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Tales From The Principalities
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ALL STORIES ARE TRANSLATED BY ERIC HENRY

CHAPTER THREE TALES FROM THE EASTERN ZHŌU



The game of kickball. Ink painting in the Zibo Chinese Ceramics Museum in Zibo City in Shandong Province in Summer 2007. Artist unknown. Image edited by David Henry.



The nine tales presented in this section all occur during the second phase of Zhōu history. The Zhōu continued to exist for 515 years after losing their western capital, and its Kings or “sons of Heaven,” as titular Rulers of the entire Chinese realm, continued to be ritually important, but they became steadily less powerful as time went on. There was a “Zhōu royal domain” just south of a horizontal stretch of the Yellow River and directly west of the State of Zhèng, but this domain had no more actual strength or size than many States beyond its borders. It is customary to divide the Eastern Zhōu into two eras: the Spring and Autumn (771–479) and the Warring States (403–221), with a seventy-three-year interregnum in between. Zhōu ceased to exist in 256, thirty-five years before the end of the Warring States. The Eastern Zhōu Tales in this work all belong to the Spring and Autumn Era, with the exception of the Wú and Yuè Tales, some of which conclude at slightly later dates. ~ Eric Henry.

Author: Unknown, 4th Century BCE.

6. Restoration of an Overthrown Ruler

This is the first of the stories in “Tales from Zhōu” that concerns the Zhōu Court after its eastern relocation. King Huì who forms the subject of this item reigned from 651 to 619 BCE. This item concerns a usurpation and a restoration, both violent. Certain ritual improprieties committed by the usurpers give the restorers confidence that their operation will be successful.

Summary: Prince Tuǐ usurps the Zhōu throne and drives his elder brother King Huì from the royal domain. King Huì takes refuge in Zhèng. Lord Lì of Zhèng hears that the usurper often has sacred odes and other music performed at banquets to which he invites the officers who helped him seize the throne. Consulting with the Duke of Guó, Lord Lì expresses

the view that Prince Tuǐ's indulgence in such entertainments is under the circumstances a gross violation of propriety and, thus, a sure indication that he will suffer disaster. He therefore thinks that conditions are right for attempting a restoration of King Huì. This is Item 11 in "Tales from Zhōu" (Book 1). The story appears also in *Zuǒ Tradition*, Zhuānggōng 20, Item 1. Items in the preceding and following years, Zhuānggōng 19 and 21, also have some relevant details. ~ Eric Henry.

In the third year of the reign of King Huì of Zhōu [675 BCE], Biān Bó, Shí Sù, and Wěi Guó drove him out and established Prince Tuǐ 頹 in his place.¹ King Huì resided in Zhèng for three years. Prince Tuǐ entertained the three officers at a banquet with Wěi Guó as the guest of honor, at which the *biān wǔ* were among the musical selections performed.² Lord Lì of Zhèng thereupon met with Guóshú³ and said, "I have heard that when the overseer of justice has criminals executed, the Ruler refrains from having music performed; how then could he dare to enjoy music in the midst of calamity! I have heard that Prince Tuǐ is having songs and dances performed without cease. This is enjoying music in the midst of calamity. What greater calamity could exist than the expulsion of a King

¹ Prince Tuǐ was the son of King Zhuāng by his favorite concubine Wáng Yáo 王姚. Wěi Guó 蒍國 was his tutor. When King Huì assumed the throne, he seized Wěi's orchard, the dwelling of Biān Bó 邊伯, and the grain stipend of Shí Sù 石速, so the three of them drove the King out. These three individuals were all officers in the Royal Court. Zǐ Tuǐ 子頹 was the youngest son of King Zhuāng by his concubine Wáng Yáo 王姚. Wáng Yáo enjoyed the special favor of King Zhuāng, so her son Tuǐ was also cherished. Zǐtuǐ's tutor was Wěi Guó 蒍國.

² The *biān wǔ* 遍舞 were odes of the Six Dynasties. The Ode for Huáng Dì was called "Yún mén" 雲門, the Ode for Yào was called "Xiāo Shào" 箫韶, the Ode for Yǔ was called "Dà Xià" 大夏, the Ode for Yīn (Shāng) was called "Da Huò" 大濩, and the Ode for Zhōu was called "Tài Wǔ" 大武.

³ Lìgōng or Lord Lì 厲公 was Tū, the son of Lord Zhuāng of Zhèng. Guóshú 穀叔 was the Zhōu minister Guōgōng Línfù 穀公林父.



and the usurpation of a throne? To forget grief in calamity is the same as celebrating in calamity. Disaster is sure to befall such a one. Should we not escort the King back to Zhōu?”

Guó Shū agreed with this. The Count of Zhèng took the King in by the Yú 圉 gate and Guó Shū entered by the north gate. They killed Prince Tuǐ and the three officers, and the King was returned to the throne.

Author: Unknown, 4th Century BCE.

7. The Political Significance of Supernatural Beings

This item deals with a central preoccupation of people in this era. Invisible powers, they felt, were always looming in the background. In every State, Court Archivists had to address the spirits viva voce at the end of each year in order to recount the principal actions performed by the State in the preceding year. This procedure was accompanied by much anxiety, because it was believed that the spirits would inflict retribution on the archivists themselves and the States they served if (1) any of the reports were untrue, and if (2) any of the actions reported were in themselves unworthy. One result of this is that the reports were kept as brief and uncommunicative as possible.

Summary: A spirit descends at a place called Xīn in the State of Guó. King Huì of Zhōu asks Chief Archivist Guò what this means. Guò explains that the appearance of a spirit may mean either that a State will rise to supreme power or that it will perish, depending on the character of the Ruler. He cites an example of each phenomenon for each of the preceding three dynasties. He believes that the present spirit is that of Dān Zhū, the deposed heir-son of the Sage-King Yáo, and that its appearance presages the destruction of Guó five years hence. He suggests that the Duke of Zhōu go to Guó and together with certain Zhōu ministers and a descendant of Dān, and make certain offerings to the

spirit without any requests for blessings. Chief Archivist Guò goes also to observe these rites, and sees that the Duke of Guó requests the spirit to enlarge his territory. The impropriety of this action strengthens Chief Archivist Guò's conviction that Guó will perish. This is Item 12 in "Tales from Zhōu" (Book 1). See *Zuǒ Tradition*, Zhuānggōng 31, which has a much shorter and somewhat different version. ~ Eric Henry.

In the 15th year of the reign of King Huì of Zhōu [662], a spirit descended at Xīn.⁴ The King asked Chief Archivist of the Interior Guò 過 about this,⁵ saying, "Why did this happen? Did a spirit actually appear?"

"It did," said Guò. "When States are about to flourish, their Rulers are invariably enlightened, correct, pure, and kind; their virtue is sufficient to make glorious their fragrant incense, and their favor is sufficient to unite their men and their people to them. The spirits partake of their sacrifices and the people are submissive to their decrees; both people and spirits are devoid of resentment, and so the spirits descend to observe the virtue of their rule and to distribute blessings in response.

"When States are about to perish, their Rulers are greedy, deluded, profligate, lethargic, filthy, and tyrannical. Their Ruler is foul, so fragrant incense cannot rise. Their punishments are arbitrary, so the clan chiefs harbor double loyalties. The bright spirits do not cleanse them and the people harbor distant aims [dreams of rebellion]. Both people and spirits are filled with resentment that they have no means of expressing, so spirits go as well to those Rulers to observe their harsh

⁴ Xīn 莘 was located in the State of Guó 虢.

⁵ The archivist of the Interior was responsible for appointments and removals, and for designations used for Lords of States, orphans, Ministers, and Court Officers.



wickedness and visit calamities upon them. This is why the appearance of spirits is sometimes a sign that a state will flourish and sometimes a sign that it will perish.

“Long ago, when Xià was about to flourish, Róng⁶ came down to Mount Sōng.⁷ When Xià was about to perish, Huí Lù⁸ appeared at Qín Suì.⁹ When Shāng was about to flourish, Táo Wù¹⁰ appeared at Mount Pī.¹¹ When Shāng was about to perish, Yí Yáng¹² appeared at Mù 牧. When Zhōu was about to flourish, Yuè Zhuó sang at Mount Qí,¹³ and when Zhōu declined, Dù Bó shot the King¹⁴ at Hào.¹⁵ These were all expressions of the will of the bright spirits.”

“What is the spirit that has just now appeared?” asked the King.

“In former times,” replied Chief Archivist Guò, “King Zhāo took a

⁶ This is Zhū Róng 祝融, the fire god and mythical founder of the ruling House of Chǔ.

⁷ Xià yáng, the first Xià capital, was near Mount Sōng. Sōng 崇 refers to Sōnggāo shān 崇高山, Mount Sōnggāo. The Xià capital was in Yángchéng, which was close to Sōnggāo.

⁸ Huí Lù 回祿 was a god of fire, in its destructive aspect.

⁹ Qín suì 聆隧 is a place name.

¹⁰ Táo Wù 聆隧 was a name for Gǔn 鯀, father of Yǔ the Great. Cì 次 means guò 過, pass through; pī 丕 means dà 大. Pīshān was in Hédōng 邳山在河東.

¹¹ Mount Pī 丕山 was located in Hédōng.

¹² Yí Yáng 夷羊 was the name of a supernatural beast.

¹³ Mount Qí 岐 was the central stronghold of the predynastic Zhōu.

¹⁴ Dù Bó 杜伯 was an officer unjustly executed by King Xuān. His ghost was said to have brought on the King's death by shooting immaterial arrows into his heart.

¹⁵ Yuè Zhuó 鸞鸞 was the name of a phoenix, the singing of which presaged the rise of the dynastic Zhōu. Hao 鄩 was the capital of the Western Zhōu.

wife from the State of Fáng; her name was Lady Fáng.¹⁶ She was double-natured and had an affinity with the spirit of Dān Zhū.¹⁷ Dān Zhū drew close and mated with her, and it was thus that King Mù was born. This greatly influenced the blessings and misfortunes of the descendants of Zhōu. Spirits never wander far from those they haunt. Might it not be Dān Zhū's spirit?"

"Whom will it haunt?" asked the King.

"It will be in Guó," replied Chief Archivist Guò.

"Why then has it come?" asked the King.

"I have heard," said Chief Archivist Guò, "that when a Ruler practices the Way and draws down a spirit, it is called 'encountering a blessing'; but when a Ruler is depraved and draws down a spirit, it is called 'eliciting a disaster.' In the present instance, affairs in Guó have been neglected. Could it be that Guó will perish?"

"What can I do about this?" asked the King.

"You must order the Chief Steward to have the Chief Celebrant and the Court Archivist lead Lí Xìng to the place¹⁸ and present offerings of flesh, grain, and silk to the spirit. No prayer should be addressed to it."

"How much longer will Guó survive?" asked the King.

"In former days Yáo drew close to the people in cycles of five years, and now his descendant has appeared—the manifestations of spirits do not outlast their intrinsic limits. Judging from this, Guó will not last longer than five years."

¹⁶ King Zhāo 昭王 was Jiǎ 瑕, the grandson of King Chéng 成 and the son of King Kāng 康. Fáng 房 was the name of a State. The lady referred to was called Fáng Hòu 房后.

¹⁷ Dān Zhū 丹朱 was the son of the sage-king Yáo. He was denied the succession because his father considered him unworthy.

¹⁸ Lí Xìng 狸姓 was a descendant of Dān Zhū 丹朱.



