Chapter I
Kingship
(1980)

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“Roi, basileus, tyrannos, rex, dux, imperator, melch, baal, pharao, éli, shodai, adoni, shak, sophi, padisha, bogdan, chazan, kan, krall, king, kong, koenig, etc., etc., all expressions that seem to mean the same thing and that express completely different ideas” (Voltaire [1771] 1879: 375).

At first glance, it is tempting to think Voltaire is right: kingship assumes such different forms it seems impossible to reduce them all to a common denominator. Yet upon considering each form in its entirety, one is immediately struck by the recurrence of certain themes and structural relationships. Even the history of the principal forms of kingship, in Europe and Asia alike, reveals constants, as if only a limited number of possibilities were available.

Hence, the notion of kingship raises the problem that is central to every comparative attempt: how to identify not an abstract essence that sacrifices differences and history, but on the contrary certain structural principles that testify to both.

Let us begin with a minimal definition of “kingship.” Kingship is a mode of political organization where one person—the king—is the center of, or the focal point for, the entire community. As such, the king represents the fundamental values of the society over which he reigns, and is therefore considered sacred or even divine. Even when the king is not sacred in sensu stricto, he stands in a privileged relationship to those who are: gods or their interpreters, their priests.
The mystic powers of kingship generally come in tandem with military power. In many theories of kingship, one power derives from the other: for some, sacred aspects are primary and military power is derived, whereas for others “it was a lucky warrior who was the first king” (Voltaire, Mérope I, III), or, to go along with Max Weber ([1922] 1968: 1141), “Everywhere the king is primarily a warlord. Kingship originates in charismatic heroism.”

The theory that posits the first king as a “magician” is associated with the the name of Frazer, according to whom kingship is the result of “superstition.” This superstition has positive effects, however, allowing the most capable men (magicians and thus inevitably intelligent impostors) to obtain power and authority over other men, to change ancestral customs, and thus to advance humanity (Frazer 1905: 82–88). Soon, however, the intellectual consequences of the political revolution introduced by the king-magicians affect their status: it becomes difficult to believe that they have the power to directly control nature. The king-magicians thus turn into king-priests: they now claim to reach their goals through transcendental powers, the “gods,” with whom they are capable of communicating and whom they at times even claim to incarnate (ibid.: 127–28). In a subsequent phase, the religious aspect of kingship is separated from the “civil” one: temporal power is given to one person, spiritual power to another, and, meanwhile, the magicians become scientists (ibid.: 151).

A contemporary scholar, Luc de Heusch (1958, 1962a), still refers to Frazer when he distinguishes between “magic kingship” and “religious kingship.”

A. M. Hocart’s theory (1927, [1936] 1970), which has come back into fashion, is a modified form of Frazer’s. Hocart abandons the categories of “magic” and “religion” and the idea that kings are useful impostors, but he still puts forward the hypothesis that kingship has ritual origins. For Hocart, the king is in all societies the “principal” actor in a mimetic rite whose function is to promote life: imitating, for example, natural phenomena, plant and animal species—or, rather, the spirits or gods who give them life—the “principal” believes he can identify with them and influence them for the community’s benefit. Only when men have learned to obtain life by secular means does kingship correspondingly become secularized, leaving as its legacy to the bureaucratic State its centralized structure, which originally resulted from the division of ritual labor.
Among the many criticisms that can be made of the “ritualistic” theory, one should be emphasized: the major weakness of Hocart’s hypothesis is that “ritual” and “political” are radically opposed, and that the “political” is posited as an evolutionary phase that comes after the “ritual.” However, even if we want to admit that kingship originally has purely ritual ends, these ends inevitably involve dimensions that are not ritualistic. Hocart ignores the material and social conditions of possibility of the rite. The complex ritual organization that he associates with kingship is already a political organization, because it requires that a certain number of people be hierarchically associated, that they become the focal point for the community, that resources for the rite be produced, and so on. The opposition between “ritual” and “political” is therefore artificial. If the idea that the ritual the king performs generates life can continue to be confirmed in collective experience, this is also because its performance actually produces life and prosperity as they are concretely possible in a certain social form: it stimulates cooperation, the formation of surpluses and their circulation, and so on. The rite is thus simultaneously the representation of the ends of kingship (which are identified with those of society as a whole) and of the means that actually lead to these ends. It provides, in short, a coordination and a totalization of all social activities.

It is not, therefore, a question of establishing a causal and evolutionary relationship between “ritual” and “political”: these categories are of our creation. What matters, rather, is to understand that there are no social structures without symbolic structures, and vice versa.

Similarly one-sided is the theory that posits the king as a “lucky soldier.” The theory disregards the fact that violence and military success are themselves objects of cultural interpretation: they are not seen as simply physical force. The isolation of physical force, the opposition between purely military and purely religious power, is a modern phenomenon. The king’s military power gains legitimacy by acquiring meanings that transcend the power itself. Moreover, the conquering king is transformed when he establishes a permanent relationship with the population and the territory he controls: he moves from the periphery to the center of society. He thus associates himself with the values of this center, even if he maintains, as we will see, a relationship with the chaotic and violent world of the periphery.

The duality of the figure of the king is universally reflected in mythology and in the ritual of kingship: the king is a foreigner, a violent conqueror, but at the same time “the king belongs to the people,” as
the Yoruba say (see Lloyd 1954), he is the guardian of the established order.

As we will see, this duality has symbolic causes, but it is also rooted in a reality that symbolism must order and control.

**The king as conquerer and predator: African examples**

The formation of monarchic states is explained by some as an endogenous process and by others as the result of a conquest that permits a militarily strong group to impose itself on another and exploit it (Balandier 1967). In reality, the two processes can be, and in a certain sense always are, combined (Mair 1977: 21–22). It must be emphasized that even when kingship grows out of an endogenous process, disparities in power are created at the regional level: inevitably, the stronger group expands and becomes conqueror. The “conquering” and “foreign” aspects of kingship thus have quite real origins. Two African examples effectively illustrate this point.

The formation of Rwanda, a kingdom of the inter-lake region of eastern Africa, has been reconstructed in detail by Belgian scholars (Vansina 1962; Heusch 1966). I briefly summarize here the schema proposed by Jan Vansina.

The original population of the region between the great lakes was made up of Hutu farmers who were either politically acephalous (every lineage was autonomous), or organized in small groups guided by hereditary leaders, endowed with ritual privileges and in particular with the ability to control atmospheric phenomena (Vansina 1962: 77–78). Vansina thus supposes a situation quite similar to that of the “king-magicians” described by Frazer. His reconstruction is indirectly confirmed by the presence in the region of political organizations of the same type, for instance that of the Alurs, which Aiden Southall (1953) suggests developed through an endogenous process.

This region was then infiltrated by groups of pastoral people of Nilotic affiliation, later known as Tutsi, who occupied its pastures. These populations also had an acephalous organization, but group migration took place under the guidance of leaders who were able, with gifts or livestock loans, to attract a sufficient number of men for their incursions. Once settled in an area occupied by the Hutus, a band would offer them protection from other groups and their raids. Thanks to their military superiority and mobility, which allowed them to control relatively vast areas (pastoral peoples, because of the very nature of their activity and because of the need to open new pastures,
are strongly expansionistic and have an effective military organization), the invaders secured control over the Hutus; they also obtained work and agricultural products from them, which were only partially compensated by counter-prestations of sheep-farming products.

Vansina claims that the leaders of the groups who were most successful in gaining control over of the Hutu people became the first kings, who then began to replace the leaders of confederated lineages with their own relatives, reinforcing in this way their control over the group they led. This also led to scissions amongst rivals. The formation of the kingdom of Rwanda was the final result of a series of similar scissions that began with the kingdom of Mubari, which, according to traditional accounts, was the first to be formed.

The two brothers who founded the kingdom of Rwanda conquered small neighboring kingdoms, two of which had adopted the ritual practices of Hutu leaders and had even taken on their title: abiru. These abiru lineages came to be associated with the Rwandan king’s court; as a result, according to Vansina, the Tutsi kingship became sacred (more likely, in my opinion, this was a passage from a purely Tutsi sacredness to a sacredness that took on the values and symbols of the dominated people; cf. below). This sacredness favored the unification of the invading group around its leader.

