

SACRED ROYALTY

From the Pharaoh to the
Most Christian King

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Wooden panel-painting, the earliest known portrait of
an English monarch, dating from the 1390s.

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INTRODUCTION

Several years ago, when we published our study *Les Métiers de Dieu*¹ as an introduction to a spirituality of the active life, we left out of our exposition the priesthood and the royalty, the loftiest reflections of the divine activities *ad extra*, which by their very importance exceeded the framework we proposed to ourselves, and we wrote that we awaited another occasion to speak of the problem of social organisation in order to set forth the bases of a sacred politics, several aspects of which we had quickly sketched in the conclusion of the book.

This occasion is presented to us by the spectacle offered today of the breaking up of our civil societies; a decomposition the beginnings of which date back distantly, to be sure, but which is accelerating dangerously. The extent is such that these societies seem to be afflicted by a galloping consumption, to counter which thinkers—theoreticians and inventors of systems of every kind—seek remedies in vain, since the source of the evil is situated at the level of the modern intelligence, which, in this domain as in others, operates according to ineffective governing principles that very few are prepared to renounce.

Thus, the most urgent task at the present time is the reformation of the intelligence. As others have said before more eloquently, it is a matter of reconstituting an intellectual elite in the true sense of the word; that is, capable of rejoining the spiritual principles of the Great Tradition which the West progressively betrayed five centuries ago, ever since the age of the celebrated Renaissance, which in reality was in many respects a true death.

1. An English version is available as *Divine Craftsmanship: Preliminaries to a Spirituality of Work* by Jean Hani, translated by John Champoux and Robert Procter, San Rafael, CA: Sophia Perennis, 2008.

The reconstitution of this intellectual elite must function not only in the higher spheres of religion—which, too, is in a sorry state—and philosophy in the true sense of the term, but in all domains that depend upon them, in particular that which immediately follows in order of precedence, for it governs the entire outward life of man: the social and political domain.

The problems posed within this area are difficult to broach today, for politics is an article of distrust, even contempt, on the part of our contemporaries who still retain sound ideas; an attitude which we easily understand when it is a question of political life as enacted before our eyes, and which offers us the scarcely uplifting spectacle of decadent regimes and heads of state who are often no more than wretches, dangerous megalomaniacs, or even agents of subversion—people who have scaled the heights of power and take advantage of a populace ironically declared to be sovereign, but which in reality is powerless in the face of speculations of every kind and stupefied by propaganda, like a crowd immersed in the burlesque of a carnival. The temptation is great, therefore, to lose interest in the political situation and retire within one's own ivory tower. But this is a position that must be surmounted, no matter how distasteful; for one who still has sound judgment and ideas, to abstain is to resign. Of course, we do not necessarily refer to an active engagement in civic life, which may not be one's vocation, and in our times is not without hazards. It seems to us that all men who are pained by an awareness of the present state of affairs can and must, if one may say so, seek the truth within the political domain also, and, having found it, teach others; for in the situation in which we find ourselves, this is the only way that things can change: by the minds of others changing for the better and recovering the right path.

It is to these men that this book is addressed in order to help them recover political truth to the extent we are able, because the first work of charity is that of the truth, on this plane as well as on all others. To tell the political truth, to repeat it gradually, is at a given moment perhaps the only thing possible, but it is of capital importance, for this truth, at first proceeding step

by step, will end by shining forth with powerful brilliance and sweeping away all established errors.

This political truth is not to be invented; it has long existed, or rather, it has always existed. It has not varied, at least not in its foundations, but only in its modalities, for it is not the fruit of human opinions, but, on the contrary, springs from superhuman principles revealed to man by metaphysics and by religion. Immutable throughout the course of time, it is universal in its extension; it is found in one form or another in all peoples and at all times, "from the Pharaoh to the Most Christian King"², passing through India, China, Africa, etc; only the modern world, child of the modern West, is ignorant of it or fights it. This truth is part of that sacred and universal tradition to which we refer in all our studies, for it is also the sole irrecusable reference for whoever wishes to find the truth that transcends opinions.

This political truth is what is incarnated in sacred royalty, namely, in the religious conception of the temporal power, the only one capable of organising a fully normal society, that is, a civil society that, while assuring the necessary material well-being, serves the final destiny of man, which is spiritual, since this type of political power is subject to the impulses of the Divine Spirit, the source of every norm of life in all domains.

A politics always depends upon a philosophy and, as Thucydides rightly saw, when principles get incarnated in a lasting institution, it will develop all their consequences. Bad politics is nothing other than bad philosophy erecting its principles into maxims of public law, so as in the end to lead the society to catastrophe. But it is not enough to say that, in order to have a good politics, it is necessary to have a good philosophy; it is necessary to specify further—since many of our contemporaries have forgotten this—that philosophy is not really good unless it depends upon metaphysics and is in perfect agreement with Revelation. Moreover, a philosophy so defined can be really and totally efficacious at the level of political action only if the rulers govern with their eyes fixed on the divine law, and with Divine

2. "The Most Christian King", *le roi très-chrétien*, was the traditional title of the king of France. See below p. 191.

aid, which requires that they be integrated in a spiritual organism that places Divine aid at their disposal. It is precisely this organism which is termed sacred royalty; sacred because, for the government of a given country, it participates in that Power which by its Providence governs the entire universe. And this participation is rendered effective by the rite conferred in the name of the Divine Power: the coronation or royal initiation.

No doubt, some will not fail to object that this lofty conception of government of a spiritual nature has not been able to prevent, at all times and in all places, the appearance of scarcely respectable princes, either owing to their incompetence or their weakness, or even because of their scandals or crimes, and whose memory history has documented. This could make one think that sacred royalty is no more capable of assuring the common good than any other political regime. To this we would reply first of all, that one must not exaggerate the number of bad princes, nor accord too much importance to history regarding this point: as happens in novels, it likes to bring to light the dramatic. In addition, since it makes use of the chronicles of the past, it is necessarily influenced by them. Now, for the most part, chronicles record only the crises, famines, terrors, etc.; in short, the calamities of the life of the age in question, and without further thought, passionately designate as responsible those who in reality were not. Thus, the number and importance of things that went badly, and those responsible, are considerably increased, while what is good, as well as good men, are left somewhat in the shadows. Moreover, let us not forget that history has often been deliberately denatured, whether owing to rivalries between individuals, groups or peoples, or for ideological reasons. In this respect, for two centuries the French have been presented with a history for the most part readily falsified in view of a precise ideology which more or less systematically calumniates man and his deeds at every opportunity. Having said that, we do not, of course, deny the existence of decadent or blameworthy princes, but only that this is not an argument against the systems of government of which they were detainers. Those who fulfil the loftiest functions, including the holiest, are

not always the best. But one must not find in these weaknesses of *men* arguments against the *institutions*.

If an institution is good, there is no reason to condemn it for the simple reason that at a given moment a ruler has been unworthy of it; for it is evident that in such a case the fault clearly comes not from the institution, but from the man, and precisely because he has not been faithful to the institution. And the impartial observer, when he considers with serenity the history of humanity, will have to acknowledge that all great things—we mean to say all truly great things, not the artificial greatness of many of the feats of modern “progress”—and all lasting things have been accomplished by people living under the kind of regime of which we are speaking. In any case—and this, we believe, is an observation worth noting—the institution of sacred royalty had, among others, the capital advantage that, through its intrinsic qualities, owing to the fact that it is founded on the nature of things, it offered society a solid framework that precisely allowed it to overcome, without irreparable harm, the misdeeds of a bad reign, and which for it was a guarantee for the future.

Let no one tell us, however, that it is impossible to turn back the clock, that the political regime of sacred royalty is past, and inconceivable in our world; in short, that it is an altogether obsolete conception. We think, on the contrary, that it is very timely, because only that is truly timely which is eternal. In relation to humanity, sacred royalty is in essence universal and eternal, for the simple reason that it is founded on universal and eternal principles. Certainly, we do not have in mind a pure and simple restoration of what has been, in the exact form that it had in times past—for nothing is ever repeated exactly in all its modalities—but of becoming aware of that which ought normally to exist, and which will necessarily return, whatever the form it may take, once the present decomposition has reached the end of its final stage. And that date is perhaps not as distant as might be thought. Meanwhile, for those who pursue it, the study of the models of the past will in any case have the advantage of allowing them to reason about the political problem in the light of sacred Tradition, and thus, as we have said above, of contrib-

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uting to an intellectual restoration, the necessary prelude to a restoration of the institutions.

CHAPTER I

SACRED ROYALTY

“It is necessary that the princes deign to recognise that the monarchy is at root a republic ... a republic with an hereditary president”; these words of Thiers¹ may apply to a good number of present-day kings that still remain in the great nations, but they could not apply in any way to true royalty. However, they allow us to situate sacred royalty *a contrario* inasmuch as they attest to the degradation of the authentic royal function. The true king differs radically from the constitutional king as well as from the republican magistrate—to which he is assimilated in a sense—by the nature and origin of his authority and function, and modern conceptions regarding these have nothing to do with the reality we propose to examine. Regardless of differences in detail in this or that country, the principles of these conceptions are very well summarised in the exposition of one of the “fathers” of modern theories of power in the eighteenth century: speaking of “political authority”, Diderot writes, “No man has received from nature the right to rule others,” which is certainly true if one speaks of political power. The consequence of this proposition, which must be acknowledged, is that the right to rule—which does exist—has to come from a superior being; but Diderot does not take this consequence into account. He considers paternal authority only for a moment in order to discard it from the social and political sphere: “If nature has established some authority, it is paternal power; but paternal power has its limits and, in the state of nature, it ends as soon as the children are able to direct themselves.” Does the power then come from God? No, because, he continues, “the power of God is always immediate

1. Discourse to the National Assembly on 8 June, 1871.

in the creature” and “God is a jealous master ... who never loses his rights and never communicates them.” A sophistry, a ridiculous proposition, a falsehood which no philosophy worthy of the name could admit.