The King had Chief Steward Jìfù¹⁹ lead the chief of the Fù 傅 clan together with the Chief Celebrant and the Chief Archivist to make offerings of flesh, jade, and fragrant wine to the spirit. Archivist of the Interior Guò followed the procession to Guó.

The Lord of Guó had his own Chief Celebrant and Chief Archivist beseech the spirit for land as well. Upon his return, Chief Archivist of the Interior Guò reported this to the King and said, “Guó will surely perish. To fail to offer pure sacrifices and at the same time seek blessings will surely cause the spirit to bring disaster upon them. To seek to use the people without first drawing them to you will surely cause the people to be disobedient. A pure sacrifice is one offered with complete integrity of intention. Drawing the people to one is accomplished by extending kindness and protection to them. But now the Lord of Guó stirs up his exhausted clan-chiefs to magnify his own perversities. Alienating the people and angering the spirits, he nevertheless seeks profit from them.²⁰ Won’t he be making trouble for himself?”

In the nineteenth year of the King’s reign [655], Jìn seized Guó.

Author: Unknown, 4th Century BCE.

8. Dí Tribesmen and the Zhōu Throne

In the Spring and Autumn Era (771–479), non-Chinese tribal communities existed next to Chinese States throughout the land. The ancient Chinese had four generic designations for them depending on their location. The Róng 戎 were in the western part of the realm, the Dí 狄 in the north, the Yí 夷 in the east, and the Mán 蠻 in the south. Though they babbled incomprehensibly, presented military problems, and had customs regarded with disdain by the Chinese, the Rulers of

¹⁹ Chief Steward Jìfù 忌父 was Zhōugōng Jì-fù 周公忌父, the Duke of Zhōu.

²⁰ Qíú lì 求利 means qǐng tǔ 請土, asking for territory.

principalities often found it expedient to form alliances or even contract marital alliances with such groups. The present item is an instance of this.

Summary: King Xiāng grows angry with Zhèng for attacking a small State related to the royal house and for seizing a royal emissary. He decides to use Dí forces to attack Zhèng. Fù Chén urges him not to do this, citing (1) Zhèng's close family ties to the royal house, and (2) Zhèng's past services. King Xiāng rejects this advice, has the Dí attack Zhèng, then resolves to take a Dí Princess as a Consort. Fù Chén strenuously objects, observing that marriages by Heads of State cause advantage to flow either into, or away from, a State. He provides many examples of each process. He, then, shows that a Zhōu-Dí marital connection would be an example of the second, or disadvantageous, process, since it would entail the loss of the "seven virtues," which he enumerates and discusses. King Xiāng ignores this advice and takes the Consort. This is Item 1 in "Tales from Zhōu" (Book 2). See also *Zuǒ Tradition Xīgōng* 24, Item 2. ~ Eric Henry.

In the thirteenth year of the reign of King Xiāng [640], the men of Zhèng attacked Huá.²¹ The King sent Yóu Sūnbó to Zhèng to intercede for Huá. The men of Zhèng seized and detained him.²² The King was

²¹ Hua 滑 was a small, royal-surname State. Previous to this, Zhèng had attacked Huá, and Huá had acceded to Zhèng's demands, but upon the return of Zhèng's forces, rebelled again, so Prince Tǔ of Zhèng and Xiè Dǔ Kòu took troops to attack Huá.

²² Yóu Sūnbó 游孫伯 was a Zhōu Officer. The Zhèng Ruler was Lord Wén of that state, personal name Jié 捷 (reigned 671–627). Zhèng was angry with Zhōu because King Huì of Zhōu had not bestowed an official title on Lord Lì of Zhèng after the latter had restored him to the throne in 672. Zhèng was also angry at Zhōu's partiality to the States of Wèi and Huá.



angry and decided to use the Dí to attack Zhèng.²³

Fù Chén²⁴ advised against this, saying, “This can’t be done. An ancient saying says, ‘Though slander may cause rifts among brothers, they still keep would-be attackers far away.’ The poem by Duke Wén of Zhōu says, ‘Brothers quarrel within walls, but repel insults from outside.’²⁵ From this, one can see that though brothers quarrel within the family compound, they do not let these quarrels destroy their sense of kinship.

“Zhèng is fraternally related to the royal house. Lords Wǔ and Zhuāng of Zhèng performed great services under Kings Píng and Huán.²⁶ Ever since our removal to the eastern capital, we have relied on the support of Jìn and Zhèng. When Prince Tuǐ rebelled, it was Zhèng that put him down.²⁷ To cast Zhèng aside because of a petty disagreement would be tantamount to allowing a small irritation to make you forget great favors. Surely that will never do!

“Moreover, when brothers quarrel, they do not apply to others for help, lest they reap the advantage. To reveal dissension and cede advantage is a breach of solidarity; to cast aside relations and go over to

²³ “The Dí 狄” here refers to a small tribal entity whose Rulers were surnamed Wěi 隗.

²⁴ Fù Chén 富臣 was a Zhōu Court Officer.

²⁵ *Odes*, poem 164, “Cháng Tǐ” 常棣. Duke Wén of Zhōu is Zhōu Gōng, the Duke of Zhōu.

²⁶ After the death of King Yōu, Lord Wǔ of Zhèng, aided by his ministers, preserved the House of Zhōu. King Píng relocated to the east in Luò City and was succeeded by King Huán. Lord Zhuāng of Zhèng served as his minister and on Zhōu’s behalf attacked States that were remiss in their duties to Zhōu. He attacked Sòng for this reason in 713 (Yǐngōng 10).

²⁷ Zǐ Tuǐ was the son of King Zhuāng of Zhōu and the junior uncle of King Huì. He usurped the throne of King Huì, who went to live in Zhèng. Lord Lì of Zhèng killed Zǐ Tuǐ and escorted Huì back to the Zhōu throne. This is related in Story 6 above.

the Dí is inauspicious; to repay virtue with resentment is to fail in empathy. Solidarity, please note, gives rise to advantage, auspiciousness allows one to serve the spirits, and empathy is used to safeguard the people.

“If solidarity is not maintained, then advantage will not accumulate.

“If auspiciousness is not earned, then blessings will not descend.

“If empathy is not practiced, then the people will not support their ruler.

“The enlightened Kings of former times never failed in these three virtues and therefore were able to remain in secure possession of all under Heaven and to soothe and unite the clan chiefs. Their decrees have not been forgotten. Your Majesty cannot cast them aside.”

The King did not listen to this. In the 17th year of his reign [636], he sent Dí troops to attack Zhèng.

The King felt that the Dí had performed a great service for him and so decided to take a daughter of the Dí chieftain as a Consort. Fù Chén advised against this, saying, “This won’t do. Marriage, please note, is a step that leads either to calamity or to good fortune. If used so that profit accrues domestically, then it brings good fortune; but if it causes profit to flow outward, then it brings calamity. Your Majesty now intends to cause it to flow outward; is this not a stairway to disaster?”

“In former times the States of Chì and Chóu²⁸ arose from Tàì Rén;²⁹ Qǐ and Zèng³⁰ arose from Tàì Sì;³¹ Qí, Xǔ, Shēn, and Lǚ³² arose

²⁸ The Rulers of Chì 摯 and Chóu 疇 were of the Rén 任 surname.

²⁹ Tàì Rén 大任 was the consort of Wáng Jì 王季 (third son of Gǔgōng Dǎnfù) and the mother of Zhōu Wén-wáng. Her clan was descended from Zhòng Kuí 仲癸 of Xī Zhòng 奚仲.

³⁰ The rulers of Qǐ 杞 and Zèng 縉 were of the Sì 姒 surname.

from Tàì Jiāng 大姜;³³ and Chén 陳 arose from Tàì Jī.³⁴ These States were all able to direct profit inward and form close bonds with their relations.

“In former times, the destruction of Yān arose from Zhòng Rén;³⁵ that of Mì Xū arose from Bó Jí;³⁶ that of Kuài arose from Shū Yún;³⁷ that of Dān arose from Zhèng Jī;³⁸ that of Xí arose from Chén Guī;³⁹ that of Dèng

³¹ Tàì Sī 大姒 was the consort of King Wén and the mother of King Wǔ. Her clan was descended from Yǔ the Great.

³² The rulers of Qí 齊, Xǔ 許, Shēn 申, and Lǚ 呂 were of the Jiāng 姜 surname.

³³ Tàì Jiāng 大姜 was the consort of Tàì-wáng 太王 (Gǔgōng Dǎnfù) and the mother of Wang Jì 王季; her clan was descended from Four Peaks (Sìyuè 四岳).

³⁴ Tàì Jī 大姬 was the eldest daughter of King Wǔ and the elder sister of King Chéng. She was given in marriage to Yú Húgōng 虞胡公, a descendant of Shùn 舜 enfeoffed at Chén, whose rulers were surnamed Guī 媯.

³⁵ Yān 閼 was a State with the surname Yún 允. Its founder took a daughter of the clan of Zhòng Rén 仲任 as his Consort. Táng Shàngshū 唐尚書 observes that his State was destroyed by King Wǔ of Zhèng; it did not perish because of the marital alliance with the Zhòng Rén clan.

³⁶ Bó Jí 伯姬 was a daughter of the ruling House of Mì Xū 密須. *Zuǒ Tradition* speaks of “the drums of Mì Xū” and “the armor of Jué Gōng” 闕鞶. The drums and armor were what King Wén captured when he extinguished these two States. In the *Odes*, “Dà yǎ,” a passage says, “The men of Mì were not respectful; they dared oppose a great State.”

³⁷ Kuài 郇 was a State with the surname Yún 允. Shū Yún 叔允 was a woman of the same surname who was the Kuài Ruler’s Consort. Táng Shàngshū, a commentator, says, “This State was also destroyed by King Wǔ of Zhèng. It didn’t perish because of a woman.” In *Gōngyáng Zhuàn*, a passage says, “The Count of Zhèng was friends with the Duke of Kuài. He had an affair with the Duke’s Consort and took his State.”

³⁸ Dān 聃 was a State with the surname Jī 姬; it was the fief of King Wǔ’s son Dān Jì 聃季. Zhèng Jī 鄭姬 was a woman of Zhèng who became the Dān Ruler’s Consort. It was a case of marriage between parties of the same surname, like that of Lord Zhāo of Lǚ taking a Consort from Wǔ.

³⁹ Xí 息 was a State with the surname Jī 姬. Chén Guī 陳媯 was a woman of Chén who became the Marquis of Xí’s Consort. Dissension between Cài and Xí arose over her treatment by the Cài Ruler while on a visit. Chǔ became involved in the dispute as well, with the eventual result that King Wén of Chǔ extinguished Xí

arose from Chǔ Mǎn;⁴⁰ that of Luó arose from Jì Jī;⁴¹ and that of Lú arose from Jīng Guī.⁴² These were all cases in which profit was directed outward and kindred were alienated.”

“How is profit directed inward and how directed outward?” rejoined the King.

Fù Chén replied, “Give respect to the eminent, give renown to the worthy, give employment to the meritorious, give authority to the elderly, give love to one’s kin, give ritually correct treatment to newcomers, and maintain close relations with old associates. If you do this, then none among the people will fail to strengthen their resolve in carrying out orders from above. Officers will not alter their ways, and resources will not be lacking. Whatever you seek will infallibly arrive, and your actions will infallibly take effect. When the hundred clans⁴³ and the innumerable multitudes seek riches, so as to give them to their superiors, this is “directing profit inward.” But if these seven virtues are abandoned, the people will harbor disloyal allegiances, each looking only for his own profit, and the ruler’s needs will not be fulfilled. This is

and abducted Chén Guī (a.k.a. Xí Guī) in 679.

