

Chapter One

Ritual Manuals

Exegetical Hermeneutics and the Re-Embodiment of Antiquity

Often I bewail the difficulty of *Ceremonies and Rites* [Yili]. And but few are those who practice its injunctions today. Transmissions of ancient practice have grown apart, so that one cannot investigate how the rituals of antiquity might be restored. Today, truly, we lack all means to put *Ceremonies and Rites* to use. Yet it contains in crude form the structures laid down by King Wen and the Duke of Zhou. . . . How regrettable! that I did not live to see those times, advancing and retreating, bowing and yielding in their midst. Alas! Such boundless sorrow!

—Han Yu (768–824 CE)¹

For half my life, I studied in different places, reading *Ceremonies and Rites* till late at night. After so many years of immersion, I suddenly experienced a feeling of discovery. Now, every time I open a section, it is as if in my heart-mind, inside my eyes, I can actually see the ancients, across more than a thousand years, and it is as if I bow, yield, and turn in their midst. Many a time I must have waved my arms and stamped my feet in joy without knowing it.

—Ao Jigong (1301)²

In 726, four years after Emperor Xuanzong (r. 712–756) of the Tang dynasty had ordered the compilation of a new ritual code, Secretarial Receptionist Wang Yan proposed to edit the *Record of Ritual* (*Liji*) into a contemporary protocol in which current precedent would replace arcane passages. Zhang Yue (667–730), Right Aide at the Academy of Scholarly Worthies, protested this proposal: “The *Record of Ritual* was compiled during the Han dynasty and has been transmitted across the centuries as an unassailable scripture. Today we stand far removed from

the sages of antiquity, and I am afraid that it will be impossible to inflict such alterations.” Instead, Zhang Yue proposed to return to *Rites of the Zhenguan Period* (*Zhenguan li* or *Da Tang yili*, 637) and *Rites of the Xianqing Period* (*Xianqing li*, 658), and to reopen based on those protocols the debate about the relationship between current precedent and ancient ritual. The emperor endorsed Zhang Yue’s proposal.³

Rites of the Kaiyuan Period of the Great Tang (*Da Tang Kaiyuan li*), completed in 732, merged imperial precedent with canonical ritual in seamless ritual narratives. The new ceremonies designed by the Academy of Scholarly Worthies overlay the palace grounds and imperial bodies with the spaces and choreographies of ancient ritual scripture, thus combining the authority of the canon with the detailed protocol of the imperial court. Although subsequent generations of ritual specialists emended parts of *Rites of the Kaiyuan Period*, they honored its hermeneutical principles. The ritual codes compiled in the tenth and eleventh centuries at the Song imperial court still bore a significant resemblance to the Kaiyuan code.⁴

But in 1078, Chen Xiang (1017–1080) completed a revision of imperial sacrificial rites in which he denounced his predecessors’ attempts at merging canon and precedent:

Your humble servant Chen and his fellow compilers of *Detailed Investigations into the Rites and Texts of the Imperial Altars and Temples* [*Xiangding jiaomiao liwen*] observe: The ceremonies of the seasonal offerings to the illustrious spirits at the Altar of Heaven and the sacrifices to the imperial ancestors at court in outline all follow Tang ritual. Even the placement of spirit tablets on the altar, the imperial conveyances, and the trappings of the ceremonial guard are devised according to a combination of precedents from different eras. When one compares these ceremonies to the rituals of the ancient kings, the differences are immediately apparent. Moreover, the insistence on the combination of precedents from different eras has resulted in countless conflicts, both in the words used and in the emotions conveyed. For a long time, ritual specialists have transmitted protocol with only minor, insubstantial changes, and those who insisted on reform relied entirely on the practices of their own day.⁵

Chen Xiang wrote his denunciation of ritual precedent in a time when scholars were gaining confidence in their ability to recover ancient

ritual. The ancients who had seemed forbiddingly remote to Zhang Yue and Han Yu in the eighth century, to eleventh-century scholars had become a visible, tangible presence. Since the canon had been first committed to print in 953, its texts had become available to a growing community of scholars.⁶ This community gathered not only in bookshops, libraries, and academies, but it existed in the written and printed space of letters and books. Into this printed space Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072) introduced in 1063 his *Record of Collecting Antiquities* (*Jigu lu*), an annotated collection of stone inscriptions he had gathered over several decades. A few years later, Ouyang Xiu's friend Liu Chang (1019–1068) ordered the contours of eleven ancient bronze vessels engraved in stone and circulated rubbings from these engravings under the title *Record of Pre-Qin Vessels* (*Xian-Qin guqi ji*).⁷

The works of Ouyang Xiu and Liu Chang inspired an enthusiastic following among their contemporaries, who began collecting and reproducing inscriptions and vessels with abandon. The reproductions made private collections accessible to remote scholars. In this space of paper and ink, a community of epigraphists and archaeologists assisted one another in deciphering inscriptions and classifying vessels, comparing items from different collections, and corroborating their surmises with canonical citations. Within a few decades, Song scholars identified the names and ritual functions of all types of ancient bronze vessels and acquired a proficiency in reading and writing ancient script forms.