“All other authority (than the paternal),” the author continues, “comes from a source other than nature. If this be well examined, it will always be traced back to one of these two sources: either the force and the violence of the one who has taken possession of it, or the consent of those who are subject to him through a contract, made or assumed, between them and the one to whom they have conferred authority,” because “the prince has received from his own subjects the authority which he has over them.”²

This theory—which is not Diderot’s, for it is that of almost all the “philosophers” of the century, and which comes to them directly from the English “free thinkers” and the works of Locke, but which originates earlier, as we shall see—is the basis of all the political constitutions and all the political philosophies of the modern world. It is the work of thinkers wandering in Aristophanic “clouds”, and has nothing to do, not only with the teachings of sacred science, which is obvious, but also with the most serious results of ethnology concerning different civilisations; results which contradict Diderot’s three propositions on violence, the social contract, and the delegation of authority. It is false to assume that power is a conquest of violence, as when Voltaire also said: “The first king was a lucky soldier.” Chesterton rightly pointed out that the saying concerning the strongest who, with great struggle, arrogated authority to himself, is not foolish only if the mystical element and the admiration aroused by the sovereign are not taken into account.³ The saying takes into account only the origin of violent regimes, tyrannies imposed by usurpers, who always and everywhere have been carefully distinguished from legitimate rulers. It is true that many kingdoms were founded by “victorious warriors”, but their victory served only to *designate* them for power, and not to

2. Diderot, *s.v.*, “Political Authority,” in *The Encyclopedia*.

3. G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, 1927, p. 67.

found this power, which has always been conferred in the name of something superior to material force and of a spiritual order, which is what Chesterton designates, inaccurately, by the word “mystical”, and which would be better termed “sacred”. The same remark applies to the social pact, the existence of which is undeniable, but the role of which under normal conditions consists merely in the *election*, the acceptance by the people of the ruler who will exercise power, but it does not consist in *investing* him with power. For in normal societies, power and authority do not come from the people, who, therefore, are quite unable to delegate it to the ruler. One had to await the deviations of the modern West to encounter such a statement, against which the entire universal tradition rises up. For tradition, authority has a supra-human source, which is its only possible justification. Let us note in passing that Christianity is in perfect agreement with this universal tradition, basing itself on the words of Christ, who told Pilate: “Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin” (John 19:11). This implies nothing less the divine origin of the imperial power of Rome. Despite all its errors, ethnology has the merit of showing how the source of political power in societies termed “primitive” involves a non-political element—which the ethnologists identify with magic. This identification is altogether inaccurate: in the first place, because they do not know in a precise manner what magic is, since it is confused with witchcraft, in which they see, at most, merely inventions, imposture and gestures without real efficacy; secondly, because, according to them, these inventions and shams are no more than means for an ambitious person to justify the violence that they assume he has imposed upon the group—which brings us back to the concepts of modern philosophers and sociologists—or at best, for creating the force which he has to impose on the group, which ultimately amounts to the same thing. The theory of the majority of ethnologists is weighed down with two errors: materialism and evolutionism. The first prevents them from acknowledging the truth and the nature of magical operations (as well as those of religion, let it be said

in passing); the second, which moreover is related to the first, makes them put forth as a principle, as an indisputable dogma, that men were savages to begin with, that they lived in hordes like animals—for humanity, according to them, descends from the apes—hordes in the midst of which, they assume strong men gradually began to appear, who imposed themselves by violence. This point of view, however, has been severely criticised by an ethnologist who has not allowed himself to become penetrated by the aforementioned philosophical double error. “The power of the ruler,” writes Servier, “is a cultural fact which varies from one civilisation to another.... It is absurd to wish to view this as the necessary stage, after the horde, of all social evolution.... It is vain to seek, in any civilisation whatsoever, the traces of an evolution of social structures going from the family to the clan, then to the city, to the nation and to empires. In humanity we find human groups which are perfectly organised and generally endowed with complex structures that are impossible to class and distribute over the length of an evolutionary scale.”⁴

Having said this, what is true in the results of ethnological research generally attests to a non-political, or non-sociological element, as at least the secondary basis of political power. Only this element is not magic, but it is rather *religion*, which is what Chesterton was saying when speaking of “mysticism”. Of course, we do not claim that there has not been magic, including its degenerate form, witchcraft, in the exercise of power in primitive societies and in all traditional societies, but this was only secondarily so. For contrary to what many ethnologists and historians of religions still think, magic did not come before religion, so that religion emerged from it. Rather, magic is some-

4. J. Servier, *L'homme et l'Invisible*, Paris, 1964, pp. 317 & 318. It is a pleasure for us to render homage here to J. Servier, who, from the beginning of his scientific activity at the French University, had the courage to fight the tyrannical and stupid “dogmas” inherited from the 18th and 19th centuries, which rendered ethnological researches sterile. The day that French science frees itself from the materialist quicksand, it will acknowledge all that he has done for it.

thing altogether different from religion; it co-existed with it, and was practiced on a different level.

It is this religious—or, more exactly, sacred—element that is the foundation of power in every normal society. Power comes from the Divinity, but, sociologically speaking, it comes through the mediation of paternity. The natural archetype of socio-political power is paternal authority, because the archetype of civil society, as Aristotle clearly saw, is the family. Just as society is an extension of the family in the form of a community, and not, as the moderns teach, a collection of individuals, so too the ruler, the king, exercises a power which is an extension within the group of the paternal function, which is of divine origin through the mediation of nature; the earthly father is the image, the reflection, of God the celestial Father, because “all paternity descends from the Father of lights” (Eph. 3:15 & Jas. 1:17).

It is from this source that royalty in its normal form—sacred royalty—proceeds; it is paternity, a paternity raised to the second power, sacred by nature, but whose sacredness is confirmed by means of rites.

* * *

But before entering upon its study, it is important to make clear what we mean by sacred royalty. Ethnology and the history of religions employ the expression in a very precise sense, inherited from the analysis made by Frazer in his famous work, *The Magical Origin of Kings*. Whatever subsequent modifications may have been made to Frazer’s conception, what is essential in it continues to be the guiding pattern of official scholars in their investigations. In order to define the “sacred king”, the “divine king”, they start from a kind of “portrait-type” of the sacred king, whose characteristic features are the following: 1) he is a god incarnate, 2) he is capable of influencing the life of his people in a beneficent manner, 3) more particularly, he is a maker of rain and good weather, 4) his powers are dependent upon his strength, his physical vigour, and that is why 5) his reign is limited, since after a fixed period, or upon approaching old age, he is killed, in fact or symbolically, and his divinity, along with

temporal sovereignty, passes to a younger and more vigorous man. Having taken this scheme from Frazer, they apply it to all cases, so that in order to be considered a “divine king”, the prince under investigation must fit the prototype, failing which he will not be considered a “sacred king,” and will be eliminated from the group of princes deemed worthy of entering the Frazerian pantheon of “divine kings”.

Although it is fundamentally true, we reject this abusive definition inasmuch as it applies fully only to rulers of societies that are termed “primitive,” and even then not to all. We who do not study royalty from the point of view of the ethnologists, nor from that of the history of religions, but rather from the standpoint of the universal sacred Tradition, consider sacred every king whose authority comes expressly from divinity and who exercises his power under the guarantee of the appropriate rites which authenticate such divine delegation, whatever may be the particular features of this divine character of the sacred royalty. These particularities, which vary from one tradition to another, such as the power to make rain, or to cure, etc., obviously spring from the divine quality where they do exist, but they may also not exist in this or that culture, which does not mean that the divine quality of the sovereignty is absent. As for the fact of killing the aged king, far from being a specific feature of sacred royalty, it is simply a fact of decadent cultures in which it constitutes the degenerate form of rites which we shall define later on, for they are found in various royalties pertaining to very developed cultures with a high degree of civilisation.

Let us add, in order to bring these preliminaries to an end, that we also do not agree with the position of those who reserve the quality of “sacred king” to those princes who are “priest-kings” and whose person combines royal and priestly powers. This conception is not unfounded, for assuredly there is no sharp distinction between the two powers, and even in traditional societies in which there exists a constituted priesthood along with the prince, the latter always retains a certain priestly character; however, this can be considerably reduced, without that signifying that the prince has ceased to be a “divine” or “sacred” king.

Thus, we shall keep to a very broad definition, in accordance with traditional teaching, and say that all royalty is sacred when it is acknowledged that a mandate from heaven is exercised, which is confirmed by an act of the spiritual authority and the appropriate rites.

The universality of this conception of royalty throughout different cultures and ages already represents—prior to all theological and metaphysical justification in favour of its regularity—a capital testimony, which will now claim our attention.

SACRED ROYALTIES ACROSS SPACE & TIME

Although the divine character of royalty is constant in all traditional cultures, it does not, however, always present itself in an absolutely identical form. Broadly speaking, we may distinguish two conceptions made up of two series of ideas, which moreover are linked and mingled in varying degrees. The prince appears now as similar to those numerous beings endowed with divine gifts which are called *numina*, gods or “spirits”, a kind of visible god, a divine emanation or incarnation, a god-man or a man-god; but in another respect, as an agent of the Divinity, the depository and executor of His Will, inferior to Him, elected by Him, yes, but also judged by Him. We may term the first conception *divine royalty*, and the second *royalty by divine grace*. But, once again, the distinction is not sharp, and strictly speaking, each of the two conceptions can be defined only by the predominance of one content without excluding the other. That is why, in any case, the sacral power can be considered, as a first approximation at least, to be a degree intermediate between God and man, but whose constant is clearly its divine character.

