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166—Grain cultivation (in Sumer and Egypt) takes place under public control, for the land and its products belong to the local god, and the surplus is duly stored in centralized granaries within the fortified citadel of the newly built cities. It was in the orderly exercise of this over-all control by the temple and the palace that writing was first invented, to keep account of quantities of produce received and disbursed. The political agents that collected and distributed the grain could control the entire population.

170—The sheer force could not by itself produced the prodigious concentration of human energy. That demanded the cooperation, or at least the awed submission and passive consent, of the entire community.

The agency that effected this change, the institution of divine kingship, was the product of a coalition between the tribute-exacting hunting chieftain and the keepers of an important religious shrine. Without that combination, without that sanction, without that luminous elevation, the claims that the new rulers made to unconditional obedience to their king's superior will, could not have been established: it took extra, supernatural authority, derived from a god or a group of gods, to make kingship prevail throughout a large society. Arms and armed men, specialists in homicide were essential; but force alone was not enough.

Even before the written record becomes available, the ruins from the earliest pre-dynastic al-Ubaid period of Ur indicate that the transformation had already been effected: here, as elsewhere, Leonard Woolley found a temple, within a sacred enclosure, where the royal granary, at once a food storehouse and a bank, would likewise be placed. The authority, priestly or royal, that collected, stored, and allocated the grain, held the means of controlling a large, dependent population—provided the granary was constantly guarded by walls and warriors.

Under the protective symbol of his god, housed in a massive temple, the king, who likewise served as high priest, exercised powers that no hunting chief would have dared to claim merely as the leader of his band.

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This fusion of sacred and temporal power released an immense explosion of latent energy, as in a nuclear reaction. At the same time it created a new institutional form, for which there is no evidence in the simple Neolithic village or the Paleolithic cave: an enclave of power, dominated by an elite who were supported in grandiose style by tribute and taxes forcibly drawn from the whole community.

171—In Egypt almost from the beginning, in Mesopotamia at intervals, the king was conceived as a god in his own right. Egyptian history, as a tale transmitted, begins at this point. By this union of cosmic and earthly power the ruler became at once a living person and an immortal: he was born and died like other men, yet he would be reborn, like his other self, Osiris, even as his power was renewed each day, like that of the returning sun, Atum-Re, after effecting a safe passage through the night and emerging again in the East.

As with Ptah, the primal Egyptian deity, the words coming forth from the king's mouth brought a world into existence; and when he uttered a command, he must be obeyed. Not merely did he hold the powers of life and death over the community, but he was the living incarnation of that community: they were one, as Ptah himself was one with all he had created. The Pharaoh's life was the community life, his prosperity its prosperity, his health its health. The community lived and flourished vicariously, through the king: so in piously saluting every mentioned of his name with the words, "Life, Prosperity, Health," they were ensuring these benefits for themselves.

172—Witness the final act of Marduk's battle with the primeval goddess Tiamat: "With his unsparing mace he crushed her skull."

173—By identifying the person of the king with the impersonal, above all implacable, order of the heavens, royal power received in immense super-charge of energy: the king's political authority, based on weapons and military exertion, was vastly augmented by the inordinate supernatural powers he wielded.

Kingship everywhere partook of divinity; all kings exercised their extraordinary authority by 'divine right,' for the king was a

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necessary executioner of the gods' decrees, as well as the chief agent for establishing great collective enterprises such as the building of cities and canal systems.

176—It was during the Third Dynasty of Ur—a period of vigorous constructive activity—that all the kings except the founder claimed divinity. This evidence decisively couples divine kingship with the characteristic public works program of the megamachine. Little tasks might still be left to little men, but big tasks belonged to the king by reason of the special powers he commanded: above all, the unique power to create a colossal labor machine.

Both to establish and maintain kingship, an infusion of divine power was essential. But the constant intercourse with Heaven, necessary for the guidance of the king, demanded professional aid from priests, magicians, soothsayers, interpreters of dreams, and readers of cosmic signs, who in turn were dependent upon the king's secular power and wealth for their own status and office.

177—On the theological basis of kingship, then, the testimony of Mesopotamia is as clear as that of Egypt...And the words uttered by the earliest kings of both lands continue to ring through history both in the claims of 'legitimate' kings like Louis XIV, and in the no less extravagant assertions of a Hitler, a Stalin, or a Mao, whose abject and adoring followers have imputed omniscience to them.

As a condition of taking office, Marduk insists that when he gives a command, he must be obeyed by his fellow gods without question, "Let my word instead of you, determine the fates; unalterable shall be what I may bring into being: neither recalled nor changed shall be the command of my lips." These words are worth noting. They set forth the terms on which the new collective mechanism was brought into being.