The cauldrons and beakers created a connection between Song literati and the ancients that was both historical and timeless. The patinated vessels found on riverbanks and in ancient burial grounds had stood in distant times on royal altars and in noble temples. But the vessels also held a universal truth, an understanding of cosmic patterns that had informed the ritual, music, institutions, and social structure of antiquity and that could not be expressed in words. As Fan Zhen (1008–1088) memorialized in 1037, in a debate about musical reform, “Music is harmonic *qi*. Harmonic *qi* is conveyed by sound, and sound originates in formlessness. Therefore the ancients transmitted the system of sound by means of concrete objects, that men in later times might study them.”⁸

Ancient bronze vessels and musical instruments instantiated a cosmic order that the ancients embodied in ritual performance. Ritual allowed man to conform to the natural order and to attain his proper place in society and the cosmos. Culture had thus merged with nature

in ancient civilization, in a perfect, lasting order. But whereas vessels had survived intact across the millennia to convey timeless truths through their enduring proportions, ritual had been imperfectly inscribed, in texts that subsequently had suffered fragmentation, neglect, and corruption at the hands of careless scholars. In his preface to the monograph on ritual and music in the *New History of the Tang*, published around the same time as his *Record of Collecting Antiquities*, Ouyang Xiu sets forth this degeneration of ritual from a pervasive, inherent order to a bounded, meaningless practice:

Until the Three Dynasties, order issued from one source, and ritual and music pervaded the realm. But since the Three Dynasties, order has derived from two sources, and ritual and music have become mere words.

In antiquity, halls and carriages served as dwellings, robes and caps as clothes, ewers and beakers as vessels, and metal bells, stone drums, silk strings, and bamboo flutes as musical instruments. With these, the ancients approached their altars and temples, surveyed the court, and served the spirits, and thus instilled order among the people. . . . Every single act of the common people issued from ritual. The instillment in the people of filiality and compassion, friendship and brotherliness, loyalty and trust, and humaneness and duty could therefore simply proceed through their dwellings, actions, clothing, and food. Ritual inhered in their every action, morning and night. This is what I mean when I write "order issued from one source, and ritual and music pervaded the realm." . . .

After the Three Dynasties had come to naught, the Qin dynasty perverted the legacy of antiquity, and all those who possessed the realm since referred to the Qin, whether in the matter of emperor and officials, nomenclature and rank, imperial institutions, or the structure of palaces, carriages, clothing, and vessels. . . . The ritual and music of the Three Dynasties, their names and implements, were carefully stored away by officials, to be produced periodically for use at the altars and temples and at court, and one would say, "This is ritual. Here-with we instruct the people." This is what I mean by "order derives from two sources, and ritual and music are mere words."⁹

In order to retrieve the incorporated knowledge of the ancients, to recreate the permanently ritualized bodies of antiquity, to realign

human civilization with the cosmic order in an enduring empire, scholars in the eleventh century engaged in a dialectical investigation of the historical remains of the Three Dynasties and the timeless truths revealed in nature and the cosmos. Combining archaeology, epigraphy, philology, and exegetical hermeneutics, literati of the late Northern Song attempted to reconstruct ancient texts, understand their meaning and context, and embody their injunctions in the present. They reinscribed canonical texts in order to be able to reincorporate their cosmic truth in the present. Like the ancient vessels, ritual created a direct, physical connection with the ancients that collapsed a distance of millennia into a shared, timeless, embodied truth. Thus, Zhai Qinian (fl. 1142) wrote in his *History of Seal Script (Zhoushi)* of the archaic rites performed under Emperor Huizong (r. 1100–1125):

With one stroke he wiped away the vulgar speculations of the scholars of the Han and the Tang. After a myriad generations, the classification of the vessels of the Three Dynasties was finally restored, so that the matters recorded in the canon were no longer mere words.¹⁰

Yet the archaic rites of Huizong failed to establish a lasting peace. In 1114, Huizong performed the summer solstice sacrifice at the Altar of the Earth with twenty-eight reproductions of ancient bronze vessels, inscribed with archaic texts honoring deities and ancestors.¹¹ Twelve years later, Jurchen armies besieged Kaifeng and conquered the northern half of the Song empire. In the caravans of imperial kinsmen, conducted by Jurchen soldiers to the northern steppes, traveled Emperor Huizong and hundreds of ancient bronzes looted from his palace. Private collectors abandoned their antiquities on their flight to the south. Although southern scholars occasionally obtained ancient bronzes through trade with northern merchants, the study of antiquities did not regain the fervor of the Northern Song. To some, the lost collections symbolized a decadent culture of material excess, epitomized by an extravagant emperor who in the pursuit of his oblivious obsessions lost his empire and his life.¹²

Paper and ink proved more durable than bronze and stone. The reproduction of steles and vessels ensured the preservation of many important collections for scholars of the Southern Song. Antiquity was once more reduced to text. Epigraphy, archaeology, philology, and canonical exegesis operated on the level surface of the written page,

where scholars of the Southern Song could bow and yield among the ancients through commentaries, illustrations of ancient vessels and dress, plans of classical courtyards, and reconstructions of ritual choreography. By the thirteenth century, *Family Rituals*, compiled by Zhu Xi and emended by his disciples, gained acceptance as a new scripture, a ritual text that transposed the cosmic patterns inscribed in the ancient canon onto contemporary spaces and contemporary bodies.