⁴⁰ Dèng 鄧 was a State with the surname Mǎn 曼. Chǔ Mǎn 楚曼 was a woman of Dèng who became the Consort of King Wǔ of Chǔ (reigned 739–689). She gave birth to King Wén of Chǔ. Upon passing through Dèng, King Wén observed that it was rich territory. He therefore extinguished and absorbed it.

⁴¹ Luó 羅 was a State with the surname Xióng 熊. Jì Jī 季姬 was a woman of the clan of Jī who became the Consort of the Luó Ruler and brought about that State’s destruction.

⁴² Lú 盧 was a State with the surname Guī 媯. Jīng Guī 荊媯 was a woman of Lú who became the Consort of a Chǔ Ruler.

⁴³ The “hundred clans” refers to the cadet branches of ruling houses, which were given surnames and whose chiefs in former times held hereditary Court positions.



“directing profit outward.” The Dí have no place among the King’s ruling houses. Zhèng holds the south in submission to us. If Your Majesty treats them meanly, you will not be giving respect to the eminent.

“The Dí are wolf-like by nature, while Zhèng has still not lost the practices of Zhōu. If Your Majesty slights Zhèng, you will not be giving due respect to the worthy. Kings Píng, Huán, Zhuāng, and Huì all benefited from Zhèng’s meritorious service.⁴⁴ If Your Majesty casts Zhèng away, you will not be giving employment to the meritorious. Jié 捷, the Count of Zhèng is of a commanding age, and Your Majesty is junior to him in years; thus you will not be giving authority to the elderly. The Dí are a people of the Wěi 隗 surname, while the House of Zhèng is descended from King Xuān.⁴⁵ If Your Majesty mistreats Zhèng, you will be failing to show love to your kin. A principle of the *Rites* is that newcomers shall not replace old associates. If Your Majesty replaces the clans of Jiāng 姜 and Rén 任 with a daughter of the Dí, you will be ignoring what is ritually correct and casting away old associates.⁴⁶ With a single action Your Majesty will cast away seven virtues. That is why I say that

⁴⁴ Wéi Zhāo summarizes this history as follows, “After his removal to the east, King Píng of Zhōu relied on Lord Wǔ of Zhèng. When King Huán came to the throne, he was assisted by Lord Zhuāng of Zhèng. King Zhuāng, the son of King Huán, turned his attention elsewhere. Huì was King Huì (personal name Liáng 涼), the grandson of King Zhuāng and the son of King Xǐ. When his throne was usurped by Tuǐ, he took up residence in Zhèng and was restored to his position by Lord Lì of Zhèng. From the time of King Píng, Zhèng had performed signal services for Zhōu for generations, so the text says, “they all enjoyed Zhèng’s meritorious services.”

⁴⁵ Zhèng was originally a fief of Yǒu 友, the younger brother of King Xuān and youngest son of King Lì. The enfeoffment occurred in 805.

⁴⁶ *Rites* (lǐ 禮) were socially and traditionally prescribed modes of behavior. When properly performed they were thought to be both seemly and supernaturally efficacious.

this would cause profit to be directed outward. As the *Documents*⁴⁷ say, ‘One must have the capacity to endure in order to succeed.’⁴⁸ Because you are unable to endure a minor provocation, you are casting away Zhèng, and you are moreover taking Shú Wěi 叔隗 and mounting the Dí stairway to disaster. The Dí are swine and jackals; their appetites cannot be satisfied.”

The King did not accept this advice.

In the 18th year of his reign [634],⁴⁹ the King set aside his Dí Consort. In retaliation, the Dí came and reviled and killed the Count of Tán.⁵⁰

Fù Chén said, “In former times, I repeatedly admonished the King, but he did not take my advice, and so this calamity has come upon us. If I do not go out and do battle, the King will surely believe that I harbor resentment.” He then went out and died in battle with his followers.

Previously, the Consort Dowager Huì Hòu desired to elevate Prince Dài 帶 to the throne, so the rebels took a place at the head of her supporters and showed the Dí the way to enter the capital city.⁵¹ The Dí

⁴⁷ *The Book of Documents* (Shūjīng 書經) (or just *Documents*, Shū 書) was one of five canonical ancient works. It consisted of speeches attributed to various ancient figures. The other four canonical works were the *Odes*, (Shī 詩), *The Changes* (Yì 易), *The Book of Rites* (Lǐ jì 禮記), and *The Spring and Autumn Annals* (Chūnqiū 春秋).

⁴⁸ This passage does not appear in the extant *Documents*.

⁴⁹ The text is in error by one year. It should read “the 17th year” of his reign [635].

⁵⁰ The Dí were attacking the royal city with a view to replacing King Xiāng with his brother Prince Dài. The Count of Tán 譚伯 was a Royal Court Officer, also known as Yuánbó Máo 原伯毛.

⁵¹ Huì Hòu 惠后 was the Principal Consort of King Huì, the previous Zhōu Ruler. Wéi Zhāo says that at the time of the insurrection she was no longer alive, but her adherents still favored Prince Dài.



then entered, and the King went to reside in Zhèng. Lord Wén of Jìn later returned him to the Throne.

Author: Unknown, 4th Century BCE.

9. Wángsūn Mǎn Observes an Army

Like nearly all the items in *Tales from the Principalities*, this story is focused on a prediction. When a Qín Army passes by the Zhōu capital on its way to attack Zhèng, Wángsūn Mǎn, a Royal Court Officer, is able to tell from the careless behavior of the troops that they will suffer a setback. This prediction is borne out when, upon the return of these troops from Zhèng, Jìn inflicts a bloody and ruinous defeat on them at Yáo, and captures three Qín Generals. This is Item 5 in “Tales from Zhōu” (Book 2). A parallel account appears also in *Zuǒ Tradition*, Xīgōng 33, Item 1.

The soldiers here show their devotion to the ideal of Zhōu sovereignty by facing the royal city and prostrating themselves, but then depart from ritual norms by leaping over their chariots’ guardrails in order to remount. A modern observer might be favorably impressed at this expression of vigor and high spirits, and view it as a harbinger of success. The ancient observer in the anecdote, however, is alarmed at this irregularity, and interprets it as an indication of impending defeat. The conclusion of the tale validates this interpretation. ~ Eric Henry.

In 627 [Zhōu Xiāngwáng 24], a Qín Army passed by the north gate of the Zhōu capital on its way to mount a surprise attack on Zhèng.⁵² The men all doffed their helmets and prostrated themselves in the direction of the royal city. Having done this, more than 300 of them remounted

⁵² The Army was led by the Qín officer Mèngmíng Shì 孟明視, the son of Bólǐ Xī 百里奚. The Zhōu capital was Wáng Chéng 王城.

their chariots by leaping over the guard rails. Wángsūn Mǎn observed this carefully and spoke to the King: “The Qín army will certainly suffer a setback.”

“Why?” asked the King.

“The Army is careless and arrogant,” replied Mǎn. “Due to their carelessness, they lack well thought-out strategies and, due to their arrogance, they lack propriety. Their lack of propriety makes them disorderly, and their lack of schemes will lead to self-entrapment. If they walk into a trap while failing to maintain order, how can they escape defeat? If the Qín Army suffers no setback, it will show that the Way no longer operates.”

When the Qín forces were on their return from this expedition, the men of Jìn defeated them at Yáo and captured three of their Generals, Bǐng,⁵³ Shù,⁵⁴ and Shì.⁵⁵

Author: Unknown, 4th Century BCE.

10. Chén Doomed

The animating event underlying this item is scarcely even alluded to in the account itself, though it must have been uppermost in the minds of the first readers of *Tales from the Principalities*. Zuǒ Tradition, Xuángōng 9, Entry 13 records that in 600 BCE Lord Líng, the Ruler of Chén, and two of his senior ministers appeared in court wearing the undergarments of a woman whose sexual favors the three were enjoying in common. The woman, Xià Jī, herself an aristocrat, was the widow of a member of Chén’s ruling clan. Sporting the undergarments, the three exchange ribald pleasantries with each other in full court. A Chén Court Officer

⁵³ Bǐng was Bó Yǐ Bǐng 白乙丙, the son of Jiǎn Shu 蹇叔.

⁵⁴ Shù was Xīqǐ Shù 西乞術.

⁵⁵ Shì was Mèngmíng Shì 孟明視.

tries to remonstrate with Lord Líng about the unseemliness of this behavior, and gets assassinated for his pains.

In this item from *Tales*, the lady's name is never mentioned; nor are any details introduced concerning the sexual improprieties of Lord Líng and his ministers. Instead, it provides us with a description of a capital city in which all ritually prescribed activities have fallen into disuse, so that no business can be conducted. The observer is Duke Xiāng of Shàn, an officer in the royal Court of Zhōu. While traveling from Sòng to Chǔ on official business, he passes through Chén. His detailed description of the defects of administration in Chén bear witness to the vast extent and complexity of ritually prescribed activities in a State capital. He finds that none of the seasonal tasks stipulated in the ancient Zhou almanacs, such as road clearing, fodder storage, bridge building, and wall construction are being carried out; moreover, none of the stipulations of Zhōu concerning the reception of emissaries from other States are in operation. Not only that, Lord Líng of Chén is wearing a southern-style hat and is going every day with his two highest ministers to amuse himself in the household of Xià Zhēngshú (the son of the widow named in the Zuǒzhuàn passage). Upon his return to the royal Zhōu capital, Duke Xiāng warns King Dìng that Chén will soon either perish or suffer disaster. Heaven punishes kingdoms that depart from established ways, and Chén is precariously situated between larger States. This is Item 7 in "Tales from Zhōu," (Book 2). Duke Xiāng of Shàn's visit to the Chén capital is not mentioned in *Zuǒ Tradition*, but the scandal that forms the real subject-matter of his remarks is narrated in Xuāngōng 9 to 11, various items.

This is one of a number of items in *Tales from the Principalities* in which the narrative element seems a mere pretext for the presentation of a huge body of ritual detail. The reason for this preoccupation is that

adherence to the ritually prescribed actions was seen by the early Chinese as being essential to the survival of ruling houses and individuals. Here, and elsewhere in *Tales*, everything comes down to the issue of survival. ~ Eric Henry.

King Dìng [of Zhōu; reigned 606–586] sent Duke Xiāng of Shàn⁵⁶ on a mission of greeting to Sòng. Duke Xiāng borrowed passage from Chén so as to convey the King's greetings to Chǔ as well. The star Huǒ (Antares) could already be seen in the morning,⁵⁷ but weeds filled up the roads, so that no one could pass. The sentinels were not at their frontier posts, the director of highways neglected the upkeep of the roads, the wetlands had no embankments, and the rivers had no bridges. The fields had unstored fodder in them and the threshing floors were not completed. Trees were not planted along the roads, and newly cleared areas had but few sprouts. The banquet stewards set forth no welcoming dishes and the palace wardens were not on hand to assign hostels to visiting emissaries.⁵⁸ The capital had no quarters for travelers and the city outskirts had no lodges for the destitute.⁵⁹ The people were about to be put to work on a pleasure terrace at the household of the clan of Xià.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Duke Xiāng of Shàn 單襄公 served the Zhōu King as a Court Officer.