178—In the act of establishing law and order within the sacred territory of their gods, kings came into conflict with rival kings and foreign gods, equally arrogant in their imputed divinity, who also claimed the same kind of blind loyalty and awestruck obedience. Too

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often they were tempted to assert their superior power by encroaching on neighboring states and despoiling their inhabitants.

179—Here again Jacobsen re-enforces Frankfort's interpretation: "An orderly word (for the Mesopotamian) is unthinkable without a superior authority to impose his will." The Mesopotamian feels convinced that the authorities are always right, or at least that there is no use arguing with them. "The command of the palace, like the command of Anu, cannot be altered. The King's word is right; his utterances, like that of a god, cannot be changed." These words resound with sickening familiarity in our present totalitarian states.

184—The gods served as a model for kings (among the Babylonians, Assyrians, Hittites, etc.). In the metaphors used in the most ancient Pyramid text, describing a deified Pharaoh, one encounters a kind of unrestrained cannibal lust in dwelling on the scope and power of the divine king. As pictured there kingship was actually a man-eating device. To match these frightful symbols one would have to turn to a playwright of our own day who presents a woman eating the genitals of her lover.

Lest my characterization seem extravagant, let me support it with Erman's translation:

"He it is that eateth men; that liveth on Gods, that possesseth the carriers and despatcheth messages. The Runner-with-all-Knives. He that stranglenth for him; he draweth out for him their entrails, he the messenger whom he sends death to. He it is that eateth their magic and swalloweth their lordliness. Their great ones are for his morning meal, their middle-sized ones for his evening meal, and their little ones for his night meal. He hath broken up the backbones and the spinal marrow, he hath taken away the hearts of the Gods, he hath eaten the Red Crown, he hath swallowed the Green One. He feedeth on the lungs of the Wise Ones: he is satisfied with living on hearts and their magic."

Brutal compulsion was the necessary accompaniment of the large-scale organization and the extensive order introduced by

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kingship. Herodotus' history is full of revolting descriptions of the rabid violence of kings.

185—Apart from murder and rape, the most horrendous crimes punished by civilized authority stem back to the 'unpardonable sin' of kingship disobedience to the sovereign. Murderous coercion was the royal formula for establishing authority, securing obedience, and collecting booty, tribute, and taxes. At bottom, every royal reign was a reign of terror.

Disobedience to the orders of a superior was the worst of sins; and even 'answering back' was a serious offense.

Woolley cites a Hittite law: "And if ever a servant vexes his master, either they kill him, or they injure his nose, his eyes, or his ears." Such mutilations were the favorite form of punishment.

192—The invention of writing made it possible to fix accountability when written orders were not carried out. Accountability and the written word both went along historically with the control of large numbers; and it is no accident that the earliest uses of writing were not to convey ideas, religious or otherwise, but to keep temple records of grain, cattle, pottery, fabricated goods, stored and disbursed.

This happened early, for a pre-dynastic Narmer mace in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford records the taking of 120,000 prisoners, 400,000 oxen, and 1,422,000 goats. The arithmetical reckoning was an even greater feat than the capture.

198—This extension of magnitude in every direction, this raising of the ceiling of human effort, this subordination of individual aptitudes and interests to the mechanical job in hand, and this unification of a multitude of subordinates to a single end derived from one source alone: the divine power exercised by the king. The king, or rather kingship, was the prim-mover. In turn, the staring success of the enterprise confirmed that power.

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Such strict, all-embracing order began at the top: consciousness of the predictable movements of the sun and the planets. In giant collective works, as in the temple ceremonials, it was the king who gave forth the original commands: the king who demanded absolute conformity and who punished even trivial disobedience. It was the king who alone had the godlike power of turning men into mechanical objects and assembling these objects in a machine.

202—At the start, the virtues of divine kingship must have bedazzled all men. For this was the ‘Age of the Builders’: and the new cities that arose were deliberately designed as a simulacrum of Heaven. Never before had so much energy been available for magnificent permanent public works.

202—At this earliest stage, personality and power went together: both centered in the king. For the sovereign alone could make decisions, alter ancient local customs, create structures and perform collective feats that had never been imagined, still less carried out before.

In short, he could behave like a responsible person capable of rational choice, released from tribal custom: free to be, when the situation demanded, a non-conformist, and able to introduce by edict and law deviations from the ancestral pattern. Like the king’s original monopoly, that of immortality, some of these prerogatives would, under pressure, be passed along eventually to the whole community.