ASHANTI · Of the first conception, we find examples in Africa as well as in the Middle and Far East. Thus, with the Ashanti, a people occupying the central region of the Gold Coast and constituting a large part of the Akan race, the king is the incarnation of Nyame, the supreme god, who is the King *in divinis* as creator and Providence. It is considered that he is the supreme lord of the society of men, living among them and helping them

throughout the course of their lives, for “all men are sons of Nyame.” “Nyame is the King,” declare the Ashanti. But the presence of Nyame among his children is brought about through the mediation of the prince, and while he is on the throne the prince participates directly in the royalty of Nyame, and his person is sacred. He wears the *adaebo*, a triangular chest-piece symbolising divine and universal authority, and he sits on the *sampini*, a dais of three steps. Both symbols signify that the sovereignty of Nyame and of the king extend through the three zones of the universe, a tripartite structure encountered almost everywhere, including the Western tradition. The king must not merely distinguish himself by his physical integrity, but also, and above all, by his virtues, for he is a blessing for his people if his soul is pure. He then “shines” by means of these virtues and is assimilated to *Awia*, the Sun, hence the choice of the colour gold for many of his accessories: his throne, which encloses both the spirit of the previous kings and the spirit of his entire people, is golden; and also his crown, his ring, his bracelets and his sandals. He thus appears as the earthly figure of the “king of glory,” Nyame. The king of the Ashanti is therefore the human support of the manifestation of the supreme god, and that is why his soul must be pure. In addition, in order to maintain this purity or, if need be, to restore it, the rite called *kra-guare*, the “purification of the soul,” is practiced on the birthday of the king and on feast days. This rite allows the king to make still closer his intimate union with Nyame, which is the condition for participating in his power. The *kra-guare* falls into the well-known category of altogether analogous rites practiced in almost all sacred royalties.

SHILLUK · Among the Shilluk, of the region of the White Nile, the king is assimilated to Nyakang, the founding god of Shilluk royalty. When a king dies, a sanctuary identical to that of Nyakang is constructed over his tomb, thereby showing the assimilation of the king to Nyakang. The sanctuary of Nyakang is constituted by a *temenos* in which several huts are raised, one of which is the holy place. The newly elected king is lodged there for a month in order to communicate with Nyakang and assimilate his substance.

EGYPT · But in Africa,⁵ it is Egypt that offers us the perfect example of sacred royalty, and it does so within the framework of a vast empire with a particularly evolved and refined civilisation.

In Egypt, royalty is not as in other great lands a political institution legitimised by the gods; it is an integral part of the rulership of the world by the gods. This is what the myth of the divine dynasties expresses symbolically, according to which Egypt was first governed by gods who, having decided to return to heaven, first founded the historical royalty which was to govern in their stead.

The pharaoh is in himself of a divine nature, and it is this divine nature that is the foundation of his power. This fundamental datum is made explicit in different theological developments. Broadly speaking, there were two main conceptions. According to the first, it is considered that the supreme god is present *in* the king, that he inhabits him in the way in which he is present in a statue for worship or in a sacred animal. The king is the incarnation of God, an incarnation produced at the moment of his enthronement and, at the death of the prince, this presence passes to his successor. This presence is expressed in the title of the king, formed by five elements, the first of which is termed the *Name of Horus*, Horus the solar god. Thus, to designate the sovereign it is ordinarily said “The *Horus So-and-So*,” so that the name of the god is followed by the fifth element of the entitlement, which is the proper name of the king.⁶ The *Name of Horus* is inscribed on a “shield” on which there is hawk, the sacred

5. It is worth insisting on the “African” character of Egyptian civilisation. By studying it along with those of the Near East, Greece and Rome, the books on ancient history have lost sight of this, as is well demonstrated by S. Sauneron in his study, *Les prêtres de l'ancienne Egypte*, Paris, 1957.

6. Here, for example, is the titulary of a prince of the 13th Dynasty:

The Horus has unified the Two Lands

Lasting Splendour

Soul of the Gods

Ra shines with life

Sobek is happy [Sebekhotep]

This last title, Sebekhotep, is the true name of the king.

animal which is the support of the king. The king is also called "The Horus who is in the Palace".

According to another theological conception, the pharaoh is "the son of God," and his power comes to him from the fact that he has been engendered by the god of heaven; he is the "son of Ra," and this designation corresponds to a second element in his title which is inscribed on his coat of arms. The king is the "living image" on earth of his father (*ikon zosa*, in the Greek of the Rosetta Stone). This divine filiation of the pharaoh is expounded in texts recounting the birth of the sovereigns and which are accompanied by reliefs presenting the scenes corresponding to the different moments of the event. We possess those of the history of Amenophis III, of Ramses II, of Nectanebus and Hatshepsut (in Dayr al-Bahri). Almost all of them follow a practically identical scheme, which is as follows: In a celestial assembly, Amon-Ra announces to all the gods the next birth of a new king. Thoth pronounces the name of the queen who will be his mother. Amon, *with the features of the reigning king*, goes to the sleeping queen, who awakens upon perceiving the perfume of the god and smiles at His Majesty. Amon-Ra tells her the name of the future king and the god unites with the queen. Khnum, the ram-god, fashions the body of the child on his potter's wheel; Heket breathes life into the clay figurine. Khnum and Heket conduct the pregnant queen toward the place of birth. The birth of the child king then takes place, and he is suckled by the goddess Hathor.

To grasp the spirit in which these types of mythical narrative were understood, it suffices to recall that in India there exists a "rite for the procreation of a child," according to which the husband, upon uniting with the woman, pronounces this formula: "I am Heaven, thou art Earth"; thereby, man and woman are identified, during the act of procreation, respectively with Purusha and Prakrti, namely, the two divine principles of universal Creation. This way of acting corresponds to the conviction that the individuals are accomplishing an act that in great measure surpasses them: they are merely human "supports" of the divine activity that acts through the universal Energy and Life. It is thus that one has to understand the meaning of the Egyptian

narrative referring to the birth of the new king: there too, the human father, who is really the reigning pharaoh, is merely a “passage,” serving only as the intermediary of the divine power. The human mother conceives spiritually; she is, as it were, *Mut-em-Ua*, “Mut in the Barque,” that is, the Mother, Femininity.

This divine ancestry makes of the pharaoh a solar being, since his true father is Ra, the Sun. For this reason he wears in his diadem the *ureus*, the serpent of Ra, which spits the fire that devours his enemies, the dark powers. For this reason also, the royal palace is named *akhet*, “the Horizon,” a word written with the figure of a mountain with two summits between which the sun rises;⁷ and finally, this is why the appearance of the king in full pomp on his throne is called *hi*, a word designating the sunrise, and in particular, the sunrise on the primordial hill on the first day of Creation.

The pharaonic monarchy is hereditary, and it is the divine filiation which founds this heritage. Later, the ceremony of coronation confirms and manifests this heritage. Its purpose is to present the divine election of the king as the work of the gods.

The ceremony begins with the enthronement of the young king, who appears above the throne before the Great; he is proclaimed and receives homage. There then takes place a representation that shows the council of the god in whose midst Ra salutes the new king whom he has elected as the heir.



Scenes of the consecration of Pharaoh Amenophis III: he can be seen, from left to right, receiving through the “water of all life” the lustration from the hands of Horus and Seth, then taken by Atum and Khons to Amun-Ra, who crowns him, while Thot inscribes “his years”.

7. It is noteworthy that the word also designates the temple, for example in Abidos.

Next comes the conferring of the royal names by the priests, followed by the conferring of the power by the gods, that is, by the priests who act *in persona deorum* and who generally wear the masks of the gods. The king is brought into the sanctuary where the god salutes him as Horus. After that, he receives from the priest *Inmutef* a lustration which fills him with divine power. He then proceeds to the coronation: the prince receives the two crowns, white and red, corresponding to the two Lands (Upper and Lower Egypt), and the diadem bearing the *uraeus* from the hands of Horus and Seth, and sometimes also Thoth (that is, from the priests who act in their name). The placing of the crowns and the diadem is of particular importance, for the crown is more than an emblem: like the throne,⁸ it is charged with *barakah*, and signifies that the sovereign leaves his individual thought and character in order to receive the thought and character of the god at the same time that he receives his power. In addition, the prince receives the other royal insignia: the mitre, the whip, and the mace.

After the rite of the “union of the two Lands” under the symbols of the papyrus and the iris, there takes place the “inscription in the annals”: Thoth and Seshat inscribe the names of the kin on sheets from the *ished* tree. Then follows the erecting of the *djed* pillar, symbol of the principle of stability, of the continuity of life: the purpose of the rite, of course, is to stabilise the royal power in harmony with the stability of the world, represented by the four planes that cross the pillar horizontally and which correspond to the four elements. There is another rite of stabilisation which reinforces the erection of the *djed* pillar: the king fires arrows towards the four cardinal directions in order to reinforce his authority to the ends of the earth and to annihilate his enemies; he also frees four birds who will announce his access to the throne. The erecting of the *djed* and the firing of the arrows are rites which are also carried out during the commemorative

8. The throne of the pharaoh is cubic in form, and adorned with two lions walking and surmounted with a baldaquin, which is to say that it presents, as do all traditional thrones, a very important cosmic symbolism, which we shall study.

feats of the divine dynasties; what is renewed above all is the triumph of Horus. But it is always a matter of assuring the stability of the kingdom and the order of the world: the texts which are then read recall the creation of power *in principio* by the reign of the solar god. The erecting of the *djed* takes place also during the *Sed Festival*, which is a feast day of the king's regeneration, a regeneration of which we have spoken earlier.⁹

Since the pharaonic royalty is the most perfect example of divine royalty—including the worship of the sovereign with priests designated for such a function—it is worth having a conception that is as exact as possible of this divinity of the sovereign: the precisions given by this case will apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the other analogous cases we shall consider.