⁵⁷ This meant that it was the tenth month according to the Xià calendar. Huǒ 火, Antares, is the same as xīn sù 心宿; it is one of the twenty-eight constellations. It is the fifth of the seven sù 宿 in the gray dragon (cāng lóng 蒼龍); it has three stars belonging to Scorpio (Alpha [Antares], Sigma and Tau; tiān xié zuò 天蠍座). The second star is called tiān wáng 天王 Heavenly King or Antares, and is in the west. *Shijing* 154, “Qī yuè liú huǒ 七月流,” refers to this star (See *Cí Hǎi*, “Xīn sù” 心宿).

⁵⁸ Wéi Zhāo 韋昭 notes that the term sī lǐ 司里 is equivalent to lǐ zǎi 里宰 and that this functionary was in-charge of State reception hostels, guǎn 館.

⁵⁹ Wéi Zhāo notes that the xiàn 縣 are here equivalent to the sì diàn 四甸, the four adjoining areas of the capital domain, and that each was sixteen lǐ square.



Upon arriving at the capital, Duke Xiāng found that Lord Líng of Chén and his ministers, Kǒng Níng 孔寧 and Yí Xíng-fù 儀行父,⁶¹ were wearing southern-style hats⁶² and making excursions to the household of the Xià clan. They put up the emissaries but did not grant them an audience.

When Duke Xiāng returned, he reported on his mission to the King, saying, “Even if the Marquis of Chén suffers no great misfortune, his State is still sure to perish.”

“For what reason?” asked the King.

“When the star *jué* in the constellation [of the gray dragon] appears,” replied Duke Xiāng, “the rains cease.⁶³ When the star *tiān-gēn* appears, the rivers dry up.⁶⁴ When the star *běn* 本 appears, leaves fall from the trees and the grass dries up.⁶⁵ When the star *sì* 駟 appears, frost descends.⁶⁶ When the star *huǒ* 火 appears, fresh winds warn of the

⁶⁰ Lord Líng of Chén was having an illicit affair with Xià Zhēngshū’s mother and thus had the terrace built at this location so as to better enjoy himself there.

⁶¹ Chén Línggōng 陳靈公, personal name Píng Guó 平國, was a descendant of Shùn and the son of Lord Gōng 恭公. Kǒng Níng 孔寧 and Yí Xíng-fù 儀行父 were two ministers of Chén. They were going to Zhēng Shū’s house to share in Lord Líng’s illicit intrigue with Zhēng Shū’s mother.

⁶² Nán guān 南冠, “southern hats,” refers to Chǔ guān 楚冠, Chǔ-style hats.

⁶³ The star *jué* 角 appears in the morning in the east at the beginning of *jiàn xū* 建戌, a period also known as *hán lù* 寒露 or “cold dew.”

⁶⁴ The star *tiān gēn* 天根 appears between the stars *kàng* 亢 and *dǐ* 氐. It appears five days after *hán lù*. The *yuè lìng* 月令 (“monthly almanac”) says, “The rivers first go dry in mid-autumn.”

⁶⁵ *Běn* is the same as *dǐ* 氐. It appears ten days after *hán lù*. The twigs detach because the *yang* 陽 force is spent.

⁶⁶ *Sì* refers to *tiān sì*, the heavenly horse team. It appears in the middle of the *jiàn xū* period 建戌.

approach of cold.⁶⁷

“This is why the teachings⁶⁸ of the former Kings say, ‘When the rains cease, the roads are to be cleared; when the rivers go dry, bridges are to be built; when the leaves fall from the trees and the grass dries up, provisions are to be stored; when frost descends, winter furs are to be put in readiness; and when the fresh winds arrive, the city walls and the palace buildings are to be repaired.’⁶⁹ That is also why the *Xià Almanac*⁷⁰ says, ‘In the ninth month, roads are to be cleared, and in the tenth month, bridges are to be built.’ Its seasonal admonitions say, ‘Collect your bins of stored grain; ready the baskets and shovels for moving earth. When the Fire Star (*Yíng-shì* 營室) is in the morning sky,⁷¹ the work of ramming earth begins. When *huǒ* first shows itself, it is time to gather before the village warden.’ This was how the former Kings spread the influence of their virtue among the people without expense of property or treasure.⁷²

“But in the State of Chén, though *huǒ* has appeared in the morning sky, the roads are as if blocked up; the fields and threshing

⁶⁷ *Huǒ*, as earlier, refers to Antares, or *tiān wáng* 天王, in the Chinese constellation *xīn sù* 心宿.

⁶⁸ The teachings referred to are from lunar almanacs (*yuè lìng* 月令). The rains end in the ninth month and the rivers go dry in the tenth month.

⁶⁹ This is after *huǒ* appears, the beginning of the period *jiàn hái* 建亥.

⁷⁰ This is the almanac ascribed to the Xià ruling house, which Zhōu used as a basis for its own almanacs.

⁷¹ *Yíngshì* was a name for the star *dìng* 定. In *jiàn hái* 建亥, in the *xiǎo xuě* 小雪 or “lesser snow” period, *dìng* appears in the noon position in the evening, and earth-work can begin. Poem no 50 in the *Odes*, one of the airs of Yōng 鄘, says, “When *dìng* first reached the mid-point, we worked on the Chǔ palace.” [定之方中, 作于楚宮.]

⁷² Treasure: literally, “bribes.”



floors are as if cast away, the wetlands have no embankments, and the streams have no pontoon bridges; this shows that they have abandoned the teachings of the former Kings.

“Among the regulations of Zhōu is one that says, ‘Trees arranged in lines are to be used to mark out the roads, and food stalls are to be set up in the outlying areas so that the roads may be kept in good order.’⁷³ There are to be places for grazing in the outskirts of the capital, and the boundaries are to have dwelling places for sentinels. The dried swamplands are to have tall grasses, and the parklands are to have groves and reservoirs as a precaution against disasters.⁷⁴ The other land shall all be grain fields, and the people shall not hang up their seed-drills. The scrublands shall not be overgrown with wild grasses. People shall not be taken away from their seasonal work, nor shall their labor be regarded lightly. As a result of this, there will be abundance and no dearth, and ease and no exhaustion. Functionaries in the walled cities will do their appointed tasks, and county seats will have commoners who carry out their allotted tasks.’

“But now, in the State of Chén, the roads and paths cannot be distinguished; fields are lost among weed-grown lands; the crops, though grown, are not collected; and the people are wearied out by labor occasioned by the idle amusements of the Ruler. This shows that Chén has cast away the rules and practices of the former Kings.

“The ‘Reception of Emissaries’⁷⁵ has a passage that says, ‘When a

⁷³ Every ten *lǐ* there was to be a hut, and each hut was to have things to eat and drink.

⁷⁴ “Disasters” refers to famine and warfare.

⁷⁵ This is *Zhì guān* 秩官, a lost Zhōu Dynasty work, which, according to the Grand Ricci dictionary, was perhaps a chapter in the *Cháng Guān* of Zhōu.

guest from a State equivalent in size to the host State arrives, the Overseer of Border Passes [*guān yǐn* 關尹] is to report the fact, and a Palace Emissary [*xíng lǐ* 行理] bearing an official jade insignia is to go forth and greet him. Attendants [*hòu rén* 候人] are to escort him in, and an Officer of Ministerial Rank [*qīng* 卿] is to go to the outskirts of the capital to preside over a feast to commiserate with him on the austerities of the journey. The Overseer of Gates [*mén yǐn* 門尹] is to have the entranceways prepared and swept, and the Chief Celebrant [*zōng zhù* 宗祝] is to take charge of sacrificial offerings in the temple. The Village Wardens [*sī lǐ* 司里] are to assign a reception hostel to the visitor, and the Overseer of Laborers [*sī tú* 司徒]⁷⁶ is to put work teams in readiness, the Minister of Public Works [*sī kōng* 司空] is to see to the condition of the roads, and the Minister of Criminal Justice [*sī kòu* 司寇] is to suppress banditry.⁷⁷ The Superintendents of Forests and Lakes [*yú rén* 虞人] are to contribute lumber supplies, and the Capital-outskirt Superintendents [*diàn rén* 甸人] are to collect firewood. The Chefs [*huǒ shī* 火師] are to oversee the cooking hearths, and the Overseers of Waterworks [*shuǐ shī* 水師] are to oversee washing arrangements. The Banquet Stewards [*shàn zǎi* 膳宰] are to send in cooked food, and the Storehouse Keepers are to send in grain provisions. The Army Marshal [*sī mǎ* 司馬] is to have the Stable Keepers see that fodder for horses is placed at the guest's disposal⁷⁸ and Craftsmen [*gōng rén* 工人] are to inspect their carriages [so as to make repairs]. The Court Officers shall all come to do service according to their capacities, so that when

⁷⁶ This perhaps means that the *sī tú* should supply a visitor with a full complement of followers.

⁷⁷ This perhaps refers to “rounding up the usual suspects,” or rounding up all the pickpockets before an important public event.

⁷⁸ Wéi Zhāo notes that the Stable Superintendents were subordinate to the Marshal.



guests come, they will feel as if they were returning home. Therefore, no effort or expense is to be grudged for guests, regardless of their rank, so that all will have feelings of affection for their hosts. When a guest from a Great and Noble State arrives, he is to be served with added ceremony and respect by all concerned.'

"As for emissaries of the King, these are to be served in person by the Chief Officers of all departments, with the High Ministers overseeing them. If the King should come on a tour of inspection, then the Ruler is to personally oversee these arrangements.'

"Now, though I, Cháo 朝, am devoid of ability, I belong to a branch of the House of Zhōu, and it was in obedience to the King's decree that I went to Chén as a guest; but no one responsible for these arrangements came forth. This shows that they despise the rules of the former Kings concerning official ranks and responsibilities.

"Among the directives of the former Kings is one that says, 'The way of Heaven is to reward goodness and to punish excess; therefore, among the States that I establish, none are to pursue irregular ways, none are to yield to disrespect and wantonness; and all are to preserve their ancient codes and rules, so as to enjoy the favoring support of Heaven.'

"But now the Marquis of Chén cares nothing for the established ways passed down by his forebears and has cast aside the decorous and seemly rules governing the relations of a Ruler with his Consort and Ladies-in-Waiting. Instead, he leads his High Ministers of State in wanton debauchery in the household of Xià. Is he not, by these actions, sullyng the purity of his clan?⁷⁹ The House of Chén is descended from

⁷⁹ The "debauchery" refers to an undisguised sexual affair between Lord Líng of Chén and Xià Jī 夏姬, the widow of Lord Líng's paternal cousin Yù-shú 御叔. Yù-shú was the son of Prince Xià 夏, who was a younger son of Lord Xuān of Chén

our Tàì Jī 太姬.⁸⁰ He has cast aside his formal robe and headgear and goes abroad wearing a southerner's cap—does this not show neglect of regular procedure? These things also are a violation of the directives of the former Kings.

“In ancient times, the teachings of the former Kings caused virtue to spread and flourish; but even so the former Kings feared that they might stumble and transgress. If the Ruler of Chén throws away those teachings and casts aside those regulations, if he despises the official positions of the former Kings and violates their directives, what means can he adopt to preserve his State? Situated as he is between great States, and lacking those four things, can he long endure on the throne?”

It was in the sixth year of King Dìng's reign [601] that Master Shàn went to Chǔ. In the eighth year of the King's reign [599] the Marquis of Chén was killed by the Xià clan-chief [Xià Zhēngshú].⁸¹ In the ninth year [598] the Viscount of Chǔ [Chǔ Zhuāngwáng, reigned 613–591] invaded Chén.⁸²

(reigned 692–648).

