

Chapter One

THE WARRIOR ARISTOCRACY

During the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., China was dominated by a warrior aristocracy whose privileged status was marked by its monopoly of ritually directed violence. Sanctioned killing in the forms of sacrifice, warfare, and hunting constituted the central rites of the cults of the ancestors and the state altars, and the performance of these rites set the aristocracy apart from the common people. This aristocracy was in turn divided on the basis of ascriptive kin ties into a hierarchy of lineages, each with its own capital, temple, and military forces. United by kinship and a shared nobility, and identical in their basic organizations and capacities, the senior and cadet lineages in a state enjoyed a proximate equality distinguished only by the ritual ranking of their cults. Originally, the senior lineages were dominant, and interstate wars were the primary form of the ongoing struggle for supremacy and glory, but over the centuries the cadet lineages proved able to expand their power and gradually asserted their dominance in the various states. This competition among lineages led to a world of vendetta and civil war, where alliances both among and within states could be secured only by the religious sanction of sharing the blood of a sacrifice in the ritual of the covenant, and the expansion of the social range and functions of these blood oaths led to a gradual redefinition of the political realm. Thus it was out of the aristocratic pattern of licit violence and the internecine struggles to which it led that the Warring States and the Chinese empire emerged.

The major problem for studying this era is that apart from some of the poems in the *Shi jing* and a few of the later chapters of the *Shang shu*, which cannot be dated with any precision, we have no literary

sources written during the period in question. A highly detailed narrative of the years from 722 to 464 B.C., however, appears in the *Zuo zhuan*, a work generally dated to the mid-fourth century B.C. This work is a compilation of historical anecdotes appended to a year-by-year chronicle of events written from the perspective of the state of Lu. It is obviously a multilayered work drawing on many sources and having passed through many hands, but it was compiled in its final form by men working in the Confucian tradition, and it later became one of the "classics" of that school. The judgements and attitudes of the final redactors are consistent with those expressed in the *Lun yu*, and when the stories have a clear "moral," these are in harmony with the positions of the Confucian school. However, the actions and speeches attributed to the historical actors frequently depict a world of institutions and values totally at odds with those of the Warring States Confucians and the other philosophical schools. In many cases these speeches and actions are the objects of criticism, but even the words and deeds of seemingly "positive" characters often suggest a world far removed from that of the Warring States authors, and these traces of an "alien" world offer an intelligible, internally consistent vision of society.

Moreover, in contrast to the philosophical texts of the period, in which historical incidents are cited as adjuncts to an argument, or with the more closely related *Guo yu*, which is "philosophy and rhetoric in a historical setting," the *Zuo zhuan* contains many stories that have no clear moral message, as well as extensive chronicles that offer no more than dated events.¹ The preservation of large amounts of material that serve no moral argument and of speeches and actions that depict a world alien or hostile to Warring States Confucianism suggests that despite heavy reworking, the *Zuo zhuan* is our only detailed repository of information on a social order that was already vanishing by the time that philosophical and historical texts appeared in the late Spring and Autumn period. Because much of the evidence is preserved simply as a target for criticism, and the chronological arrangement of speeches and anecdotes is not necessarily reliable, the text does not allow a detailed study of the process of change in the Zhou socio-political order. Instead, one can at best achieve a schematic contrast of "before" and "after," where the extant text already represents "after," and "before" must be deduced from otherwise unexplainable values and practices appearing in the anecdotes. This reconstruction can also be supplemented by evidence preserved in Warring States philosophical works, the writings of Sima Qian, and many archeological finds.

For expository purposes I have divided the chapter into four sections. The first discusses how the ritual violence of sacrifice, warfare, and hunting in the service of the ancestral cult defined the nobility of the

period. The second shows how a political order defined by lineage segmentation dispersed authority throughout this nobility and produced a multitude of rivals for honor and power. The third section focuses on the obsession of the nobility with an honor based on martial prowess and shows how this led both to constant interstate warfare and a regular recourse to blood vengeance, vendetta, and civil war. The final section examines the crucial role of blood oaths in creating new political ties in a world where internecine struggles were destroying the old ties of shared kinship and cult.

Warfare and Sacrifice

In the Spring and Autumn period political authority was derived from the worship of potent ancestral spirits and the gods of locality through regular offerings made at the altars of the ancestral temple and the state. The actions that set the rulers apart from the masses were the “great services” of those altars, and these services were ritually directed violence in the form of sacrifices, warfare, and hunting. These activities, symbolically linked through the ceremonial exchange and consumption of meat, reached their common culmination in the offering up of living beings at the altars. Thus the noble was above all a warrior and sacrificer, a man who took life in order to feed the spirits who gave him power.

The centrality of violent acts to religious cult and the political order was axiomatic in the Spring and Autumn period.

The great services of the state are sacrifice and warfare. In the sacrifices one takes the meat from the sacrifices in the ancestral temple, and in warfare [before setting out on campaign] one receives the meat from the sacrifices at the *she* altar. These are the great ceremonies of the spirits.²

This passage states explicitly that sacrifice and warfare were the principal forms of state or public service, and it links them through the shared ritual consumption of meat. This consumption, in turn, presupposed the killing of sacrificial animals, so the ritualized taking of life constituted the defining feature of the political realm in Zhou China.

A remonstrance to the duke of Lu supposedly offered in 716 B.C. not only asserted that warfare and sacrifice were the chief services of the state, but went further and argued that they were the sole activities proper to the lords of men.

