

3.9 THE HISTORY OF THE WESTERN ZHOU

We possess three types of sources for Western Zhou history: textual sources dating from the Classical era, inscriptional sources from Western Zhou ritual bronze vessels, and archaeological reports of excavated Western Zhou sites. In this section, only the first two will be discussed, and the principal function of the section will be to provide you with a large group of translations from Zhou inscriptions that will allow you to pursue group research for class presentations.

Much of the basic information concerning traditional views about the Western Zhou was covered in earlier readings on the Classical view of the rise of the Zhou. The *Shiji* accounts of the conquest and of the career of the Duke of Zhou may be found in those “Spring and Autumn China” readings, along with information derived from other texts, such as the *Book of Poetry*.

The text that is translated in this section is also from the *Shiji*. It consists of those sections of the “Annals of the Zhou” that span the era from the completion of the conquest of the Shang to the fall of the Western Zhou and the flight of King Ping to the eastern capital at Luoyang. (The text continued the narrative translated in reading 1.5.) This narrative, recorded during the Han Dynasty many centuries later, should be used as a basic outline against which to compare the inscriptional evidence of the next section, which is the most fundamental type of primary data. (There are a few elisions in the text, where I have not included passages that tangentially quote the *Book of Documents*.)

The Annals of Western Zhou History After the Conquest of the Shang: The *Shiji* Account

King Wu (1045-1043)

[After King Wu demobilized his troops and returned to the west,] he hunted as he travelled, touring his lands. He recorded matters of governance, composing the text, “Successful Completion of the War.” It was then that he designated the estate lands of the hereditary lords of regions and bestowed upon them sacrificial vessels for use in their lineage temples. He composed the text, “Division of the Vessels and Goods of Yin.”

“Successful Completion of the War” (“Wu cheng”) is the name of a chapter of the *Book of Documents*, the original version of which no longer appears in that text. “Division of the Vessels and Goods of Yin” (“Fen Yin zhi qiwu”) is another lost chapter.

Thereupon, King Wu, recalling the sage rulers of past eras, rewarded the descendants of the Spirit-like Farmer with estate lands in Jiao, the descendants of the Yellow Emperor with estate lands in Zhu, the descendants of the Emperor Yao with estate lands in Ji, the descendants of the Emperor Shun with estate lands in Chen, the descendants of Great Yu with estate lands in Qi.

Thereupon, he bestowed estate lands upon his meritorious ministers and gentlemen who

had joined in planning the conquest. The first of these to receive an estate was Commander Shangfu (Grand Duke Wang); his estate was to be garrisoned at Yingqiu and named Qi. King Wu bestowed his younger brother Dan, the Duke of Zhou, with an estate to be garrisoned at Qufu and named Lu. He bestowed [his cousin] Shi, the Duke of Shao, with an estate in Yan, his younger brother Shuxian with an estate in Guan, and his younger brother Shudu with an estate in Cai. Others received estates according to their status.

These grants of estates (which have traditionally been referred to as “fiefs”), represent the establishment of the Zhou political model. Only a small capital region of the broad Zhou state was administered directly by the ruling king. Control of outlying regions was entrusted to close relatives and allies and their descendants, who ruled territorial estate lands by hereditary right from bases in militarized fortress cities.

Summoning in assembly of the rulers of the lands in all the nine regions, King Wu ascended the hills at Bin in order to gaze back toward the capital region of the Shang.

As King Wu continued his return toward the homeland of Zhou, he was unable to sleep at night. The Duke of Zhou visited the King in his residence and asked, “Why have you been unable to sleep?”

“I will tell you,” said the King. “From a time before I was born until the present, a period of sixty years, Heaven received no sacrificial offerings from Yin. In consequence, wild deer roamed in all the pastures and insect pests infested the fields. It was because Heaven received no sacrifices from Yin that our success today has come about. It was Heaven that established the House of Yin: in its time, the Yin promoted 360 famous men, yet never ruled with brilliance – yet until this time neither was it destroyed. And I have not even yet secured the protection of Heaven. Where would I have the leisure to sleep?”