The ritual manuals of the Tang and Song dynasties reinscribe canonical texts to allow reincorporation of the timeless knowledge of the ancients. As an interface between performing bodies of the past and the present, the ritual manual is a provisional text that dissolves when its written bodies and spaces assume concrete shape. But despite the ambition of the authors to make their texts disappear, the ritual manual remains a text—the historical product of exegetical convictions and hermeneutical techniques. Like the ancient bronzes scrutinized by Song literati, ritual manuals are both historical and timeless. As products of exegetical scholarship, they betray the scholarly fashions and political ambitions of their time. Yet, as scripts for performance, they merge past and present, text and body, reader and performer, in a space where the literatus may bow and yield among the ancients and into which the present reader, too, may enter.

Weddings in ritual manuals belong to a ritual cycle that repeats endlessly through the generations to produce and reproduce the ritual bodies of family and society. But unlike cappings and pinnings (ceremonies marking the adulthood of boys and girls), funerals, and sacrifice, weddings also produce biological bodies. Although the permanently ritualized bodies envisioned by some Tang and Song exegetes merge biological sex and ritual subject position (just as nature and culture merge in the permanently ritualized civilization of antiquity), sexual bodies and ritual bodies remain logically distinct as male and female (*nannü*), and husband and wife (*fufu*). While capping and pinning create ritual bodies by initiating boys and girls into the ritual cycle, weddings create the legitimate sexual bodies necessary to sustain the ritual cycle itself. In the words of the chapter “The Meaning of Weddings” in the *Record of Ritual*:

Only after establishing respect and gravity does wedding ritual allow the groom and the bride to become intimate. Such is the general purport of the rite: it is thereby that the distinction between male and female is completed, and it is thus that

proper relations between husband and wife are established. Only after male and female have been differentiated can husband and wife have proper relations; and only after husband and wife have established proper relations can father and son achieve intimacy; and only after father and son have achieved intimacy can ruler and minister attain their proper stations. Therefore it is said, “Weddings are the root of ritual.” Truly, ritual begins with capping; has its root in weddings; achieves its utmost gravity at mourning and sacrifice; confers the greatest honor at court audiences and official missions; and establishes harmony at archery and community wine drinking ceremonies. This is the general purport of ritual.¹³

The sexual bodies of male and female set the ritual cycle in motion, yet these sexual bodies themselves remain outside the cycle. The proper placement of sexual bodies in the ritual time and space of weddings therefore posed difficulties to authors of ritual manuals in the Tang and Song dynasties. An understanding of their ruminations and solutions in this matter yields insights into the important hermeneutical changes that informed the ritual manuals of the eighth through thirteenth centuries. But an understanding of these solutions requires an acquaintance with the raw materials and basic techniques of exegetical hermeneutics.

CANONICAL WEDDINGS: FRAGMENTS AND HERMENEUTICS

Of all canonical texts, the second chapter of *Ceremonies and Rites*, “Wedding Rites of an Ordinary Officer” (*Shi hunli*), contains the most comprehensive wedding sequence. From this chapter, authors of ritual manuals in the Tang and Song dynasties derived the basic ritual narrative for wedding ceremonies.

The sequence (see fig. 1.1) opens with a series of rituals commonly designated the Six Rites (*liu li*): Submission of the Choice (*na cai*), Asking the Name (*wen ming*), Submission of the Auspicious Result (*na ji*), Submission of the Betrothal Gifts (*na zheng*), Requesting the Date (*qing qi*), and Fetching the Bride (*qin ying*). In the first five ceremonies of this series, a representative of the groom’s family (the guest) communicates his family’s intentions to a representative of the bride’s family

FIGURE 1.1. Schema of Wedding Ritual according to *Ceremonies and Rites*.

Submission of the Choice (*na cai*)

Host arranges the messenger's seat outside the gate
| Guest arrives, communicates through host's assistant
| | Host meets guest at the gate; they enter and ascend
| | | Guest conveys message and goose; host bows
| | Guest descends and exits; host descends
| [Guest communicates through host's assistant]

Asking the Name (*wen ming*)

Guest communicates through host's assistant
| Host meets guest at the gate; they enter and ascend
| | Guest conveys request and goose; host bows
| | Guest descends and exits; host descends
| Guest announces the end of the rite through assistant
Host rewards the messenger with a meal

Submission of the Auspicious Result (*na ji*): same as Submission of the Choice.

Submission of the Betrothal Gifts (*na zheng*): same as previous, but with gifts of cloth and deerskins instead of a goose.

Requesting the Date (*qing qi*): same as Submission of the Choice.