When the duke was about to go to Tang to view the fishing, Zang He Bo remonstrated, “The prince does not take any animal that is

not of use in the practice of the great services [of state] or whose substance cannot be used to make implements [for sacrifice or battle] . . . Therefore one uses the spring hunt, the summer hunt, the autumn hunt, and the winter hunt, all in the intervals between agricultural labor, to practice the [great] services. Every three years there should be a review of the troops. . . . The lord does not shoot any bird or beast whose flesh is not offered in the sacrificial pots or whose hide, teeth, bones, horns, fur, or feathers are not used on the sacrificial vessels. The creatures which fill the mountains, forest, streams, and marshes and the providing of tools are the business of underlings and the lowly officers; the lord has nothing to do with them.”³

In this passage lordship is defined exclusively through the performance of ritually coded violence in sacrifices, military action, and the hunt. All other activities are dismissed as the work of “underlings.”

The inclusion of the hunt might appear to be at odds with the first passage, which cited only warfare and sacrifice, but as Walter Burkert observed in his study of sacrifice in ancient Greece, “For the ancient world, hunting, sacrifice, and war were symbolically interchangeable.”⁴ In this period of Chinese history warfare was not clearly separated from hunting, for numerous early texts describe hunts as a form of military ritual or training, and it was not uncommon for a hunt to turn into a campaign or a campaign into a hunt.⁵ Writers would often invoke images of the hunt to describe the conduct of battles.⁶ Moreover, the hunt and warfare were equated in both linguistic usage and law. The most common terms for “military” or “martial” (*wu* 武, *rong* 戎) also applied to hunting, the word “hunting” (*lie* 獵) could also describe an army’s attack, and the same word (*huo* 獲) applied to what was captured in battle or taken in the hunt. Collective oaths with the force of law were sworn at the beginning of a hunt just as before a battle, and misconduct during a hunt was punished according to military law.⁷ Hunting as a form of warfare thus was also one of the “great services.”

The identification of sacrifice and warfare/hunting as the central forms of state service is made explicitly only in the *Zuo zhuan*, but this idea underlies many passages in other Confucian works that generally suppress appeals to the primacy of violence. Thus, in the introduction to his famous periodization of the Zhou decline, Confucius stated:

When all under Heaven has the Way, then rites, music, and punitive expeditions are initiated by the Son of Heaven. When all under Heaven lacks the Way, then rites, music, and punitive expeditions are initiated by the feudal lords.⁸

This passage refers to rites and music rather than simply sacrifice, but given the centrality of sacrifice in the Zhou ritual complex, it clearly echoes the equation of political authority with sacrifice and warfare. This point is made explicitly in another passage attributed to Confucius, where “the Way” itself is identified with sacrifice and warfare.

Confucius said, “When I engage in war I conquer, and when I sacrifice I obtain good fortune. This could be called obtaining the Way.”⁹

The lengthy ode “Closed Temple” is a hymn to the glories of the ruling house of Lu, and its panegyric dwells solely on the wealth and regularity of its sacrifices and the size and conquests of its army. Indeed the two major forms of taxation in the Warring States and early empires were simply transformations of the “feudal” levies for sacrifices and warfare.¹⁰ An account of the proper building of a palace complex stipulates that the ruler should first build the ancestral temple—the locus of sacrifice—then stables and military storehouses—the “locus” of warfare—and last of all the royal dwelling proper.¹¹ These quotations show that the definition of the political realm through sacrifice and warfare operated not only as an explicit maxim but also as an unspoken assumption underlying ritual practice, poetic conventions, and models of historical evolution.

Evidence from archeology and iconography supports the statements of these literary texts. Bronze metallurgy was the most advanced technology during the Shang, Western Zhou, and Spring and Autumn periods, and the production of bronze artifacts required resources and labor on a scale possible only for those with considerable power. Consequently, the types of artifacts made from bronze clearly demonstrate the concerns and priorities of the ruling elite, and as K. C. Chang has pointed out, bronze was used almost entirely for the manufacture of weapons, ritual paraphernalia associated with sacrifice, and carpenters’ tools which were necessary for the construction of chariots.¹² The same priorities are demonstrated in the development of the technique of gold and silver inlay, which appeared first on weapons in the Spring and Autumn period, then on ritual vessels in the early Warring States, and on implements of daily use only in the late Warring States.¹³

The symbolism of royal authority in Zhou China also demonstrates the centrality of sacrifice and warfare. The chief symbols of the monarch were the banner, the ax, and the Nine Bronze Tripods.¹⁴ The first two were aspects of battle: the ax was a weapon which symbolized the king’s punishing power, while the banner was the means by which commands were visually signalled. Tripods were vessels in which the

meat of sacrifices was cooked, and passages describing the sacred Nine Tripods state that they could cook meat without using fire. Thus political authority was symbolically identified with the waging of war and the performance of sacrifice.

The above evidence clearly demonstrates the primacy of ritually directed violence in the Zhou state, but it explains neither the rationale of linking sacrifice and warfare/hunting together, nor how they served to define the political order. There is evidence to suggest at least two links between sacrifice and warfare in the constitution of authority. First, they were both modes of taking life, and taking life is a vivid expression of power. Second and more important, these activities were recognized as the primary means of serving the ancestors and the gods of locality, a service which consisted of both the physical feeding of these spirits and the "feeding" of their honor. I shall discuss each of these links below.