But one must also note that the king’s sacralization proceeded hand in hand with the reinforcement of his control over military power. From the sixteenth century, the king prohibits subordinate leaders from recruiting warriors without his permission; toward the end of the eighteenth century, he begins reserving the right to select the leaders of the various military units, despite not having an army of his own. In addition, he creates regional capitals, each occupied by a queen (i.e., one of his wives) and her court, which controls strategic areas and rounds up resources to sustain the main capital. Little by little, a “civil” administration takes shape alongside the military one, and, by the second half of the nineteenth century, the king Rwabugiri can afford to disregard hereditary rights to offices and appoint his own protégés instead. The extension of the king’s power leads to the expansion of his territorial dominion, and, at the same time, is rendered possible by it (allowing the gathering of new resources).

Rwandan history shows how the kingdoms of East Africa were formed by groups of shepherds who exploited groups of farmers; in West Africa we find instead, at the origins of kingship, warrior groups
that control international commerce and use weaker populations as hunting grounds for slaves.

In his interesting book on the relationship between State and technology in Africa, Jack Goody notes that in West Africa, the combined effect of poor soil, abundant availability of land and absence of the plow prevents the formation of a sedentary agriculture that is able to produce significant surpluses. Transportation and exchange difficulties, in combination with the above factors, prevent the formation of a class of lords that can live off the control of agricultural resources. The economic support for a politically centralized organization thus cannot be income from the land (as, for example, in medieval Europe), but instead consists of the two complementary activities of war and commerce (Goody 1971: 42). Military expeditions indeed allow the collection of spoils, in particular of slaves, some of whom are sold to European traders in exchange for guns (which enable the capture of other slaves), while others, especially in Dahomey (Lombard 1967: 74), are put to work to produce the food that is necessary to sustain the king and his court. Military superiority also insures the control of markets (which are taxed) and of commercial routes (on which tolls are levied), the monopolization of trade in certain products, and the creation of stable sources of supply from vassal states, which provide slaves, cola, nuts, ivory, and gold as forms of tribute.

The military superiority of the mostly immigrant groups that formed the monarchies of West Africa was made possible by the combination of two exogenous factors: the introduction of iron weapons and of the horse (Goody 1971: 43–49). Indeed, the kingdoms of the Savannah were built “on horseback.” There is therefore a certain parallelism with East Africa: in both areas, the founders of the monarchies are groups of conquerors characterized by mobility (shepherds in one area, horsemen in the other) and military superiority. In the West as in the East, the spread of iron technology set in motion processes that have led to the formation of complex political organizations (ibid.: 46–47). Both of these areas also illustrate another important fact: in the absence of ecological, technical, and organizational conditions stimulating the production of an agricultural surplus and its regular collection, plunder is the primary and fundamental form of wealth collection that enables the formation of an aristocracy and the kingship it expresses. War is therefore the principal “means of production” of these political organizations: often commerce complements it,
prodding it on and providing the instruments (the arms, for example) of its perpetuation. Thus in West Africa, the kingdoms of the forest areas—whose formation lagged behind that of the other kingdoms founded by the horsemen of the Savannah (Smith 1969: 4–5)—became increasingly dependent on the foreign trade that occurred, especially in the fifteenth century and beyond, in the Gulf of Guinea. The control the king exercised over trade, and therefore also over firearms, and the absence in the forest area—difficult for horses to penetrate or survive in—of an equestrian aristocracy counterbalancing royal power, explain how the kings of Benin and of Dahomey, and also to a certain extent those of the Ashanti (cf. Wilks 1967), were able to acquire a supremacy that was out of the reach of their colleagues who headed the “cavalry states” of the Savannah (Goody 1971: 51–55). With regard to Benin, R. E. Bradbury speaks of a “patrimonial regime” (1973: 133–46); the king of Dahomey is in any case able to develop a full-fledged bureaucratic organization and to increase slave production (Lombard 1967: 77). It should also be noted that the increasing importance of the slave trade, upon which the prosperity of these kingdoms is based until the nineteenth century, by intensifying raids, fosters the formation of kingdoms in the peripheral hinterlands, both because the kings of the coastal areas create vassal states of horsemen who are given the task of capturing slaves, and because the acephalous tribes that do not flee into the inaccessible inland areas enter into confederacies with one another and choose leaders or kings who defend them from the incursion of the raiders. In this way kingship spreads over vast areas through a process ultimately dominated by external factors. It is therefore quite appropriate that kingship appears to local consciousness as an institution that has an external reference point.

Both the Rwandan and the West African case confirm therefore that a politically centralized organization does not form because of an immanent tendency to extend and to reinforce the functions of “government.” It is thus difficult to believe, following Goody, that “the nucleus of the state systems can be discerned even among lineages, age-sets, cult-associations, and other basic groupings of acephalous society” (1971: 18). Under normal conditions, acephalous societies tend in fact to recreate themselves as such, since the means of household production in force prevent the formation of a significant surplus and, most importantly, prevent its concentration in the hands of the few (cf. Sahlins 1972). In this system, a leader can increase production
and accumulate a surplus only temporarily, if he is able to persuade friends and relatives to work for him in preparation, for example, for a feast. In this way, the leader becomes indebted, and the debts must be paid. In the end, what is accumulated needs to be redistributed, and often paid back with an interest, so that the “great man” is really only great when he has become poor (cf. Sahlins 1963).

It also should not be forgotten that in a society whose principal production is food, there is a quantitative and temporal limit to accumulation. The accumulation of food is not in and of itself an incentive. As Max Gluckman (1960) has noted with regard to the Zulu, a leader is not able to eat much more than a common man.

The egalitarian ideology of acephalous societies ensures in any case the elimination of disparities in power and wealth. Amongst the Kapauku of Irian Jaya (Western New Guinea), the relatives of a leader who is too rich, and thus too egotistical, kill him yelling “You should not be the only rich man, we should all be the same, therefore you only stay equal with us” (Pospisil 1958: 80).

So, if acephalous societies evolve toward unequal forms, it is because inequality is imposed by a dominant group. However this group is formed, it remains associated, even in its subsequent transformations, with the externality of constraint, with the alterity of authority. This externality and alterity is oftentimes spatialized: and in a world of scattered communities, authority is in fact extraneous, if not foreign.

**From outside to inside**

The king is thus a warrior, a conqueror, inextricably linked to the use of force. But this force is not simply physical; his military superiority and his success seem exceptional and thus not human. It is a short step to the view that these are divine. Thus, for example, the success in war of Goth kings was attributed to their divine nature (see Jor-danes’ *De origine actibusque Getarum*, XIII). And when Chaka, after having moved from victory to victory, founded the Zulu kingship, he was considered a god (Mofolo 1931: 133, 139), and his exceptional military success was attributed to the aid of magic powers. But in the end, these powers consist in the accomplishment of actions that are in opposition to normal human behaviors and motivations: his boundless thirst for power brings him to kill in cold blood (or allow to die) his brothers, the chief who had protected him and even the woman who was most dear to him, and, more notably still, was pregnant with his child. Like other kings who surrounded themselves with animals
or with monstrous men (dwarfs, albinos, the “insane” [cf. Anderson 1972: 12; Heusch 1966: 156]), Chaka surrounds himself with two monstrous characters, one of whom is half beast (Mofolo 1931).

Metahuman, the king is in fact always associated with untamed nature, inaccessible to man, and in particular with fierce animals like the leopard, the lion, the elephant, the python, and so forth. The kings of Dahomey claimed to have descended from a leopard that one of their ancestresses met in the forest (Argyle 1966: 4); in the European Middle Ages it was believed that a special relationship existed between kings and lions, so much so that “enfant de roy ne doit lyons mengier” (cf. Bloch 1973: 148)—indeed, lion does not eat lion. As for Yoruba kings, they descended from the god of thunder, Shango (Morton-Williams 1967: 38). One could multiply ad infinitum examples of the association between kings and all that which in nature constitutes uncontrollable, and therefore divine, powers. Even in Saint Paul (Rom. 13: 1-7) we can find the echo of the idea that the power of kings is divine because it is power: if power comes from God, any king, good or bad, is a manifestation of God and should therefore not be opposed.

But if the king, precisely because he has strength, transcends humanity and is conflated with nature, then it is possible to control nature by controlling the king. The extraneous, invading character of the king thus takes on a meaning quite different from the one considered so far. With the king, nature penetrates into culture and can thus be domesticated, controlled. The scourge is now beneficent, and he who bears death becomes a bearer of life. But to make this possible, it is necessary to transform the king: the invader must become part of the people he rules, transcendent power must become immanent.

This transformation of the king is usually represented in the rite of coronation (Hocart 1927: 75–77). Through this rite, violent and non-human power is transformed into legitimate and productive power: the king is united with the people, both directly and through the gods who represent the moral principles of the community. Naturally, the king does not have to literally be a true invader: the rite of coronation takes on the task of representing the king’s passage from human to divine, from immanent to transcendent, and his triumphal return (symbolic “invasion”) into the human, to the inside of the community.