“To secure Heaven’s protection and be secure in Heaven’s House we must thoroughly seek out those who are wicked and remove them as we have done with the Yin king Zhòu. We must strive day and night to comfort and draw the allegiance of the people, and so secure us in our western lands. We must gain their willing submission through brilliant rule that shines with the brightness of our virtue.

“From the bend of the River Luo to the bend of the River Yi the land is level and the people dwell in ease. This was the homeland of the House of Xia. In that place, we would gaze south to Mount Santu and north to the slopes of Yue Peak; if we looked behind us we see the Yellow River, ahead would be the courses of the Rivers Luo and Yi. Thus we would not be distant from Heaven’s House.”

This section depicts King Wu as the first to plan the founding of a second Zhou capital city in the centrally located plain between the Luo and Yi Rivers – site of the future Luoyang. The second capital was ultimately located near to Mt. Song, which was sometimes pictured as the central mountain of the realm and the axis mundi – the pivot of

the world. Mt. Song was sometimes referred to as Heaven's House (*tian shi*), and that phrase seems to be used in this text both to mean the broad kingdom that had been under the sway of the Shang and the mountain at its center, which would be an ideal seat of Zhou power, as it supposedly had been long before for the Xia kings.

Only after King Wu had laid out a plan for the Zhou to dwell at the city of Luo did he finally return home. Then he released his horses on the south slopes of the Hua Mountains and let loose his cattle on the plains of Taolin. He put aside his axe and shield, stored away his weapons and released his troops, and so manifest to the world that he would employ the tools of war no more.

Two years after he had conquered the Yin, King Wu went to inquire of Jizi, Prince of Yin, seeking the cause of the fall of Yin. Jizi could not bear to speak of the evils of the Yin, and he merely instructed King Wu on the general causes of a state's persistence or demise. King Wu too felt uneasy, and his questions were only about the Dao of Heaven.

This brief episode is meant to explain the background of a conversation between these two men that is supposedly preserved in the "Great Plan" ("Hong fan"), an influential chapter of the *Book of Documents*.

King Wu fell ill. The kingdom was not yet united and the leading lords were alarmed. Solemnly, they consulted the turtle shell oracle. Thereupon the Duke of Zhou fasted and performed a rite of exorcism, offering his own life as a substitute for the King's. King Wu somewhat recovered, but later he died. The heir apparent Song ascended the throne as his successor, King Cheng.

The tale of the Duke of Zhou's attempt at self-sacrifice is told in reading 1.6.

King Cheng (1042-1006)

When King Cheng was young, the Zhou had just brought order to the empire. The Duke of Zhou was afraid that the patrician lords would rebel against the Zhou and so he assumed the powers of a regent to administer the state. Guan Shu and Cai Shu, together with others of the brothers of the late King Wu, rose up in rebellion against the Zhou under the standard of Wu-geng, the son of the last Shang king Zhòu.

The Duke of Zhou assumed the powers of King Cheng and launched a campaign which led to the deaths of Wu-geng and Guan Shu, and to the banishment of Cai Shu. He installed Weizi Kai, a prince of Yin, as the clan leader of the Yin lineage and gave him a patrimonial estate in Sung. Then he rounded up many of the remnant people of Yin and presented them to his youngest brother Feng, who became the ruler of the land of Wey under the title Kang Shu. . . .

The Duke of Zhou occupied the office of regent for seven years. When King Cheng came of age, the Duke of Zhou returned to him the reins of government and faced north at court in the

position of a minister.

King Cheng resided in the royal precincts of Feng and ordered the Duke of Shao to erect walls of encampment once more at the city by the River Lo, as his father King Wu had intended. The Duke of Zhou once again divined and surveyed the site, and saw the construction work through to its finish, settling the nine royal cauldrons in that city. “This is the center of the empire,” he said. “When the lands of the four quarters submit tribute, their routes to this place will all be balanced in distance” . . .