Earlier scholars have noted that the close linkage of warfare and sacrifice in Zhou China suggests the highly ritualized character of combat in the period, but it also indicates that sacrifice was clearly regarded as a form of bloodshed and killing analogous to warfare. The central act of any sacrificial ceremony was the slaughter and consumption of one or more animals, but the role of bloodshed in these rituals went beyond this. The cereal dishes that accompanied the sacrificial banquet were made with grain from a special field sanctified through the dismemberment and burial of several animals, and even the ice employed in some offerings had to be consecrated with the blood of a sacrifice.¹⁵ Several scholars have argued that the most common character for "sacrifice" (*ji* 祭) was a variant of one character meaning "to kill" and was virtually homophonous with the most common character used to refer to killing (*sha* 殺).¹⁶ In some cases the texts refer explicitly to "killing altar-sacrifice" (*sha yin* 殺禋) or "blood sacrifice" (*xue ji* 血祭).¹⁷ Thus the early Chinese were quite conscious of the centrality of killing to the act of sacrifice.

Moreover, there is evidence from Warring States texts that the Chinese of that period clearly perceived the objects of sacrifice as victims. Stories in the *Zuo zhuan* tell of a barbarian chief who recognized that a cow was lowing to mourn the fate of its sacrificed offspring, and of cocks who mutilated themselves to avoid being sacrificed.¹⁸ The *Mencius* tells of how King Xuan of Qi substituted a sheep for an ox about to be sacrificed because the ox had the "terrified look of an innocent man being led to the place of execution."¹⁹ The *Zhuangzi* repeatedly hailed the good fortune of animals whose imperfections saved them from sacrifice, and scorned the honors that preceded death on the altar.²⁰

Not only was sacrifice seen as a form of killing, but the link between taking life and authority was emphasized by the fact that the king

and the feudal lords acted as their own sacrificers; they personally performed the sacrifices in their own states.²¹ This practice was based on the idea that ancestral spirits would accept sacrifice only from the eldest male descendant of their line, so the heads of the cadet lineages must also have served as the sacrificers in their own temples.²² Consequently the privilege of personally killing the sacrificial victims offered to the ancestors marked paramount authority in the state and in the subordinate lineages.

However, while the privilege of killing as a sacrificer, hunter, or warrior was a hallmark of power in the Spring and Autumn period, these acts were all justified as elements of ancestor worship, and it was the service of this cult that was the ultimate basis of authority. The cultic role of sacrifice seems clear, but those of hunting and warfare will require some elaboration.

Hunting played at least three roles in the service of the ancestors: 1) it provided animals that were offered up in the temples; 2) hunts were an element of ceremony in several major sacrifices; 3) hunts were identified with combat, which was itself a form of service to the ancestors. Evidence of the third role was provided above, so I will here deal only with the first two.

Organized hunting and fishing expeditions to provide offerings for use in sacrificial rituals or as dried meat for ceremonial banquets are the subject of frequent divination in the oracle bones of the Shang dynasty. The same practices are also mentioned in bronze inscriptions of the Western Zhou and in the poems of the period, both those in the *Shi jing* and the somewhat later poems of the "Stone Drum" inscriptions discovered in the seventh century A.D. Finally, the systematizing ritualist texts of the Warring States period also prescribe the use of seasonal hunts to gather offerings for the sacrificial altars, and they list numerous officials who had charge of preparing this game for use in temple rituals.²³ The role of hunting in providing game for sacrifices is also demonstrated by the fact that the term for whatever was captured in hunt or battle (*huo* 獲) was also a technical term meaning "living beings obtained for sacrifice."²⁴ Finally, it is probably the use of wild animals in sacrifices that underlay the development of the "animal parks," which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four. One function of these parks, which first appeared in the Spring and Autumn period, was the training of wild beasts by human handlers, and the use of such animals in sacrifices is portrayed on one of the bronze cowrie shell containers discovered at Shizhaishan in Yunnan.²⁵

In addition to providing creatures for offerings, hunts themselves also played a role in some sacrificial ceremonies. When it was devastated by fires in 524 B.C., the state of Zheng held a special sacrifice at

the *she* altar to ward off misfortune, and this ceremony included staging a general hunt.²⁶ Other references to hunts staged as elements of sacrificial ceremonies, including those in the “Stone Drum” inscriptions, also link them to the *she* altar, perhaps because of its strong ties to warfare and punishments.²⁷ In any case, it is clear that the great, collective hunts were also potentially forms of worship.

Like the collective hunts, military campaigns were also forms of serving the ancestors. This point is explicitly made in a story set in the state of Chu in 555 B.C.

[Zheng] was going to turn against Jin and raise the Chu army to drive them off, but Zi Kang [chief minister of Chu] did not agree. The king of Chu heard of this and sent his messenger Yang to tell Zi Kang, “The capital populace says that I am master of the state’s altars but will not send out the army, and when I die they will not bury me with proper ritual. It has been five years since I ascended to the throne, and the army has not yet gone out. The people say that I am enjoying my leisure and have forgotten the inherited achievements of the previous rulers. May the minister please plan some way to deal with this.”²⁸

It was as “master of the altars” that the king was obliged to send out his armies. The purpose of sending them out was to defend the “inherited achievements of the ancestors,” and the result of failure to do so would be denial of proper rites when he himself became an ancestor. The men of Jin, Chu’s great northern rival, also justified warfare as a form of “service to the previous rulers,” and in 539 B.C. Shu Xiang supposedly foretold the destruction of the lineage of the ruler of Jin because he and his officers no longer went out on expeditions.²⁹ To a degree this prophecy reflects a utilitarian recognition of the need for military preparedness, but its stress on regular expeditions and the emphasis on the fate of the lineage clearly link it to the other passages which insist that the purpose of war is to serve the ancestors.