⁸⁰ Tàì Jī was the daughter of King Wǔ of Zhōu, who gave her in marriage to Guǐ Mǎn 媯滿 (a.k.a. Yú Hú-gōng 虞胡公), the son of his chief potter, and then enfeoffed him in Chén.

⁸¹ Wéi Zhāo provides this summary: Chén Línggōng together with Kǒng Níng and Yí Xíngfù were drinking wine with the Xià clan chief. Lord Líng said to Xíngfù, “Zhēngshú [the Xià clan chief] looks like you.” He replied, “He also looks like you.” Perceiving that the two were joking about his paternity, Zhēngshú was stung by this. When Lord Líng went out, Zhēngshú killed him with an arrow that he shot from the stable.

⁸² King Zhuāng of Chǔ entered Chén in order to punish the Xià chieftain for the crime of murdering the Lord of that State. He destroyed Chén, but then reestablished it.



Author: Unknown, 4th Century BCE.

11. A Doomed Court Officer of Jìn

A recurring theme in the history of the Spring and Autumn Era is the rivalrous relationship of the two great States of Jìn and Chǔ. Of the two, Jìn, a northerly State, was closer to the Zhōu Throne and enjoyed greater cultural legitimacy, while Chǔ to the south was regarded with disdain by the northern States as being semi-barbarous; nevertheless, Chǔ was so large and menacing that, for geopolitical reasons, it had to be regarded with the utmost seriousness. Each of the two States repeatedly attempted to subdue the other, and the battles they fought had consequences for all the other States in their vicinity. This theme is exemplified in the three most famous battles of the Spring and Autumn Era: the Battle of Chéngpú (632 BCE) in which Jìn was victorious over Chǔ, the Battle of Bì (597 BCE), in which Chǔ was victorious over Jìn, and the Battle of Yǎnlíng (575 BCE), in which Jìn was again victorious over Chǔ. It is the third of these battles that provides the context for the present story.

In the wake of that event, Xì Zhì, a Court Officer of Jìn, comes to the Zhōu Court to announce Jìn's victory over Chǔ, an act that accords with Jìn's theoretical fealty to the Royal Court. Xì Zhì is full of self-satisfaction because he believes that his own exemplary behavior on the battlefield had much to do with Jìn's success. He is, moreover, convinced that this behavior will infallibly lead to his becoming the next prime minister of Jìn. Some officers at the Royal Court are impressed by his words and believe that he should receive special regard, so that he will later be able to assist the Zhōu Court from his position in Jìn. But another Zhōu Minister, the same Duke Xiāng of Shàn who predicted Chén's destruction in the previous item, predicts that Xì Zhì's boastfulness and contempt for his fellow officers will result in his destruction. This prediction is borne out the following year when Xì Zhì is assassinated

along with the rest of his clan. This is Item 9, the last, in “Tales from Zhōu” (Book 2). A very brief version appears also in *Zuǒ Tradition*, Chénggōng 16, Item 12.

Some of Xí’s boasts will seem bizarre to modern readers. Xí is convinced that his conspicuous display of ritual correctness on the battlefield, through such actions as dismounting before pursuing the Chǔ Ruler, and allowing the Count of Zhèng to go free when he could have been captured, helped the Jìn side to gain victory by striking all the spectators dumb with awe at Jìn’s virtue. This is yet another demonstration of the quasi-supernatural importance of ritual in these stories. ~ Eric Henry.

After Jìn 晉 defeated Chǔ 楚 at Yān 鄆 [in 575], Xì Zhì⁸³ was sent to the Zhōu Court to announce the victory. Before he accomplished this, Wángshú Jiǎngōng⁸⁴ invited him to drink wine with him. The wine, furnishings, and gifts were all very splendid, and the two took great pleasure in their drinking and conversation.

The following day, Wángshú Jiǎngōng recounted the merits of Xì Zhì in Court. Xì Zhì also met and conversed with Duke Huán of Shào.⁸⁵ The Duke of Shào told Duke Xiāng of Shàn⁸⁶ about it as follows, “Master Wángshú recounted the merits of Xì Zhì because he knows that Zhì will surely become the Prime Minister of Jìn. When he becomes Prime Minister, he will surely gain the following of many lords. I would urge

⁸³ Xì Zhì 郤至, also known as Wēn Zhì 溫季, was the grandson of the Jìn officer Bù Yáng 步揚 and the son of Què Jū 鵲居 of Pú 蒲 city.

⁸⁴ Wángshú Jiǎngōng 王叔簡公 was a Zhōu Court Officer, also known as Wángshū Chén Shēng 陳生.

⁸⁵ Duke Huán of Shào 邵桓公 was another Zhōu Court Officer.

⁸⁶ Duke Xiāng of Shàn 單襄公: a Zhōu Court Officer. See Story 10 above.



you gentlemen to lead the way for him;⁸⁷ that way we can gain a foothold in Jìn.

“Xì Zhì has come to us ostensibly to announce the victory of Jìn, but his real purpose is to advance his own interests. ‘Without me,’ he said, ‘Jìn would not have fought. Chǔ had five disadvantages, but Jìn didn’t know enough to exploit them. It was I who insisted that they do so. Chǔ broke the covenant with Sòng;⁸⁸ that was the first disadvantage. Because Chǔ lacks virtue, it uses territory to bribe the Vassal Lords;⁸⁹ that was the second disadvantage. Chǔ casts aside its skilled and sturdy officers and uses the young and the weak instead; that was the third disadvantage. Chǔ establishes high counselors and then doesn’t use their advice;⁹⁰ that was the fourth disadvantage. The eastern Yí and Zhèng are both followers of Chǔ; but each adopts its own position, not acting in unity;⁹¹ that was the fifth disadvantage.’

“‘The fault did not arise from Jìn, so Jìn enjoyed the people’s support.’⁹² Under the leadership of their commanders, Jìn’s four armies

⁸⁷ “You gentlemen” refers to Duke Xiāng of Shàn and one or two other key figures in the Zhōu Court. “Leading the way for him” means inducing the Marquis of Jìn to make Xì Zhì Prime Minister.

⁸⁸ The Covenant with Sòng was a trilateral peace covenant between Jìn, Chǔ, and Sòng arranged by Huá Yuán 華元 of Sòng in 579. Huá Yuán was friendly with the Chǔ Prime Minister Zǐzhòng 子重 and with the Jìn officer Luán Wǔzǐ 欒武子, and it was through them that he arranged the covenant. The treaty was made in the twelfth year of the reign of Lord Chéng of Lǚ (579). Four years later, in 575, Chǔ and Zhèng broke the terms of the treaty by attacking Sòng.

⁸⁹ Chǔ gained Zhèng’s allegiance through the gift of the fields of Rǔ Yīn 汝陰.

⁹⁰ “High counselors” refers to Zǐ Náng 子囊. Zǐ Náng didn’t want Chǔ to violate the covenant with Jìn, but the King rejected his advice.

⁹¹ “The eastern Yí” refers to the Yí tribes east of Chǔ.

⁹² In other words, it was Chǔ, not Jìn, that went against the Covenant.

were solid and strong.⁹³ Because the troops were well-ordered, the Vassal Lords supported our cause.

“‘This being the case, we had five advantages. We were in the right; that was the first advantage. The people were with us; that was the second advantage. Those in command fought valiantly; that was the third advantage. Our formations were well-arrayed; that was the fourth advantage. And the Lords were friendly to us; that was the fifth advantage.

“‘Only one such advantage would have been sufficient reason to act. To be able to attack with five advantages an opponent who suffers five failings and then avoid doing battle is to be unworthy to be regarded as a human being. In such circumstances, one cannot but do battle. Luán 欒 and Fàn 范⁹⁴ didn’t want to attack. It was I who compelled them to. That we fought and won was due to my exertions. But in battle also, they lacked schemes. I thrice pursued the troops of the Chǔ Ruler; that was courage. Whenever I saw the Chǔ Ruler, I dismounted before pursuing him; that was propriety. And when I gained an opportunity to capture the Count of Zhèng, I released him; that was empathy. With Jìn’s affairs carried out in this fashion, Chǔ and Yuè will be sure to come with tribute.’

“I said, ‘You are indeed skillful, but the official appointments of Jìn are always in accord with rank. I fear the position of Prime Minister will not fall to you.’

⁹³ Jìn had then recently established a fourth Army. The four armies were led by eight great officers. Luán Shū 欒書 assisted by Shì Xiè 士燮 led the Central Army; Xì Qí 郤錡 assisted by Xún Yān 荀偃 led the Upper Army; Hán Jué 韓厥 assisted by Zhì Yíng 智罃 led the Lower Army; and Zhào Zhān 趙旃 assisted by Xì Zhì led the New Army.

⁹⁴ ie. Luán Shū and Shì Xiè, the Commanders of the Central Army.



“He said, ‘What does rank have to do with it? In former times, the officer Xún Línfù⁹⁵ rose from Assistant Commander of the Lower Army to the Prime Ministership.⁹⁶ Zhào Dùn⁹⁷ got to be Prime Minister without ever having had a military appointment. And now Luán Shū⁹⁸ has risen to top rank from the Lower Army. If I were to become the fourth in the series, I would not be inferior in any respect to those three gentlemen. Why shouldn’t it be possible for the Assistant Commander of the New Army to become Prime Minister? This is something I will definitely pursue.’

“Those were his words. What do you think of this?”

Duke Xiāng of Shàn said, “There is an expression that goes, ‘The weapon lies upon his neck.’ It applies perfectly to Xì Zhì. A gentleman does not put himself forward. He is not yielding in his methods; how can he cover up the merits of others? It is human nature to want to prevail over those above us, but one must not cover up others’ merits. One who acts so will succeed only in pushing himself down. The sages, therefore, placed great value on yielding. As the proverb says, ‘Beasts hate the net, and people hate those who act superior to them.’ An old writing says, ‘The people can be approached; they cannot be dominated.’⁹⁹ A passage in the *Odes* says, ‘Easy and self-possessed is our Lord; / He seeks for blessings by no crooked ways.’¹⁰⁰ Propriety requires that one yield thrice

⁹⁵ Xún Línfù 荀林父; referred to in the text as Xún Bó 荀伯.

⁹⁶ This was a jump from sixth to first position.

⁹⁷ Zhào Dùn 趙盾; referred to in the text as Zhào Xuānzǐ 趙宣子.

⁹⁸ Luán Shū 欒書; referred to in the text as Luán Bó 欒伯.

⁹⁹ This passage doesn’t appear in the extant *Book of Documents*.

¹⁰⁰ *Odes* #239, “Hàn lù 旱麓,” last stanza, last two lines.

to another of equal status; this shows that the sages knew that people cannot be made to accept domination. Therefore, one who seeks to rule the world must first seek to know the people's will; only then can he enjoy protection and receive long-lasting advantages.

"But now Xì Zhì seeks to surpass seven others who are superior to him in rank. This is tantamount to attempting to conceal their merits. All seven will bear grievances against him. The resentment, even of a person of no standing, can place one in an intolerable position, let alone the resentment of such wealthy officers. What can he do to withstand them?

"Jìn's victory occurred because Heaven looked with disapproval on Chǔ and, therefore, used Jìn to give Chǔ a warning. But now Xì Zhì wants to steal the accomplishment of Heaven, saying that it was the result of his own efforts. Does he not thereby create difficulties for himself? To usurp the actions of Heaven is inauspicious and to slight others is unprincipled. One who acts inauspiciously will be cast away by Heaven, and one who is unprincipled will turn others against him.