We would certainly be deluding ourselves if we were to consider that the pharaoh was god purely and simply, like Horus or Ra—that he *was* Horus or Ra. In reality, the Egyptians always maintained the distinction between the man and the god in the king. We have seen that the king was called the Horus So-and-So, with his name coming after that of the god; this double designation shows the tension between the two natures in the prince. He is the incarnation of the god, but he is always distinct from the god. Besides, Heliopolitan theology made it quite clear that the king, as “son,” was inferior to his father, and that his power came to him as something lent to him. The reigning king was no more than a symbol: he incarnates the divine principle, the creative Word, for which he serves as the support of its manifestation. The true king is Horus, the Horic principle. To the king are attributed the title and qualities of that which he symbolises, so that the prince constitutes, as it were, a living theological metonymy. And the worship that is rendered to him, the adoration, the gestures of prayer, are not addressed to the man, but to his *ka*, that is, to the divine personality with which he has been invested;¹⁰ and G. Posener says excellently, “it is not

9. At the *Sed Feast* a very special rite of rebirth is also practiced, the *tikenu*, or passage through the skin of a sacrificed animal; a rite that we shall encounter again in the *diksa* of India.

10. The texts of the royal temple of Dahshur specify that the priests are

the man that is venerated, but the Power which is clothed with a figure.”¹¹

The same observations apply to the Ashanti king, of whom we have spoken before; he is identified with Nyame, the god (inasmuch as he has been endowed with his power), and at the same time, he is the subject of Nyame, whose wrath he fears.

In this way, one may grasp the radical difference which separates this traditional divine royalty, which is a supra-human institution, from the “worship of sovereigns” which flourished in the Hellenistic and Roman epochs, during the course of which there were despots who deified themselves, owing to the servility of their subjects, the most surprising example of which is that of Demetrios, one of the Diadochi, and the history of his apotheosis seems to push back the limits of the degradation as well as the stupidity of men. In the year 290, by decree of the Athenians, in fact, he was honoured as the “only (sic) god because—the Athenians said—the rest of the gods are either too remote, or have no ears, or do not concern themselves with us; you, however, we see, you are there, not in wood or stone, but really; we love thee, grant us peace, o beloved.”¹² It is true that the Diadochi did no more than follow the example of the founder of their dynasties, Alexander, who accepted, if not encouraged, being worshipped.¹³ And what can be said of the last representatives of this “cult of sovereigns”, the emperors Domitian, Aurelian, Caligula, Elagabalus, and Diocletian, who had themselves called *dominus* and *deus*, and obligated their subjects, on pain of death, to venerate them as such publicly. In reality this “cult of sovereigns” was a poorly hidden “personality cult”, as it is termed today, and an unbridled worship of man; and in most cases, man given over to

“priests of the living *ka* of the king”, and not priests of the king.

11. G. Posener, *De la divinité du pharaon*, Paris, 1969, p. 102.

12. Athenaeus 6.252.

13. The Ptolemies of Egypt did not refrain from deifying themselves, using the pharaonic tradition, but, of course, denaturing it as well. By way of example, there is this inscription in honour of Ptolemy XIII at the temple of Isis at Philae: “to the Lord, king and god” (Dittenberg, OGI, 1868).

his worst instincts. It was the complete degeneration of “sacred royalty,” and even a total inversion of the sacred. For in this case, it is not the divine power that descends upon man to invest him with a superior personality; it is man who decides, by his own will, to put himself—or more exactly, to try to put himself—in God’s place. This does not mean, however, that the imperial institution was not a sacred royalty. We shall speak of this again later.

Heavenly and solar descent as the foundation of the king’s divinity was not confined to Egypt. In reality, it is the constitutive part of most royal theologies. Such is the case amongst the Mongol peoples in Central Asia and in the Far East.

Among the Paleo-Turkic people of Mongolia and Siberia, the *kagan*, “emperor,” comes from Heaven, which is the supreme God, *Tangri*. In a letter written in 584, a *kagan* presents himself as “born from Heaven, wise and holy son of Heaven”. Celestial descent can present itself in a mythic form similar to those encountered in certain totemist peoples; thus, in a text taken from the official Annals of the kingdom, one can read that “the origin of Genghis Khan is Borta Cino (the wolf), come from Heaven.”

TIBET · In ancient Tibet as well, the origin of royalty—which held power before the government of the country took on a theocratic form—is identified with a heavenly descent. The king who ascended to the throne constituted a new epiphany of the Celestial Ancestor, the first king, an archetypal king, as it were, who reappeared in the new king in the manner of an *avatara*. The funerary stele of a Prince Krisron bore a genealogy which began with Odespurgyal who “descended from heaven to become the prince of men”. The divine ancestor is renewed in the new king, since, as the chronicles say, he is simultaneously present on two parallel planes, the earthly and the heavenly. And the kings are the successive manifestations of the “heavenly Kri” or “heavenly king” who descended first in the founding Ancestor of the dynasty, who then transmits the *barakah* to all. The divine character of the king is attested in one of his principal insignias, the helmet (*dburmog*), which is not a warrior attribute but the symbol of royal power that comes to the king from his divine essence. Another insignia is the cord (*rmutag*), symbol of the

luminous “cord” that emerges from the head of the king and joins him to heaven; it was said that at their death the princes rose back to heaven through this cord, which the shamans employ to make the souls of the dead arrive in heaven. Moreover, the kings, like shamans, could go up to heaven at will in order to converse with the divinities there.¹⁴

JAPAN · Japan offers us an example, unique in our day, of a divine monarchy and true theocracy which has been perpetuated up to our time without interruption for more than 2,600 years. We have before our eyes an institution which is astonishingly similar, in its basis if not in its details, to that of ancient Egypt, and which in the twentieth century can give us an idea of what the pharaonic royalty was.

As with Egypt, the Japanese archipelago, according to tradition, was governed first by the gods (*kami*). The primordial couple *Izanagi* and *Izanami* (corresponding to *Purusha* and *Prakrti*, the universal Essence and Substance) engendered a certain number of gods, among them *Amaterasu-omikami*, goddess of the Sun, and her brother *Susano-no-mikoto*. The latter received the governance of the earth, while the goddess received that of heaven. But since he had governed his domain badly, the heavenly *kami* took possession of the earth and Ninigi-no-Mikoto, the grandson of the goddess, was sent there. Finally, he gave the power to a great-grandson of Amaterasu, Jimmu-tenno, who was the first human emperor of Japan, and in 660 BC founded the still reigning dynasty. We have before us a line of authentically “divine” rulers, although having passed over to the human state. The emperor of Japan bears the title of *Tenno*,¹⁵ namely, “celestial sovereign”: he is also termed *Ten-shin*, “son of Heaven”. “He is

14. According to other Tibetan traditions, the descent from heaven to earth of the king is accomplished by the intermediary of the cosmic *mountain* marking the centre of the world. The *mountain*, like the *cord*, is a symbol of the *Axis Mundi*.

15. The word *mikado* properly designates the imperial palace, but is often employed to designate the emperor himself, according to a custom that occurs elsewhere: in ancient Egypt, *pharaoh*, the usual designation of the king, signified in the first place “the great palace” (*per aa*); likewise it was also called “The Holy Seat”.

considered a living *kami*,” a contemporary Japanese author, Kumitake Kume, informs us, “loved and venerated by the nation more than anything else on earth.” He is also called *Aki-tsu-mi-kami*, “divinity in human form”, and “god manifested”;¹⁶ according to Chikao Fujisawa, he is also *Sumera-mikoto*, “the sacred Word capable of provoking spiritual union”; also, “the power which gathers the nation in all spheres”; and finally, *Naka-ima*, “the incarnation of the eternal present”.

Nonetheless, here as elsewhere, the line of descent does not suffice to establish definitively the imperial divine status. The sovereign is converted into *Aki-tsu-mi-kami*, “human god”, only after the consecration, so that once again this appears as indispensable to “make the king”.

The consecration comprises several rites. The first is the *senso*, the accession to the throne which is brought about by the bestowal of the “Three Treasures” (*Shansu no Shinki*), which are the insignia of power: the Mirror, the Sword, and the Necklace of Jewels. These are objects of a divine origin, either made or found by *kami*. According to the myth, these three treasures were given to Prince Ninigi when he was sent to earth by Amaterasu, who told him: “Illumine the entire world with the brilliance of the mirror; reign over the earth by the marvelous power of dominion of these jewels; triumph over those who do not submit by brandishing this divine Sword.” The chief insignia is the Mirror, about which Amaterasu also says, in one of the holy books of Shinto, the *Kojiki*: “Consider this mirror exactly as if it were Our August Spirit, and revere it as if it were We whom you revere.” This Mirror, which is deposited in the great temple at Ise, is the sacrosanct object of Shinto, for in it resides the solar goddess. A copy of it was made and is deposited in a temple of the Imperial Palace.

The symbolism of the Three Treasures has been expounded in different ways, of which the most plausible one, following the Zen thinkers, sees in them the images of the three imperial virtues, knowledge (in the Mirror), bravery (in the Sword), and

16. Let it be recalled that the same title was used by some Ptolemies, also proclaimed “manifest gods” (*theoi epiphaneis*).



Left: The Japanese emperor wearing the *akebono*, dawn-coloured garment, following the taking of the oath. He holds in his right hand the *shaku* (sceptre); *Right:* Enthronement of the emperor, who wears the *koonozengo* and the *ryuei-no-kammuri* coiffure.

benevolence (in the Jewels), with the following cosmic correspondences: the Body of the Sun, the Essence of the Moon, and the substance of the Stars. The bestowal of the Three Treasures upon the new emperor is the principal rite of consecration, for it is this that transmits the spiritual influence.

After the *senso* comes the *sokui-rei* or enthronement. In one of the temples of the Palace, the *Shinshin-den*, the emperor sits on the Throne, the *Taka-mikura*, “Lofty and august seat”, in the form of a palanquin, painted with black lacquer and decorated with a phoenix and a *kirin*, a mythical animal, and also with flowers of eight petals and beneficent clouds in five colours. On its hexagonal roofing are fixed seven mirrors, of which the central one is situated over the head of the emperor and directed towards him.