The Duke of Shao served as the Lord Protector and the Duke of Zhou became General-in-Chief. He went east to attack the Yi-tribes of the Huai River Valley. When the Duke of Zhou returned, he composed the “Institutes of the Zhou,” which established and rectified ritual and music. The regulations of administration were thereupon reformed. The people lived in harmony and the sounds of odes of praise rose up.

After the Yi-tribes of the east had been subdued by King Cheng, Xi Shen sent gifts. These the king presented to Elder Rong. . . .

When King Cheng lay dying, he feared that the heir apparent, Prince Zhao, was not worthy of the throne. He ordered the Duke of Shao and the Duke of Bi to lead the patrician lords in ministering to the prince and establishing him upon the throne. After King Cheng died, the two dukes did lead the patrician lords in presenting Prince Zhao at the royal ancestral temple. There they instructed the prince in the arduous nature of the kingly enterprise to which King Wen and King Wu had devoted themselves. They explained that great stress must be laid upon thrift in government and that the king must not possess many desires, in order that he may approach his tasks with reverence and faithfulness. Then they composed for him the document “The Departing Mandate.”

King Kang (1005-978)

Prince Zhao was subsequently enthroned as King Kang. Once King Kang ascended the throne, he issued a proclamation to all the patrician lords proclaiming the enterprise of Wen and Wu in order to extend it; this was the “Announcement of Kang.”

In this way, during the reigns of Kings Cheng and Kang, the empire was at peace and for over forty years, there was no cause to employ corporal punishment. King Kang ordered the Recorder, the Duke of Bi, to separate the residential areas of the people and create a suburban site near the capital city of Zhou; this was the “Order to Bi.”

King Zhao (977-957)

When King Kang died, his son Xia, known as King Zhao, succeeded him. During the reign of King Zhao, the kingly Dao grew obscure. King Zhao traveled south to tour and hunt, and he did not return. He died on the north bank of the Yangzi River. No messenger was sent to court to report his death because they did not wish to speak of the circumstances.

There are a number of interesting accounts of King Zhao's demise, which is one of the more puzzling events of the early Zhou. One text, the *Generational Annals of the Emperors and Kings*, reports thus: "The virtue of King Zhao declined. He campaigned in the South and crossed the River Han. The boatmen disliked him and provided him with a boat of hardened mud. When the king had sailed the boat the middle of the stream, the boat became wet through and dissolved. The king together with the Duke of Cai drowned in the water. His aide Xin Youmi possessed long arms and great strength. He swam out and retrieved the king's body. The people of Zhou would not speak of these events."

The *Bamboo Annals* story differs. "In the sixteenth year of his reign, King Zhao attacked the people of Chu. Crossing the River Han, he encountered a large rhinoceros. In the nineteenth year, in the Spring, a light of many colors was observed penetrating the 'Purple Palace' region at the pole of the night time sky. When the Duke of Cai and the Earl of Xin accompanied the king in [another] attack upon Chu, the sky grew dark and birds and rabbits trembled. All six divisions of the royal army were lost in the River Han and the king died."

King Mu (956-923)

Man, the son of King Zhao, was enthroned: this was King Mu. King Mu was already fifty at the time he came to the throne, and the kingly way had decayed. King Mu regretted that the way of Kings Wen and Wu had disappeared, and he ordered that Bojiong assume the position of Grand Ostler, admonishing him with the "Order to Jiong." Peace was thus restored.

The following lengthy account of the speech of the Duke of Cai is clearly included as an explanation of the enmity of the Dog Nomads towards the Zhou. It was the Dog Nomads who eventually, in 771 B.C., overran the Zhou capital, killed the king, and brought the Western Zhou to an end. The inclusion of the admonishment of the duke indicates the historian's judgment that it was King Mu's failings that planted the seeds of the later disaster.