206—In times of peace, kings and nobles lived by the pleasure principle: eating, drinking, hunting, playing games, copulating, all in ostentatious excess. So at the very period when the myth of the machine was taking form, the problems of an economy of abundance first became visible in the behavior and the fantasies of the ruling classes—here, too, mirroring in advance the processes at work in our own age.

If we note attentively the aberrations of the ruling classes throughout history, we shall see how far most of them were from understanding the limitations of mere physical power, and of a life that centered upon an effortless consumption: the reduced life of the parasite on a tolerant host.

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The boredom of satiety dogged this economy of surplus power and surplus goods from the very beginning: it led to insensate personal luxury and even more insensate acts of collective delinquency and destruction. Both were means of establishing the superior status of the ruling minority, whose desires knew no limits and whose very crimes turned into Nietzschean virtues.

208—Great buildings whose baked clay surfaces were coated with brilliant glazes, even gold, sometimes encrusted with semi-precious stones, embellished at intervals by monumental sculptures of lions or bulls, dominated the new cities of Mesopotamia. Such buildings naturally fostered communal pride: vicariously, the meanest drudge in the new ceremonial centers and cities participated in these feats of power, these wonders of art, daily witnessing a life that was entirely beyond the reach of the humble peasant or herdsman.

209—The construction and cultural elevation of a whole city was largely the work of the megamachine. The rapidity of its erection and the enlargement of all its dimensions, particularly its central nucleus, the temple, the palace, and the granary, bear testimony to royal direction. Walls, fortifications, highroads, canals, and cities, remain supreme acts of the 'sovereign power.'

Throughout history, this original image of the city called forth human devotion and effort. The great mission of kingship has been to overcome the particularism and isolationism of small communities, to wipe out the often meaningless differences that separate one human group from another.

210—In the building of the city and all the special institutions that accompanied it, kingship came to its greatest constructive culmination. Kings demonstrated how much popular communities, once they were collectively organized in great mechanical units, could accomplish.

The mighty cultural heroes and kings who fabricated the megamachine and performed these tasks, from Gilgamesh and

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Imhotep to Sargon and Alexander the Great, roused their contemporaries from a sluggish passive acceptance of cramped, 'natural' limits: they called upon them to 'plan the impossible.' And when the work was done, that which had seemed impossible of human performance had, in fact, been realized. From around 3500 B. C. on, nothing that men could imagine seemed to lie entirely beyond the reach of royal power.

For the first time in man's development, the human personality—at least in a few self-elevated but representative figures—transcended the ordinary limits of space and time. By identification and vicarious participation, as a witness if not an active aid, the common man had an exalted sense of human potentiality as expressed in the myths of the gods, the astronomical knowledge of the priests, and the far-reaching decisions and activities of kings.

214—The dreams of an existence which counterfeited closely that of the ruling classes are still an active ingredient in the fantasy of effortless affluence that currently hovers like a pink smog over Megalopolis.

215—From the beginning the weight of the megamachine itself was the chief burden of civilization: not merely did it turn daily work into a grievous penalty, but it diminished the psychological rewards that compensate the hungers, farmers, and herdsmen for their sometimes exhausting labors. Never was this burden heavier than at the beginning, when the greatest public activity in Egypt was mainly directed to supporting the claim of the Pharaoh to divinity and immortality.

To give this whole tissue of illusions a semblance of 'credibility' in the twenty-ninth century B. C. "the tomb of Prince Nekura, son of King Khafre of the Fourth Dynast, was endowed from the prince's private fortune with no less than twelve towns, the income of which went exclusively to the support of the tomb." Such heavy taxation for such empty ostentation still characterized the Sun God (*Le Roi Soleil*) who built Versailles.



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The cost of this effort was noted by Frankfort: “Egypt was drained of talent for the benefit of the royal residence. The graves at Aua-el-Kebir—a cemetery in Middle Egypt used through the third millennium—show the scantiest equipment, and that of the poorest quality of craftsmanship, during the flourishing period of the Old Kingdom, when the pyramids were being built.” That says everything. The future historians of the great states now busily projecting manned rockets into space will—if our civilization lives long enough to tell the tale—doubtless make exactly parallel observations.

220—The conditions favoring organized war, conducted by a military machine of great potency, capable of completely destroying massive walls, wrecking dams, razing cities and temples, were greatly enlarged by the genuine triumphs of the labor machine.