"Besides, how can Xì Zhì be said to have used three effective strategies? Empathy, propriety, and courage all arise from people's actions. To exert oneself to the point of death out of principle is called courage. To serve what is right and follow example is called propriety. To perform great and numerous services out of principle is called empathy. A false show of empathy is thieving;¹⁰¹ a false show of propriety is shamelessness;¹⁰² and a false show of courage is banditry.¹⁰³ In warfare,

¹⁰¹ A reference to Xì Zhì boasting about sparing the Count of Zhèng.

¹⁰² A reference to Xì Zhì jumping down from his chariot whenever confronting the King on the battlefield.

¹⁰³ A reference to Xì Zhì chasing after the Chǔ troops but not destroying them, as well as currying the favor of the Chǔ King while engaged against him in battle.



let us note, destroying the enemy is uppermost; in keeping treaties, following principle is uppermost. Military merit is based on concrete accomplishments and Court appointments are based on rank.

“To betray his side through the unauthorized release of the Lord of Zhèng was banditry; to reject valor and indulge in lenience was a shameless act; to betray the State by befriending the enemy was theft. To use three crimes as a basis for displacing one’s superiors is no way to gain the leadership of a State. It appears to me that ‘the weapon lies upon his neck’—he cannot survive long. Even our Wángshú will not avoid disaster. In “The Great Oath” it says, ‘That which the people desire, Heaven will assuredly comply with.’¹⁰⁴ Wángshú may want Xì Zhì, but will he be able to avoid compliance with Heaven?”

Xì Zhì returned and died the following year [574] in the upheavals of that time. Wángshú Jiàngōng¹⁰⁵ later fled to Jìn to escape the troubles arising from the lawsuit of Bó Yú [563].¹⁰⁶

Author: Unknown, 4th Century BCE.

12. A Prediction of Disorder in Jìn

This story is an example of prophesy based on details of stance, gaze, and gesture. Here, as in the previous two selections, the prophetic speech is attributed to Duke Xiāng of Shàn of the Royal Court. Shortly after the Battle of Yānlíng [575], he attends a Multi-State Assembly at Kēlíng in Zhèng, and observes anomalies in the bearing and speech of five

¹⁰⁴ “The Great Oath” (*Shūjīng*, “Tài shì”) paragraph 5. [In Legge’s translation: “What the people desire, Heaven will be found to give effect to.”] Wéi Zhāo says that this passage does not appear in the version of the *Documents* that he consulted.

¹⁰⁵ Wángshú Jiàngōng 王叔簡公 is here referred to in the text as Wángshú Chén Shēng 王叔陳生.

¹⁰⁶ For more on Xì Zhì, see Jìn 6:04 and 6:10.

participants, four from Jìn and one from Qí. After the Assembly, the Lǚ Ruler asks the Duke apprehensively about Jìn's intentions with regard to Lǚ, whereupon Duke Xiāng assures Lord Chéng that he need feel no concern. His observations have made it plain to him that the personages from Jìn will soon meet with disaster. This prediction was borne out in the following two years. Duke Xiang takes care to explain the theoretical basis of his observations to the Lǚ Ruler. This is the Item 1 in "Tales from Zhōu" (Book 3). No parallel account appears *Zuǒ Tradition*.

In his critique of *Tales from the Principalities*, Liú Zōngyuán pours contempt on the prognostications that form the subject of this story: "Though these five personages all met with death, Duke Xiāng of Shàn had no reason to regard their destruction as inevitable. And as for his claim that Interstate Assemblies of Lords are great affairs in which the future can be known from the gestures of the participants, this shows that he was a purveyor of superstition (若是，則單子果巫史矣). If such things as distant gazes, high-striding walks, and incautious speech are sure indicators of destruction, then those condemned to destruction must be very numerous. If incautious speech indicates destruction, then what about the incautious speech of Duke Xiāng of Shàn himself? Is he to be the only one to escape punishment by Heaven?" ~ Eric Henry.

At the Kēlíng assembly [574]¹⁰⁷ Duke Xiāng of Shàn saw that Lord Lì of Jìn had a distant gaze and a high-stepping stride. When Xì Qí of Jìn came to see him, his speech was presumptuous; when Xì Chōu came, his speech was slanderous; when Xì Zhì came, his speech was boastful;

¹⁰⁷ Kēlíng 柯陵 was in western Zhèng. For more on the Battle of Yānlíng and its aftermath, see Jìnyǔ 6:03 to 6:12.

and when Guó Zuǒ of Qí came, his speech was incautiously explicit.¹⁰⁸ When Lord Chéng of Lǚ saw Duke Xiāng, he spoke of the threat that Jìn posed to his state and of Xì Chōu's false allegations.¹⁰⁹

Master Shàn said, "You have nothing to dread, sir; Jìn will soon be in chaos, and the Lord of Jìn together with the three Xìs will all be victims of it!"

"I am much afraid that I shall not escape the wrath of Jìn," said Lord Chéng. "You said just now that Jìn will suffer disorder. May I ask whether this will be due to the operation of Heaven or due to the affairs of men?"

"I am neither a blind admonition declaimer nor an omen-divining archivist," replied Duke Xiāng. "How could I understand the way of Heaven? But I saw the Jìn ruler's demeanor and listened to the

¹⁰⁸ Of the four people mentioned here, Xì Qí 卻錡, Xì Chōu 卻犇, and Xì Zhì were three brothers who were soon to die as the result of a Court intrigue. The fourth, Guó Zuǒ 國佐, also known as Guó Wǔzǐ 國武子, was the son of the Qí minister Guó Guīfù 國歸父. He also was soon to lose his life.

¹⁰⁹ Lord Chéng of Lǚ (Prince Hēigōng 黑肱; reigned 590–73) was the son of Lord Xuān. The previous year, Luán Yàn 欒黶 of Jìn had begged Lǚ to send troops to assist Jìn in attacking Zhèng, whereupon Lord Chéng had prepared to meet with the forces of Jìn. At that time, Shúsūn Qiáorú 叔孫僑如 had an illicit relationship with Lord Chéng's mother Mù Jiāng 穆姜 and wished to do away with the clans of Jì 季 and Mèng 孟, so as to take over their property. Mù Jiāng told Lord Chéng to drive away the two clans as she was bidding farewell to him. Using the Jìn emergency as an excuse, Lord Chéng asked to delay the matter until his return. This angered Mù Jiāng. Pointing to Lord Chéng's half-brothers, Prince Yǎn 偃 and Prince Chù 鉅, who were just then hastening by, she said to Lord Chéng, "You are unfit—either of these two could rule instead." Lord Chéng grew fearful and lingered at Huài Tuí 壞隄 so as to heighten security around the palace, with the result that he did not arrive to join the campaign. Xì Chōu of Jìn later accepted a bribe from Shúsūn Qiáorú, for which he slandered Lord Chéng to the Marquis of Jìn, saying that the reason he had lingered at Huài Tuí was to observe the outcome of the battle. Lord Lì of Jìn was angry at this and later refused to receive Lord Chéng at a conference at Shā Suí 沙隨. This was the reason for Lord Chéng's apprehensive remarks to Duke Xiāng of Shàn. See *Zuǒ Tradition*, Chénggōng 16, Item 5, pp. 890–91, and Item 6, p. 891.

three Xìs' speech. These were certain indications of calamity. A man of quality, let us note, uses his eyes to still his limbs, and his feet move in accordance with his gaze. This is why one can know his heart by observing his expression. Eyes must serve as the vehicles of seemliness and feet must serve as the porters of the eyes. But just now the Lord of Jìn had a distant gaze and a high-striding gait; his eyes were not directed toward his limbs, and his feet were not the bearers of his eyes—his heart, then, is necessarily out of adjustment. How can one, with eyes and limbs at odds with each another, endure long?

“To convene a meeting of the Lords, please note, is a great enterprise of the state;¹¹⁰ for on such occasions one can discern the survival and destruction of noble houses. And so, if the realm is not to suffer calamity, a ruler's gait, speech, countenance, and listening must show no trace of disharmony when they take part in an assembly; from this, one can surely determine the strength of their virtue. Those whose gaze is distant each day ruin what is proper; those whose gait is high each day cast aside their virtue; those whose speech is bold each day fail to keep their word; and those whose listening is indiscriminate each day suffer loss of reputation. The eyes, let us note, are used to act in accord with what is seemly; the feet are used to tread the path of virtue; the mouth is used to demonstrate good faith; and the ears are used to transmit one's good name abroad. Therefore, one cannot but take great care with these. When all these faculties decline, the ruler will suffer evil, and when these faculties are lost entirely, the state will follow suit. The Lord of Jìn has already lost two of these faculties; that is why I speak.

¹¹⁰ I here adopt the reading “guó” 國, which appears instead of “mín” 民 in the Gōngxù text.



“The men of the clan of Xì, let us note, enjoy great favor in Jìn; with three Ministers and five Court Officers among their number; this should alarm them.¹¹¹ High position is a sure sign of swift collapse, just as an excess of rich food can swiftly turn to poison. In the present case, the speech of the elder, Xì Qí, was presumptuous; that of the middle one, Xì Chōu, crooked; and that of the younger, Xì Zhì, boastful. The presumptuous insult others; the crooked deceive others; and the boastful conceal others’ merit. To enjoy such favor and to add to it three such causes of resentment—who could bear such provocations?

“Even Master Guó of Qí will be involved in their downfall. To live in a disordered state and indulge in explicit speech, detailing the faults of others, is to sow resentment. Only the worthy can listen tolerantly to explicit speech; are there such people in Qí?

“I have heard that when states that cultivate virtue are bordered by states with lax practices, they will surely reap great blessings. In the present case, you are close to Jìn and are bordered by Qí. When Qí and Jìn suffer disaster, you may assume leadership of the states. How can you fear that your virtue will be less than Jìn’s? Let me add that the man of “the long-limbed Dí” is covetous and unprincipled.¹¹² His greed, in fact, knows no bounds. Why not cast him out?”

¹¹¹ Xì Qí, Xì Chōu, and Xì Zhì were all great officers. There were five other Court Officers in the clan as well. They were referred to collectively as “the Eight Xì.”

¹¹² “Cháng Dí” 長翟, the “long Di,” was the name of a non-Chinese group referring to their unusually great height. “The man of Cháng Dí” was a derogatory way of referring to Shúsūn Qiáorú. Dé Chén 得臣, Qiáorú’s father, defeated the Dí 翟 at Xián 鹹 and obtained a territory called “Qiáorú of the Cháng Dí,” so he named his son Qiáorú. Qiáorú, as mentioned above, had an illicit relationship with Lord Chéng’s mother Mù Jiāng and wished to drive away the clans of Jì and Mèng so as to seize power in Lǚ.

The Marquis of Lǚ returned and drove Shúsūn Qiáorú from the state. The Kēlíng assembly took place in the eleventh year of King Jiǎn's reign [574]. The following year, Jìn killed the three Xìs. The year after that, the Lord of Jìn was assassinated and buried with a single carriage outside the eastern gate of Yì, while in Qí, Guó Wǔzǐ was murdered.

Author: Unknown, 4th Century BCE.

13. The Folly of Damming a River

This is one of a number of 1 in *Tales from the Principalities* in which interference with natural objects and processes is seen as inauspicious. Liǔ Zōngyuán responded with skepticism to this tale: “The strength or weakness of a dynasty is a function of the strength or weakness of the rulers’ virtue. What can the damming of a river have to do with it?”