The third rite is the *daijo-sai*. It is preceded by a purification (*chinkon-sai*) intended to pacify the spirit of the emperor and assure his life and health. For the *daijo-sai* the prince is seated in the temple of the *kami*, the *Shinden*, in the Palace. He wears his

priestly dress, for he is the high priest of Shinto. The *daijo-sai* is a rite of communion with the Divinity: the Tenno “savours the rice” with his divine Ancestor Amaterasu. Through this rite, he is capable of “incarnating the spirit” of the goddess and attains the state of *Ama-tsi-hi-tsugi*, that is, he acquires the “spiritual light” of *Ama-tsu-hi-tsugi*, the “heavenly successor of *Toyo-uke-no kami*”, and he becomes *Aki-tsu-mi-kami*, “god in human form”. Then, dressed in his priestly garments of raw silk, he enters the inner chamber of a sacred pavilion, the *Yuki-den*, where he finds the Divine Couch (*shinza*) upon which the Ancestor Jimmu-tenno received the command to preserve the Divine Mirror. Inside the sacred pavilion he accomplishes a series of rites throughout the night until dawn. The sovereign offers his deified ancestors foods which he shares with them: first, rice, cultivated near the Palace according to minutely detailed rites for its tilling, planting and harvesting, and accomplished by the representatives of the emperor. The cooking is accomplished over a fire lit by rubbing, with *hinoki* wood from the imperial forest.

The last part of the coronation, the *shimpo*, consists in the emperor sending offerings to the temple at Ise, the residence of Amaterasu. Afterward a feast is celebrated, a sacred banquet which the prince shares with his subjects.

Throughout all the ceremonies of the coronation, according to a traditional text, it is considered that the sovereign is “wrapped” in the personality of all his predecessors, and finally, in that of *Ameno-minaka-nuchi*, “Lord of the true centre of Heaven,” the supreme divinity of Shinto.

CHINA · As with the Japanese *tenno*, the emperor of China was the “Son of Heaven” (*tien-tsu*), with the sun as his emblem. He participated in the divine nature by birth. The supreme god—Heaven, in China—deposited in him the “celestial mandate” (*tien-ming*) to rule. This mandate is the fruit of a *barakah* possessed by the founding Ancestor of a dynasty, as we have seen before in the case of Tibet. The origin of every dynasty is a hero miraculously born of the works of Heaven. Thus the myths relate that the ancestor of the Yin kings was conceived by his mother after she swallowed a swallow’s egg (the bird which is considered the “messenger of the gods,” and here the bearer of

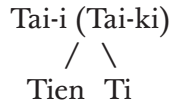
the divine “seed”); the ancestor of the Kings of Chou was conceived by his mother after she had walked in the “footprints” of “giant steps”, that is, the steps of the god of Heaven. This fecundation by fitting into the steps of a divine giant is to be found in the Chinese legends, and in addition in those of many other traditions. Other marvellous features point to the supernatural character of the initial ruler of a dynasty; thus, the five primordial rulers of China possessed the supreme gift of Efficacy (*ling*) characteristic of divine beings (*chen*): Huang-ti, for example, possessed Efficacy from his birth, and could speak before he was three months old.

The superhuman greatness of the imperial institution appears clearly in a passage from Lao Tzu: “The Way (*Tao*) is great; Heaven (*Tien*) is great; Earth (*Ti*) is great; the King (*wang*) too is great. In the Middle, then, there are four things, but of these only the King is visible.”¹⁷ To understand this text and the profound meaning of the imperial institution, the Taoist doctrine, codified particularly by Lao Tzu, must be recalled briefly, specifying that this properly metaphysical doctrine has at all times inspired the concept of royalty in China, parallel to the exoteric doctrine codified at a certain point in time by Confucius, but equally ancient, since both doctrines are simply two faces of one and the same Chinese Tradition—contrary to the attitude of most Sinologists, who conceive their studies solely from the historical point of view, and distinguish periods in which the royal doctrine supposedly was Taoist and others in which supposedly it was Confucian. No doubt certain princely lines and certain emperors adhered more particularly to one or the other doctrine; but this in no way changes the fact that the real conception rests fundamentally on the Taoist metaphysical doctrine, and moreover, it could not be otherwise, in China as elsewhere, for reasons which will appear further on.

Taoism takes its name from the word *Tao*, translated as “The Way,” but which in fact designates the supreme Reality. It designates at one and the same time the superior Non-Being or Beyond-Being (*Wu-ki*) and pure Being or Unity, termed the “Great

17. *Tao Tê Ching* 25.

Extreme” (*tai-ki*) and the “Great Unity” (*tai-i*).¹⁸ The polarisation of Being generates the universal Essence, termed “Heaven” (*T'ien*), and the universal Substance, termed “Earth” (*T'i*). The Great Unity, Heaven and Earth form the first and fundamental triad, the origin of universal Manifestation which is produced between the Essence and the Substance; symbolically, between Heaven and Earth:



Man is part of manifestation, the total extension of which is comprised between the two poles of Essence and Substance, Heaven and Earth. But at the same time, man is the centre of this manifestation and he synthesises it: we speak, of course, of man in his primordial and fundamental nature, which the Chinese tradition terms “true man”, and which in Christian language corresponds to man before the Fall. Man is placed between Heaven and Earth, and he is the result of their reciprocal influences, but by his central position he is situated on the Axis, the *Axis Mundi*, around which the entire Manifestation is extended. This Axis measures the distance between Heaven and Earth, the extension of the cosmos, and indicates the hierarchy of the states of manifested Existence. The summit of this Axis touches *Tai-i*, and it is by this Axis that Heaven and Earth communicate and are relayed to Unity. The “true man”, who is normal man, is situated therefore at the central point at which the powers of Heaven and those of Earth, which the Chinese tradition terms respectively *Yang* and *Yin*, are united, and where they are in perfect equilibrium. The “true man” is the one in whom *act* is equal to *potency*, and in whom the celestial nature dominates the earthly. Therefore, in his world he fulfils the role of “motionless mover”, imitating the “non-acting” (*wu wei*) activity of Heaven. Hence it is he who normally should be the “king of creation”, a function

18. More specifically, the “Nameless *Tao*”, corresponding to *Wu-ki*, and the “Named *Tao*”, which corresponds to *Tai-i*.

which was entrusted to him by God, and which he exercised normally before the Fall, according to the Book of Genesis.

This position of the “true man” is expressed in the Chinese Tradition by a triad: Heaven (*T'ien*), Earth (*T'i*), Man (*Jen*), with Man being placed between the two extremes so as to show his central position. In addition, this triad is expressed in the character 王 in which the upper horizontal stroke represents Heaven, the lower one, Earth, and the middle one, Man. Moreover, the middle stroke is crossed by a vertical stroke, which is the expression of the Axis uniting Heaven and Earth, and which together form a cross. This character expresses the nature of the “true man” and shows him as “son of Heaven and Earth” occupying the central point situated on the *Axis Mundi*. Now, this character transcribes the word *wang*, designating the “King”, the Emperor, which means that the king is identified with the “true man”. Of course, it is not the individual as such that exercises the royal function, but the superior personality with which he is invested, and which is linked to the royal function, and which in a sense is bestowed upon him at the same time as the “heavenly mandate”. In the next chapter we shall see in what this function consists and how it corresponds to the nature and role of the “true man” (*chen-jen*) and, at a superior degree, to the nature and role of the “transcendent man”. Now, the “transcendent man” is termed *chun-jen*, an expression in which the word *chun* is that which characterises divine being, which the Judeo-Christian tradition expresses in saying that before the Fall man was made “in the image of God”. By this it can be seen, therefore, why and how the sovereign as such can be said to be of a divine nature, which again, moreover, is expressed by his title of “son of Heaven”, a formula in which the mention of Earth is omitted in order to emphasise his “divine” character and to distinguish him from the ordinary man, who is “son of Heaven and Earth”. This does not mean that this latter formula is not applied to the emperor; quite the contrary, for among the prerogatives of his function is that of realising the integration of all the subjects in the general harmony of the Universe.

This is what the symbolism of the imperial instruments and buildings demonstrate particularly; they all translate into graph-

ic form the nature of the “true man” and of the “transcendent man”.

Thus, the dress of the ancient emperors was round above (the collar) and square below, signifying that in the “true man” represented by the prince, his head reaches Heaven, while his feet rest on Earth, so that the very person of the sovereign constituted, as it were, an image of the Axis uniting the two poles of Manifestation. In addition, in this dress were represented the sun, the moon, the constellations and lightning (see plate p.24): another manner of indicating that, as we said above, the personality of the prince as “true man” is a synthesis of the Universe.

The same intention, during the era of the Tsin Dynasty, governed the decoration of the imperial palace, in order to make it a veritable summary of the world. Thus, the palace of Huang-ti presented reductions of the Milky Way and the Arch of Triumph which crosses it; in the palace of the emperor Wu there were animals from the four kingdoms; there were lakes, the shores of which represented distant lands and the “Isles of the Immortals”; there were genies of bronze on high columns and, for the emperor, a tower with a double spiral walkway, from the top of which one could gaze out into the vastness. It was yet another way of signifying that the prince was the “master of the world”. But the most profound symbolism of the imperial residence was the central edifice, the *Ming-tang* or “Temple of Light”, the form and role of which we will consider when studying the royal function in the next chapter. Let us say simply for the time being that this building had a square base and a round roof; the same structure governed the chariot of the Emperor, composed of a square box connected to a vertical mast topped by a circular canopy (see plate p.25). Thus, dress, chariot and palace by their fundamental structure, analogous to the character *wang*, expressed the nature of the sovereign as incarnating the function of “True Man” and “Transcendent Man”, “son of Heaven and Earth”, fixed in the “Invariable Middle” (symbolised by the central cross of the character *wang*), and ultimately identified with the Axis of the World.

