

The Fall of Urs

by [Justin Wong](#) (January 2020)



The King, Max Beckmann, 1934

In the days of antiquity, there was once a flourishing civilisation that fell and was conquered. This fact is not unusual in itself, as there exist examples of societies once technologically advanced that fell; that had in their yoke nations of lesser strength; that were wealthy beyond compare; and that led the world in every endeavour, in politics and literature, in science and philosophy. There are numerous examples of this in the ancient world, in Babylon, in Persia, in Greece, and in Rome, to name but a few. Empires that were birthed in barbarism, that came to maturity in civilisation, that declined in a deluge of decadence, before being defeated, invaded by some or other foreign horde, who reduced a once brimming civilisation to ruins. Where as a result, their previous splendour exists in memory only, and the statues of art that once adorned their public squares, and such that they knelt down to in prayer, now survive only as fragments, or have turned to dust.

Though this is true of how the majority of civilisations fall, it isn't so with the unrecalled country of Urs, for they fell not from conquering armies but destroyed themselves as someone who overindulges in life through excess, a destructive impulse, and their steadfast devotion to their idols.

For many scholars of ancient history, the kingdom of Urs never existed, though their name should be recalled. The tale of their decline contains in it a moral truth regarding the structure of society. Their story is not to be found in studies in world history alongside the Sumerians, the Akkadians, the Hittites, the Hebrews, or the Babylonians. Perhaps their world was greater than all of these, though, in

the sense that their advancements pre-dated the earliest of the aforementioned civilizations by several centuries. Their world was overflowing with ingenuity and with art, and they were said to practice a sophisticated form of primitive religion.

There were parts of their world that would doubtless be distasteful to the modern reader in that their country was made great by the practice of slavery. This was done by the kidnapping of citizens in neighbouring countries; and from wandering tribes that lived nomadically around the confines of their sphere. In addition to this, was the widespread practice of indentured servitude of those native to their dominion, a practice whereby these citizens would willingly give away their freedom for a time with the promise of land at the end of their term.

Along with this there were women who were sold into prostitution, who were paraded around the temples on holy nights, where they would fornicate with the adherents of their faith to appease the wrath of their gods. This religious-sexual practice was done as a form of atonement that they believed purified the air for the presence of the gods to enter their temple and into their idols, the things carved in stone which were said to become animated with life in their presence.

Their country was an agrarian society in which farmers worked the land, rearing the cattle and growing grain that they had to make sure lasted through the fruitless winters. The fact they were a country located in the middle-east, meant that winters were rarely harsh, though yield-less just the same.

The people were ruled by kings, several Kings ruled over Urs in its lifespan, If there were periods of ill-fortune the mantle of ruler was taken over by the nearest one in their lineage of the royal bloodline.

What made their society fail was not their attachment to an ideal, such as faith, love, and forgiveness, but it was an attachment to the will of their gods, who asked for nothing from their ruler, and let their people be as free as they pleased, regardless or not of how destructive this was. All things that were the result of the freedom of their citizens were the will of the gods. This meant that all their blessings and curses that they experienced were divinely ordained. That meant that their society didn't have concepts such as brotherhood, charity, and justice, notions that were alien to them. When good things transpired it was a cause of celebration, when bad things transpired they too were cause for celebration. They were people for whom a sense of virtue had been cut away by their underlying beliefs, and all that has happened, and all that is to happen was prefigured in a realm far-off from their knowing. With this being the dominant belief swimming in their collective conscious, there world was one of cruelty and lies, of malevolence and adultery.

Their widespread belief that life goes on like the wheels of a carriage, being pulled along by an outside force, made them curious of what the stars had in store for them, what judgment in the eventual progression of time they had to face. This led many, both serf and master, both merchant and royal, to peer into the future to see what the gods had planned for them to enact in the grand, cosmic theatre of life, like a child climbing on top of a barrel to peer through

the windows of a forbidden place. They did this by way of scanning the cloudless skies, measuring the positions of planets, as such things were widely believed to teach them of their fates. In addition to this, the particular placements of the sun, the moon, and the stars in the night sky meant they were able to communicate with the dead, invoking the presence of spirits, those who had passed over to the other world. In the king's court there was always an astrologer present, guiding him on the right course of action. In the court were also poets, seers, and scribes, those who aided the king in his role as ruler.