Summary: When the Gǔ and Luò Rivers flood and threaten the royal palace, King Líng wants to try damming them, but Crown Prince Jìn warns that obstructing the processes of nature will result in scarcity, disruption, and loss of supernatural support. He contrasts the failures of Gòng Gōng and Gǔn, who tried to control rivers by damming, with the successes of Yǔ the Great and an officer called “Four Mountains” (sì yuè) who used channeling and diking. Gòng Gōng and Gǔn were defeated and destroyed, whereas Yǔ the Great, and the figure referred to as “Four Mountains,” were given surnames and clan names, and became founders of illustrious ruling houses, vestiges of which still remain. The first two failed in spite of illustrious ancestry (Huáng Dì and Yán Dì); the second two succeeded in spite of having disgraced ancestors (Gǔn and Gòng Gōng). It was policy, not ancestry, that brought about their failures and successes. Crown Prince Jìn quotes proverbs and poems to the effect that disaster does not come unless invited. He observes that it took fifteen reigns from Hòu Jì to King Wén to establish the Zhōu order. Fourteen



reigns have now passed since King Lì first disturbed that order. He, therefore, fears that Zhōu's decline may be completed in the next reign. He warns the King to heed the dire examples of such subjugated peoples as the Lí, the Miáo, the Xià, and the Shāng. Those who cast aside the Five Constant Practices (see footnote in text) will cause their progeny to be enslaved. People's destinies are determined by their actions, not by their relative stations in life. The King ignores this advice and dams the river. Under the next ruler (King Jǐng, the younger brother of Crown Prince Jìn), disorders arise due to his cultivation of favorites, and his death is followed by a succession struggle. By the time of the reign of King Dìng (apparently a mistake, for King Zhēn Dìng, reigned 468–441), the royal house no longer possesses any authority. (King Dìng 定 [reigned 606–587] and King Zhēn Dìng were two different rulers whose reigns were in different eras. The Chinese text needs to be referring here to King Zhēn Dìng 貞定, not King Dìng). This is Item 3 in “Tales from Zhōu” (Book 3).

~ Eric Henry.

In the twenty-second year of the reign of King Líng of Zhōu [550],¹¹³ the Gǔ and Luò 洛 Rivers¹¹⁴ fought with each other,¹¹⁵ threatening to destroy the King's palace. The King wanted to dam the rivers, but Crown Prince Jìn advised against it, saying, “It won't do. I have heard that in

¹¹³ King Líng, personal name Dàxīn (reigned 571–558), was the son of King Jiǎn (reigned 586–572).

¹¹⁴ The Luò 洛 ran south of the Zhōu capital Wángchéng, while the Gǔ 穀 lay to the north and flowed east into the Chán 澶. During the reign of King Líng, the Gǔ swelled and, from a point west of the city, flowed south into the Luò, destroying the southwest sector of the capital city and threatening the palace. The men of Qí, therefore, walled Jiá 郟 in 550.

¹¹⁵ What this means in concrete terms is anyone's guess; perhaps “met and rose dangerously.”

former times, those who led the people did not level mountains, raise marshlands, block streams, or make channels leading from wetlands. Mountains, let us note, are accumulations of earth; marshes are places to which all things converge; streams are pathways for vital essences; and wetlands are places where water collects. When Heaven and Earth came into being, matter was collected into mountains on high, and living things were made to return to low places. Valley streams were located and cleared, so that life-giving forces could have channels and ponds and weirs were made so as to complete their perfection. For this reason, accumulations of earth are not to be leveled, and things are to have their points of return, and thus vital essences do not stagnate, but neither do they disperse; and due to this the people have goods to maintain themselves in life, and places of interment in death. Thus, they need not fear premature death, loss of sanity, plague, or illness, and are free from the worries of famine, cold, scarcity, and poverty. Both high and low can be secure in their positions, so as to await the unexpected. This was the supreme concern of the sage rulers of old.

“In former times Gòng Gōng cast away these principles, lived in ease and pleasure, lost all dignity due to his excesses, wished to dam up the streams, level the high places, and fill in the low ones, and thus do damage to the realm. Heaven withdrew its blessings, the people withdrew their support, disaster and disorder arose, and Gòng Gōng was destroyed. In the reign of Shùn,¹¹⁶ there was Gǔn of Chóng Bó; he gave rein to unrestrained desires, and followed in the criminal paths of Gòng Gōng, and Yáo had him executed at Feather Mountain.¹¹⁷ His son Yǔ¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ “Shùn appears in the text as “Yǒu Yú 有虞. Though Shùn had no heirs, he is said to have belonged to the Dynasty of Yú. “Yǒu Yú” is an example of an antique naming convention, according to which he was the “possessor of Yú.”

¹¹⁷ Wéi Zhāo explains the apparent impossibility of having Gǔn 鯀 live in the reign



thought over the excesses of his forebear and altered his methods, examining the characteristics of all natural things, comparing their endlessly varied natures, adapting them to the peoples' needs, and measuring them through comparison to the myriad creatures. Gòng Gōng's grand-nephew through the youngest son of a sibling, was named to the post of Chief of the Four Mountains,¹¹⁹ and assisted Yǔ in this work, going to all the high and low places, digging beds for streams and draining stagnant ponds, collecting water to make vegetation luxuriant, protecting the height of the Nine Mountains, removing obstructions from the Nine Streams, making protective barriers around the Nine Wetlands, enriching the plant growth in the Nine Marshes, encouraging the flow of the Nine Springs, making all the Nine Realms suitable for habitation, and uniting the Four Seas. And so, the Heavens were clear of lingering frosts, the earth was clear of unseasonal heat, the waters were free of stagnating forces, fire was devoid of destructive power, the spirits were free of disordered movements, the people were free of unrestrained desires, the seasons were free of disruptive reversals, and the creatures of the earth did no harm to the living. The merit of Yǔ, the director of all things, measured by his channeling methods, was supreme in splendor,

of Shùn, but suffer execution under Yáo, by emphasizing that Shùn served Yáo as an assistant for a long period. The title "Chóngbó 崇伯 given here to Gǔn, appears to indicate that he was the bó (Count or Lord) of a region called "Chóng." That being the case, his son was also the bó of that region.

¹¹⁸ Yǔ 禹, a.k.a. Dà Yǔ 大禹, "Yǔ the Great," appears in the text at this point as "Bó Yǔ" 伯禹, "Chief Yǔ."

¹¹⁹ "Four Mountains" (sì yuè 四岳), was an official title; in the Chinese text the term is used to refer to a single person, the holder of that title. This person, according to one explanation, was the leading official in the hierarchy of those offering sacrifices, charged with making offerings to the four sacred mountains, Tài Shān in the East, Hua Shān in the west, Héng Shān in the south, and Heng Shān in the north.

and made a deep impression on the heart of the Supreme Lord. Heaven cherished him, conferred the realm upon him, and bestowed upon him the surname “Sì” and the clan-name “Yǒu Xià.”¹²⁰ This was to show that he was able to shower blessings on all living things. Heaven also conferred a state upon the Four Mountains chief, the designation hóu bó 侯伯, “chief elder,” the surname Jiāng 姜, and the clan name Yǒu Lǚ 有呂;¹²¹ this was to show that he was a person able to act as Yǔ’s right-hand man in nourishing all creatures and enriching the people.

“Was all this simply because the King, and the “Four-Peaks” chief¹²² who assisted him, were the recipients of special favor? They were both descendants of rulers who had gone down to destruction. It was because they were able to splendidly fulfill their obligations that they were able to leave descendants who continued their sacrifices without change or interruption. Though the ruling line of Xià is in decline, Qǐ and Céng¹²³ still survive; though Shēn 申 and Lǚ 呂 are in decline, Qí 齊 and Xǔ 許¹²⁴ still survive.¹²⁵ Only splendid merit can lead to the bestowal of surnames and the enjoyment of sacrifices leading to possession of the

¹²⁰ The clan name Yǒu Xià 有夏 indicates that that he was put in possession of the land of Xià, said by Wéi Zhāo to be an area east of Guānzhōng, the “land within the passes,” where the State of Qín would eventually arise. The surname Sì 姒 was to be used as the lineage designation of all States ruled by descendants of Yǔ.

¹²¹ Yǒu Lǚ: “the one who possesses the region of Lǚ.”

¹²² Literally “Four Counts or Overlords,” sì bó 四伯.

¹²³ Qǐ 杞 and Céng 邾 both had Rulers who bore the Xià surname: Sì 姒.

¹²⁴ Shēn 申, Lǚ 呂, Qí 齊 and Xǔ 許 were all Jiāng-surname States.

¹²⁵ Qǐ and Céng were awarded by King Wǔ of Zhōu to the descendants of Yǔ. Shēn, as Wéi Zhāo explains, was a region that was granted to the descendants of the Sì Yuè during the Shāng and Zhōu Periods. Qí and Xǔ were awarded by King Wǔ to the descendants of Lǚ.



realm. As for the loss of these things, this can be brought about only through the agency of greed and excessive desire. Thus, one who loses his clan name and surname falls and cannot again rise up, his descendants hold no commanding positions and become mere slaves and lackeys. So, did those who went to destruction do so merely because they enjoyed no special favor?

“Those two, Gòng Gōng and Gǔn, were descendants of Huáng Dì 黃帝 and Yán Dì 炎帝. It was only because they failed to take the measure of all things, failed to act in accord with the succession of the seasons, failed to take stock of what was right for people and spirits, and failed to take example from living things, that they were destroyed and their posterity cut off, so that they remain to this day without sacrifices. In those instances where their status was restored, this could come about only through the substitution of loyalty and good faith for former habits. They [Yǔ and the chief of the “Four Mountains”] took the measure of things and acted in accord with the seasons, cooperated with people and spirits and took example from living things, so they concluded their careers with the highest glory, to which was added the honor of receiving surnames and clan names”.

Crown Prince Jìn added, “If we look into the teachings bequeathed to us by the former Kings, examine their statutes and laws, and look at those who perished and flourished, all can be known. Those who flourished in every case had the merits of Yǔ and the Four Mountains chief;¹²⁶ while those who perished in every case used the failed policies of Gòng Gōng and Gǔn.

“In the present instance, our policies have that which goes counter to rule, and is angering the Lords of the two rivers, causing them

¹²⁶ Here identified with the surname Lǚ 呂.

to make a contest of their powers, which will do harm to the palace. Would it not be impermissible for Your Majesty to attempt to gloss this over? People have a saying that goes, ‘Do not pass by the gates of a man whose life is in disorder;’ and, ‘The one who helps the chef gets items to enjoy; the one who helps a combatant suffers wounds;’ and, ‘Troubles do not befall to one who has no desire for trouble.’ As is said in one of the *Odes*,

The four steeds onward dash,
The royal banners furling,
Disasters from disorder spring,
No State without upheaval.¹²⁷

And as another passage in the same poem says,

People thirsting for disorder,
Had better opt for poison.¹²⁸

“When one sees disaster and disorder without concern, the damage will assuredly be great, and the more this is concealed, the more evident it will become. When the people are resentful due to disorder, one cannot draw near even to them—so how much more is this the case with the spirits? If Your Majesty should try to block up the fighting rivers while beautifying the palace, this will be the same as beautifying disaster and assisting dissension—is this not a way of magnifying harm and courting injury? From the times of our former Rulers, Kings Lì, Xuān, Yōu, and Píng, the disasters they courted have never ceased. If we

¹²⁷ *Odes* 257 (“Sāng Róu” 桑柔), second stanza.

¹²⁸ Same poem, stanza 11.



magnify these disasters, I fear that this will affect our descendants. Will not the royal house decline still further? What can be done about this?