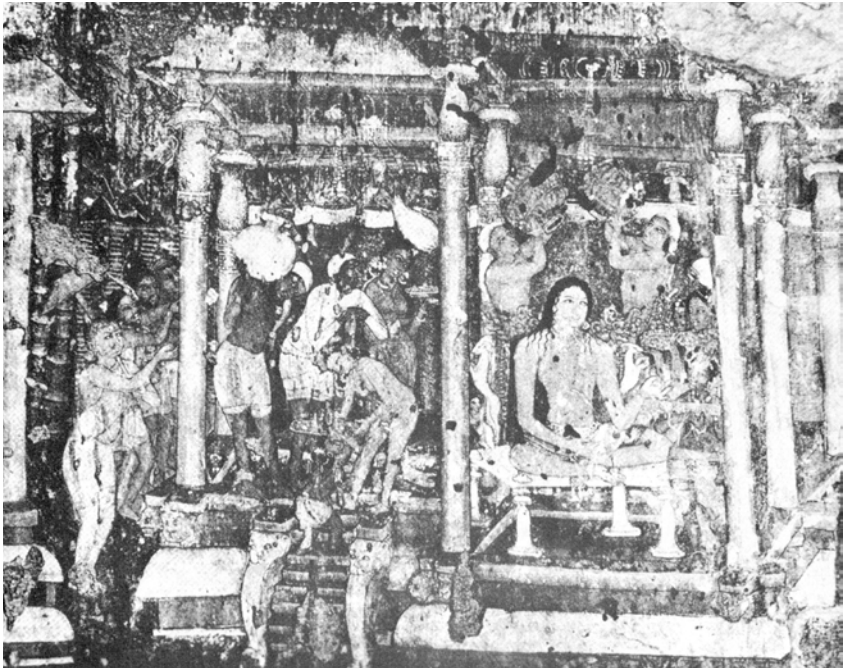
The character of “divine royalty” is not as marked in all traditions, and what can be seen is an approach by degrees towards another conception, that of “royalty by divine grace”. This is what occurs in the Indo-European zone, in India and Iran, for example.

INDIA · In India the king is considered to be a *deva*. In the Hindu tradition this word, which is the same as the Latin *divus* and the Greek *di(w)os*, designates an intermediate god or a genie. The sovereign is the *deva raja*, the “divine king”. According to the *Laws of Manu*, the king was created “at the beginning” from particles taken from the Eight Devas called the “Guardians of the World” (*lokapala*) and in charge of ruling the eight cardinal points; the essence of these Devas constitutes the “royal majesty” (*pratapa*) and, according to the commentary of Kulluka, express the role of the king.¹⁹ The same doctrine is expressed in another way when it tells us that royalty emerged from the god Indra, who is the archetype of the king, as Agni is the archetype of the spiritual head; or also, that the kings bear within themselves a part of the essence of Vishnu.²⁰ The object of the coronation ceremony (*rajasuya*) is to transform the human individual, granting him this divine personality. In accordance with all ancient rites, the *rajasuya* consisted in a reiteration of the creation, since, in virtue of the fundamental analogy between the macrocosm and the microcosm, any particular creation—in this case, that of a king—has to reproduce the natural process of the world’s creation. In the first phase of the *rajasuya*, the candidate undergoes a regression to the embryonic state in order to “lose” his individuality, which will be substituted by the supra-human personality. In the cosmic order, this phase corresponds to the period of maturation of the universe or to that of the harvests. There follows a symbolical gestation of one year intended to achieve the formation of the new body of the candidate, a “divine” body. This symbolic body is obtained, either by the mystical marriage of the prince with the caste of the *brahmins* (*brahmana*), or with the people, a marriage which will cause him to be born from their

19. *Manusmriti* 7.1 ff.

20. *Mahabharata* 12.59.127 ff.

respective wombs, either by the rite of the union of the two masculine waters with the feminine waters, or even by that of gold (= fire) with silver (= water). Afterward there takes place a series of rites by which the king acquires sovereignty over the “three worlds” (*tribhuvana*), incarnates the cosmos, and becomes the cosmocrator. First, the king raises his arms vertically, a gesture that symbolises the raising of the *Axis Mundi*, with which the king is going to identify. Then the king is anointed: standing on his throne, with his arms still raised, he then appears as the Axis of the World fixed to the Earth’s navel—the centre of the world, symbolised by the throne—and touching heaven. The model of the royal anointing is the anointing of Varuna and Indra, the gods of sovereignty. The king is consecrated by reference to the consecration of Varuna and Indra as kings. The formulae of consecration say that the king is anointed with the unguent thanks to which Indra, when he was anointed, won victories and conquered the world. After that, the king receives an aspersion of



The affusion of Prince Mahajanaka (Ajanta fresco, 6th century AD). The analogy between the Hindu and the pharaonic rite is particularly striking.

water symbolising the waters which descend from heaven along the Axis (= the king) to bless the earth. Finally the king takes the Three steps of Vishnu, giant steps by which the god conquered the world; by this rite the king is identified with Vishnu, he extends his power to the entire earth, the entirety of the world, for he ascends symbolically to the zenith.²¹ This course subdues the evil influences and allows life to develop naturally; through it, moreover, the king attains to heaven, becomes a *deva* and enters in communion with *Prajapati*, “Master of creatures”. A *rajasuya* of this type was still celebrated in 1956, upon the accession to the throne by the king of Nepal.

During the historical period, the *rajasuya* ceremony was accomplished only twice during a reign. But it is altogether probable that in earlier times it was practiced more often, even annually, for without doubt it reproduces the fundamental pattern found almost everywhere, and has the role of reanimating, as it were by its repetition, the divine life in the person of the sovereign.

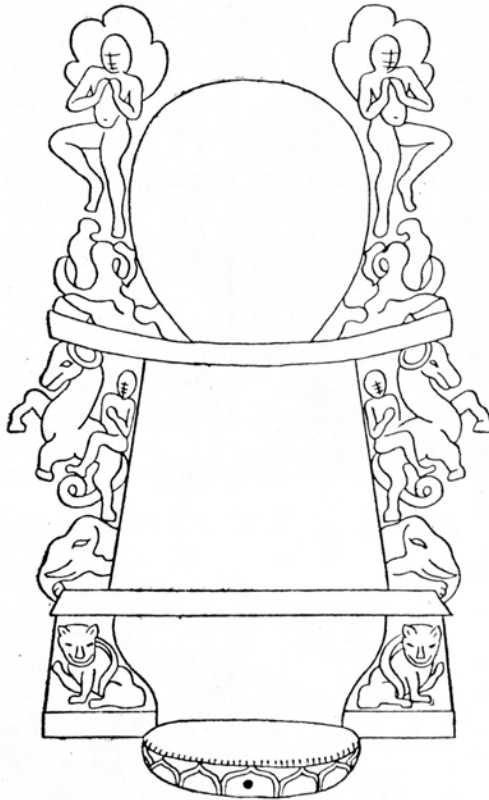
For the sovereign is not personally “divine”. In India, it is royalty that is divine, not the king as individual. He is revered as a god only because his *state* and his *role* are divine. At the same time the king is also subject to *Dharma*, the divine law governing the world, which is the principle of royalty.²² The king is not Indra, nor is he Vishnu: Indra and Vishnu are *in the king*,²³ in order to serve the people.²⁴ It is the same in Thailand: the Khmer king is a *deva* as in India, and takes the name “living Buddha”; but this expression has to be understood: he is not an incarnation of the Buddha; he is merely the support of a ritual act that places him—him and his kingdom—in communication with the unseen Buddha. The king offers his person as a support to receive as a reflection of divinity so that it may radiate in his kingdom. The

21. Here is the formula for conferring sovereign power to the king (the rite of *Vajapeya*): “Thou art the walk of Vishnu, thou art the step of Vishnu, thou art the stride of Vishnu.”

22. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 1.44.

23. Rangaswami Aiyangar, *Rajadharma*, 1941, p. 108.

24. *Mahabharata* 1.19.



Indian royal throne, with animal motifs on the back
(drawing after a carving at the Guimet Museum).

making of a statue of the king as a Buddha should not be viewed as an apotheosis, as P. Mus said, but as a *devotio*: he gives himself to the Buddha, and his human body becomes the earthly “trace” of its divine model; the royal person becomes the support of a reflection of the Buddha.²⁵

It will be noted that in both cases that have been evoked, that of India and that of Thailand, there has been no mention of a divine *filiation* of the prince; royalty here appears more clearly as a divine *gift*, a royalty *by divine grace*. However, too great an

²⁵ P. Mus, *Barabudur*, passim. See G. Coédès, “Le culte de la royauté divinisée,” in *Conférence*, t.I, Rome, 1951.

importance should not be given to this observation, for the mention of a divine filiation of the king can also coexist with the idea of a donation of power through grace. There is no need to be surprised at this: at root, whatever may be the form taken by the doctrine of royal power, it is in the final analysis always *by grace* that the prince receives this power. Divine filiation, like the genealogies that trace the royal line back to a god, all have a symbolical value, something which modern scholars have often not understood: they have the function of expressing in mythic language—which is proper to the sacred—the superhuman source of divine power.²⁶ In both conceptions of royalty that we have mentioned—*divine royalty* and *royalty by divine grace*—everything is a matter of proportions in the expression of the two constitutive elements of royal status: on the one hand, the sacral character or status of the man who exercises it, and on the other, the mode of realisation of this status. In the end the resulting difference is rather small in either case.