The passage to the wild, monstrous world is often represented spatially by a movement from the village to the forest or the bush. Also frequent is a ritual incest which the king is obliged to perpetrate,
which represents his transcendence of the line of conduct of the community and thus too of kinship ties, which are based on the prohibition of incest (Heusch 1958, 1962b: 147). From this negative point of view, incest is divine like all that is monstrous insofar as it is not human. But incest can also be considered a positive manifestation of the king’s divine character: by marrying his own mother, his own daughter, or his own sister, the king makes his self-reliance clear. Indeed he does not need to receive women from other men, he depends on no one, just like a god.

Other “monstrous” acts necessary to accede to the throne can include ritual parricide (there are examples of this in East Africa and from the Magadha kingship in India (cf. Basham [1967] 1971: 931), matricide (for the kingdom of Oyo, see Morton-Williams 1967: 65), the murder of other blood relations, or, simply, human sacrifice (for Dahomey, see Argyle 1966: 117).

The combination of incest with parricide is by no means limited to the Oedipal myth: quite the contrary, it is found for example in East Africa (Heusch 1962b: 149) or in Hawaii (cf. Valeri 1972).

These and other practices allow the king to transcend the human world, to acquire a “wild” sacredness which is characterized as an uncontrollable force and identified with nature. Strengthened by this sacredness, the king can, like an irresistible conqueror, break into the world of culture. But by entering into contact with this culture, the king is transformed. It is significant that many African kings, Jukun kings for example, after having symbolically or actually engaged in ritual incest, renounce it definitively once they have re-entered the human world (cf. Meek 1931: 138–39). Their relationship with the queen mother will remain very close, but it will be desexualized (for Dahomey, see Lombard 1967: 83).

The identification of the king with nature undergoes a parallel transformation: after the leopard-king, the lion-king, or the cannibal-king, which correspond to the king’s “conquering” and wild aspect, comes a king who is identified with beneficent nature or even with edible plants. For example, the Jukun king, who is called lion when he enters the capital (“The slouching gait, the lion approaches with slouching gait: take to your heels!” sing the drum players [Meek 1931: 152]), is then called “Azaiwo (our Guinea-Corn), Afyewo (our Groundnuts) or Asoiwo (our Beans)” (ibid.: 129), or “our crops,” “our rain,” “our health,” “our wealth” (ibid.: 137).
An analogous transformation takes place in the relationship between the king and the law. The conquering king is a transgressive king: in order to gain power he has disobeyed the law, he has killed, he has committed incest, and so on; but once in power, he is the keeper of the law, he punishes murder, incest, and so forth. Thus Romulus—after having founded Rome committing, among other crimes, one or more *parricidia* (he kills his brother and, according to one version, his adoptive father)—passes a law that prohibits *parricidium* (see Plutarch, *Lives*, Romulus, 22, 4). Moreover, the king, mobile and active before he is brought to power, becomes immobile (the Yoruba king, for example, could not leave his palace [cf. Morton-Williams 1967: 61]) and even makes himself invisible, hiding behind a curtain when he speaks with other men (as in West Africa [Meek 1931: 123]; and East Africa [Heusch 1966: 73]), or closing himself up in a hut during the day (as in Hawaii, see Kamakau [1866–71] 1961: 10).

The idea that the coronation transforms the conqueror and the usurper into a king with a priestly, if not divine, nature, can also be found in the Christian West. It is expounded, for instance, by Jean Golein in his famous fourteenth-century *Traité du sacre*:

> and when the king disrobes, this is testimony that he is relinquishing his former worldly state to take up that of the royal religion; and if he holds it in such reverence as he should, I believe that he is as fully cleansed of his sins as one just professed in a religious vocation; concerning which St. Bernard says towards the end of his book *De precepto et dispensacione*: that just as sins are pardoned at baptism, so they are on reception into the religious life. (cited in Bloch [1924] 1973: 278)

Theodor Balsamon narrates that the emperor Johannes Zimisces, guilty of having obtained the throne by assassinating his predecessor Niceforo Foca, was nonetheless admitted into church by the patriarch because “the royal unction had obliterated the assassination of which Zimisces was guilty even before he received this unction” (see Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, CXXXVII, col. 1156).

It is well known that, according to Marc Bloch ([1924] 1973: 81), the rite for treating the scrofula of French and English kings originates in the attempt of two usurping dynasties (the Capetians and Plantagenets) to legitimate themselves. But this attempt was successful not only because it was in tune with the ideology of sacred kingship, as Bloch maintains, but also because it corresponded to an equally im-
important schema: the individual and violent power of the usurper king had to transform into a power beneficent for the collectivity; the warrior-king had to sublimate into the priest-king and even the god-king. The same schema was applied moreover by Pipin of the Franks, a usurper who had to sublimate into a priest-king, receiving unction from the ecclesiastical authority (Kern [1914] 1939: 35–36).

Dialectic of the warrior and the priest in Eurasia
It is clear that the passage of the king from the extreme of warrior to the opposite extreme of priest, from evil force to beneficent force, cannot be total or irreversible without taking away a necessary dimension of kingship. Three solutions are possible: either the king, who has become priest and even god, is paired with a person who carries on the warlike and more strictly “political” functions of kingship; or, vice versa, the king remains fundamentally a warrior, but has to be rounded out by a priest who insures his relationship with the divine in its beneficent aspect; or, finally, the king as an individual, or rather kingship as a function, oscillates over time between the two states.

Each one of these three solutions has been adopted in different societies, or, over time, by one and the same society. For example, it is well-known that the first solution was adopted in Japan up through 1868. However it should be emphasized that the dual sovereignty realized by the mikado (or tennō, tenshi: “priest”-king) and by the shōgun (“soldier”-king) was itself the product of a complex evolution, whose point of departure was the failure of a unified kingship based on the Chinese model, with centralizing and bureaucratic tendencies. The collapse of this centralized system was facilitated by the progressive weakening of the emperor’s military importance. This weakening was above all determined by two concomitant factors: the absence of an external military threat and the adoption of Buddhism, which teaches non-violence and the sacred nature of every form of life. The imperial army was practically abolished, while at the same time the Chinese bureaucratic ideal was never realized. This resulted in increasing chaos, the emergence of private armed bands, some of which were maintained by the Buddhist convents themselves, and so on. Already in the mid-ninth century, the role of the emperor was split into two by regents, the Fujiwara, who held administrative and military power but still resided at court. From the twelfth century onward, however, with the shogunato Kamakura, the separation between the emperor (whose functions are only religious) and the shōgun (whose powers are based
on control of the warrior class) became also spatial. From that point on there were two capitals (Bendix 1978: 63–73); in one resided a divine and non-violent sovereign, and in the other a human and violent potentate. The conflict between the opposed exigencies of the two components of kingship was thus resolved by severing them.

The Indo-European area offers the most interesting and complex examples of oscillation over time from one solution to another, oscillations that are a function of history but that presuppose, more profoundly, the persistence of the idea that royal power (and in reality every form of political power) is inevitably ambiguous for the very reason that, as totalization of society, it must incorporate contradictory elements.

The oldest representations seem to reflect a precise awareness of this ambiguity. Two examples are particularly illuminating, one being the rituals that in ancient India permit periodic renewal of royal power, the other the cycle of legends that narrate the events of Roman kingship.

We will first consider the evolution of the Indian ideology: this ideology illustrates the passage from a situation where the king oscillates over time from one pole to the other, to one—more stable but no less ambivalent—where to each extreme corresponds a single official.

J. C. Heesterman (1978: 9) summarizes the dilemma of Indian kingship with this formula: “The king has to belong to the community, but at the same time he must stand outside so as to guarantee his authority.” In the oldest period of Indian kingship, the king belongs both to the “agricultural community,” grāma, and to the “jungle,” aranya; it is in the latter that the king finds the divine source of his authority. The conflict between these two “belongings” is irremediable; the ritual of royal consecration enables not its solution but its control, by expressing it symbolically: for this reason, it cannot be performed once and for all, but has to be repeated periodically (cf. Heesterman 1957). Community and jungle are thus reduced through ritual to two phases in a temporal cycle.

In a successive phase, the cyclical nature that the ritual originally possessed was intentionally destroyed in favor of a linear order, so as to “break out of the endless cycle by establishing a new conception of the transcendent, and thereby of authority” (Heesterman 1978: 15). This transformation is correlated with the expansion of sedentary agriculture and with the elimination, or rather devaluation, of the warlike and violent aspect of kingship. Agonistic aspects of royal investi-
ture (for example, chariot races) are eliminated or ritualized: the authority figure thus flees every challenge and aleatory aspect of the game and becomes “incontestably transcendent.” But as such, this authority is “irretrievably cut off from the social world” (ibid.: 16). Absolute authority no longer belongs to the king, but to the sacred texts, to the *Veda*.