Fetching the Bride (*qin ying*)

Arrangements at the groom's chamber
| Departure of groom and followers
| | Groom arrives at the bride's gate
| | | Bride, duenna, and followers assume their places
| | | | Host meets groom at the gate; they bow, enter, ascend
| | | | | Groom presents goose and bows
| | | | Groom descends and exits
| | | Bride descends
| | Groom, bride, duenna, and followers depart
| Groom, bride, duenna, and followers arrive at groom's gate
| Groom and bride enter the groom's chamber
| | Groom and bride wash, sacrifice, eat, drink, bow
| Groom leaves the chamber; bride remains
| | Groom and bride disrobe, followers spread mats, pillows
| | | Groom re-enters, loosens bride's tassel
| | Followers leave the chamber with the candles
| Followers consume the leftovers of the nuptial meal

Bride Meets Her Parents-in-Law (*fu jian jiugu*)

Parents-in-Law Receive the Bride (*jiugu xiang fu*)

Bride Visits the Ancestral Temple (*miao jian*)

(the host) and conveys their gifts. This ritualized dialogue and exchange of objects take place at the center of symmetrical space (the center of the platform of the host's family temple) and symmetrical time. The choreography of bodies through ritual space and time in fact creates this center: the guest enters and exits, announces the beginning and the end of the ritual, ascends and descends. Even the acts that prepare and dismantle the ritual site (and that therefore, strictly speaking, lie outside ritual time and space), become implicated in this symmetrical structure: the host arranges a seat for the guest outside the gate prior to the guest's arrival, and after the guest has announced the end of the ceremony, the host invites the guest for a meal. (During this meal, the guest no longer represents the groom's family but only the messenger in the capacity of messenger; thus, in this separate ceremony the guest replicates the host's bows as he does not in the central ceremony.)

Fetching the Bride employs the same ritual grammar of spatial and temporal symmetry in a longer, more complex choreography of bodies and clothing, vessels and foods. On the evening of the wedding, the groom's family prepares for the arrival of the bride, arranging foods, vessels, and other objects inside and outside the groom's chamber. The host of the groom's family sends off the groom, who subsequently assumes the role of host, setting out at dusk with carriages and followers to fetch the bride. When the groom arrives at the bride's gate, the ritual role of host passes to the bride's father, who instructs the bride before welcoming the groom. The groom presents a goose at the temple and bows toward the north. When he descends the steps, the bride follows him, accompanied by her *duenna* and followers, to be led to her carriage. At his compound, the groom (at certain points helped by ritual assistants) leads the bride through the gate, into his chamber, and through a ritual washing, and then through sacrifices, libations, and a ritualized meal (Sharing the Meal [*tong lao*] and Sharing the Nuptial Cup [*he jin*]). After the meal, the groom leaves the chamber. The bride's followers receive the groom's clothes and spread his mat while the groom's followers do the same for the bride. After the groom has re-entered the chamber and loosened the bride's tassel, the followers leave the chamber to finish the leftovers of the nuptial meal, taking the candles with them.

The next day, the bride engages in a series of ritual exchanges of food and drink with the groom's parents (The Bride Meets the Parents-in-Law [*fu jian jiugu*], The Bride Feeds Her Parents-in-Law [*fu jun jiugu*], and The Parents-in-Law Treat the Bride [*jiugu xiang fu*]). The

groom's parents then reward the followers with a meal and gifts. In the third month after the wedding, the bride visits the groom's ancestral temple for the first time (*miao jian*).

The wedding sequence as a whole consists of a series of interlocking symmetries rather than one overarching symmetrical structure. The separation of the bride from her natal family (begun three months before the wedding with her instruction in the family temple) and her integration into the groom's family (starting with the groom and the groom's parents, and completed with her visit to the groom's ancestral temple) suggest an overarching, symmetrical structure that places the night of the nuptial meal at the exact temporal center. Yet within that structure exist symmetrical entities that do not center on the wedding night but rather on acts that are peripheral to other symmetrical structures. Every preparatory act finds its completion, and every core is embedded in peripheral acts, both in complete ceremonies and in ritual details. The wedding sequence as a whole, however, combines circular and linear time in a complex texture that defies simple analysis and univocal interpretation (see, for example, Fetching the Bride in fig. 1.1).

The exposition of the basic ritual choreography in "Wedding Rites of an Ordinary Officer" is followed by a section of notes (*ji*). Some of these notes supply ritual details for the wedding sequence, including the precise words of all formalized dialogues. But the notes also provide general injunctions about timing (all ceremonies should take place at dawn or dusk), space (all ceremonies should take place in the temple), words (all words should be beautiful, not offensive), and food (all foods should be fresh and whole).

The exegetical hermeneutics of Tang and Song scholars assumed not only that the notes to "Wedding Rites of an Ordinary Officer" should be integrated into the basic sequence, but that injunctions and details from other scriptures supplemented the wedding sequence of *Ceremonies and Rites*. Tang and Song exegetes held that all canonical texts preserved traces of antiquity, and the cosmic unity of that legendary time implicated its textual traces which, even when corrupted and incomplete, partook of a similar coherence.