King Mu prepared to launch a campaign against the Dog Nomads. Moufu, Duke of Cai, admonished him saying, "This may not be. The former kings made their virtue bright and did not need to make a show of their arms. Weaponry should be husbanded and mobilized in the proper season. If it is mobilized thus it will inspire awe, but to make a show of troops is to play with them, and if one plays with them they will have no power to inspire fear. For this reason, the ode of the Old Duke says,

Assemble our spears and halberds,
 fill our sheaths with bows and arrows.
 Our quest is for excellent virtue,
 we lay it forth in this grand music:
 Truly, may our kings preserve this!

“The way the former kings treated the people was to encourage them to set right their virtue and deepen their natural sentiments, to make goods that they desired ample and ensure that their material needs were met. They made clear what benefited and what harmed the state and ornamented these distinctions by means of patterns. Thus they encouraged the people to apply themselves to what was beneficial and avoid that which was harmful, to cherish virtue and fear the awesome. Hence they were able to protect their generations and amplify their grandeur.

“Of old, our former progenitor Prince Millet served Yao and Shun and Yu, the founder of the Xia. When the Xia went into decline, casting aside agriculture our former king Buzhu lost his office and went off into the midst of the nomad tribes. But he dared not be lax in his tasks and cultivated his virtue in accordance with the times and carried forth his traditions. He cultivated the teachings and laws of his forbears and was diligent from dawn to dusk. He preserved these traditions with reverence, loyalty, and faithfulness. As the generations passed, all possessed such virtue, and none brought shame upon their forbears.

“In the times of Kings Wen and Wu, they shone forth this brilliance from the past and added to it kindness and harmony. They served the spirits and protected the people so that none were not happily content. When the king of the Shang, *Di-xin*, acted with great evil towards the people such that the common people could not bear it, they looked with longing towards King Wu, hoping that he would join in battle at the plains of Mu by the city of Shang.

“In this way, the former kings did not exert themselves in military affairs, rather they were diligent in caring for the people and freeing them from harm.

“According to the regulations of the former kings, the lands within the estates of Zhou are the Capital Regions, the lands beyond are the Patrician Estates. The outer marches guarded by the lords and the garrison commanders constitute the Regions of Guests; the lands of the Yi-tribes in the East and the Man-tribes in the South constitute the Attached Regions; the lands of the Rong-nomads and the Di-nomads constitute the Wasteland Regions. Within the Capital Regions, there should be contributions to the daily sacrifices; within the regions of the Patrician Estates there should be contributions to the monthly sacrifices; within the Regions of Guests there should be contributions to the seasonal sacrifices; within the Attached Regions there should be annual tribute sent; within the Wasteland Regions there should come word that the Zhou ruler is ever acknowledged as king.

“The rule of sacrifice of the former kings was this: If offerings for daily sacrifices are omitted

by those within the Capital Regions, cultivate one's intent; if offerings for the monthly sacrifices are omitted within the Patrician Estates, cultivate one's speech; if offerings for the seasonal sacrifices are omitted in the Regions of Guests, cultivate social patterns; if annual tribute fails to come from the Attached Regions, cultivate reputation; if acknowledgment of kingship fails to come from the Wasteland Region, cultivate virtue. Only if all these steps have been followed completely, then, if still none come from such a region, cultivate punishments. Then you may corporally punish those who do not contribute to the daily sacrifice, attack those who do not contribute to the monthly sacrifice, campaign against those who do not contribute to the seasonal sacrifice, admonish those who do not send annual tribute, and report their failings to those who do not acknowledge the kingship of the Zhou.

“Thus do you have penalties for corporal punishment, weaponry for attack, preparations for campaigns, ordinances of awesome admonishment, and the rhetoric of official notification. If these ordinances have been applied and the appropriate words sent and still there is no response, then you must further cultivate your virtue, not send the people off to distant places.

“In this way, there will among those near be none who does not obey, and among those afar, none who does not submit.

