedents.

¹⁰This is the also sense of Chinese yì 義, conventionally translated “righteousness,” but perhaps better as “rightfulness.”

¹¹A sensitive matter. Num 35:30, “Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be slain at the mouth of witnesses; but one witness shall not testify against any person that he die.” Deut 17:6, “at the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is to die be put to death; at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death.”

¹²ANET 159-161.

¹³For the entire Hammurabi code, see Roth **Law** 71-139.

3. Commerce

Law changed the status of women. It also changed the status of property. Two court cases show that transition. The first grants a right of inheritance:

Num 17:1-11. Then drew near the daughters of Zelophehad . . . and they stood before Moses, and before Eleazar the priest . . . saying, Our father . . . had no sons. Why should the name of our father be taken away from among his family, because he had no son? Give unto us a possession among the brethren of our father. And Moses brought their case before Yahweh. And Yahweh spake unto Moses, saying, The daughters of Zelophehad speak right; thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren . . .

and the second *qualifies* that right, on behalf of the families:

Num 36: 1-12. And the heads of the fathers' houses of the family of the children of Gilead . . . came near, and spake before Moses . . . and they said, Yahweh commanded my lord to give the land for inheritance by lot to the children of Israel, and my lord was commanded by Yahweh to give the inheritance of Zelophehad our brother unto his daughters. And if they be married to any of the sons of the other tribes of the children of Israel, then will their inheritance be taken away from the inheritance of our fathers, and will be added to the inheritance of the tribe whereunto they shall belong . . . And Moses commanded the children of Israel according to the word of Yahweh, saying, the tribe of the sons of Joseph speaketh right. This is the thing which Yahwe doth command concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, . . . only into the family of the tribe of their father shall they be married. So shall no inheritance of the children of Israel remove from tribe to tribe . . .

But if property can be inherited, it can also be sold, giving new options to anyone with money to invest. Canaanite tradition had always sought to protect the have-nots, by such customs as leaving harvest gleanings for the poor.

In an area of marginal rainfall, one allows the land to lie fallow periodically. This custom was presently embodied in law, and known as the Sabbath:

Exod 23:10. And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the increase thereof; [11] but in the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie fallow.

Lev 25:3 . Six years shalt thou sow thy field, and six years shalt thou prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruits thereof; [4] but in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath unto Yahweh: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard . . .

Deut 15:1. At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. [2] And this is the manner of the release: every creditor shall release that which he hath lent unto his neighbor and his brother; he shall not exact it of his neighbor and his brother, because Yahweh's release hath been proclaimed. [3] Of a foreigner thou mayest exact it; but whatsoever of thine is with thy brother thy hand shall release.

The early community was not just solicitous for the poor, it was a barrier to their commercial exploitation. That barrier did not hold for long . Proverbs 31 ends with praise of an ideal wife, the manager of some great estate. Here is that poem (with v15, missing in the Masoretic text, supplied from the LXX).

And with it, we will conclude this chapter.

- [1] A worthy woman who can find?
for her price is far above rubies.
- [2] The heart of her husband trusteth in her,
and he shall have no lack of gain.
- [3] She doeth him good and not evil
all the days of her life.
- [4] She seeketh wool and flax,
and worketh willingly with her hands.
- [5] She is like the merchant-ships;
she bringeth her bread from afar.
- [6] She riseth also while it is yet night,
and giveth food to her household, and tasks to the maidens.
- [7] She considereth a field, and buyeth it;
with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.
- [8] She girdeth her loins with strength
and maketh strong her arms.
- [9] She perceiveth that her merchandise is profitable,
her lamp goeth not out by night.
- [10] She layeth her hands to the distaff,
and her hands hold the spindle.
- [11] She stretcheth out her hand to the poor,
Yea, she reacheth forth her hand to the needy.
- [12] She is not afraid of the snow for her household,
for all her household are clothed with scarlet.
- [13] She maketh for herself carpets of tapestry,
her clothing is fine linen and purple.
- [13] Her husband is known in the gates,
when he sitteth among the elders of the land.
- [14] She maketh linen garments, and selleth them,
and delivereth girdles unto the merchant.
- [15] She opens her mouth heedfully and with propriety,
and controls her tongue.
- [16] Strength and dignity are her clothing,
and she laugheth at the time to come.
- [17] She openeth her mouth with wisdom,
and the law of kindness is on her tongue.
- [18] She looketh well to the ways of her household,
and eateth not the bread of idleness.
- [19] Her children rise up, and call her blessed,
her husband also, and he praiseth her, saying:
- [20] *“Many daughters have done worthily
but thou excelleth them all.*
- [21] *Grace is deceitful, and beauty is vain,
but a woman that feareth Yahweh, she shall be praised.*
- [22] *Give her of the fruit of her hands,
and let her works praise her in the gates.”*

It is one of the great love poems of the Bible, as the last three lines show. Economically speaking, it shows how far the entrepreneurial spirit had come.