One day when King Uzzah was on the throne there was much unrest in the land. A famine arose and the people that were once brimming with vitality began to suffer. Though there was a young man who came to the palace of the King so as to make him aware of that which was blackened to him.

He wandered in, after begging the guards to let him inside, as there was something he most urgently needed to tell the king. After much pleading, they allowed him in, his character to them seemed trustworthy, which was somewhat out of character from the common people in his kingship. Besides, there was something sincere about him and the urgency with which he spoke.

Walking through the hallways of the palace was a novel experience, he had never seen things of this magnitude gathered all in one place, the floors of marble, the statues, the paintings, the ornaments. There were numerous things made of gold, or other precious metals and stones. It looked very much like the booty of war brought together in one place, where the beautiful things displayed glimmered in the

candlelight, showing off the riches of the royals to guests such as this boy who wandered in.

He walked into the main room where the King sat upon his golden throne, encrusted with jewels, oceanic sapphires, and rubies as red as pressed grapes among them. As he nonchalantly walked into the rooms where others stood, the king basking in the attentions of those stood around, gazing at him in his court. The king was seated and he was philosophizing on some or other subject, splitting hairs and lost, far-off somewhere in a world of his own making, where his thoughts only seemed to matter.

On the boy entering into the palace he was taken aback, for someone had approached him who he had never before seen. Though there was something about his demeanour that fascinated him as he possessed a quality he rarely had seen in his life, an earnestness, an innocence.

“What brings you here?” the king asked.

“Dear King, I am here to make you aware that in the town of Tristea—the place from which I have come—there is a famine, crops have failed to flourish, blight has affected things that were fruitful. People are slowly beginning to perish through want, these people are under your dominion.”

“These things you enlighten me to. What do you wish me to do about them?”

“We have heard things have not been so harsh for you in the North. We have heard that you have had a bountiful harvest with surplus grain.”

“That is true, blessed are we here, where the gods have showered goods upon us, in the way of a wondrous and fruitful harvest.”

“Then why can't you who have plenty, who are blessed by the gods give to us the bounty that is extra?”

“Where do these notions of yours come from? Are not all things the will of the gods? By doing what you ask of me, am I not trespassing in a realm of my unknowing? Rebelling against the powers which I myself am under, that have ordained everything?”

“Though surely your kingdom will be halved in two as a house of quarrelling lovers. Your population will be killed through hunger, or sell themselves into bondage, to be a part of the surrounding nations.”

“These things you warn of are not cause for action; but that of praise.”

The boy left the palace with his advice not taken. Though the advice of this youthful creature, who seemed to the

King to be naïve, expressing sentiments that came across as foreign, echoed in his head as the bells that rung through city streets.

He came to think of him more, especially when what he told him came to pass. When most who were living in the once brimming city of Tristea had died of hunger or had sold themselves into bondage. Then his once vast kingdom was made shorter. Neighbouring nations pounced on them, and the territory of Tristea was transformed and divided up between other powers.

This worried King Uzzah greatly. The fact that the kingdom he was to hand over to his son would be smaller in size than the one he inherited, the land of his fathers, troubled the king.

What he once thought of troubles relegated to a small and rather removed part of his dominion, transformed into troubles of his own. He was thus perplexed on how such a fate could fall on him. As was true of everything that happened, it was the will of the gods, whom he thought were punishing him for something he did or didn't do. That he was someone cursed in their eyes. He wondered to himself what he had done to anger them in this way, where his legacy was but a fraction of what it had been when his father handed the kingdom to him.

He wondered to himself if that boy who came out of nowhere, materialising out of the void, as a flower through the gaps of stone slabs, was still among the living, or if returning home to the place of his origins had perished in the

fashion of his townsman, or sold himself to the enemy for a less brutal existence, in servitude, in slavery. There was every chance that this boy, prophetically seeing the future in visions, escaped his hometown—off into a place where he would suffer but a liveable existence, where water would satisfy his thirst, and bread his hunger.

He sent out his men to search for this lad, giving them a description of him, where they were asked to look out for a youth of a particular age, complexion, and manner of speech.

They brought to the palace a few young men of this description. They were sent away, along with those who didn't quite match the description, when they realised it wasn't the boy he spoke to on that day. Though on three times it being the false boy, on the fourth time they brought to him the boy who had before come to see him.