“Now, since the close of the time of the chieftains Great Bi and Boshi, the tribe of the Dog Nomads has sent acknowledgment of the Zhou's kingship according to their proper office. If you, the Son of Heaven, were to say, ‘They do not send offerings for the seasonal sacrifices, this I will make a show of military might,’ you will be casting away the teachings of the former kings. Will you not then be in danger of defeat? I have heard that the Dog Nomads have established patterns of sincerity and, according with the old virtue, they preserve to the utmost the pure and natural. They have means whereby to resist us!”

But the king campaigned against them. He returned having captured four white wolves and four white deer. From this time forth, envoys from the Wasteland Regions no longer appeared at the Zhou court. . . .

Here, the account reproduces an entire chapter of the *Book of Documents*. The point is to show that in response to unharmonious behavior among the patrician lords, King Mu resorted to a system of laws and punishments. The text, “Punishments of Lü,” may be found in Clae Waltham's edition of James Legge's translation of the *Book of Documents* (*Shu Ching*, “The Marquis of Lü on Punishments”).

King Mu was the sole successor of Kings Wen and Wu to inspire an extensive and complex set of legends, which by no means create a consistent portrait. For example, in the *Bamboo Annals*, the northwestern campaign against the nomad tribes seems to be supported by the Duke of Cai and envoys continue to come to court from nomad tribes. The chief theme of these traditions, however, is that King Mu loved to travel, and roamed to distant lands. There exists, in fact, a *Tale of Mu, Son of Heaven* (*Mu Tianzi zhuan*), of uncertain date, which recounts these marvelous legends in great detail.

King Mu reigned fifty-five years.

Recall that King Mu came to the throne at the age of fifty. (Of course, Chinese compute ages differently: children are one at birth and add a year each New Year's. King Mu may actually have been a relative youth of 103, plus a little, at his death.)

King Gong (922-904)

When [King Mu] died, his son Yihu, succeeded him as King Gong.

King Gong was traveling along the north bank of the Jing River with Duke Kang of Mi accompanying him. Three sisters came to the duke seeking to become his consorts. The duke's mother said, "They must be given to the king. Among beasts, three constitutes a flock; among people, three constitutes a crowd; among women, three constitutes dazzling beauty. When the king hunts, he dares not capture a flock; when a duke travels, he does not fail to acknowledge a crowd; when a king fills his harem, he does not take three women from a single clan. Now dazzling beauty is the finest of things. But if the common people should in this way send three women to a single lord, what lord would possess the virtue to be worthy of it? Even a king does not possess such virtue, how much less so a little runt like you? My little runt, if you take them all, in the end you will be destroyed!"

The duke did not present them to the king, and King Gong did indeed extinguish the state of Mi.

King Yi (903-877)

When King Gong died, his son, Jian, succeeded him as King Yi. During the reign of King Yi, the royal house declined, and the poets composed verses satirizing it.

The *Bamboo Annals* lists several instances of nomad attacks on the capital regions, and says that King Yi actually moved the capital some thirty miles, seemingly for defensive purposes. Other sources tell us that the brother of King Yi, the future King Xiao, acted as regent for the last five years of his father's reign.

King Xiao (876-868)

When King Yi died, the younger brother of King Gong succeeded him as King Xiao.

Note the very unusual instance of the Zhou throne passing to a brother rather than a son.

King Yí (867-860)

When King Xiao died, the heir of King Yí, Xie, succeeded him as King Yí.

According to legend, the most notable act of King Yí was to punish the duke of Qi for licentious behavior by boiling him in oil in a great tripod in front of the assembled patrician lords.

King Li (859-842)

When King Yí died, his son Hu succeeded him as King Li.

When King Li had reigned for thirty years, he developed a fondness for material goods and made Duke Yi of Rong a close favorite.

A grandee of the Zhou house named Rui Liangfu admonished King Li. “The royal house seems ready to sink low. The Duke of Jung is pleased to monopolize wealth and has no thought of great difficulties to come.

“Wealth is born of the world of things and borne by heaven and earth; to monopolize it leads to great harm. Heaven and earth and all the things of the world must partake of it – how can one seek to monopolize it? There will come a great fury, yet the duke does not prepare for such difficulties. If he instructs you according to these lights, will you long endure on the throne?