The identification of warfare as a form of religious “service” is also reflected in the highly ceremonial character of military campaigns. Every stage of the campaign was marked by special rituals that linked the actions in the field to the state cults and guaranteed the sacred character of battle. Although some Western scholars have described these as a “ritualistic overlay” covering the pragmatic “reality” of battle, they actually defined the basic nature of warfare in the period. The aristocratic warriors of Zhou China were never allowed to forget that they fought in the service of their ancestors and gods, and that combat was ultimately an element of cult.

Every campaign began at the temples, where the rulers performed a series of rituals to assure the success of the campaign. The state's ruler first sacrificed at the *she* altar and at the ancestral temple, where he announced the campaign to the spirits of the previous rulers. Religious insignia from the *she* and the spirit tablets of the ancestors were then brought out from their temples to accompany the army on its march.³⁰ The commander of the army received his charge in the ancestral temple and an offering of meat at the *she* altar, and passages from later works say that the ruler also presented him with a weapon, either a bow or an ax, at the ancestral temple.³¹ Leaders of participating sublineages likewise sacrificed at the temples of their ancestors and exchanged meat from these sacrifices with the ruler of the state. After the rulers had purified themselves through fasting, the weapons of the army were issued at the ancestral temples.³² Finally the troops were assembled in their ranks at the *she* altar in a special ceremony (*zhi bing* 治兵), and with the rituals completed, they set out to battle.³³

While on the march, the army regularly made sacrifices to the major mountains or rivers that they passed. These sacrifices generally took the form of a *lü* (旅), a "travel sacrifice" intended to ward off harm from evil spirits or from the gods of the localities upon whose domains they had trespassed.³⁴

When an enemy force was encountered in the field, the day and place of battle would be formally fixed by the two parties, and then the preparations for combat would begin. Many of these were simply questions of physical readiness, such as sharpening weapons, checking chariots, feeding horses, and having the army eat their fill.³⁵ However, the pre-battle meal is identified by a special name (*ru shi* 蓐食), and it is likely that it was a ceremonial occasion peculiar to the field of battle. This conclusion is supported by the fact that a soon-to-be-defeated commander's recklessness is shown by his remark that he will destroy the enemy first and only then have his meal.³⁶

The battle proper was likewise preceded by a series of religious rituals, and these are described in a scene prior to the battle of Yanling in 575 B.C. The king of Chu ascended a sort of crow's nest to observe the opposing Jin army with a defector from that state, and the latter explained what was happening.

The king said, "They have dispatched men to the left and right; what is this?" "They are summoning the officers." "They have all gathered at the central army." "They are planning together." "They are pitching a tent." "They are reverently divining before [the spirit tablets of] the earlier rulers." "They are striking the tent." "They are going to issue the command [*ming* 命]." "There

is a clamor and a rising of dust." "They are filling in the wells and leveling the cooking-places and then forming ranks." "They are getting on the chariots and those on the left and right [the two warriors on either side of the driver] are picking up their weapons and dismounting again." "They are listening to the solemn declaration [*shi* 誓]." "Will they fight?" "I cannot yet tell." "They have got back on their chariots and those on the right and left have dismounted again." "This is the battle prayer."³⁷

Divination and the battle prayer clearly served to invoke the presence of the ancestors and other guardian divinities of the state, and these rituals are mentioned prior to several battles.³⁸ The systematic destruction of the camp is also a regular feature of the preparation for battle, and it had a strongly ritualistic character. Some argue that it was simply a means of creating a level space on which to arrange the army, but it would have been easier to line up outside the camp. Kierman has suggested that this leveling "had an essentially ceremonial significance comparable to the burning of boats after crossing a river," and this is clearly correct. It was a maxim of the period that the true warrior was the man who had resolved on death, and the leveling of the camp was the tangible expression of this resolution not to return from the battle.³⁹

The most significant religious ceremony in the preparations for battle, however, was the "solemn declaration" or "oath" (*shi* 誓). This character signified a solemn statement that invoked the spirits as witnesses to bind a man to act in a certain manner. In Zhou China the commander of an army issued such a declaration before every battle, and the *Shang shu* contains five texts that purport to be examples. Although the declarations attributed to the founders of the Xia and Shang dynasties are fabrications, and it is uncertain that any of the others represents a declaration actually given before an army, these documents show us the basic character of the genre, and their evidence can be corroborated by the text of one *shi* preserved in the *Zuo zhuan*.

The oaths in the *Shang shu* all follow a basic formula. The commander details the crimes of his enemies, asserts that he himself is without particular merit but is following the will of Heaven, tells the members of his army how they are to conduct themselves in the battle, and stipulates the punishments that will befall them if they do not obey and, in some cases, the rewards they will receive if they obey and triumph. The oath in the *Zuo zhuan* follows this pattern.

