

The making of kings

"Rock Art, Khoisan," in World History Commons, <https://worldhistorycommons.org/rock-art-khoisan> [accessed September 18, 2022]



Where did the idea of royalty come from?



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The extraordinary and unusual suggests there could be other powers – more than human powers



Lakshmi Tatma, born with 4 arms and legs



Hallucinatory substances provide imagery of other worlds and fantastic therianthrope beings recorded and preserved as cave art.

Images, Hollman 2005
See the work of Lewis-Williams

Religion created by entheogens in hallucinatory substances

- Entheogen = psychoactive substance that induces spiritual feelings and/or hallucinations. Derived from plants



Having established that 'higher' powers exist, the way for a person to make claims to being connected to those higher powers was paved.

Graeber suggests that temporary divine status was afforded people for ritual purposes...but that the game kept going.





Rituals: important social events that can appease 'the gods'

- Ritual activities – social or individual – function to influence outcomes
- Rituals cohere social groups under a shared intention. These regularly repeated actions further link social identities.
- Rituals are used to call to higher powers to ensure fertility, harvests, health and safety, assuming that the gods can deliver.
- Rituals often use a stand-in actor divinity to appeal to.

But how did one person get to rule over the rest?

- Graeber suggests that temporary divine status was afforded to an actor (as faux gods) for ritual purposes...but that the 'game' didn't stop.
- If rituals allowed people to communicate with gods (and thus secure survival), then wouldn't it be a good idea to keep a 'ritual' going all the time?
- Ritual practitioners are key figures in social life, having esoteric knowledge that others don't possess.

Maurice Sendak
Wo die wilden Kerle wohnen

Ein Diogenes Kinderbuch



Royalty may have originally existed as a mechanism to ensure social security

- But different generations adapted the role (see ethnographic details in Graeber and Dubrovsky) and found ways to stay in and hold more power.
- Instead of playing the role, they established a living role and ruled.





Moving from egalitarianism to hierarchy

- Most foraging (hunter-gather) groups today are non-hierarchical, using consensus and debate to make decisions.
- The notion of an obvious leader appears where horticulture is adopted – perhaps in association with establishing settlements (non-nomadic).
- Being settled generates new social problems (Diamond 1987) – property, theft, disease – and new economic systems. This calls for new controls and an authority to obey, especially as groups expand.
- The divine position now may have merged with ‘ruler’, as the final everyday social authority/the law.

Etymology of the word 'king': From one of us to one of them

- The word 'king' is a European term; other locations use different words.
- King – denotes kinship/family, rather than divinity.
- 'It is possibly related to Old English cynn "family, race" (see kin)', which developed into describing a person who "descended from noble birth" (or "the descendant of a divine race")'.
(<https://www.etymonline.com/word/king>)
- This signals that kings were considered 'head of the family'.





General characteristics of royalty

- Cannot be the same as the commoners (often an incomer).
- Must be looked after/protected
- Employ symbolic objects, elaborate costumes – especially spectacular head gear
- Royalty walks a thin line between being ‘divine other’ and one of ‘The People’. Keeping a distance from ‘The People’ is important. Separation encourages mystery and authority.

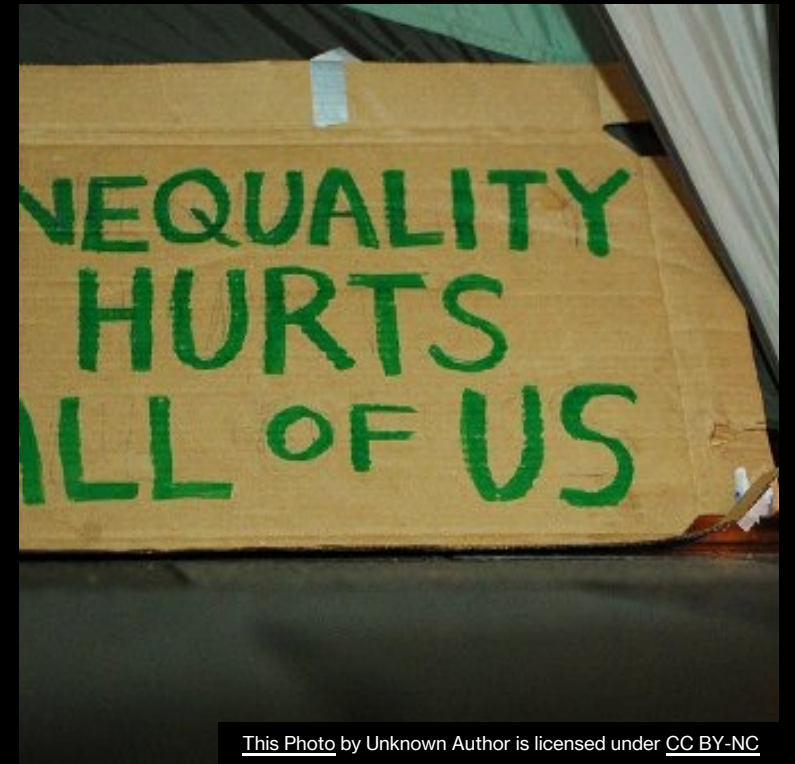
Immortality and 'the corporation'

- Royals, being part divine, are advertised as immortal.
- Immortality is understood through the idea of 'the corporation'(established by European medieval monks)
- 'A corporation* is an immortal body made up of lots of mortal ones. This is a very strange idea, but it's important because there are still "corporations" today, and they are very powerful.'(Graeber and Dubrovsky 2020).
- This allows the line to last forever – there's always another one.

*a group authorized to act as a single entity and should benefit the 'share holders'

Understanding the social function of inequality

- Deep history suggests that all human groups were originally egalitarian. A move to hierarchies may have emerged with settlements.
- A temporary ritualistic link to the divine could have been established to secure communication and security. Over 1000s of years the temporary role evolved to a permanent position – like the shaman – then developing into a ruler with powers.
- Initially this fake inequality was for protection, today it has altered into a soft power capitalist business.



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Egalitarianism – Hierarchy - Democracy

- The movement from 'ritual proxy for deities' to Chief/ King/ dictator, Empereur etc took 1000s of years and is a complicated journey.
- Egalitarianism was a conscious move to avoid the hierarchical oppression of certain dominant individuals (see Boehm).
- Being settled and accumulating surplus may have allowed some to accumulate capital and therefore the power to impose rules = local chiefs (see Marx/Engels).
- The creation of elected leaders should shift that power back to the people...



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CEOs are today's kings

According to Graeber and Dubrovsky (2020), CEOs of large corporations might be the kings of today.

References

- Diamond, J. 1987 The Worst Mistake in the History of the Human Race, *Discover Magazine* pp.64-66 (also see his books)
- Graeber, D., and Dubrovsky, N. 2020 *What are Kings?* Ebook [online] available at https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ae0ebef1aef1da34cfb6554/t/5ebdce652cb21602bbbd84bb/1589497512029/kings_small.pdf
- <https://www.etymonline.com/word/king>