IRAN · This coexistence of two conceptions appears clearly in ancient Iran. In fact, there is nothing clearer than this declaration of Darius in his *Behistun Inscription*: “By the grace of Ahuramazda I am king; Ahuramazda gave me the kingdom.” Nonetheless, the person of the prince has a strongly marked divine character; for example, in the ceremonial of the “adoration” of the king the *proskynese* was customary, as in Egypt. Thus, Themistocles, desiring to see the Great King, is told by Artaban: “Among the many fair laws that we have here, the fairest is that which commands reverencing the king and prostrating oneself before him as before *the image of the god who governs the world*.”²⁷ It is the same expression—“the image of the god”—that was em-

26. When we speak of “symbolic value”, we do not employ the word “symbolic” in the sense too often given to it in the profane world in order to oppose it to words like “real”, “concrete” etc. What is “symbolic”, far from being unreal, is on the contrary much more real than something simply “concrete”, for the symbol, which points to the bond uniting the visible thing to a superior invisible reality, confers on the visible thing a greater reality.

27. Plutarch, *Themistocles* 27.

ployed to designate the pharaoh in that most characteristic form of *divine royalty*.

And here again, in Iran, we meet with a mythical genealogy. The king is holy because he descends from the gods. He is the brother of the Sun and the Moon and his true abode is in the stars; certain kings were regarded as Sun-Kings, others as Moon-Kings. In a letter to the Emperor Constantius, Shapur II titles himself thus: "I, Shapur, king of kings, companion of the stars, brother of the Sun and the Moon."²⁸ The royal mantle and the tiara, moreover, were adorned with stars and with solar and lunar signs.²⁹ As Brother of the Sun and of the Moon, the Iranian king, by his very nature, had an affinity with fire: he descended from heaven like lightning in a column of fire. It is told that when Mithridates was still a child, a bolt of lightning burned his swaddling-clothes without touching his body, and that a trace of celestial fire remained on his face and that he hid it with his hair. When he was a man, a lightning bolt once again fell near him, striking the building while he slept, passing through the quiver that hung over his head, incinerating the arrows.³⁰ The igneous nature of the king was symbolised by the *nimbus* of fire surrounding his head, the *xvarnah*, which was also a symbol of good fortune. This is why the king could not be looked at without danger: during the Sassanid epoch, while seated on the throne, he veiled his face so that the "solar brilliance" emanating from him would not harm those present. Curiously, a vestige of this belief persisted to our times at the court of the Shah: when entering to see the sovereign, one covered one's face with one's hands, crying, "*misuyam*", "I am consumed". This idea that the king, descendant of the solar God, had a shining face is common to India and to Iran. In the Mahabharata, king Yudhishtira also covered his face with his clothing, so that the world would not be consumed by the fire which he radiated; and the *Laws of*

28. Ammianus Marcellinus, 17.5.1.

29. Arsaces, founder of the royal dynasty of the Parthians, was considered a divine person, (Amm. Marcell., l.c.). In addition, the divine origin of the Arsacid king is mentioned by Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, 7.2.24.

30. Plutarch, *Quaest. Conv.* 1.6.2. Cf. Athenaeus 5-512D.

Manu also say that the radiance of the king is that of the sun and burns the eyes like the sun.

The divine character of the king of Iran is also reflected in an important feature of the court etiquette: like the divinity, the king is practically inaccessible during the age of the Achaeminid dynasty and that of the Parthians. To penetrate into the interior court of the palace without permission was a crime punishable by death, as we see in the *Book of Esther* (Chap. 4) and in Xenophon,³¹ and Herodotus tells us that no one could enter into the presence of the king except for a few who are specially privileged: all communication between the sovereign and his subjects was done through messengers.³² At banquets, some of the guests ate outside the royal apartments; the others ate with the king, but not at the same table. In reality there were two halls, one leading to the other; the king could see his guests through a curtain in front of his door, but he remained invisible to them.³³

The principle of the celestial descent of the Iranian king caused the appearance of a series of narratives concerning Cyrus and Mithridates Eupator, whose case was also related back to Zarathustra. According to these narratives, the king is the incarnation of Mithra, the principal adviser to Ahuramazda; as in the case of Mithra, the king was born in a cave, from a star that descended to it, just as a bolt of lightning falls from the sky. Many prophecies circulated through the centuries immediately preceding the birth of Christ and at the beginning of the Christian era: they spoke of the "Great King", that is to say Mithra, whose reincarnation—the new *avatara*, to employ the technical Hindu term—was awaited because he was to bring salvation to all humanity. It was believed that these prophecies would be realised in the person of certain sovereigns, especially Mithridates Eupator, of whom we spoke above. It was related that at his birth a star was seen shining with such brilliance that it seemed

31. Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 7.5.41.

32. Herodotus, 199.

33. Heraclitus of Cumae, in Athenaeus 4.25.145.

to eclipse all the others, and that the same phenomenon was reproduced during his coronation. Likewise with Hushetar; the night he was born, a sign was seen in the sky: a star falling from heaven to signal the newborn.

If we allude to these narratives and to the prophecies that are their origin, it is because they refer to a particular aspect of royalty, to the theme of the *King of the World* and of the *Saviour King* of which we shall speak later.

BABYLONIA · The situation of royalty as we have described it in the Indo-Iranian zone is almost identical to the ancient empires of the Near East, in Sumer as with the Assyro-Babylonians.

The sovereign sometimes seems to be assimilated to a divinity. The celebrated Hammurabi is glorified in the *El-Amarna* Letters as the sun which rises over the land day after day; he is called “Sun-god of Babel”; an Assyrian inscription is addressed to him in these terms: “Thou art the image of Marduk, master of the world.” Hammurabi also bore the title of “son of god”, “son of Sin” (the Moon), “son of Dagon”, “son of Marduk”. But there is no need to attribute to the titles the full consequences that seem to impose themselves at first sight. In fact, a prince such as Gudea, for example, is in reality titled “son of Ninsun”; however, it is also said that he is “the shepherd considered by Ninsun in her heart, rewarded by Igalimma with the principality and the sublime sceptre....” Certain names of kings bear the determinative of the divinity, for example Naram Sin, in Akkad, or also those of the third dynasty of Ur; Sargon I was titled “king of the land”, “he who rules the four kingdoms”, the divine title of Anu, of Enlil and of Shamash (the Sun), and the Assyrian kings took the title of Shar Kishati, “king of the universe”. Despite everything, the fundamental character of royalty is not divine as in other cultures, and all these divine titles have to be situated together with the texts that very clearly indicate that royalty is the object of an election on the part of the divinity. Above, we have seen the text that referred to Gudea. Similarly, Eannatum, the king of Lagash, is “he whose name was pronounced by Enlil, given strength by Ningursu, considered by Nanshe in her heart, nourished with the sacred milk of Ninhursaga, granted a name by Inanna.” Ashurnasirpal II is “called by Ishtar”, who “entrusted



Ashurbanipal on his ceremonial chariot (fragment of a relief at the Louvre). As in China, the chariot is covered by a canopy. The king is wearing a tiara.

him with the sceptre of righteousness”; and Asarhaddon, speaking of himself: “In the joy of their hearts, the gods, lifting their eyes upon me, had chosen me legitimately to be king.”

The ceremony of enthronement confirms this impression. The new king comes to the temple and, according to an expressive formula, “grasps the hands of the god”: this gesture is one of homage and, in return, the god transmits the power which he alone disposes, giving the prince the sceptre and the crown and proclaiming his name, showing that it is once again the god who is the author of the election. In placing the crown on the head

of the chosen one, the Assyrian priest says: "May Asur and Ninlil, *the lords of thy diadem*, place the diadem on thy head for a hundred years ... may thy priest and the priest of thy sons find favour before Asur. With the sceptre of righteousness make immense thy country. May Asur grant thee swift satisfaction, righteousness and peace."

In fact, the exact conception of royalty of the Assyro-Babylonians is perfectly summarised by the tradition according to which, they say, at the beginning of time, and then again after the Flood, "royalty descended from heaven". *Royalty*, not the *king*; it is the *function* that is *divine*, not the titular.

GREECE & ROME · Alongside the splendours displayed by the oriental monarchies, the kings in ancient Greece and Rome pale in comparison, not only because, during the most brilliant epoch of classical civilisation, the title of king was no longer anything more than a survival, and the titular confined to the most restricted religious functions, of which we shall speak later, but also because, even in the archaic epoch, during which the king fully exercised his functions, he never occupied in these countries the eminent place that we have seen in Egypt, India or other places. Nevertheless, in Greece as well as in Rome, royalty appears with the same fundamental characteristics by which it is known everywhere: it possesses an undeniable sacral character.

In Crete, Minos, whose name designates less a fabled hero than a function—as in Egypt, the word pharaoh—is the son of Zeus, and every nine years he withdraws into the sacred cave of Ida to render accounts to the father of his administration, and to receive instructions and a renewed power for a new period. In Homeric society the king is qualified as "divine" (*theios*, *di(w)os*), "son of god" (*diogenes*), "suckling of Zeus" (*diotrephes*). Agamemnon and Menelaus descend from Zeus through Tantalus, Pelops and Atreus. The king holds his dignity (*time*) from Zeus;³⁴ his power is a "sacred power" (*hieron menos*),³⁵ for the king incarnates the divine power of which the symbol is the sceptre: that of Agamemnon is the work of Hephaestus and it is

34. *Iliad*, 196.

35. *Odyssey*, 7.167 and passim.

Zeus himself who gave it to him to reign.³⁶ The kings of Athens all descended, by way of legendary genealogies, from divinities. In Ilia, the kings descend from Zeus, in Corinth, from Apollo.³⁷ In Sparta as well, where there were two kings, they all descended from Zeus.