“He who rules as king over the people should channel wealth so that it is distributed to all above and all below. He must ensure that the spirits and living beings receive their due, and live in daily dread that they will bring grievances against him. It is for this reason that the hymn says:

Patterned Prince Millet,
 worthy companion of Heaven,
 Established the teeming masses;
 none without his needs fulfilled.

And the great court ode says:

Distributing gifts, such is the Zhou.

Do these not suggest that one should fear difficulties if wealth is not distributed? And for this reason, the Zhou has survived until this day.

“But now the king has learnt to monopolize wealth, and will this do? If a common man

monopolizes wealth he is called a thief. If a king does so, he will have few upon whom to rely. If the Duke of Jung's counsels are heeded, the Zhou will certainly collapse!"

King Li paid no heed and appointed the Duke of Rong as Minister-in-Chief in charge of administration.

The conduct of the king grew increasingly despotic and lavish. The people of the capital began to revile him. The Duke of Shao admonished the king, "The people cannot bear your rule." The king was furious. He employed a shaman from the land of Wey and had him use his special sight to identify those who spoke against him. Whoever the shaman reported the king executed. Soon, the clamor of the people subsided. The patrician lords ceased to come to court.

By the thirty-fourth year of his reign, the king had become even more tyrannical. The people of the capital dared not speak; they looked at one another as they passed on the roads. King Li was delighted. He told the Duke of Shao about it. "I was able to put a stop to the slander! They don't dare speak now."

"You have blocked it," replied the duke. "But to dam the mouths of the people is more dangerous than a dike by a river. When a river that has been blocked up breaks through its dikes there are always many who are hurt, and it is like this with the people. That is why those who know how to manage the waters dredge the rivers so as to guide their proper flow; those who know how to manage the people, proclaim encouragements so that they will speak.

"The government of a Son of Heaven calls for all those from the ranks of high ministers to the *shi* to express themselves through poems; it calls on blind musicians to offer songs, scribes to offer documents, generals to offer cautions, the blind to offer rhapsodies and chants, artisans to offer admonishments, and commoners to pass along their remarks. Courtiers must exhaustively correct the king, his clansmen must investigate his governance thoroughly, court musicians and scribes must instruct him and the elders must elaborate on their instruction. And after all this, the king reflects on all he has learned. That is why his affairs proceed without obstruction.

"The possession of mouths by the people is like the possession of rivers and mountains by the earth: it is the font from which riches flow, the fertile fields and the plains from which food and clothing are born. It is through the words that are released from their mouths that good government or failure arises. To enact what is good and defend against what brings failure is to give birth to riches, food, and clothing.

"The people conceive of things in their minds and give vent to them through their mouths; when their thoughts are complete they may be put into practice. If you block up their mouths, what will come of it!"

The king paid no heed. The kingdom continued on with the people afraid to speak for three

years more. Then the people revolted and attacked King Li. The king fled to the city of Zhi.

King Li's heir apparent, Prince Jing, hid in the household of the Duke of Shao. When the people of the capital heard this, they surrounded the duke's compound. The duke said, "In the past, I admonished the king urgently and he paid no heed, so we have come to these difficult times. If I allow them to kill the prince the king will look upon me with fury as his enemy. A minister who serves his lord endures danger and does not inspire fury as an enemy; he may have cause for complaint, but he himself is never angry – and how much more must this be true of one who serves a king!" Thereupon he sent his own son out as a substitute for the prince, and in this way, the prince was able to escape.

The Gong-He Period (841-828)

We are far from clear as to the nature of what is known as the "Gong-He Period" of the Western Zhou. King Li was in exile in Zhi; his son was very young. The inscriptional evidence suggests that this was a time when a single man named Hefu, controlled the government during a time of chaos. But the *Shiji* account describes a period of joint regency by two high dukes at the capital, the Duke of Shao and the Duke of Zhou. Note that these titles had become fixed for men who occupied certain offices in the royal court, and who were the descendants of the original dukes of Shao and Zhou, the younger brothers of King Wu.