Zhao Yang [commander of the army supporting the lord of Jin against rebel lineages] declared [*shi*], "The Fan and Zhonghang lineages have gone against the mandate of Heaven, slaughtered

the common people, and seek to tyrannize Jin state and slay its lord. Our lord relied on Zheng to protect him, but now Zheng has betrayed him; they cast off the lord and aid his [rebel] servants. But in this battle we follow Heaven's mandate, obey the command of our lord, restore the potency of duty, and eradicate the shame [of our state]. For one who conquers the enemy, if he is a higher minister he will receive a large district and if he is a lower minister a small district; if he is a noble he will receive 100,000 *mou* of land; if he is a farmer, artisan, or merchant he will be permitted to seek service at court; if he is a slave or bound to menial service he will be freed. Should I commit no crime [i.e., win] then the lord will consider [how to reward me]. Should I be guilty [of defeat], then may I be punished by strangulation, may I have only a thin coffin with no outside layers, may it be drawn by an unornamented horse and wagon, and may I not be buried in the graveyard of my lineage."⁴⁰

This declaration differs from those in the *Shang shu* only in that it dwells exclusively on the rewards to be given to the army in the event of success and the punishments to be visited on the commander should he fail. This perhaps reflects the desperation of the situation, which called for drastic measures. In any case, the punishing of defeated commanders was a common practice in the period, and the rest of the oath follows the pattern of the *Shang shu*.⁴¹

Before every battle the warriors would assemble and be told why the will of Heaven, the imperatives of duty, the honor of the state, and the spirits of the ancestors demanded that this battle be fought. Together with the divination before the tablets of the ancestors, the battle prayer, and the ceremonial command (*ming*), this oath fixed the day's carnage within the political and religious framework. It stipulated the rules of discipline, but did so in a form which bound both the commanders and the warriors to the common service of their ancestors and the gods.

After the battle the immediate task was to dispose of the bodies of the dead. Given the centrality of ancestor worship in the period, securing the corpses for burial was extremely important, and men would fight to retrieve the bodies of their fellows on the field or arrange exchanges after the battle.⁴² But the corpses of the enemy might also be collected into a large tomb mound as a monument to bring glory to the ancestral cult. Fan Dang said:

Why doesn't my lord build a collective tomb and gather the Jin corpses into it to make a *jing guan* [京觀, literally a "great dis-

play,” a large mound with a marker to identify it]? I have heard it said that when you defeat the enemy you must show it to your descendants in order that they not forget the achievements of your military prowess.⁴³

The king of Chu rejected this proposal, insisting that such treatment was reserved for the particularly wicked, but even his rejection acknowledges the practice. Other passages in pre-Qin texts also refer to this custom, and one states that the *jing guan* of numberless bones rose up like the hills and mountains.⁴⁴

A victorious army would often use the corpses of the defeated to erect a monument to its victory, like the Greek *tropaion*. These artificial hills would stand as visible and lasting memorials to the victors, and as the passage above suggests, the tumuli were part of the web of practices that linked warfare to ancestor worship and the service of the lineage. The mound was to be left especially for the descendants of the victors, that they might know the prowess and glory of those who came before and seek to extend that glory in their turn.

When the army returned to their own state after the battle, they performed the ceremony of “calling the army to order” (*zhen lu* 振旅) and then the ceremonial drinking (*yin zhi* 飲至) to mark the conclusion of the campaign.⁴⁵ Prisoners, the heads or left ears of those slain, and any spoils taken in battle were then presented at the ancestral temples of the state and the cadet lineages.⁴⁶ With these ritual offerings the campaign proper ended, although the spoils of battle could also be sent as gifts or tribute to the Zhou king, the hegemon, or a friendly state.⁴⁷

Thus the hunt and the military campaign both culminated in offerings at the temples, and as was noted above, the word for what was taken in battle or hunt had the technical sense of “living beings obtained for sacrifice.” All the “great services” converged in the sacrificial service of the altars, and indeed the word translated as “service” (*shi* 事) could in the narrow sense mean “sacrifice,” as in the standard phrase *you shi* (有事). When several speakers identified battle as a “great service,” and even applied the phrase *you shi* to combat, they were explicitly describing warfare as a form of religious, sacrificial ritual.⁴⁸ In this way warfare logically culminated in the offering up of the spoils of battle, and above all in human sacrifice.

Under the Shang dynasty human sacrifice had been a regular institution closely linked to military activities. Excavations have revealed the mass execution of slaves or prisoners to “accompany” the deceased Shang rulers, and the oracle records contain many divinations regarding the sacrifice of members of non-Shang states or tribes. The hundreds of bodies discovered in some royal tombs were probably prisoners taken in

warfare, and it is even possible that some campaigns were fought solely for the purpose of obtaining these sacrificial victims. Combat was tied to the service of the cult of the dead, and military success was clearly manifested in the scale of human sacrifice.

Although apparently not as central as it had been to the Shang kings, the practice of human sacrifice continued into the Zhou. A tradition is preserved in many later Zhou works that following his defeat of the Shang army, King Wu sacrificed the Shang king and his two wives, presented the heads of all the slain enemy soldiers at his *she* altar, and then had the heads burnt as an offering at his ancestral temple.⁴⁹ The *Zuo zhuan* lists several instances of human sacrifice in order to criticize the practice, but the existence of this polemic—which also appears in the *Mozi*—suggests that in the fourth century human sacrifice was still a common practice. This conclusion is supported by the fact that the king of Qin attempted to ban human sacrifice in 383 B.C.⁵⁰ However, the primary evidence for human sacrifice during the Zhou comes from archeological excavations, which show that it continued throughout the dynasty; indeed, more examples have been found from the Warring States period than the Spring and Autumn.⁵¹ Even under the Han dynasty human sacrifice was still practiced in the Dian state on the southwestern frontier, as depicted on the covers of the bronze containers found at Shizhaishan.⁵²

The scattered references to human sacrifice in the historical records and even its more frequent appearance at the archeological sites cannot show how often it was performed or how widely accepted. However, there is clear evidence of several regular institutions that were modified versions of human sacrifice. The most important of these was the aforementioned presentation of prisoners at the ancestral temple, the *she*, or some other locus of sacrifice. In several cases the text states explicitly that the prisoners were sacrificed or killed, while in others their ultimate fate was unclear. However, even if the prisoners were finally spared, the symbolism of the practice and the terminology used clearly equated the prisoners with animals taken for sacrifice in the ceremonial hunts, objects captured in battle, and the heaps of heads or ears of the slain.⁵³ Whether those captured were sacrificed or spared, the ceremonial presentation demonstrated that warfare *logically* culminated in the sacrifice of the enemy, just as the hunt culminated in the sacrificial offering of the game.