“From the time that Hòu Jì brought peace to a disordered world, and down to the times of Wén, Wǔ, Chéng, and Kāng, we were able to keep the myriad peoples pacified. From the time that Hòu Jì laid the first foundation of rule, fifteen Kings succeeded him before King Wén settled the realm, and eighteen reigns passed before King Kāng again pacified the realm, so great was the difficulty of this. King Lì was the first to alter the canons [of rule], and fourteen Kings [have followed him]. Virtue took fifteen realms to achieve peaceful establishment—will fifteen reigns be insufficient to secure disaster? I worry both early and late, saying, ‘What sort of virtue must be cultivated to shed a bit of glory on the royal house and [allow us to] meet with Heaven-conferred favor?’ And if Your Majesty should aid and magnify these disasters, how can the consequences be withstood? Does Your Majesty not take example from the Kings of the Lí and the Miáo, and after them the last rulers of the Xià and the Shāng, who failed to honor Heaven above, take pattern from Earth below, and harmonize the people in the middle, but instead set at naught the seasonal activities of the four regions, failed to serve the spirits and cast away the Five Constant Practices?¹²⁹ This is why the people have destroyed their temples, burned their sacrificial vessels, and why their descendants have become slaves destroyed by the populace, without even the slightest regard for the glorious virtues of the enlightened Rulers who preceded them.

¹²⁹ The Five Constant Practices are: “taking example from Heaven, conforming to Earth, harmonizing the people, observing the seasonal cycle, and sacrificing to the spirits.”

“And thus, the Rulers who operated according to the five practices¹³⁰ received the rich blessings of Heaven, enjoyed the honorable exertions of the people, had descendants who were finely provided for, and enjoyed fame that has not been forgotten. All this is known to you, the Son of Heaven.

“Among the descendants of those raised high by Heaven, some are working in the fields, because their desires brought disorder to the people. Some who were among the fields are [now] next to the altars of the state, because their desire was to bring stability to the people. There is no reason to be astonished at this. As is said in the *Songs*,

Yīn’s mirror is not far to seek;
It lies in the time of Xià.¹³¹

Crown Prince Jìn continued, “Of what use will it be to adorn the palace? It will only provoke disorder.

“Judging this from the standpoint of Heaven and the Spirits, it is inauspicious; judging the matter through comparison with the beings of the earth, it is inappropriate. Sorting it in accord with the governance of the people, it is lacking in empathy. Measuring it in accord with seasonal succession, it is not harmonious. In the light of former teachings, it is incorrect. Looking at the *Odes* and the *Documents*, and the wise sayings of the people, we can see that this is the way Kings perish. Looking at the

¹³⁰ The text has only “these five,” *cǐ wǔ zhě* 此五者. Something may have dropped from the text, or, conceivably, the narrator is here referring to Yǔ the Great, and “Four Mountains,” forgetting that “Four Mountains” was one person, not four. Or perhaps “the five” are the most illustrious of the Zhōu Rulers: Hòu Jì, Wén, Wǔ, Chéng, and Kāng.

¹³¹ *Odes* 255 (“Dàng” 蕩), last stanza, last two lines. The literal meaning of the second line is, “It lies in the era of the Xià Lord.”



matter from top to bottom, it is plain that nothing could have a more extreme degree of harm. Let Your Majesty consider this well.

“Our affairs, let us note, fail to follow established patterns in great things and fail to follow the natural order in lesser things. If great matters are not patterned on Heaven above, and lesser matters are not informed by the order of Earth below, do not follow the example of people in between, and depend on actions that go contrary to seasonal succession in the different regions, then they will necessarily be ill-regulated. To persist in ill-regulated actions is a path to harm.”

The King in the end dammed the rivers. By the time of King Jǐng,¹³² many favorites appeared in Court, and disorder began to appear. When King Jǐng died, the royal house succumbed to chaos. By the time of King Dìng,¹³³ the royal house was in a much-decayed state.

Author: Unknown, 4th Century BCE.

14. Walling the Capital: An Omen of Doom

This is a further example of the perceived inauspiciousness of engineering projects.

Summary: When Biāo Xī of Wèi hears that the Zhōu officers, Duke Wén of Liú and Cháng Hóng, have persuaded Wèi Xiànzǐ, the Prime Minister of Jìn, to have the royal city of Chéng Zhōu walled, he observes to Duke Mù of Shàn, another Zhōu officer, that all three will certainly come to ruin, for in attempting to prop up a ruler whom Heaven has abandoned, they are placing themselves in opposition to Heaven. This is

¹³² King Jǐng (reigned 544–520) was the son of King Líng and the younger brother of Crown Prince Jìn.

¹³³ King Dìng’s reign was earlier than that of King Líng. “King Dìng” here is thus probably a reference to King Zhēn Dìng, personal name Jiè 介 (reigned 468–441), a son of King Jìng (reigned 519–476).

Item 9, the last, in “Tales from Zhōu”(Book 3). No parallel version appears in *Zuǒ Tradition*. ~ Eric Henry.

In the tenth year of the reign of King Jìng 敬王 [510], Duke Wén of Liú 劉文公 and Cháng Hóng 長弘 wished to wall Zhōu [i.e. the city of Chéng Zhōu¹³⁴], and informed Jìn of their desire so as to obtain assistance.¹³⁵ Wèi Xiànzǐ 魏獻子 was Prime Minister of Jìn. He spoke with Cháng Hóng, agreed to his proposal, and prepared to call the Vassal Lords together so as to carry it out.

Biāo Xī 彪侯 of Wèi 衛 came to Zhōu and heard of this. He met with Duke Mù of Shàn 單穆公 and said, “Can Cháng and Liú escape destruction? There is a Zhōu Ode that goes,

Those whom Heaven sustains cannot be destroyed,
And those whom Heaven destroys can likewise not be sustained.¹³⁶

Biāo Xī added, “King Wǔ made this song in ancient times when he conquered Yīn. He directed that it be used as a banquet ode of the type

¹³⁴ Maria Khayutina has suggested that the name “Chéngzhōu” meant “Perfected Zhōu.” I am indebted to Professor Michael Nylan for this information.

¹³⁵ King Jìng 敬王 was the son of King Jǐng 景王 and the younger brother of King Dào 悼王, who was briefly his predecessor on the throne. What Liú and Cháng wished to wall was the domain of Chéng Zhōu 成周. Chéng Zhōu was to the east of the River Chán 瀋, a tributary of the Luò 洛, and Wáng Chéng was to the river’s west. Previously, Prince Cháo 朝 had rebelled and, in the summer of 519 (Zhāogōng 23), entered Wáng Chéng, whereupon King Jìng had fled to Liú 劉. In the autumn, King Jìng took up residence in Dí Quán 狄泉, a city in Chéng Zhōu where the royal graves were located. In 516 (Zhāogōng 26), King Jìng’s troops were defeated, after which he fled to Huá 滑. Later that year, the men of Jìn rescued him, and he reentered Chéng Zhōu. Prince Cháo fled to Chǔ. Many of his adherents remained in Wáng Chéng, and King Jìng feared them. Jìn, thereupon, called upon the Vassal Lords to garrison Zhōu. This was laborious, so Cháng Hóng wished to wall Zhōu instead.

¹³⁶ This from a “lost ode”; that is, it does not appear in the extant *Shījīng*.



called yù 餼 and entitled it “Zhī” 支 or “Sustenance,” so that it might be bequeathed to later generations and cause them to exercise perpetual vigilance.

“Rituals that are carried out while the assembled officers stand are called yù. They set forth the greater principles; only a few are of this type.¹³⁷ This is so that the listeners may be daily spurred to anxious vigilance and because he wished to teach the people to set a guard upon their behavior. But those who recite ‘Sustenance’ must thoroughly know the operations of Heaven and Earth; otherwise, it will not spur posterity to vigilance.

“And now Cháng and Liú wish to sustain that which Heaven is destroying. Is this not difficult?

“From the time of King Yōu,¹³⁸ Heaven has snatched away the men of Zhōu’s understanding and caused them to cast aside virtue through their reckless infatuation until, arrogant and abandoned, they lose their clan chiefs. Heaven has long been at work destroying them, but the Prime Minister Wèi Xiànzǐ is seeking to supply their deficiencies. I fear it is impossible. Not even that which water and fire injures can be rescued, much less that which is injured by Heaven.

“There is a saying that goes, ‘Doing good is like climbing upward; doing evil is like collapsing.’ In ancient times, when Kǒng Jiǎ¹³⁹ plunged Xià into disorder, it took but four more reigns for the dynasty to crumble, but when King Xuán¹⁴⁰ exerted himself in the service of Shāng, it took

¹³⁷ Instead of “diǎn” 典 read “qǔ” 曲.

¹³⁸ King Yōu 幽王 was the last King of the Western Zhōu, reigned 781–771 BCE.

¹³⁹ Kǒng Jiǎ 孔甲 was the fourteenth King of the Xià. His traditional reign dates are 1879 to 1849 (BCE).

¹⁴⁰ King Xuán 玄王 was the mythical founder of the Shāng tribe.

fourteen more reigns for the dynasty to flourish. When Dì Jiǎ¹⁴¹ plunged Shāng into disorder, it took but seven more reigns for the dynasty to crumble, but when Hòu Jì 后稷¹⁴² exerted himself in the service of Zhōu, it took fifteen more reigns to flourish. It was fourteen reigns ago that King Yōu plunged Zhōu into disorder; that the dynasty has been able to safeguard its royal treasures is already beyond explanation; how can it ever be made to flourish again?

“Zhōu was like a great mountain, a vast plain, a deep wilderness; so it was able to bring forth a great wealth of fine talent; but King Yōu, through his debauchery, made of it an earthen mound, a heap of dung, a drainage ditch. How can such a thing ever be corrected?”

“Who will suffer most for this?” asked Master Shàn.

“Retribution will be swift in overtaking Cháng, for he has usurped the role of Heaven in attempting to supply the wants of humans. The way of Heaven, note, can only be obeyed, it cannot be flouted, but Cháng has gone counter to this principle and led Master Liú into delusion. He will surely suffer three disasters: first, for disobeying Heaven; second, for acting counter to the Way; and third, for leading others into delusion. Even if Zhōu should escape disaster, Cháng will assuredly be slaughtered. It will reach even to Master Wèi¹⁴³ of Jìn. If he should enjoy the blessing of Heaven, it will perhaps be his person alone, and not those of his descendants, that will be affected, but the sons and grandsons of Master Liú will assuredly suffer calamity.

“For that man to cast aside established rules so as to indulge his personal desires, to use artifice to ameliorate Heaven-sent disasters, to

¹⁴¹ Dì Jiǎ 帝甲, a.k.a. Zǔ Jiǎ 祖甲, was the 25th Shang King, reigned 1258–1226 BCE.

¹⁴² Hòu Jì 后稷 was the mythical founder of the Zhōu tribe.

¹⁴³ Wèi Xiànzǐ.



put the clan chiefs to hard labor so as to magnify his own renown—these actions will surely subject him to grievous calamities.”

That same year [509] Master Xiàn of Wèi assembled the officers of the Vassal Lords at Dí Quán 狄泉 and then went hunting with them at Tài Lù 大陸, where he was burned to death. Later, at the time of the Fàn and Zhōngháng troubles, Cháng Hóng was involved, and in the 28th year of the reign of King Jìng 敬王 [492] he was killed at the behest of Jìn. Later, after the accession of King Zhēn Dìng 貞定王 [468], the House of Liú perished.