This hermeneutics provided Tang and Song scholars with a miscellaneous array of ritual details and interpretative statements concerning ancient wedding ritual. *Rites of Zhou (Zhouli)* lists the office of matchmaker and explains that the matchmaker collected the birth records of all boys and girls in the realm so that they might be timely and properly

married—men at the age of thirty and women at the age of twenty.¹⁴ The *Guliang Commentary* (*Guliang zhuan*) and the *Record of Ritual* mention the same ages for male and female marriage, and “Cutting an Axe-Handle,” in the *Book of Songs* (*Shijing*), emphasizes the indispensability of a matchmaker in the conclusion of a marriage.¹⁵

How does one cut an axe-handle?
 Without an axe it is impossible.
 How does one take a wife?
 Without a matchmaker she cannot be got.¹⁶

References to matches and wedding ceremonies during the late Zhou occur throughout the historical records of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu*), with opinions by the early commentators about the appropriateness of these various undertakings.¹⁷

Longer passages on wedding ritual appear in several chapters of the *Record of Ritual*. “Summary of Ritual Details” (*Quli*) explains that wedding ritual establishes proper differentiation between male and female through the matchmaker and betrothal gifts, through announcements to authorities, spirits, and the local community, and through exogamy.¹⁸ In “Master Zeng Asked” (*Zengzi wen*), Kongzi (“Confucius”) and Zengzi discuss several aspects of weddings: a three-day candlelight vigil at the groom’s house and a three-day prohibition of music at the bride’s house; the first sacrifice by the bride in the third month of marriage; and the contingencies caused by deaths in the families of the groom or the bride, or by the death of the groom or the bride themselves between Submission of the Choice and the bride’s first visit to the groom’s ancestral temple.¹⁹ A long passage on cappings and weddings in the chapter “Sacrificing a Single Beast at the Ramparts” (*Jiao tesheng*) places weddings in a context of cosmic reproduction and proceeds to discuss the meaning of different stages in the wedding sequence: the betrothal gift as an expression of trust and fidelity, the precedence of male over female, and the cultural and cosmic significance of a balance between intimacy (of the groom and the bride) and differentiation (of male and female), and between equality and inequality. It also decrees that there be no music or congratulations at weddings.²⁰ The chapter “Miscellaneous Records” (*Zaji*) includes notes on the combination of cappings and weddings with various stages of mourning,²¹ on the bundle of cloth presented as a betrothal gift, on the introduction of the bride to the groom’s relatives after meeting the

parents-in-law, and on the incomplete pinning that marks the adulthood of unmarried daughters at the age of twenty.²² “Fundamentals of Sacrifice” (*Jitong*) argues that through wedding ritual one recruits outside assistance for one’s sacrifices,²³ and according to “Explanation of the Canon” (*Jingjie*) weddings prevent debauchery by enforcing differentiation between males and females.²⁴ In “Duke Ai Asked” (*Ai gong wen*), Duke Ai and Kongzi debate the appropriateness of the sacrificial garb donned by the king at Fetching the Bride. Kongzi argues that the solemnity of the occasion, the ensurance of continuity in royal sacrifice, justifies the sacrificial robes.²⁵ In “Notes on Barriers” (*Fangji*), Kongzi voices his despair over the occurrence of elopements in times when proper wedding ritual still enforced differentiation, over transgressions of the clear prohibitions against same-surname marriage during the Zhou dynasty, and over the occasional disappearances of brides despite the practice of Fetching the Bride.²⁶

Song scholars read “The Meaning of Weddings” (*Hunyi*), a systematic exposition that constitutes one of the last chapters of the *Record of Ritual*, as an early Han commentary on “Wedding Rites of an Ordinary Officer” in *Ceremonies and Rites*. The chapter explains that wedding ritual forges a bond between two families and ensures patrilineal continuity in ancestral sacrifice. The simultaneous production of the legitimate sexual bodies of male and female (through differentiation) and of the ritual bodies of husband and wife (through intimacy) makes weddings the root of all ritual. “The Meaning of Weddings” also explains the symbolism of individual acts and ceremonies, with especial emphasis on obedience (*shun*) as the principal virtue of the bride. The chapter ends with a discussion of the segregated living space and cosmic duties of the queen and the various levels of imperial consorts on one hand, and the king and his palace officials on the other hand.

Although scholars in the Tang and the Song shared important hermeneutical assumptions, their interpretations of individual passages could differ significantly. According to some, the goose presented in ancient wedding ceremonies symbolized the bride who followed the groom as the goose follows the sun (the groom and the sun both being yang), while according to others the goose symbolized marital fidelity (since geese mate for life). Yet others argued that the goose corresponded to the rank of Ordinary Officer and that other ranks offered different kinds of fowl. Some held that in antiquity males and females had married at the exact ages of thirty and twenty (and opinions differed further about the specific cosmological and biological reasons for

this practice), while others deemed that the ages of thirty and twenty had been the upper limits of timely marriage.

Inconsistencies in the diverse canon further complicated these debates. The matchmaker mentioned in *Rites of Zhou* and the *Book of Songs*, for example, does not appear in the detailed wedding sequence of *Ceremonies and Rites*. And according to the *Record of Ritual*, The Bride Feeds Her Parents-in-Law should be held on the day after The Bride Meets the Parents-in-Law, but *Ceremonies and Rites* does not specify this. Scholars also disagreed about the place of weddings in larger ritual structures. Some took pinning to be the female, inner equivalent of public male capping, while others argued that capping and pinning were asymmetrical because girls did not achieve full adulthood until marriage. And some proposed that weddings should precede cappings in the ritual cycle, as some canonical passages indicate.