How is it then possible to relate authority and kingship? By establishing a relationship between the *brāhman* ("priest"), who embodies transcendent authority, and the *rājā* ("king") who possesses immanent power. Heesterman suggests that in the beginning, *rājā* and *brāhman* did not belong to mutually exclusive groups. When the king went into the forest he became a *brāhman*, a fact which is probably reflected in the rite of royal unction where the king is proclaimed “brāhman” (ibid.). The reformers radically separated king and *brāhman*, and the authority of the king from ultimate authority. The king, by now permanently *inside* the community, needs the authority of the *brāhman* who is left *outside*. These two moments, which originally alternated in the figure of the king, have been definitively separated into two functions, into two classes. But in this way an irresoluble conflict is created between the need to keep the two principles separate, and the need to make them cooperate (ibid.: 18).

Heesterman’s characterizations of both the older phase of Indian kingship and the “reformed” phase are in some ways debatable.

As far as the older phase is concerned, it seems that the opposition between the sacred external and the profane internal, between the external source of the authority and its internal application, is poorly formulated. The analysis of the ritual shows that the king’s passage to the outside symbolizes a military expedition. But it is in the *inside* that the king is anointed and enthroned. In other words, the opposition between internal and external does not correspond, for the king, to the opposition between profane and sacred, but rather to two forms of sacredness precisely analogous to those described above: the conquering, “untamed” aspect of the king’s sacredness, and the “domesticated” aspect—productive for the community—of the king’s sacredness. The king’s oscillation between the two spheres thus has a different meaning from the one attributed to it by Heesterman, who too rigidly identifies “outside,” “authority,” and “sacred,” and who must therefore allow for the paradoxical figure of the warrior who is at the same time a *brāhman* (ibid.: 16).
Equally debatable is the characterization of the “reform.” Here, too the rigid equation between an outside, in which all authority is concentrated, and an inside, in which there exists only force, leads Heesterman to distort in part both the figure of the king and the figure of the brähman. His hypothesis forces him to identify the brähman with the renouncer, who is effectively outside of society. But how do we then explain the fact that the brähman stands within society, that he is part of the caste system?

As for the king, it is true that he gains his authority from his relationship with the brähman, but it is also true that he adds something of his own, which should not be ignored. In fact, the king finds his own legitimacy in his capacity to transform the abstract, transcendent order (dharma, divine law) into a concrete, immanent order; he must, for instance, protect the caste system, which allows persons to realize their own dharma. In this way, the merits acquired by the subjects affect the king’s status; in fact, such merits will be considered his merits as well, since it is his government that made them possible (cf. Lingat 1973: 211).

Certainly, the divide between transcendence and immanence cannot be overcome, and thus kingship can never resolve the ambivalence, indeed the contradiction, of its positioning between two opposing worlds. The scission of sovereignty in brähman and rājā is the sign of this; but their cooperation makes it possible to attenuate that scission and to justify the recurrent idea that the king embodies the dharma (Spellman 1964: 99). Furthermore, the transcendence of the brähman, which impedes his direct exercise of power, allows him to maintain the continuity of divine law, and therefore enables him to transform the various “conquerors” by subjecting them to the supreme values of the community. From this perspective, the mechanical association of the brähman with the “outside” and the king with the “inside” appears unacceptable. The brähman is outside of society only insofar as he must preserve intact the values which regulate it; therefore, with regard to the still “untamed,” “conquering” king, he is “inside,” whereas with regard to the already transformed king, he is “outside.” As one can see, the relative position of the three terms—brähman, king, community—changes in the different phases of ritual transformation, just as the meaning of the opposition inside/outside changes.

In my view, the brähman is not simply added as an antithetical principle to the king; the king is, or should be, transformed by his rela-
tionship with him. The sign of this transformation is not only the fact that the king is considered an incarnation of dharma, but also that he institutes a complementary relationship with society, through which the merits of his subjects become his own merits, since it is he who made them possible. Between the warlike and the dharmic aspects of sovereignty there is therefore no radical opposition or separation. Rather there is a tension, which is expressed and controlled by its symbolic representation in ritual, and by the ideology that necessarily connects priest and king.

As one can gather, then, the mechanism by which the forceful king is transformed into a king who is beneficient for the community exists even in India, in forms which are typically its own.

* * *

The originary oscillation of kingship between two poles and their transformation into two permanent statuses can be found also in Rome, another society of Indo-European origin.

The legends about Latin and Roman kingship are long and complex, and it is clear that they have to be analyzed taking into consideration all of the “codes” that they presuppose. Nevertheless, it is possible to list a certain number of characteristics that define, together or separately, the various kings:

1) The king is a foreigner. At the very least, Saturn, Aeneas, Romulus, Numa, Tarquinius Priscus and Servius Tullius fit into this category. Even Brutus, whom one can associate with the kings because he is considered a second Romulus (so much so that his statue was erected amongst those of the kings [see Plutarch, Lives, Brutus, I]), is the son of a foreigner, Marcus Junius, whom Tarquinius Superbus suspected of aspiring to royal dignity and whom he therefore had killed;

2) The king is “untamed.” He is often turbulent (Romulus is an example of this) and gains power by killing his predecessor or a rival (Amulius kills the son of Numitor, heir to the throne of Alba Longa; Romulus, in one version, kills Titus Tatius; Ancus Marcius kills Tullus Hostilius [see Dionysius, Antiquitates Romanae, III, 35, 2-4]; the sons of Ancus kill Tarquinius Priscus; Tarquinius Superbus kills Servius Tullius and Marcus Junius); the king is a rebel (like Romulus and the regicides listed above; one can also think of Saturn, conquering king and god linked to the Saturnalia, which are a symbolic rebel-
lion against the established authority—according to Macrobius [\textit{Saturnalia}, I, 8] the celebration was introduced by Tullus Hostilius, warrior king \textit{par excellence}; he is associated with the forest and with the animal world (for example, Picus, Faunus, and Romulus, who is nourished by birds of prey and by wild animals [see Plutarch, \textit{Lives, Romulus}, 7, 6]), as well as with rearing livestock, a mobile activity which from the point of view of sedentary farmers is also turbulent and destructive (as in the case of Romulus); and with war, and particularly with the furor that characterizes it (e.g., Tullus Hostilius and his champion, Horace [cf. Dumezil 1942]). Finally Brutus, the uterine grandson of Tarquinius Superbus who nevertheless transcends kingship and creates the Republic, puts the final touch on this catalogue of traits universally associated with the disordered aspect of kingship. As his own name indicates, he pretends to be an imbecile, and is used as an actual fool at the court of the Tarquin (Livy, I, 56);

3) The king is originally a slave. Servius Tullius is an example of this, but so is the \textit{rex nemorensis} of Aricia, who was a fugitive slave (Frazer 1911–15, I: 11). The role of slaves in the Saturnalia is well-known; one can deduce that the slaves are connected with Saturn and, indirectly, with Tullus Hostilius, who instituted this festival;

4) The king is associated with a prostitute. So it is with Romulus, raised by one Acca Larentia (Plutarch, \textit{Lives, Romulus}, 4, 3) who, like the Acca Larentia associated with the rule of Ancus (Dumezil 1968: 280–81), is a prostitute;

5) The sexual behavior of the king is transgressive. Some kings rape or abduct women (Faunus, Romulus, Tarquinius), or are incestuous: Faunus marries his sister (or his daughter) Fauna, and the usurper Amulius rapes his niece Rhea Silvia (Dionysius, \textit{Antiquitates Romanae}, I, 76; Plutarch, \textit{Lives, Romulus} 4, 2). So too, in conformity with the widespread theme of royal incest, we note that at least two kings are born out of incest: Latinus and Romulus himself, if one accepts the version according to which his father is Amulius, and not Mars. But it is well-known that divine birth and incestuous birth are considered one and the same in many cultures.

The theme of royal incest also appears at a metaphorical level at the end of the monarchy. It is in fact well-known that two sons of Tarquinius (Titus and Arruns) were sent to Delphi to learn the oracle’s interpretation of a prediction. After having heard the interpretation, they also asked which of the two would become king. The answer was: the first of you who, upon returning to Rome, kisses your
mother. The two interpreted the oracle’s statement literally. But Brutus, who was accompanying the two to entertain them with his foolery, interpreted it differently and, by means of a trick, positioned himself as predestined successor of his uncle Tarquinius: he intentionally tripped over in order to fall with his mouth on the earth, “mother of all living beings” (Livy, I, 57).