“You wished to see me again?” the boy exclaimed, as he entered the room where the King on the throne sat, in what to him seemed like a perplexed state. Though two months went by since their first encounter, the King looked as if he had aged considerably since, as if he in the days since his kingdom divided, had spent it rapt in worry.

“Yes, it is evident since the time we last spoke, what you have said has come to pass. It is as clear as the cloudless sky that you have power in foreseeing future events. It is most necessary that you should work alongside me and tell me of my fate.”

“Do I have a choice in this?”

“Ha-ha,” the King burst out in laughter, “My instinct of you being a prophet is correct, as you are right to assume that you have no choice. You will guide me in my court, and tell me of the blessings and curses that will befall on me, or you will be hung like the slaughtered carcass of a heifer. When put in this manner, you do have a choice.”

“Then I graciously accept your offer.”

“Great! What is your name?”

“My name is Melech,” said the boy.

“Good, we will have a banquet for your arrival.”

Such a banquet was a debauched fair, that went on for days at a stretch. There was eating and drinking, several fattened calves were slaughtered, and ripened fruit was plucked from trees of the land. Rare vintages that sat beneath the ground in the cellars were uncorked, wine that had gained age since before the King was born, which matured with a complexity of flavour, resulting in a moreish quality that merrily intoxicated all those gathered. It was evident that all the invited guests, the public officials, the tax-collectors, the distantly related kin, along with other eminent persons, were having something of a prodigious time, where wine and merriment flowed as freshwater from the

Euphrates.

Though in Melech being pushed into this situation, he felt as trapped as a cat in a cage, where there was no way to escape, the King gladly told him as much, suggesting that if he defied him, he would treat him with the same care he did the lamb that sat roasted on the table.

Though upon deeper reflection there were perhaps worse fates that he could suffer, as compared with him being an esteemed member of the King's court, beautiful robes now adorned him, as gold upon the walls of the palace interior, clothes of the finest linen, such as he had seen previously on the fabulously wealthy, merchants that passed through the place that was home, or that rode through the streets on serf-driven carriages. That world of wealth and privilege had opened up to him. Though he wasn't sure if what the King had claimed about him was true, that he was a prophet, with the ability to foresee. He happened to be correct about his hometown of Tristea. When he said that many would perish from want, through starvation. Although he thought these predictions were a matter of mere common-sense, the logical conclusion to the King's blasé governance, his un-willingness to help a section of his society in a period of evident longing. All of this was not divination, was not prophecy, was not being attuned to unseen forces that were a locked vault to most of the senseless world. He was to go along with this arrangement as he had no choice.

He was perplexed during this period what his duties might consist of. In the days, the weeks that the banquet fizzled out to non-existence, where the routines of the palace, the regular talk of politics continued on, and the

routines of its mechanism, had returned to the pace it had been beforehand, before Melech had been placed in this court as the rug made of a Lion's hide, he found himself doing almost nothing. Days he spent on his lonesome, in the chamber which the King said was the place where he was to rest. There of course were always the palace grounds to wander around, which he did. The gardens were vast, it was an estate that would take close to a full day to walk around full circle, and such that he did in his time of leisure. There also was the library, containing innumerable scrolls, consisting of stories, poetry, and philosophy, gathered from around the world. This fascinated Melech, even if he spent the rest of his remaining days in this library, he would not be able to consume all of the words contained within this vast and chasm-like room.

A few weeks went by, and the king eventually called upon him. Unrest was simmering to a boil in his kingdom. In the town of Habish, they traded cotton with a neighbouring country, who bought it from them by the carriage full. Though the neighbouring country of Ishar were buying an exceeding amount of their cotton yields, and as a consequence ran up a huge deficit. There was nothing that the people of Habish, or the country at large bought off them in return. Though the people of Ishar knew there was in fact something they could give to them in exchange, as in their country fields of poppies flourished as mice in a cellar, and many of their farmer's fields shone brightly with red like a ruby that refracted sunlight. They were all too aware that the thing that was produced from poppies was opium. That one could quite easily become a slave to its intoxicant.

The people of Ishar decided to counteract this deficit by plying the people of Habish with opium. This was shrewd

thinking on their part and its addictive properties, the fact that it makes people slaves to its command, would make Habish indebted to them for the foreseeable future.