The hermeneutical assumptions of Middle-Period scholars not only suggested particular approaches to the concrete detail of the transmitted texts, but construed particular silences and lacunae, a particular incompleteness. The hermeneutical assumptions about the texts that had survived suggested what had been lost, creating complementary text as real and as legitimate to the exegete as the extant corpus. The legitimacy of the canon (the very notion of a canon, in fact) depended on the assumption of its historical coherence: its compilation in the latter days of the Zhou as an effort to preserve the embodied knowledge of the ancients, and its final redaction by Kongzi, the last sage. Under this assumption of completeness, silence could acquire the status of text, as in Lu Dian's (1070 *jinshi*) hermeneutical argument, "The reason that the text does not say that one can take a wife before the end of the third-degree mourning period [i.e., nine months], is that one cannot take a wife before the end of the third-degree mourning period."²⁷

Drawing on this exegetical hermeneutics, Tang and Song authors of ritual manuals construed comprehensive wedding ceremonies. The wedding rituals in these manuals combine concrete detail from canonical texts with exegetical inferences. The supplementation of the wedding sequence in *Ceremonies and Rites* with passages from other canonical texts, hermeneutical extrapolations, and interpretative contemporary substitutions of arcane details, allowed the reinscription of ancient ritual for reincorporation in the present. Realized in ritual performance, the exegetical text dissolves as time and space, past and present, vessels and bodies merge in a timeless cosmic pattern.

rites of the Kaiyuan Period:
THE MERGING OF CANON AND PRECEDENT

Although the demise of earlier ritual codes prohibits verification of later assertions about their contents, Tang and Song scholars alleged that *Rites of the Kaiyuan Period* inaugurated a new approach to ritual protocol. More than four centuries after the promulgation of *Rites of the Kaiyuan Period*, the Southern Song statesman Zhou Bida (1126–1204) wrote:

No period since the Three Dynasties had debated order as abundantly as did the Tang. Many of its views on ritual therefore deserve attention. . . . When the Kaiyuan Emperor [Xuanzong] reigned the land and guarded the well-being of his subjects, Academician Zhang Yue memorialized that the ritual codes were marred by contradictions. It would appear that he had devised ways of resolving this matter. The emperor then ordered Xu Jian, Li Rui, and Shi Jingben to make emendations. They were succeeded by Xiao Song, Wang Zhongqiu, and others, and only after several years was the code finished. It received the title *Rites of the Kaiyuan Period of the Great Tang*. The auspicious rites, inauspicious rites, military rites, guest rites, and joyful rites were then complete. . . . Only the Kaiyuan Emperor, reigning with an order both powerful and subtle, possessed a will to expansive peace that enabled him to select the scholars and ministers for the correction of ponderous codes. And only because Xu Jian and his peers in their erudite debates and in their pursuit of a unifying thread embodied the intentions of the emperor were they able to complete the work without petty disagreements. Whenever thereafter doubts arose at court, the matter could be settled by reference to this work, without assembling scholars for a debate. . . . The reader feels as though provided with a map that suddenly enables him to establish the compass points.²⁸

When completed in 732, *Rites of the Kaiyuan Period* comprised 152 ceremonies, in 150 fascicles, divided into six sections of unequal length: a section of general ritual precedent (*xuli*, fascicles 1–3, treating general matters of divination, arrangement of ancestral tablets, vessels, carriages, clothing, and prayer); auspicious rites (*jili*, fascicles 4–78, treat-

ing sacrifices and prayers); guest rites (*binli*, fascicles 79–80, treating the reception of foreign embassies); military rites (*junli*, fascicles 81–90, treating rites of war, hunting, and archery); joyful rites (*jiali*, fascicles 91–130, treating cappings, weddings, New Year's ceremonies, ceremonies at the Luminous Hall, and investitures); and inauspicious rites (*xiongli*, fascicles 131–150, treating rites for bad harvests and mourning).²⁹

The permutation of the order of the Five Rituals points to the tension between canon and precedent in *Rites of the Kaiyuan Period*. In placing the inauspicious rites last, the compilers followed the precedent of the Zhenguan and Xianqing codes rather than *Rites of Zhou* or the *Book of Documents (Shangshu)*, where the inauspicious rites follow immediately upon the auspicious rites.³⁰ In relegating the rites of death to the final fascicles of the code, the compilers not only exercised exegetical prerogative, but they placed the auspicious symbolism of the imperial court above canonical integrity. Although the text does not explain the motivations for the rearrangement of the Five Rituals, the omission of ceremonies for the mourning and burial of the emperor suggests that the decision was informed by a reluctance to write of imperial death.³¹ *Rites of the Kaiyuan Period* restored ancient ritual to the present, but the code also represented in writing the established hierarchies of bodies and space of the Tang empire. The omission of imperial burial (and of the rites of accession to the throne) excluded suggestions of discontinuity and death from this written representation of the empire.

In the structure of the individual sections and in the choreography of the individual ceremonies, the tension between canon and precedent is negotiated through the relationship between imperial rank and canonical detail. Rank supersedes the canonical sequence of ceremonies as an organizing principle in the arrangement of the individual sections. The section of joyful rites, for example, treats the emperor's capping, wedding, New Year's rites, rites at the Luminous Hall, and investment ceremonies before proceeding to the joyful rites of the heir apparent, princes, princesses, and ranked officials.