The incestuous implication of kissing one’s mother is clarified by a similar episode related to Caesar, another future ruler. Caesar dreams of raping his mother: according to the soothsayer who interprets this dream, the mother is none other than the earth (Suetonius, De vita Caesarum, VII, 2; cf. Artemidorus of Daldis, Oneirocritica, I, 79).

So, the kiss given to one’s mother, incest, and the conquest of land all belong to the same symbolic paradigm. These legends condense two aspects of kingship: a) the king is incestuous, that is, outside of society and its rules, and; b) the king becomes united with the land that he conquers, and fertilizes it;

6) The king kills a relative. Romulus kills Amulius (this, if we follow the version of the hero’s birth given by Dionysius and Plutarch, is also parricide) and kills his adoptive father Faustulus and his brother Remus; Tarquinius Superbus has his father-in-law Servius Tullius killed; Brutus kills his cousin and is at the same time killed by him; before this he had his two children put to death; and so on and so forth.

Such violent and “monstrous” traits allow kings to seize power, and define kings above all in the initial phase of their careers. The untamed aspects of the king’s transcendence must be overcome at least in part, however: if the king is not “domesticated,” he cannot reign for long over the community. The opposition between two formally homologous episodes demonstrates this, one associated with the founding of the monarchy, the other with its abolition.

The first episode is the rape of the Sabines. It involves a violent act which allows Romulus and his followers to establish a relationship with the land, whose true proprietors are the Sabine families (cf. Preaux 1962: 117). The second is the rape of Lucretia by a son of Tarquinius Superbus. Lucretia lives in Collatia, the Sabine city. Her husband, Tarquinius Collatinus, is the son of the son of a brother of Tarquinius Priscus, who had received from this king the task of governing Collatia (Livy, I, 38, 1). Lucretia thus is a Sabine woman and lives in Sabine territory [ibid.: 57]. Tarquinius’s action thus repeats formally the “rape of the Sabines,” which stands at the origins of the
monarchy; but the formal identity highlights the substantive opposition. Romulus abducts virgins (with the exception, however, of Ersilia, a matron who becomes his wife or the wife of his champion, Hostus Hostilius, grandfather of the king Tullus Hostilius [Dionysius, Antiquitates Romanae, II, 36; Plutarch, Lives, Romulus, 18, 29; Livy, I, 11, 22; Ovid, Metamorphoses, XIV, vv. 830 ff.]), who are then married properly in accordance with the most prestigious rite—confarreatio (cf. Dumezil 1979: 75; Dionysius, Antiquitates Romanae, I, 52, 25). By marrying the Sabines and having children with them, the violent invaders become “domesticated” and are able to establish definitively a positive relationship with the “people” (the autochthonous Sabines). The action of Tarquinius, to the contrary, is only brutal and untamed. He rapes a married woman and the relationship ends there, it cannot be transformed. Rather than life (children), the rape of Lucretia produces only death (the unfortunate woman kills herself).

The repetition of the founding event of the monarchy, inverted in its outcome, thus justifies the end of the monarchy, making evident a fundamental idea: if the untamed king is not domesticated, and cannot be, if his founding violence is not transformed positively, he cannot create a positive relationship with the people. Tarquinius, in contrast with Romulus, is a king who remains wholly “untamed” and violent: because of this he is rejected by the people.

This transformation is represented in various legendary episodes. But more than by the lives of individual kings, it is illustrated by the regular alternation, within kingship, between kings who realize above all their violent side and kings whose peaceful side is most evident.

Violent, warrior kings          Peaceful kings of prosperity

1. Romulus                     2. Numa Pompilius
3. Tullus Hostilius           4. Ancus Marcius
5. Tarquinius Priscus         6. Servius Tullius
7. Tarquinius Superbus

Every king clearly has disordered and ordered traits: what allows us to group them in two opposing series is the relative proportion of the two kinds of characters. Only Numa seems completely lacking in “untamed” traits, but this is probably because tradition has exaggerated
his peaceful and religious aspect to make him represent paradigmatically the series to which he belongs. The traces of a similar, but opposite, operation can be found in the characterization of Romulus, who is also the paradigm of his series.

Numa’s relationship with the nymph Egeria betrays in any case an original connection with the *rex nemorensis*, the prototype of the untamed and violent king, at least if we consider it to be significant that Egeria is present both in a grove close to Porta Capena (Juvenal, *Satirae*, I, III, vv. 10 ff.; Livy, I, 21, 33) and in Aricia (Frazer 1911– 15).

As for the traits that support the opposition of the two series of kings, the warlike and violent aspect of Romulus and Tullus Hostilius is so well-known that we do not need to examine it further. No less apparent is the association of the two Tarquini with military activity and with a politics of conquest; this is in fact the only positive aspect that Livy recognizes in them. Similarly well-known is the “legislative” character of Numa and Servius Tullius. Ancus Marcius is remembered for an important contribution: the creation of meticulous rules for declaring war, the following of which ensures the fighting of a “just and holy” war (Livy, I, 32, 12). In opposition to this “just” war is the *furocr* that characterizes the war of Tullus Hostilius and the brutality with which he treats Metius Fufetius (cf. Dumézil 1942).

In contrast, the other series of kings is associated with prosperity. Numa develops agriculture and keeps the Romans out of war, while Ancus’ name is associated with demographic expansion and wealth (cf. Dumézil 1968: 280–81); as for Servius Tullius, his reform classifies citizens according to their income. These kings are in short linked to the “popular” element—generally taken to include the lower and most numerous stratum of the citizen classes. Both Numa and Ancus are Sabines and thus “popular” *par excellence*; Servius was born of a slave woman and is represented as favorable to the people (he is also popular through distributing lands (Livy, I 46, 21).

The organizing principle briefly traced here highlights the ambivalence of kingship by polarizing the two necessary but contradictory components of kingship, and reflects in a mythical structure a transition that occurs in reality, and whose crucial moment is constituted by the rite of *inauguration* that every king must undergo.

Simplifying to the utmost, we can claim that the king passes through three phases:
1) First he asserts himself militarily or politically with force. Even popular support is, in this phase, a simple component of force. As the legends indicate, the king’s power at this stage is regarded as disordered and as acquired through actions that violate normally accepted rules of behavior;

2) The man who has imposed himself is put forward (*creatus*) by the *interrex*. Thus begins the process of legitimization, which can include or not an election (this point is controversial [cf. Palmer 1970: 211; Coli 1951: 92]), but which, in all cases, must include the rite of the *inauguratio* which allows establishment of whether there is present in the king a quality, *auges* (a noun that designates an abstraction: “increase,” “fullness” [cf. De Francisci 1959: 433; Dumézil 1974: 586]). In the oldest phase of the rite, this quality was probably transmitted to the king, through the medium of the *augur* (the priest who officiated at this rite), by Jupiter himself. This fact is suggested by Livy’s description (I, 18, 6–10)—based on the *inauguratio* of the successor of the *rex*, the *rex sacrificulus* of the Republican era in which the augur, while praying to Jupiter (whom he seems to “hook” with a lituus, a stick curved at one end), places his right hand on the king’s head. Pierangelo Catalano (1960: 28) maintains that the *augurium* has no more than “permissible juridical value, revealing the *fas*: therefore the divine power that it contains is not the sole cause of success, but the support, the help, of human and natural power.” Whatever the chosen interpretation, one fact remains certain: divine intervention completes and “perfects” human action, either by transmitting a substance to it or, at the least, by approving it and recognizing its adequacy. Indeed this recognition has the effect of completely changing the way in which people evaluate the power of the elected person; in other words, divine recognition legitimates that power;

3) Thus rendered *augustus* by Jupiter’s approval (Coli 1951: 90–91), the king comes to be recognized by the people, who confer upon him the *imperium*, that is, the legal use of power. According to some, who follow Cicero on this (*De re publica*, I, 25), a true *lex* (*lex curiata de imperio*) is voted in (cf. Palmer 1970: 212); in the opinion of others, who point out that a vote appears absurd after Jupiter’s will has been unequivocally manifested, it is a simple matter of acclamation (cf. Coli 1951: 66, 93).