A second version of human sacrifice accepted as regular by the speakers in the *Zuo zhuan* and by its redactors was the use of the blood of a prisoner to consecrate newly cast war drums.⁵⁴ It is true that in the cases cited in the text no prisoner is ever actually sacrificed, but the speeches and narration show that no one questioned the possibility or

probity of the action, and from the evidence of human sacrifice cited above there is no reason to doubt that men were sacrificed in such circumstances.

A final form of human sacrifice was the punishment inflicted upon several major rebels and assassins of rulers, who were rendered into a meat sauce and fed to members of the court or army.⁵⁵ Although this was a form of capital punishment, the shared consumption of the criminal evoked the image of sacrifice.⁵⁶ Moreover, the etiological myth for this practice, which will be discussed in Chapter Five, clearly demonstrates that it was regarded as a form of sacrifice.

This systematic evocation of human sacrifice in the period reflects the constitution of political authority through the service of the ancestral cult and the altars of the state. The "great services" were ultimately united through their culmination in sacrifice, in the taking of meat at the altars which defined them in the quote with which this section began. Sacrifice was the central religious practice of the period, and the nobility were those who devoted themselves to it. To take life and offer it up on the altars were the defining actions of the political realm, and the rulers of men were those who engaged in hunting and warfare, and then presented the fruits of their prowess to the ancestors and the gods.

The Segmentary Aristocracy

This definition of political authority through the service of the altars in the forms of hunting, warfare, and sacrifice underlay the social order of China in the Spring and Autumn period. Those who participated in these services formed an elite which set itself apart from the general populace through its devotion to ritual performances, and this elite was in turn ranked as king, feudal lords, hereditary ministers, and nobles according to kin ties defined in "lineage law." These ranks were marked in the ritual performances which defined status in this period through the assignment of a graded number or form of various ritual implements or privileges. However, these gradations were based on incremental additions to a fundamental nobility common to all members of the elite on the basis of their kinship and joint participation in the "great services." This idea of a common nobility led to a proximity of status and a sharing of authority which was radically different from the later imperial system.

Moreover, in the "feudal" system based on lineage segmentation, the lords of the individual states were lesser replicas of the Zhou king, and the hereditary ministers lesser replicas of the feudal lords. Each had his own temple for sacrifice and army for warfare, and the authority of king over feudal lord and of feudal lord over minister was based solely

on relative degree of power and ritual status. Over the course of centuries power gradually shifted from the king to the feudal lords and then from the feudal lords to the ministerial lineages, and the Confucian school and subsequent Chinese writers made this downward shift of authority the fundamental theme in their accounts of Zhou history.⁵⁷ This devolution of authority, however, was in fact the direct consequence of the organizing principles of the Zhou elite, the principles of a common nobility and a “segmented” political organization, in which both individual nobles and geographic foci of authority shared common attributes or structure and differed only in degree.⁵⁸ This general distribution of power made possible the constant, internecine warfare that finally destroyed the Zhou aristocracy.

The idea of a nobility linked by a common ancestry and devotion to the great services of the state, primarily warfare and sacrifice, is best summed up in a speech attributed to Zi Chan, the reforming minister of Zheng state, who lived in the second half of the sixth century B.C. A member of the court, Kong Zhang, had arrived late at a ceremonial reception for an embassy from Jin and in trying to remain inconspicuous had stood in the wrong position. The emissaries laughed at this *faux pas*, and after the ceremony a minister of Zheng criticized Zi Chan for allowing Zheng to appear ridiculous in the eyes of the visitors. Zi Chan replied:

Kong Zhang is a descendant of the elder brother of our lord, and his ancestor [Zi Kong] controlled the government of our state. He is a hereditary minister. He has received a charge as an ambassador and traveled throughout the realms of the feudal lords. The capital populace respects him, and the feudal lords know him. He has a position at the court and makes sacrifices in the temple of his branch lineage. In the state he has command of and income from his fief, and in the army he contributes his allotted share of men and equipment. He has his office in the funerals and sacrifices. He receives the meat [from sacrifices at the state’s altar] and returns the meat [from sacrifices at the altar of his own lineage]. He assists in the sacrifices at the ancestral temple of our lord, and he already has a fixed, exalted position. His family has held this position for several generations, and for generations they have performed their duties. What have I to be ashamed of if he forgets his place?⁵⁹

In this passage Zi Chan lists the hallmarks of a worthy man: he descends from the ruling lineage, holds hereditary office, participates in the ceremonial of the court, performs the sacrifices in his own temple and assists in those of the state temples, engages in the ritual exchange of meat that

precedes a campaign, and takes part with his followers in military expeditions. This is an epitome of the nobility based on shared descent and participation in the great services.

The mention of the ritual exchanges recalls the importance assigned to meat in the passage with which this chapter began, and the presentation and consumption of meat indeed played so crucial a role in the Zhou state that one term for the aristocracy was "the meat eaters."⁶⁰ Those who participated in a sacrifice received some share of the meat. The Zhou king regularly presented meat from his sacrifices as a special honor to feudal lords who bore his surname and to descendants of previous dynasties.⁶¹ Like the Zhou king, the rulers of the feudal states presented meat to their officers and received meat in return, so that in fact all ties within the nobility were marked by the giving and sharing of the meat of sacrifice. This reliance on the "fruits" of sacrifice to bind men together was a direct expression of the organization of the state on the basis of kin ties that were constituted through the sacrificial ancestral cults.