In individual ceremonies, canon and precedent often merge in hermeneutical extrapolation. Through the fragmented canon, Tang scholars discerned a ritualized society intricately divided by rank, but the obliteration of ancient protocol precluded full knowledge of the ritual enactment of this hierarchy. In their construction of individual ceremonies, the compilers of *Rites of the Kaiyuan Period* therefore extrapolated ranked difference from indications within the canon, but

they also relied on the expressions of rank that obtained in their own time. Through this hermeneutics of canon and precedent, *Rites of the Kaiyuan Period* merges written bodies and spaces of antiquity with the living present.

In their reconstruction of ancient imperial and royal wedding ritual, the compilers of *Rites of the Kaiyuan Period* extrapolated in the main from “Wedding Rites of an Ordinary Officer.” They identified the ordinary officer of antiquity with contemporary officials of ranks six through nine, so that the wedding ritual for this group bears the closest resemblance to the wedding sequence in *Ceremonies and Rites*. The wedding rituals for officials of different ranks (1–3, 4–5, 6–9) are distinguished by clothing, by the make of mats and carriages, by the amount and type of gifts exchanged, by the number of vessels used, and by the kinds of food served. With the increase of rank—from officials to princesses and princes, the heir apparent, and the emperor—increase the number of ceremonies and ritual actors, the refinement of clothes and ritual implements, and the costliness of gifts. The increase in rank also involves a growing divide between the family of the groom and the family of the bride. Adjustments in the ritual choreographies of the host and the guest, and the groom and the bride, lend form to that disparity.

The ritual schema of the emperor’s wedding (fig. 1.2) reveals the extent of hermeneutical extrapolation in the wedding ceremonies of *Rites of the Kaiyuan Period*. Exegetical hermeneutics combines with imperial precedent to expand the canonical sequence with additional ceremonies and to adjust its choreography, fitting it to the ritualized and gendered spaces of the Tang imperial palace. The hierarchical arrangement of imperial insignia, ranked officials, and foreign embassies in the ceremony for the Imperial Appointment of Messengers represents the empire and creates an empty center in time and space that only the emperor can fill. In Submission of the Choice and subsequent ceremonies, the main messenger faces south at the center of the host’s temple and reads aloud an imperial edict, rather than engaging with the host in a ritual dialogue. The edict, written in the imperial hand, represents the overflowing presence of the emperor that cannot be contained even by the ritual bodies of his sundry messengers. In Fetching the Bride, too, an edict represents the emperor, because the emperor will not venture from the palace to assume the role of a guest.³²

When compared with imperial wedding ceremonies, the wedding rituals for ranked officials reveal a similar conjunction of exegesis and

FIGURE 1.2. Schema of Imperial Weddings according to *Rites of the Kaiyuan Period*.

Divination of the date: accords with regular protocol.

Announcement at the Altar of Heaven: same as imperial capping.

Announcement at the Altar of the Earth: same as previous.

Imperial Appointment of Messengers:

Arrangement of the throne, seats, music, ranked sections
| Dancers, musicians, and ritual assistants enter
| Imperial insignia and officials enter
| Preparation of the central ritual site
| Emperor enters (from the west)
| Announcement of the messengers by edict
| Emperor exits (to the east)
| Messengers exit by carriage, with edict, etc.
| Officials and imperial insignia exit by rank
| [Dancers, musicians, and ritual assistants exit]
[Removal of seats, music, ranked sections, throne]

Submission of the Choice

Asking the Name

Submission of the Auspicious Result

Submission of the Betrothal Gift

Announcement of the Date

Announcement at the Temple

Investment of the Empress

Ordering the Messenger to Fetch the Bride

Sharing the Meal

Empress's Memorial of Gratitude

Empress's Audience at the Empress Dowager

Empress Receives Congratulations from the Ministers

Empress Receives the Ministers

Empress Receives Outer Noblewomen

Final Ritual for the Ministers

Empress Visits the Temple

precedent. The matchmaker of *Rites of Zhou* and the *Book of Songs* becomes a go-between, conveying the documents one finds in Tang manuals of letters and ceremonies: "In wedding ritual, first send a matchmaker and wedding letters. Initiate Submission of the Choice only after the family of the bride has given consent."³³ The extrapolation of the gifts and other forms of material display in the weddings of ranked officials coincides with concerns expressed in the sumptuary laws of the Tang empire.³⁴ Between the bride's first meeting with her parents-in-law and the departure of the followers, *Rites of the Kaiyuan Period* inserts a reception of the family of the bride by the family of the groom that lacks a basis in the canon but that mimics the language and choreography of canonical ritual.