Whichever hypothesis one adopts, the meaning of the rite is clear: one becomes king by force (it matters little whether military or political); but this force, which is in and of itself disordered and violent,
must be transcended through contact with (or the approval of) a god who represents for the community the ideal of kingship. Through Jupiter, who transforms him, the king can be united with the collectivity, which in turn confers upon him the imperium, thus legalizing his power. Although the king remains a man, he thereafter represents Jupiter, whose symbols he indeed bears: a) the red toga, sometimes embroidered with gold (toga picta), which represents the radiance of the god whose statue on the Capitoline temple was painted red; b) the scepter (hasta) (cf. Benveniste 1969: 30; Alföldi 1959); c) the ivory throne; and d) the chariot (currus) (Coli 1951: 57–59).

Just as Jupiter, “keeper of the law” (Dumezil 1977: 155), “rules over the whole world” (Cicero, De re publica, VI, 13), the rex rules over Rome.

* * *

We again find a schema similar in many ways to the Indian one: kingship implies the use of force, of military power, and is a thing of warriors; nonetheless this force is transcended by establishing a connection with divine law, which in turn creates a productive relationship between king and community. In India, the king incarnates dharma in political society; Rome, more sensitive to the distinction between human and divine, makes the king simply a representative of Jupiter.

With the passage to the republic, the two roles of the king are separated: there is then a rex sacrorum (or sacrificulus), who is first in the hierarchy but, like the brāhman, without imperium; and in an initial time period a praetor maximus, then two consuls who do have the imperium (Momigliano 1963; cf. Mazzarino 1944).

Presenting the relationship between the two aspects of kingship as a conflict between two types of kingship that never succeed in merging, the legends of the royal epoch legitimate the passage to the republican situation which excludes oscillations of sovereignty from one pole to the other by radically separating the priest from the holder of the imperium. From this point of view, the Roman evolution is parallel to the Indian one, where sovereignty is divided into brāhma (which “conceives”) and kṣatrá (which “does”), the latter being the province of the warrior (kṣatriya) (Lingat 1973: 216–17, 221). Rome went beyond this distinction, however, grounding political offices in purely human law founded in the sovereignty of the populus Romanus and not in that
of the gods. In India, on the other hand, the king has remained in an ambiguous situation, suspended between divine and human, because his task was to translate an entirely divine law (Spellman 1974: 103) into the sphere of competence of the imperium. This demonstrates that a true secularization of political authority is not possible without a corresponding secularization of the law. The presence of pragmatic precepts, like those of the Arthaśāstra, does not suffice to secularize the king: these are in fact expedients, not laws able to create a political arena endowed with its own legitimacy. It is this that certain observers, as for instance Louis Dumont (1966b), forget. This explains why the Indian king continues to be considered divine—albeit of an inferior divinity to that of the brāhman (cf. Spellman 1964: 26–42)—but also why the doctrine according to which the king has to obey the dharma (ibid.: 105) coexists in contradiction with the Arthaśātric one, according to which the artha is more important than the dharma. The latter doctrine is in effect the paradoxical result of the former. In truth, the king’s dharma consists in protecting the hierarchy of the castes, so as to allow each person to accomplish his or her own duty (svadharma) according to the dictates of divine law (Lingat 1973: 208). From this point of view, the dharma of the king encompasses all others, since it makes them possible (see The shanti parva [Śāntiparvan], 63, 25). But in order to ensure the realization of the dharma, the king has to defend the body politic, and thus follow the laws of the artha, that is, of instrumental reason, the raison d’état, which can be in conflict with the dharma’s laws. Kautilya, to whom the Arthaśāstra is traditionally attributed, is therefore able to affirm that force is more important than the dharma, given that force makes possible its effective realization: “When Kautalya [Kautilya] remarks that might and self-aggrandizement are more important than religion and morality, he means that moral principle must be subordinated to the interests of the state inasmuch as the moral order depends upon the continued existence of the state” (Drekmeier 1962: 201).

Between dharma and artha there thus exists a contradictory relationship, not—as Dumont holds (1966: 366)—a simple hierarchical relation between two perfectly distinct activities. As we have seen, the hierarchy shifts, but does not eliminate, the contradiction.

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There has been an attempt in India, linked to Buddhism, to humanize kingship in its entirety. Its paradoxical result is, however, a sacralization and even divinization of kingship.

In the Buddhist “Genesis,” the Aggañña-Suttanta, the king derives his legitimacy from a social contract that aims to remedy the Hobbesian bellum omnium contra omnes or, to use the Indian metaphor, the “logic of the fish” (matsya nyāya [cf. Lingat 1973: 207]). The king has the right to collect taxes only in exchange for actual protection (Spellman 1964: 22). But this contractualist theory is inscribed within a cosmogonic myth that provides the theory with a meaning quite different from the Hobbesian one. As Stanley Tambiah has noted (1976: 22), this myth constitutes the intentional inversion of the brahmanic myth of Manu. In the brahmanic myth, the order of the universe is generated by divine energy, while in the Buddhist myth the process of differentiation is the result of a degeneration due to purely human acts. It follows that from the brahmanic point of view, the social order, which is part of the order of the universe, has divine origin, whereas from the Buddhist point of view it is of human origin. Additionally, while in Brahmanism the priest is generated before the king and is thus superior to him, in Buddhism, to the contrary, the formation of kingship precedes that of society and its hierarchy: the king, put in place by the social contract so as to end chaos, is responsible for social organization. The brahman is thus subordinate to him.

In essence, the humanization of kingship finds its pride of place in the work of resisting the chaos of degeneration and of reproducing the originary state. The king is therefore identified with the utmost expression of the corrective process which allows the realization of freedom, the state of happiness (nirvāṇa) experienced by Buddha (ibid.: 39–40).

This doctrine was drawn from the Theravada variety of Buddhism, which asserted itself in Ceylon and in Southeast Asia, where the king is not only the emperor of the world (cakravartin), but is also a Buddha incarnate or a being destined to become Buddha (Bodhisattva). As a famous inscription of Sukhodaya says, the king “has the desire to become a Buddha and the desire to lead all creatures beyond the ocean of sorrows of transmigration” (Coedès 1948: 369).

Fundamentally, Buddhist theory reunites the sovereignty that Hinduism has divided, and ensures it a privileged relationship with dharma, eliminating the mediation of the brāhman. It also stands in opposition to caste, and subordinates all subjects in equal measure to
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the king. The reunification of sovereignty has as its goal the transcendence of the dharma–artha opposition: Buddhism nonetheless inevitably returns to this opposition in the concrete exercise of kingship (Tambiah 1976: 522). The solution adopted to resolve this contrast is an “oscillation” between two incompatible principles: the warlike and violent king, conqueror of the world, will have to transform himself, periodically or definitively, into a monk (bhikkhu, “beggar”), that is, into a member of the Buddhist “order” (Sāṅgha); or rather, like Aśoka, he will have to transform himself from conqueror into peace-maker, thus justifying, especially in Southeast Asia, an imperialist and expansionist ideology of kingship (ibid.: 46–57).

Usually, though, kingship is legitimated by an interchange (goods for merits) with the Sāṅgha. The latter recognizes the king as a “just ruler”; for his part, the king protects the Sāṅgha and as such has the right to “purify him” of the undesirable elements around him, among them the king’s adversaries (ibid.: 517–24).

It is interesting to compare the evolution that took place in South and Southeast Asia with the evolution that occurred in the medieval West. Schematizing to the utmost, one could claim that, after the fall of the Roman Empire, Western kingship passed through the following phases:

1) The monarchies of the conquering Germans were based on the idea of the sacredness of a lineage from which the king must be chosen (Kern [1914] 1938: 13; Benveniste 1969, II: 85);

2) After the conversion to Christianity, kings are officially desacralized. In effect, the Christian conception (like that of other monotheistic religions and particularly of Islam) makes all men equal before a god who concentrates all powers within himself. Nonetheless, kings keep their ancient sacredness in the popular consciousness (cf. Bloch [1924] 1973);

3) From the beginning of the eighth century, the unction of the kings by the Church sacralizes kingship in Christian terms. But the rite of unction generates an ambiguity: who is superior, the priest who gives the unction, or the king who receives it? Between the eighth and tenth centuries, the priest is subordinate to the king, whose unction has a sacramental valence that places him in direct relation to God: he is a christus;

4) With Gregory VII the Church attempts to establish its own superiority over royal authority. Removing the sacramental valence from the kings’ unction, the ecclesiastical institution tries to monopolize the
relationship with divine law and attempts to secularize kingship (Kern [1914] 1939: 55–56), or in any case to subordinate it to its own authority. This theocratic tendency is implicit in the Christian ideology of the State, according to which the State’s task is to translate divine or natural laws into positive law, contributing to the improvement of humanity and thereby procuring its salvation. As Kern writes, “the mediaeval Christian State is not merely a juristic institution, but expresses the ideal of active social betterment and civilization” (ibid.: 71).