The Dukes of Shao and Zhou assumed management of governmental affairs. Their regency was known as "Gong-He": Cooperative Harmony.

In the fourteenth year of the Gong-He period King Li died at Zhi. Prince Jing, who had grown to adulthood in the household of the Duke of Shao, was installed as king by the two dukes. This was King Xuan.

King Xuan (827-782)

When King Xuan came to the throne, the two dukes helped him administer the realm and refine the government. They emulated the surviving model of Kings Wen, Wu, Cheng, and Kang. The patrician lords once again revered the Zhou. In the twelfth year of the king's reign, Duke Wu of Lu came to court.

When King Xuan came to the throne, he did not revive the ritual of the king personally initiating the growing season by ploughing in the fields in Thousand Acres. Duke Wen of Kuo admonished him that this was not as it should be, but the king paid no heed.

In the thirty-ninth year of his reign, King Xuan did battle at Thousand Acres and the royal

forces suffered a severe defeat at the hands of the nomads of the Jiang clan.

Having lost the armies of his southern regions in this way, King Xuan wished to conduct a census of the people at Taiyuan. Zhongshan Fu admonished him saying that it was improper to take censuses of the people, but the king paid no heed and in the end he conducted the census.

In the forty-sixth year of his reign, King Xuan died.

King You (781-771)

King Xuan was succeeded by his son Gongnie, who ruled as King You.

In the second year of King You's reign, a great earthquake shook the three great rivers of the western regions of Zhou. Bo Yangfu said, "The Zhou is coming to an end! The *qi* of heaven and earth is never disorderly. If it exceeds its proper degree, it is the people who introduce chaos to it. Earthquakes occur when the yang force is suppressed and cannot arise from the earth, and the yin force is contained and cannot disperse upwards. This quake of the three rivers is due to the fact that yang has left its due position and is pressing down upon yin. The springs of the rivers are surely blocked, and when the springs are blocked the state will surely perish.

"When the water and the soil spread out they are employed by the people, but when they cannot spread the people are without the means to fill their needs; what use is there in hoping that the state will not perish?"

"It was this way when the Rivers Yi and Luo dried up and the Xia state came to its end, and when the Yellow River dried up and the Shang came to its end. Now the virtue of the Zhou resembles the last days of these two dynasties. And the springs of the rivers have become blocked, and being so, the rivers surely will dry up.

"A state depends upon its mountains and rivers; if the mountains tumble and the rivers run dry, these are the omens of a state's end. And once the rivers run dry, the mountains will surely fall. In this way, the extinction of the state cannot be further than ten years off, for ten is the cycle of the numbers. The state which Heaven means to cast aside cannot exceed its cycle."

That year, the three rivers ran dry and Mount Qi tumbled.

In the third year of his reign, King You became infatuated with his consort Bao Si. Bao Si gave birth to a son who was named Bofu. King You wished to remove the heir apparent. The mother of the heir was a daughter of the Marquis of Shen and had married as King You's queen. King You had later received Bao Si and, loving her, desired to discard the queen along with the heir, Prince Yijiu, and appoint Bao Si as queen and Bofu as heir.

The grand historian of the Zhou, Boyang, consulted the historical records and said, “The Zhou will certainly perish!”

In the past, at the time that the Xia Dynasty had entered its decline, two spirit-like dragons had descended to the king’s court and spoken saying, “We are the two lords of Bao.”* The Xia king divined about killing the dragons, removing them, and allowing them to remain. None of these divinations was auspicious. Then he divined concerning capturing their saliva and storing it. This divination was auspicious. Thereupon, the king had commanded that a formal investiture ceremony be mounted in which the dragons were presented with cloth and valuables of office and told of the divination. This being done, the dragons flew off, leaving their saliva, which was collected in a box and stored away.