What is remarkable in Greece is that the affirmation of the divine source of royal power was concreted around the Hearth (*Hestia*); the importance of the cult of the Hearth, in the family as well as in the City, is well known. The public *Hestia* was the sacred centre of the city, as can be seen already in Homer.³⁸ The first role of the kings, to which we shall return later, was to celebrate the cult of the Hearth, which, as Aristotle affirms, was the true source of royal power.³⁹ Thus, Battus, the founder of Cyrene, was the first king of that city, because, having founded it, he had lighted the public Hearth; likewise for the royal family of the Codrides in Ionia.⁴⁰ This is easily explained if we recall that the hearth has the value of the *omphalos*; it is a centre, and like all centres ritually constituted, it is symbolically assimilated to the Centre of the World, which the Pythagoreans represented as a hearth, the cosmic *Hestia*, the hearth of the Universal Fire, the source of all things.⁴¹ As an *omphalos*, the hearth, and especially the public *Hestia*, was the point of intersection of the earth with the World Axis, which according to all traditions is the way by which Heaven communicates with the here-below and conversely.⁴² This appears clearly in Hellenic homes, where an opening was made in the roof through which the smoke es-

36. *Iliad* 2.100 ff; 9.38. Cf. 18.478 ff.

37. Pausanias 5.1.2.3.

38. For example, *Odyssey* 8.40 ff.

39. Aristotle, *Politics* 7.5.11.

40. *Ibid.*, Herodotus 1.146.

41. The cosmic character of the hearth-altar has at times been emphasised by the presence of bands or ribbons arranged in a cross according to the four cardinal directions, as with the Buryats.

42. We have seen this in connection with the Chinese tradition, cf. pp. 19-23.

caped. The hearth stone was an altar stone and a sacrificial stone on which the fire burned the offerings and made them “rise” toward Heaven, whence, in return, the blessings “descended”.⁴³ Thus, it was altogether normal, in a tradition in which the ritual hearth played the chief role in the hallowing of the city, that the “heavenly mandate” should come to the sovereign in this way. Something analogous took place in ancient Ireland, where the famous Stone of Fall, brought by the divine ancestors Tuatha De Danann, played the part of an *omphalos*, serving to enthrone the king of Ireland by the sound which could be heard coming from the stone.

In Rome, although the cult of the Hearth was part of the royal prerogatives, it does not appear that it was considered to be the source of power. We know more or less how the election and investiture of the king took place. When a prince died, an interrex was named with the mission of designating the future king. In this designation, moreover, he only played an intermediary role, for it was Heaven which in reality designated the chosen one: this designation took place through the auspices. Once the new king was known, the augurs proceeded to his enthronement, the aim of which, as always and everywhere, was to publicly manifest the will of the gods and the investiture of their chosen one. The chosen sat on a seat of stone, facing South. An augur, wearing *infulae* and holding his staff, was at his left; with his *lituus* he traced certain lines in the sky, made a prayer and put his hand on the king’s head, so that the gods might manifest with a visible sign—a lightning flash or a flock of birds—that they accepted the king. Once the sign was perceived, the king, now converted into a sacred, “divine”, personage, assumed his functions. This very simple ritual was employed, for example, by Numa.⁴⁴

This sacred character of the Roman kings is confirmed by legends referring to it: Romulus is the son of the god Mars, who was united to Rhea Sylvia; he did not die, but was taken to heaven and joined to the god Quirinus (this story means that the royal,

43. We have developed these different symbolisms in our studies *Le symbolisme du temple chrétien* and *La divine Liturgie* (Ed. de la Maisnie).

44. Livy 1.18.6 ff. Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 7.174.

divine principle, after having descended from heaven is reabsorbed there upon the disappearance of a prince, and returns to descend upon his successor). In Numa, the "divine" character is expressed in the legend of his secret visits to the nymph Egeria: what is probably in question is a hierogamy, a rite that, in a sexual form, places man in relation with a divine power manifested in a feminine entity. This type of hierogamy is often encountered in sacred royalties. Another case, in ancient Italy, is that of *Rex nemorensis*, the "King of the forests": that was the name of the priest of Diana in Nemi, who doubtless had as his wife the sylvan Diana, *Regina nemorum*. This, surely, is a survival of an ancient royal rite. And it is to a hierogamy of this genre that the incest of Oedipus should be related, this incest being merely a late moralistic misinterpretation of the primitive royal rite in the version of the oedipal myth we possess, and which obviously is not the original one; what was quite certainly in question was a hierogamy with a mother goddess, doubtless the *Terra Mater*.

A final confirmation of the "divine" character of Roman royalty is given to us by the ceremony of the *triumph*, in which the royalty is so to speak perpetuated, at least in part; for the ritual of the triumph, in the opinion of most experts, is modelled on a royal ritual. The one triumphant was disguised as Jupiter-king: his face covered with vermillion (exactly as the statue of Jupiter Capitolinus on festival days), dressed in a purple tunic embroidered with gold, a laurel wreath on his forehead, another in his right hand; with the sceptre with an eagle at the end in his left hand, he advanced, mounted on a quadriga, while a slave held a crown of gold in the form of oak leaves over his head; and thus he went to the Capitol where he celebrated a sacrifice. This ritual of triumph deserves our attention, for it will play an important part, as we shall see, in that species of monarchic restoration that was the Empire.

GERMANIC LANDS · The sacral quality of royal power is also well documented in the entire zone of Germanic civilisation. The Scandinavian kings had as their mythic ancestor Odin (called Wodan or Wotan among the Germans properly so-called), and also Yngvi Frey, the god of the seasons, like the princes of Upsala, who reigned in Norway until the Middle Ages: their royal

house was called Ynglingar, and next to their name they bore the name Yngri. The “royal nobles” of the Gothic Amali, from whom they chose their king, traced their ancestry also from Odin, under the name of Gapt. The Merovingians, for their part, according to the tradition of the Salian Franks, have as their ancestor Mero Vech, who was supposedly the son of Chlogio’s Queen, after she was raped by a marine monster while bathing.

Even in the Germanic area a certain form of de facto “apotheosis” and a cult of the deceased kings is met with. Thus, the saga of King Gudmund of Sweden tells us that the people made sacrifices to him, naming him their god. The same occurred with the kings of Norway, Olaf Geirstadal and Halfdar the Black. This attitude of the Nordic peoples explains the legends that were formed regarding the survival of several princes, beginning with Charlemagne, who, they say, did not die, but was taken up—like Romulus, as we have seen—and is living in the Untersberg, near Salzburg. The last king of the Amali dynasty, Theodoric the Great, is supposed to have had the same destiny: raised up on his horse while still living, he wandered mysteriously over the world under the guise of a *wilder Jaeger* and would appear on certain occasions. It was also told that at the moment that Emperor Frederick II was dying (in 1250), a man in Sicily saw an army of horsemen and, in their midst, the Emperor, heading towards Etna (Etna was a “mountain of the dead” in which King Arthur had already been situated after his disappearance).

A closely related, although different, belief was the conviction that a deceased prince lived again in one of his descendants: Olaf the Holy, king of Norway (d. in 1030), passed as being the reincarnation of a king of the Ynglingar family, five generations previous, and who, in Geirstad, was the object of a tumultuous cult because he was considered a “divine” being.

Should these facts lead us to think that the kings of the Germanic tradition were divine beings “in their own right”, as were the pharaohs of Egypt? Certainly not. The god did not descend into the Germanic king; what they are convinced of is that *a part* of the divine being lives in the king, that the king is, from on high, united to the divinity and the *divine power*. In summary, we are once again faced with the same conception as in the Indian or

Assyro-Babylonian traditions and so many others, namely, that the royal dignity and its power descend from the divinity upon the person of the king, but that the king remains its servant.

This well-marked sacral character of Germanic royalty may initially surprise when it is also known that, for historians, this royalty is supposedly a “democratic” royalty, since it was elective and the prince was designated by the people’s assembly. The matter deserves to be examined, for it will allow us to specify what the traditional doctrine of power is—to which we have alluded at the beginning of this chapter—and what distinguishes between the *choice* of the one who exercises the authority and his *investiture*.

Let us first of all point out that the Germanic monarchy was not entirely elective, for it combined the elective system with the hereditary system, since one could not become king unless he belonged to the noble class. But it is certain, however, that even the son of a king could not become king unless he were *elected* by the assembly of the people. This assembly, called the *thing*, was constituted by arms-bearing freemen. Nevertheless, the Germanic royalty was not a “democratic” monarchy, as are modern monarchies, because the *investiture* of power really came from the divine world. In fact, the *thing* was not an ordinary, *profane* assembly, but a sacred assembly. We know from Tacitus that it was opened by a priest who summoned those attending as a “holy race”, “sons of Heimdall”; that is to say, that all present were considered as participating in the divinity, since their origin was the race of the Aesir; likewise, the amphictyony of the Suevi, which opened with a sacrifice and in which the god was considered to be present.⁴⁵ It is probable that the *thing* took place under the auspices of *Mars-Thingsus*, an avatar of the Indo-European god of the sky, *Tiwaz*, blending the characters of the warrior god and the god-master of the world, guarantor of the universal order. Thus the *thing* was a sacral assembly, the purpose of which was—in investing the king *in the name of the divinity* in which he participated *ritually* (through the sacrifice)—to

45. Tacitus, *Germania* 39.

guarantee the order of the social life by entrusting it to the chosen prince. Thus sacralised, the people could elect the king and transmit the sacral dignity to him.

The same ways could be observed by the Celts: the king was elected and invested amongst them by the nobility, in representation of the military caste, but always under the supervision of the Druids, bearers of the spiritual authority.

It will be necessary to remember this particularity of the political institutions of the Northern peoples when we study French royalty, for something analogous is found in it regarding the relationship between the king and the people, and which seems to come from Nordic institutions by way of the Franks.

* * *

Here we shall stop this review of sacred royalties across space and time, for although it is true that a much greater number could be examined than we have, it is no less certain that such an examination, besides ending by being tiresome, would give us no further essential element regarding the matter. Even if one were to include in such a review the case of less important and less structured societies than those which have served us as examples, societies which have no “royalty” properly speaking, but rather a “chiefdom”, one would arrive at the same results and, there as well, one would note that the conception and organisation of power are founded on a spiritual basis, and that the power is always considered to come from On High.