This ideology inevitably leads to the priests, as keepers and interpreters of divine law, becoming actively involved in its positive translation, rather than being satisfied with a mere spiritual or ritual supremacy (as in India). At the same time however it gives kingship a religious dignity and function, and thus motivated it to resist the Church’s initiatives. The latter, if it actually hopes to control the State, has to be able to condition it in its material powers, and thus has to take on some of its prerogatives and organizing characteristics (centralization, bureaucratization, dominion over a territory). On the other hand, the State, in order to preserve its own autonomy and dignity with respect to the Church, has to preserve and increase the sacred characteristics that the ecclesiastical power is trying to monopolize (cf. Bloch [1924] 1973; Kantorowicz 1957).

So, the rivalry between the two organisms brings them not to differentiate themselves from one another, but rather to assume one the characteristics of the other: the Church becomes “state-like”, the State becomes “church-like.” Ernst Kantorowicz (1957: 193) effectively summarized the resulting symbolic interchange:

The pope adorned his tiara with a golden crown, donned the imperial purple and was preceded by the imperial banners when riding in solemn procession through the streets of Rome. The emperor wore under his crown a miter, donned pontifical shoes and other clerical raiments and received, like a bishop, the ring at his coronation. These borrowings affected, in the earlier Middle Ages, chiefly the ruling individuals, both spiritual and secular, until finally the sacerdotium had an imperial appearance and the regnum a clerical touch.

* * *
In conclusion, Hinduism, Buddhism and medieval Christianity illustrate different modalities of the priest-king relationship and, more profoundly, the relationship between two aspects of sovereignty:

1) Hinduism subordinates the king to the priest by differentiating their spheres of activity. But as we have seen, this differentiation and its correlate hierarchy stand in opposition to phenomena that contradict them;

2) Both Buddhism and Christianity assign to the king a religious function. Clergy and kingship are therefore partially undifferentiated: the possibility of conflict is even stronger than in the Hindu formula. However, conflict occurs only sporadically in Buddhist society, above all because the Saṅgha is composed of individuals who abandon the world (with which they maintain only a relationship of exchange) and who, moreover, constitute a free association of free men (they remain so because they do not take a vow of obedience), lacking the cohesion of a bureaucratic or, at any rate, state organism;

3) Quite different, on the other hand, is the case of the medieval Church, a bureaucratic organization where the principle of obedience prevails, and which attempts to control the State directly, making it a worldly instrument for otherworldly ends. As we have seen, the struggle against the Church pushes the State to assume sacred and religious characteristics. The resulting lack of differentiation between State and Church is resolved therefore at the level of force. The Western development is thus quite a special case. Among other things, it leads to the formation of a “kingly religion” to which the “State religion” is still heir.

The symbolic structures of kingship

In his March 21st speech to Parliament, James I declared: “Kings are justly called gods for that they exercise a manner or resemblance of divine power upon earth. For if you will consider the attributes to God, you shall see how they agree in the person of a king” ([1609] 1965: 307). These bold words reveal the extent to which the king was implicitly deified by theorists of divine-right monarchies. The visible god, chosen by the invisible god, seems to fuse with the latter.

Whether through images of a transcendent god or of immanent gods, why do kings tend to be deified?

The explanations proposed are for the most part psychological: thus, recently, Paul Veyne (1976b: 587) once again took off the shelf the phenomenological theory of religion, maintaining that “the shiver
that one feels when standing before a divine statue or a sacred mountain, one also feels when introduced to the presence of the king”.

But is it experience that produces representation, or representation that generates experience? It is not fair to invoke the existence of a specific experience of the “numinous” which would make one perceive gods and emperors with similar feelings (ibid.: 585–86): the divinity attributed to kings is not reducible to an emotional reflex of a “heteronomic dependence,” but is conceptualized in a precise way, and augmented and renewed with appropriate rituals (cf. Meek 1931: 138, 42, 148–49; Heesterman 1957; Inden 1978); the king himself must behave like a divinity and hide when he needs to behave like a man (cf. Meek 1931: 10, 121; Heusch 1972: 23). We can at least say that the emotions that surround the figure of the king are perpetuated and reproduced through a corpus of practices and representations: they have thus nothing spontaneous about them. Indeed, the king’s same authority can have radically different representations in different societies; this demonstrates that the theory of “sentimental deification,” of the political emotion of heteronomic dependence, propounded by Veyne (1976b: 567), is inadequate.

It is therefore representations, and not emotions, that we should study. Furthermore, we must also refrain from confounding the ideas we ourselves associate with certain words with the ideas other cultures associate with them. The word “god” has totally different meanings in different cultures: for us, the word evokes a being who is omnipotent, immortal, invisible, and so forth. It therefore seems inconceivable that a king, whose mortality and lack of omnipotence, for instance, anybody can recognize, might be considered a god. But in innumerable theologies, gods are considered neither immortal nor omnipotent, and the opposition between the human and the divine is not as distinct as it appears to us.

Scholars often emphasize the marked differences existing between ideologies of kingship where the king is truly considered like a god (Pharaonic Egypt, for instance), and ideologies where he is considered only the privileged interlocutor of a god, his helper or representative in exceptional cases (as in Mesopotamia and China) (Frankfort 1948). Less often do these scholars note that these claims should be qualified by taking into consideration the entire pantheon and the entire ideol-

2. Editor’s translation. This passage is not in the English translation of Veyne (1990), which is abridged. —Ed.
ogy of the divine. The Indian king is often considered a god and treated as such; but in Hindu theology, where gods are innumerable, have human passions and where their very existence depends on rites performed by men, “divinity is cheap” (Basham [1967] 1971: 88). Moreover, brahmans are “more divine” than kings. The Pharaoh himself is certainly a god, but a god amongst other gods, who participates with them in a cosmic drama, from which he sometimes emerges the victim of his opponent, Seth (Frankfort 1948: 123–39).

These observations help explain why it is so difficult to compare ideologies of kingship in terms of degrees of “divinity” or “sacredness” attributed to the king function.

What is more important is to specify the structural characteristics that, in the right context, lead to a sacralization of kingship.

Whatever forms the sacredness of the king takes, this sacredness is perpetually motivated by its capacity to represent society to itself as a totality and, better still, to realize it as such. Moreover, since social reproduction depends on the reproduction of nature, the king is frequently thought to guarantee the latter (cf. ibid.: 3).

Insofar as he actually achieves social totalization as part of the totalization of the cosmos, the king is attributed with exceptional powers; moreover, he possesses the characteristics of the totality that he creates and represents, extending himself, like that totality, in time and in space. Totality and divinity are in the end equivalent notions (cf. Durkheim [1912] 1960: 630, n. 2): the king is therefore deified insofar as he is fully identified with totality (Kantorowicz 1957: 271–72). But even in the absence of this complete identification, it is still true that the king is closer to totality (represented here by a transcendent god) than his subordinates—subordinate to him precisely because of his privileged relationship with totality.

The king is the abstract idea of totality which aspires to be concretely realized. Such concrete realization is rendered in part possible thanks to a process of doubling of the king in: 1) “doubles” of his ordered dimension in a) space and b) time, and; 2) “doubles” of his disordered dimension:

1a) It is not difficult to understand why the king, as a totality, must split himself in space. By definition he has the gift of ubiquity: he is present everywhere—for instance in every court in which his law is administered (ibid.: 5). This ubiquity is often represented by sanctuaries or statues of the king spread across the land. A person is deified through her or his multiplication in the form of statues: this was under-
stood perfectly in Republican Rome, where erecting statues to living people was prohibited, save those for victors in war, which in any case represented Jupiter (cf. Versnel 1970: 84–93). When, after the victory of Thapsus, a statue was decreed for Caesar, he was automatically declared a demigod (ἡµίθεος) (Weinstock 1971: 41, 53). The same idea can be found in Babylon: whereas the king’s person was not considered divine, the statues that represent his person were! (Frankfort 1948: 303).

Elsewhere, the king’s person is doubled through his living alter egos. For example, a double of the king existed in both sectors of the capital of the kingdom of Yoruba of Oyo: as doubles of the king, they were killed at his death. With the aid of these and other “doubles” (Morton-Williams 1967: 61–63), the king concretely represents the unification of differences, both at a political-territorial level and at other levels.

Another and more important realization of the same principle is constituted by the way the structure of the court, or the capital, is generalized in all of the subordinate parts of the kingdom (cf. Lombard 1967: 83; Wilks 1967: 210). The reproduction of this structure throughout the territory allows the extension of the king’s power to be measured, and allows the sphere of influence of one king to be distinguished from the sphere of influence of another; it also facilitates administrative coordination.