When the Xia fell, this box was passed to the Shang, and when the Shang fell, this box was passed to the Zhou, and in all this time of the three dynasties, none dared to open the box. At the close of King Li’s reign, however, the box had been opened and the saliva had flowed through the court. No one could get rid of it. King Li had then ordered one of the court woman to strip naked and call the saliva. When she did so, the saliva turned into a black tortoise, which carried the woman off into the women’s chambers at the rear of the palace. In the women’s chambers the turtle was encountered by a servant girl who had only recently lost her first teeth. She became pregnant then and gave birth to a daughter afterwards. Having no husband, she cast the child away in fear.

During the time of King Xuan, there came to be a song sung by young girls that went:

A bow of mountain mulberry,
a sheath of wood from the *chi* tree:
Surely the state of Zhou shall perish!

The king learned that there was a husband and wife who were attempting to sell a bow and sheath of this description. He ordered that the couple should be caught and executed. They fled, and wandering on the road they encountered the child that had formerly been discarded by the servant girl. Hearing her sobs at night they pitied her and took her along with them on their escape. They fled to the state of Bao.

In Bao, this child was received by a courtier who had committed a crime and presented to the ruler of Bao in order that the courtier’s offense be pardoned. Later, the child was presented by the ruling clan of Bao to the king under the name Bao Si.

In the third year of his reign, King You saw Bao Si in his inner chambers and was infatuated with her. She bore him the son Bofu and, in the end, the king did indeed cast away his queen of the

*This Bao is the surname of Bao Si.

Shen clan and her son, his heir, and appoint Bao Si as queen and Bofu as the heir apparent.

“The calamity has come!” sighed the grand historian Boyang. “There is nothing that can now be done.”

Bao Si did not like to smile. King You tried ten thousand ways of making her smile, but none succeeded. Finally King You ordered that the beacon fires that were the signal for the patrician lords to come save Zhou from an enemy attack should be lit and great drums sounded. The patrician lords all came rushing, but there was no enemy to fight. Thereupon Bao Si burst into gales of laughter. King You was delighted, and thereafter would frequently light these fires. Eventually, the lords ceased to believe that the alarm was genuine, and fewer and fewer responded.

King You employed Shifu of the state of Guo as his Minister-in-Chief and gave him charge of all administration. The people of the capital were all resentful of this. Shifu was glib and clever, expert at flattery and fond of wealth.

The Marquis of Shen was furious that his daughter and her son had been deprived of their roles as queen and heir apparent. He allied with the state of Zeng and the western tribes of Dog Nomads and their troops attacked the king. King You ordered that the beacon fires be lit to assemble the patrician armies, but no troops responded to the fires. In the end, King You was killed at the foot of Mount Li and Bao Si taken prisoner. The invading troops sacked the capital city of Zhou and then left.

The patrician lords thereupon joined with the Marquis of Shen and set upon the throne Yijiu, the original heir apparent, who reigned as King Ping and carried on the sacrifices to the Zhou ancestors. Upon his enthronement, the court was removed eastward to the city of Luo in order to avoid the threat of the nomad tribes.

(Shiji 4.126-149)

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. *Mark the sections of this narrative that appear likely to be records of actual events, rather than inventions of the historian-narrator or traditional anecdotes, inserted to make the account seem more complete and memorable.*
2. *Identify points in the narrative of the Zhou where the historian is clearly highlighting the morality of the actors involved, and indicating how governance should or should not be pursued.*
3. *Which reigns appear to reflect military strength on the part of the Zhou state?*
4. *Kings Li and You were traditionally regarded as having been evil rulers. What features of conduct earned them this reputation?*

Sources and Further Readings

A fully annotated translation of the *Shiji* text appears in William Nienhauser, et al., *The Grand Scribe's Records* (Bloomington), v. 1. The best concise narrative history of the Western Zhou is Edward Shaughnessy's chapter, "Western Zhou History," in Michael Loewe & Edward Shaughnessy, ed., *The Cambridge History of Ancient China* (Cambridge: 1999), 292-351.