But it is highly doubtful if these heroic public works, which demanded an almost superhuman effort and endurance, would have been undertaken for any purely mundane purpose. Only prostration before the *mysterium tremendum*, some manifestation of godhead in its awful power and luminous glory, will call forth such excessive, collective effort.

220—The ability to wage war and to impose collective human sacrifice has remained the identifying mark of all sovereign power throughout history.

221—As late as the time of Abraham, the voice of God might command a loving father to offer up his son on a private altar; and the public sacrifice of prisoners captured in war remained one of the standard ceremonies in such ‘civilized’ states as Rome. The modern historians’ glossing over all this evidence shows how necessary it has been for ‘civilized’ man to repress this evil memory, in order to keep his self-respect as a rational being: that life-saving illusion.

The two poles of civilization, then, are mechanically organized work and mechanically organized destruction and extermination. Roughly the same forces and the same methods of operation were applicable to both areas.

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223—Note what is said as an encomium of one of the earliest exponents of this power system, Sargon of Akkad, in the ‘Sargon Chronicle,’ “He had neither rival nor opponent. He spread his terror-inspiring glamour over all countries.” To maintain that peculiar halo of power which, Oppenheim notes, radiated only from kings, “5,400 soldiers ate daily in his presence,” that is, within the citadel, where they protected the treasure and the temple granary, those monopolistic instruments of political and economic control.

224—The solemn original association of kingship with sacred power, human sacrifice, and military organization was central, I take it, to the whole development of ‘civilization’ that took place between 4000 and 600 B.C. And under thin disguises it remains central today. The ‘sovereign state’ today is only the magnified abstract counterpart of the divine king; and the institutions of human sacrifice and slavery are still present, equally enlarged and even more imperious in their demands. Universal military service (conscription on the pharaonic model) has grossly multiplied the number of sacrificial victims, while constitutional government by ‘consensus’ has only made the power of the ruler more absolute, since dissent and criticism are not ‘recognized.’

In time, the magical incentives to war took on a more reputable utilitarian disguise. While the search for sacrificial captives might be enlarged into an even more terror-making slaughter of conquered women and children, the victims, if spared, might be turned into slaves and so add to the labor force and economic efficiency of the conqueror. So the secondary products of military effort—slaves, booty, land, tribute, taxes—supplanted and guilefully concealed the once-barefaced irrational motives.

224—The repeated death of civilizations from internal disintegration and outward assault, massively documented by Arnold Toynbee, underscores the fact that the evil elements in this amalgam largely cancelled the benefits and blessings. The one lasting contribution of the megamachine was the myth of the machine itself: the notion that this machine was, by its very nature, absolutely irresistible—and yet, provided one did not oppose it, ultimately beneficent. That magical

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spell still entralls both the controllers and the mass victims of the megamachine today.

225—From the end of the first great Age of the Builders in Egypt, that of the Sixth Dynasty Pharaoh, Pepi I, comes corroborative evidence of this pervasive irrationality, all the more telling because it issues from the relatively orderly and unbedevilled Egyptians:

The army returned in safety  
After it had hacked up the land of the Sand Dwellers  
...After it had thrown down its enclosures...  
After it had cut down its figs trees and vines...  
After it had hast fire into all its dwellings...  
After it had killed troops in it by many ten-thousand.

That sums up the course of Empire everywhere: the same boastful words, the same vicious acts, the same sordid results, from the earliest Egyptian palette to the latest American newspaper with its reports, at the moment I write, of the mass atrocities cold-bloodedly perpetrated with the aid of napalm bombs and defoliating poisons, by the military forces of the United States on the helpless peasant populations of Vietnam: an innocent people, uprooted, terrorized, poisoned and roasted alive in a futile attempt to make the power fantasies of the American military-industrial-scientific elite ‘credible.’

228—Do not be a soldier, advices an Egyptian scribe from the New Kingdom: as a recruit “he receiveth a burning blow on his body, a ruinous blow on his eye...and his pate is cleft with a wound. He is laid down and beaten. He is battered and bruised with flogging.” On such soldierly foundations ‘glamorous power’ was built: the destructive process began with the preparation of the smallest unity. Obviously the ‘Prussianism’ of the drill sergeant has a long history.

229—The mere increase in actual power had the effect on the ruling classes of releasing the obstreperous fantasies of the unconscious, and giving play to sadistic impulses that had hitherto had no collective outlet. And at the same time the machine itself was dependent for operation upon weak, fallible, stupid, or stubborn human members;

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so that the apparatus was liable under stress to disintegrate. These mechanized human parts themselves could not be permanently held together without being sustained by a profound magico-religious faith in the system itself, as expressed in the cult of the gods.

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