The wedding ceremonies in *Rites of the Kaiyuan Period* are thus in the first place a matter of textual practice: an exercise in exegesis, a careful fusion of canon and precedent, that produces hermetic choreographies of written spaces and written bodies. In the detailed ritual scripts, text and performance coincide and become interchangeable: the text becomes the performance, the reader becomes the performer, and the written spaces and bodies acquire a ritual efficacy of their own. The fascicles dedicated to the weddings of ranked officials, for example, confine their differences entirely to the small print of double-column notes, leaving the main text of these three fascicles identical. Later redactions of *Rites of the Kaiyuan Period*, such as the thirty-five-fascicle condensation in *Comprehensive Records (Tongdian)* by Du You (735–812), excise all such repetition by means of fused commentaries and cross-references.³⁵ But in *Rites of the Kaiyuan Period*, the coincidence of text and performance, of reader and performer, of the written page and ritual space, forbids such abridgments, as they would create lacunae in the continuous choreography of the text.³⁶

Tang and Song scholars praised *Rites of the Kaiyuan Period*, not as a return to the ritualized society of antiquity, but as an endeavor of exegesis. Zhou Bida commends it as a work of reference and compares it to a map that orients its reader in three-dimensional space.³⁷ According to David McMullen, *Rites of the Kaiyuan Period* as a text possessed a prestige that extended beyond its ceremonies and scholarship to encompass the virtue of its times:

The continued high standing of the code, however, did not mean that the full range of its directives was in any sense mandatory in the imperial ritual programme. . . . The public

deference of scholars towards the Kaiyuan code in the post-rebellion period [i.e., after 755] is thus to be understood largely as a public expression of reverence and nostalgia for the politically prosperous, stable and expansionist era in which it had been produced.³⁸

MANUALS OF LETTERS AND CEREMONIES:
THE HERMENEUTICS OF PRACTICE AND
THE PRESERVATION OF RITUAL

Ritual manuals produced outside the Tang imperial court propose a merging of canon and precedent similar to that of *Rites of the Kaiyuan Period*. These manuals of letters and ceremonies, dating from the seventh through the tenth century, rewrite contemporary practice to configure it with canonical ritual.³⁹ Published under an array of similar titles and ascribed to a small number of prestigious authors, these manuals vie to establish claims to authoritative reworkings of contemporary practice. Titles and prefaces emphasize comprehensiveness, currency, and scholarly pedigree. The preface to *Newly Established Letters and Ceremonies of the Great Tang for Auspicious and Inauspicious Occasions* (*Da Tang xinding jixiong shuyi*), ascribed to Zheng Yuqing (746–820), sets forth the discursive context of manuals of letters and ceremonies, while according a privileged place to itself:

“When ritual obtains among men, peace reigns. But when ritual is wanting, danger looms.”⁴⁰ Such is the understanding of ceremonies and ritual among those of discriminating intelligence. Therefore great families accord grave respect to ritual at auspicious and inauspicious occasions.⁴¹ Yet the expansive, detailed complexity of canonical ritual encumbers convenient reference. The worthy men who compiled and extracted letter formats and ceremonies for auspicious and inauspicious occasions, in order to preserve ritual still in use, certainly rendered an obliging service. Yet although some dozen authors wrote such manuals, only Metropolitan Governor Mr. Du [Youjin] compared the ceremonies and rites compiled by all various authors, and it has now been in use for seventy-six years.⁴² . . . Therefore I have made selections from the array of ceremonies and compared them with the scriptures. From the wealth of

writing samples I first selected those that represent the essence of our time, and then I chose the most admirable among them.

With Li Cao, Aide to the Court of the Imperial Stud; Pei Chai, Director of the Bureau of Merit Titles; Li Ying, former Commandant of Qu Yao; Lu Zhi [754–805], Vice Director of the Secretariat and Jointly Manager of Affairs with the Secretariat-Chancellery; Yang Huan, Attendant Censor; Han Yu, Vice Director of the Transit Authorization Bureau; and others, I discussed the practices of our time and the redaction of ceremonies and rites for auspicious and inauspicious occasions. Then, with anguish, I attacked those ignorant customs from close range, since that is the heart of the matter. . . .⁴³

This preface claims to supersede earlier manuals of letters and ceremonies not because it applies new or superior standards, but because it is recent and comprehensive. It explicitly shares with earlier manuals a concern with preserving ritual from the encroachment of “ignorant customs.” The continuous change in practice, however, necessitates periodic measuring of current ceremonies against the ritual scriptures and the compilation of new manuals that aid the great families in their discrimination between canonical practice and vulgar custom. The exegetical hermeneutics of *Newly Established Letters and Ceremonies* assumes that ritual inheres in changing practice. A dialectical investigation of living practice and scripture allows the perspicacious scholar to discern ritual from custom, and to rewrite current practice to conform to the enduring standard of canonical ritual. Contemporary practice thus becomes a text, isolated from its practical associations, to be disassembled and rearranged in a textual environment.⁴⁴

The treatment of weddings in the manuals of letters and ceremonies merges canonical exegesis with contemporary practice. The untitled Dunhuang fragment S1725, for example, addresses well-established exegetical matters such as the meaning of the goose, the timing of the various wedding ceremonies, and the proper sequence for Fetching the Bride, but it also discusses, in the same section and in the same language, practices not found in canonical texts, such as the distinction between a “wife’s letter” and a “wife’s provisory note,” the proper presentation of a goat or rice, and posthumous marriage:⁴⁵

Question: What is a “wife’s provisory note”? Answer: If the wife has met her husband’s party, it is called a “letter,” but if