At the very least, the penetration of the king’s person into society is realized by his subjects’ imitation of his behavior. The king and his court tend thus to become the model of behavior (etiquette, and so forth); especially in modern Europe (cf. Elias 1969), the king has extended his control over society in this way. Giacomo Casanova keenly observed: “In those days the French imagined that they loved their king; in good faith and by habit, they repeated all his affectations” ([1791–98] 1959, II: 16). But if all people behave like the king, then the collectivity is the king: this unlimited generalization of kingship leads paradoxically to its dissolution into a new sovereign: the people. For this reason, kingship must periodically recreate the distinction between the whole (king) and the part (court) that symbolizes the whole; from this comes the phenomenon of fashion, which intensifies precisely in the capitals of modern European monarchies, where the diffusion of information is most rapid.

1b) Kingly totalization happens not only in space, but also in time. Kingship endures, though kings die. The successor is therefore the
“double” of his predecessor. This reproduction in time takes different forms and, moreover, does not pertain only to succession. Thus, for example, the king of Oyo had a spiritual double (Orun) who re-


mained with God in heaven: every year it was necessary to divine whether the king was on good terms with this double; if he was not, he was forced to commit suicide (Morton-Williams 1967: 54). There is therefore a continuous kingship at a transcendent level, which must be realized in time though immanent kingship.

So too among the Minangkabau (Sumatra), the immanent king corresponds to his transcendent double, who is in the Seventh Heaven (Abdullah 1972: 192-93). The dichotomy between the permanent divine aspect and the transient human aspect is immanent in the very person of the Jukun king. The king’s immortal and inviolable part is called juwe and is concentrated in his heart and right arm. Therefore his successor, in whom the divine king must reincarnate himself (cf. also Lombard 1967: 84), eats the heart of his predecessor (Meek 1931: 131) (this custom exists also among the Yoruba [cf. Morton-Williams 1967: 53]), and the successor keeps the deceased king’s right arm as a relic (Young 1966: 148-49). Reliquaries or regalia, insofar as they last longer than people, often incorporate the permanent aspect of kingship. Regalia moreover can appear as epiphanies of the transcendence that legitimizes kingship. Thus, according to the Malay annals (Sejarah Melayu 1952: 42-43), the regalia of the first sultan were brought from overseas by the fakir who converted the sultan to Islam and who gave him his title. The true sultan is at base the totality of regalia, the possession of which legitimizes those who are successively in charge of it.

The need to create doubles of the king who survive his death is particularly motivated by the difficulties caused by the interregnum. In many societies, in effect, the period of the interregnum coincides with an actual suspension of kingship, which translates into a temporary disaggregation of society. From this comes the tendency to abolish the interregnum and to introduce the principle of dynastic continuity, independent of the rite of coronation. Thus in India, the most ancient royal ritual presumes a period of interregnum in which the kingship dies with the king; but the rites of coronation (abhiṣeka) of the high Middle Ages (700–1200 CE) reflects the elimination, or at least the reduction to the minimum necessary, of interregnum. The continuity of kingship is never interrupted (Inden 1978: 42-43).
The kingdoms of Dahomey and Hawaii offer two striking examples of the interregnum’s consequences for societies where kingship centers on the king’s physical person: anarchy and violence reign supreme until the new king accedes to the throne (Lombard 1967: 79; Kamakau [1866-71] 1961: 22, 266; Steward 1828: 216). Similar phenomena still occurred in Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, justified by the old medieval idea that the new king is not the king until he has been crowned (Kantorowicz 1957: 317–18, 324). The interregnum can be avoided by doubling the king. One common method consists in associating the ruling king with his successor: this method can be seen, for example, in medieval India (Inden 1978: 38), in Tahiti (Henry 1928: 188), in medieval Europe (Kern [1914] 1939: 24 n. 13), in Egypt (Frankfort 1948: 101), and so on.

But the most notable method was adopted by English and French monarchies at the beginning of the fifteenth century (Giesey 1960: 26–27, 81) and reached its greatest development in the Renaissance. This method consisted in the fabrication of an effigy of the defunct king, which was treated as if it were alive (people pretended to feed it and so forth). In this way, the king was fictitiously kept alive until his successor took his place.

The ideological underpinnings of this ritual practice have been admirably reconstructed by Kantorowicz (1957). It is a practice that illustrates the idea—especially developed in English law—according to which the king has two bodies: the natural body, which is mortal, and the “body politic”, which is immortal. The latter is a corporation of one, or rather a corporation sole, that is a corporation made up of one individual who is considered eternal. Like the Phoenix, the king is the individual who represents the species and who each time is reborn in identical form, the perfect representation of kingship as totality in time and space.

The funerary effigy represents the king’s eternal body, which continues to live until it is incarnated in his successor. The contrast between the king’s eternal body and the cadaver—whose human misery is obsessively underscored, even in statuary—illustrates “the triumph of Death and the triumph over Death” (ibid.: 425).

The assertion of the idea that the king has an “immortal body,” and thus that he is, at least in this attribute, divine (ibid.: 272), is concurrent with the monarchy’s assertion of divine right. Divine right is correspondingly linked to the need to maintain the continuity of the crown over time, and thus to eliminate the interregnum. The succes-
sor takes the place of his predecessor “by divine choice”—it is God who makes the successor be born. The divine approval, and thus the divine substance of kingship, is in the very blood of the king, and is not given to him at the moment of the unction (ibid.: 331 ff.). The use of kingly effigies is situated in the position of a compromise between this new theory of succession—which implies that succession happens automatically upon the death of the reigning king—and the old medieval theory according to which succession happened at the moment of coronation: in this compromise, succession takes place at the moment of the funeral and of the burial of the deceased king. During the period of the interregnum that precedes this rite, images manifest the continual presence of the king in his immortal body (cf. Giesey 1960: 1);

2) We have already illustrated the essentially ambivalent nature of the king: violent and peaceful, disordered and ordering, and so forth. This ambivalence is manifested in the concrete history of kingship, with its conquerors, with its periods of war and of peace. But if kingship can encompass this concrete history, it is because it already contains its paradigm at a symbolic level. In effect, kingship is attributed with the property of creating order by encompassing disorder into itself, transforming and neutralizing it. Without this process, which makes kingship oscillate, more or less often, between order and disorder, kingship would dissolve. Paradoxically, then, kingship neutralizes the disorder that it itself helps to create.

The king thus holds in himself the negative principle he fights: and it is with this principle that he fights it. But victory is possible only when the internal negative aspect is completely expelled in the course of its struggle against the external negative aspect: putting to death his enemy and every other bearer of disorder, the king puts to death that which is disordered and violent within himself, and can therefore transform into the principle of order incarnate. The danger that threatens kingship is therefore the blocking of this mechanism—the danger not only that the enemy might win, but also that the expulsion of the king’s negative aspect may not be successful. In the case of such failure, the king becomes an element of disorder, an enemy to sacrifice and to drive out.

All kingships thus have developed cathartic mechanisms in which the catharsis of society coincides with the catharsis of the king’s negative aspect. The king is represented in these cases by his “monstrous double” (as René Girard defines him), who can be represented by a
prisoner of war, by a criminal, or by actual monsters, animal and natural (cf., for example, Anderson 1972: 12). The catharsis of the negative aspect can be tragic or comic, tragic if these “monsters” are put to death in a sacrificial rite, comic when they are “killed” by the laughter that they cause (the court’s monsters are also the court’s fools, found in most kingships). The two transformations of the negative aspect can be realized in more or less direct forms; they can, for example, be manifested in theatrical forms: instead of a true evil king being put to death, a fictitious representation of such a king, provided by an actor, is killed; instead of laughing at a true imbecile, people laugh at an actor who pretends to be such on the stage, and so on.

Between king and fool, king and sacrificial victim, there is always a very close relationship. Together, they represent the two complementary aspects of kingly totalization: they are the agents of incessant transformations of negative into positive, transformations that are represented in a controlled symbolic space (Willeford 1969: 151–73).

But the symbol refers to a reality whose control is always precarious: the king’s disordered double, terrifying or ridiculous, reminds him of the risk that he always runs—the risk of turning into a fool. The threat of this transformation looms as an already tragic premonition of the king’s final transformation into a victim, of the inevitable triumph of death.

Once upon a time kings represented to all this drama of all. Today, the drama is immortalized in theaters, erected by kings. Hamlet, deprived of Yorick, continues to madly combine within himself the king and the fool, Lear to discover that “when we are born we cry that we are come to this great stage of fools” (King Lear, IV, 6).

The King is dead; long live the King!