The king was in a perplexed state, and he heard that his people were becoming the servants of opium, which they would willingly give over the promise of eternal life for the milk that seeped out onto its stems. The king was all too aware that a sickness was spreading, where the people of Habish were in a sorrowful state. With this being the state of affairs, the life expectancy of his people was diminishing, and a once packed population, became a fraction of its number.

When the king called in Melech to the room where the throne was, he looked as if confused. Wondering to himself, how this would go on. It wasn't a vast period of time that passed since Tristea, his town in the south had been taken over by foreign powers. He told Melech all the news of what was going on in Habish.

"If you don't do something about this, if you don't prohibit this poison from your country, your people will not live to see next year, where their experience of spring, of summer would exist in memory only. For this is like rot that feeds upon the wooden structure of your house. It must be stopped at once or your land will be divided up as the spoils of war."

"This is all the will of the gods, it is of course preferable that I do nothing about this," the King steadfastly exclaimed.

Though as the months went by, as time slowly drifted along, the thing that Melech spoke of, that which he prophesied in the eventuality of time, came to happen. The drug that flowed freely into his land, ate away at a once brimming life as locusts blighting crop. The land in which people once lived became bereft of souls, as if a virus had afflicted them, where none but a few survived, as exemplified by a smattering of those that could be seen gathering things for fire, and scraps of food in which to hold off hunger.

As this plague made ruins with Habish, it spread out into neighbouring towns and cities, where half of the country was under the influence of opium. This was terrible for the inhabitants, and a sense of doom was seen upon their faces, a sense of despair heard in their voices. This unrest, this sense that their foreseeable days were to contain nothing favorable, led to talk of revolution. The king's men heard people talk openly of toppling the king, of replacing his rule with someone else, or upending the system with something representative of the spirit of the people at large. In a vexed and anxious state, the King called upon Melech once more.

“Have you heard the developments of what is going on in the world. There is free and flowing talk of overthrowing me, of parading me in the streets as a beast, of stoning me as a common criminal,” exclaimed the king.

“There is a lot of unrest among the people. Whilst you and those in your court live in luxury, the people under your control are suffering. There is an abundance of misery,

hunger, and despair. If you don't cure the ills of the people, you will be left with nothing to reign over. Do you not hear the words I speak? Your patrimony, the legacy of your ancestors will be reduced to dust, as if this castle you reside in, was constructed of sand. Your sons and daughters will become chattel, and be under the control of a strange tyrant."

"Though why have the gods cursed me in this way? Was it a transgression I made? My patrimony, the legacy of my ancestors, their book will shut with me. Though this is perhaps what the gods who demand nothing of me do. They lead my kingdom to fall to ruins."

The king was prostrate over what to do, for weeks he was in a state of despair, not able to eat, in perpetual unrest.

As talk of anarchy became heard through the kingdom, there was a strong desire to overthrow the existing order. Two factions came to prominence, one which sought a rule of the people, and another which desired a benevolent despotism. There was a quarrel between the two factions, and the people of Urs clung to their beliefs over how they wished their world should be.

It was natural in this instance the diminishing land of Urs became split in two by ideology. This was peaceful at first, though tensions raged to a boil, till it eventually broke out into war.

This was terrible and the population, the country that previously reduced itself through debauchery was now reducing itself through warfare. This was an unenviable state of affairs for Urs, and their diminishing multitude was reduced to a population the size of a city. Townships once overpopulated became emptied of all life; and their farmlands that once replenished the populous, failed to produce crop. In wartime each side sowed the other's fields with salt, which destroyed their ability to grow anything of worth to feed the existing plethora of people that hadn't been wounded or killed through warfare.

There arose a mighty famine through the land, when all the grain they had, had depleted as dew in the morning sun, leaving the people of Urs to disappear like fruit flies at midnight.

The king was suffering too, his high birth and the fact that he was ruler of the nation couldn't save him from the truth that there was no food, and he fell along with the rest of his people.

Then the gods they lived in fear of ruled over the land, but none were around to worship them.

Justin Wong is originally from Wembley, though at the moment is based in the West Midlands. He has been passionate about the English language and Literature since a young age. Previously, he lived in China working as an English teacher. His novel *Millie's Dream* is available [here](#).

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