Meat was central not only to carrying out the social role of sacrifice, but also in the second "great service," warfare. The king gave a ritual present of meat to those of the feudal lords who performed signal services in the military realm, and consequently the presentation of meat came to play a fundamental role in the ceremony of designating the dominant feudal lord as hegemon.⁶² Prior to launching any expedition the commander likewise received an offering of meat at the *she* altar as part of the ceremony of appointment.⁶³ Hunting, a form of warfare, also culminated in the offering up and communal eating of meat. So important were these offerings of meat that, according to the *Mencius*, Confucius resigned from office simply because the lord of Lu neglected to give him his share of meat from the solstitial sacrifice.⁶⁴ As the ceremonial culmination of sacrifice, hunting, and even warfare, eating meat was a hallmark of aristocracy and a privilege of all nobles.

In addition to defining men as aristocrats, the performance of the great services and the closely related ritual consumption of meat also set them apart from the common people.

The sons of princes devote themselves to ritual, while the petty people use all their physical strength. In devotion to ritual nothing is more important than reverence, while in the complete use of physical strength nothing is more important than respectful sincerity. Reverence consists in nourishing the spirits [of the ancestors], while sincerity consists in holding to inherited occupations.⁶⁵

This passage posits the division of society into an elite defined by its devotion to the rituals of ancestor worship and a general populace de-

fined through hereditary occupations. This division also underlies two recurring lists of categories of men that appear in many pre-Qin texts: the listing of the ranks of the nobility and those of the occupational classifications.⁶⁶

The first of these lists the four levels of nobility—king, feudal lord, hereditary minister, and *shi*—and attributes to each level a certain number of some ritual implement, a special appellation, or some type of subordinate. The number, title, and type descend in accord with the level of nobility. Thus the nine tripods were the symbol of monarchy, and each lower level was allowed correspondingly fewer tripods. Other hierarchical ritual attributes included the number of dancers employed in certain rituals, the number of rows of bells allowed in musical performances, the verb used to refer to a man's death, the rank of subordinates, the number of layers permitted for a coffin, the number of ancestral altars, the type and number of animals sacrificed, and the frequency of sacrifices.⁶⁷ Although many of these distinctions may have existed only on paper, archeological excavations have shown that some of them, most notably the number of tripods, were actually used to mark the status of a burial.⁶⁸ Those which were not related to the material elements of burials would unfortunately leave no trace in the archeological record, but numerous Confucian critiques of nobles who violated the ritual prescriptions suggest that these formulas were still a reality, if a fading one, in the fifth century B.C. These lists of ritual attributes prove that those who "devoted themselves to ritual" were men who held one of the four ranks of nobility, and the archeological evidence confirms that the basic principles sketched in the texts reflect the social reality of the period.

The second list draws together those who are defined through their occupations (*ye* 業). Unlike the lists of the nobility, those dealing with occupations were not fixed. All include the basic categories of merchants, artisans, and peasants, but longer ones also refer to two types of merchants, those who work in orchards or gardens, stable hands, gatherers of wood, herdsmen, seamstresses, menials, and those who collect the produce of mountains and wastes.⁶⁹ Several times these people are explicitly identified as those who have an "occupation," and one of the hallmarks of a well-governed state was that these occupations would not be changed. These are clearly the "petty people" who hold to their "hereditary occupations," as contrasted with the nobles who devoted themselves to ritual.

The crucial feature of this model of society is the existence of the hereditary nobility defined in the first list, those men who were set apart from the common people through their focus on the ritual service of the state cults in the forms of sacrifice and warfare. This reflects an organization and interpretation of authority radically different from that of

imperial China. The nature of this difference and its significance can best be demonstrated through an analysis of the use and significance of the character *shi* (士). In later social models this term became another occupational category, those who held government office, but in its earlier usages it was a generic term for “nobility” and even “true manhood.” This earlier use thus epitomizes the idea of an authority based on noble descent and martial valor.

Although the term *shi* in the narrow sense referred only to the lowest level of the noble hierarchy, there is evidence that it had a broader meaning as a generic term for nobleman. When a hereditary minister (*qing* 卿) went on a mission to the court of the Zhou king, he was introduced in the court with the formula “*shi* + personal name.”⁷⁰ This shows that the man’s office at the court of a cadet lineage did not apply in the court of the king, and without his title he was simply a *shi*, an ordinary noble. A passage preserved in two early ritual texts argues that all levels of the nobility employed the capping ceremony of the *shi* because they were all equal at birth and only distinguished by the subsequent addition of title and office. “The eldest son of the Son of Heaven is a *shi*. None under Heaven is exalted at birth.”⁷¹ This idea was expounded at length in a discourse attributed to Confucius, and Han commentators assumed that the rituals for the *shi* were extended to the entire nobility.⁷² This broad sense of *shi*, which included all nobles, is also preserved in the compound “minister-nobles” (*qing shi* 卿士) that occurs in several early texts and refers to all who served in the king’s court and controlled the affairs of state. In at least one case the *qing shi* are directly contrasted with the “common people”, showing that they are indeed identical with “those who devote themselves to ritual,” i.e., the nobility.⁷³

The principle of hierarchy underlying the graded lists of ritual attributes awarded to the different levels of the aristocracy also suggests a notion of a common “nobility” to which honors or titles were subsequently added. Each higher level was granted more musicians, tripods, coffin layers, or sacrifices, but the lowest level *shi* had some number or form of every attribute. The king was at the top of the nobility and the *shi* at the bottom, but the language and ritual procedures of the period insisted that the two shared a common noble nature, that they were divided in degree and not in kind.

Another facet of the character *shi* that suggests this notion of a shared nobility is its sexual connotations. The character etymologically probably depicted the male sex organ, for in the oracle bones it appears as an element that distinguishes the characters for male cattle and sheep from those for their female counterparts.⁷⁴ It preserved this root meaning in later texts where it sometimes meant “man” in opposition to

“woman.”⁷⁵ Thus the original sense was probably something like “man” or “real man,” which was easily extended to men of power or nobility. This association of nobility with virility and power suggests that it was at least potentially common to all true men, or at least to all warriors.

Moreover, the focus on killing and on devotion to ancestral cult as the definitions of nobility also marked it as a distinctively “masculine” realm. Through the regular offering of sacrifice to their paternal ancestors, along with the initiation ceremony of “capping,” the males created lines of kinship defined and transmitted through religious cult rather than biological generation.⁷⁶ This opposition of a masculine kinship based on sacrifice to the “biological” kinship traced through women underlies the argument found in several texts that Zhou, the last ruler of the Shang dynasty, abandoned the sacrifices to his ancestors because of his excessive devotion to women.⁷⁷ The way in which this specifically masculine character assigned to the elite’s sacrifice/hunting/warfare complex reflected the proximate equality of a shared nobility will become clear in Chapter Two, where it will be shown how in the absolutist state the sexual model for authority became that of the husband’s rule over his wife, rather than the shared manhood of warfare and sacrifice.

In addition to the evidence of ritual procedures, terminology, and sexual imagery, there is abundant anecdotal evidence to suggest that all members of the Zhou elite indeed enjoyed a social and ritual proximity that would have been inconceivable in imperial China. Unlike the exalted, unchallenged autocrat of the later Chinese state, the Zhou ruler—whether the king himself or the head of a feudal state—was only “first among equals.” Various stories tell of nobles who upbraided the ruler in public and spat at him without being reprimanded or punished, who rejected requests for precious objects, who played board games with the ruler in the midst of his harem, who helped themselves uninvited to food from the ruler’s table, or who called on the ruler to share dinner, only to find him out back shooting birds.⁷⁸ Being hereditary members of the nobility and rulers in their own domains, the officials and warriors of Zhou China were reduced images of the king or the feudal lords, inferior in rank but not in kind.

This proximity of status based on common descent and service of the ancestral cult was not limited to matters of ritual or sociability; it was built into the very structure of political authority in the Zhou state. Following their conquest of the Shang, the Zhou rulers had been forced to devise a means to control their vast new territories. They had done this by “enfeoffing” relations or allies in walled towns scattered throughout their kingdom and allowing them to act as semi-autonomous “statelets” which owed allegiance to the Zhou king but wielded religious and military authority in their own realms. The kingship itself was transmitted

from eldest son to eldest son, forming the so-called “great lineage” (*da zong* 大宗) of the Zhou court. The brothers, younger sons, and allies of the king held hereditary offices in the Zhou court or were enfeoffed in distant cities to act as peripheral foci of Zhou power. The eldest sons of those enfeoffed would inherit the rule of these cities, where they established their own ancestral temples and thus formed a “small lineage” (*xiao zong* 小宗) which replicated the royal line and the royal court in reduced form. The younger sons of these “small lineages” received hereditary offices at the court of the lineage, or they might in turn be enfeoffed in a smaller city within the sphere of influence of the lineage’s capital. These lesser fiefs were likewise inherited by primogeniture, and they then established their own ancestral temples and became new “small lineages.” Thus the courts of the feudal lords formed a “small lineage” which was a reduced replica of the “great lineage” of the Zhou king, and the hereditary officials of these lords formed a “small lineage” which was a reduced replica of the “great lineage” of the feudal state.⁷⁹ This is the political structure that was ritually reproduced in the additive lists of implements and titles that defined the aristocracy.

This structure was also reproduced in the patterns of sanctioned violence that defined political authority. For the performance of sacrifice the king, feudal lords, and hereditary ministers each had an ancestral temple and altars of the earth and soil where they offered up the choicest of their flocks and the booty of their hunts and battles. Each was uniquely empowered as the eldest of his line personally to offer sacrifice to the ancestors in his own lineage, and each also supervised the sacrifices at the *she* and *ji* altars. Each had the privilege of all the ritual appurtenances of nobility for funerals and other rituals, and these were distinguished only in number or scale.

In the realm of warfare this “segmented” pattern of authority—wherein peripheral foci of authority reproduced the administrative, ritual, and military forms of the central government on a reduced level—reappeared in the distribution of command and in the organization of the troops. Even in the early Spring and Autumn period, the actual power of military command lay not in the king or the ruler of the state but in the chief minister (*dangguo* 當國, *guozheng* 國政, *lingyin* 令尹) or in the minister of war (*sima* 司馬). The story cited earlier of the king of Chu who desired to send out the army but was blocked by his chief minister demonstrates this fact, and numerous cases in the *Zuo zhuan* show that such a situation was not exceptional. The most famous case was in the state of Lu, where the three ministerial families who gained control of the state each took command of one of the state’s three armies.⁸⁰ In another example, Xi Ke of Jin desired to invade Qi to avenge an insult he had received on a mission to that state, but the ruler