

BRONZE INSCRIPTIONS, THE *SHIJING* AND THE *SHANGSHU*:
THE EVOLUTION OF THE ANCESTRAL SACRIFICE DURING
THE WESTERN ZHOU

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Sources and issues

As far back as historical memory reaches, one of the central tenets of ancient Chinese religious practice and political culture was its veneration of the past. By the time of the late Shang (ca. 1250–ca. 1045 BC)—the era of the earliest epigraphic evidence—the ancestral sacrifice was, together with divination, the pre-eminent religious institution of the elite. Already in late Shang times, an abundance of royal oracle bone records along with a relatively small number of inscribed bronze vessels express an ideology of preserving, revering and imitating a former genealogical model that underlay the very notions of kingship, lineage and royal succession. Moreover, the ideas and practices of ancestor worship likely evolved through even earlier periods; their roots may ultimately be traced, as David N. Keightley has argued, to the burial practices from the 5th millennium BC onward.¹ By the end of the late Shang, the genealogical records extended back for twenty-one generations of ancestors who could receive regular sacrifices.²

This deeply felt presence of the past and orientation toward the former kings further intensified under the subsequent Western Zhou dynasty (ca. 1045–771 BC), a period for which our sources are far more diverse

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¹ Keightley, "The making of the ancestors: late Shang religion and its legacy," in *Religion and Chinese society* (Hong Kong, 2004), vol. 1, p. 5; see also his *The ancestral landscape: time, space, and community in late Shang China, ca. 1200–1045 B.C.* (Berkeley, 2000).

² Keightley, "The making of the ancestors," p. 40.

and richer in content. They consist of two principal sets of texts, one transmitted and the other archaeologically recovered: the transmitted texts are a series of ritual hymns preserved in the *Book of songs* (*Shijing* 詩經) as well as about a dozen royal speeches preserved in the *Book of documents* (*Shujing* 書經, or *Shangshu* 尚書), and, to a lesser extent, in the *Remnant Zhou documents* (*Yi Zhoushu* 逸周書). In addition to these, the archaeological work of the past century has recovered thousands of bronze artifacts, many of them inscribed, whose primary use, generally speaking, was in the ancestral sacrifice. Most inscriptions are short, though a number of Western Zhou inscriptions provide long accounts of the past that describe the merits of both the ancestors and their descendants, the patrons of the inscribed bronzes.

From the earliest commentaries onward, the hymns of the *Book of songs* have been identified as texts related to the (purportedly Western) royal Zhou ancestral sacrifice. At the core of this body of texts are the 31 "Eulogies of Zhou" (Zhou song 周頌) that are traditionally believed to have been performed during the early Western Zhou sacrifices. In addition, a number of other songs from the "Major" and "Minor court hymns" (Daya 大雅 and Xiaoya 小雅) as well as from the "Eulogies of Shang" (Shang song 商頌) and "Eulogies of Lu" (Lu song 魯頌) come not directly out of the ancestral ritual but nevertheless contain more or less detailed accounts of it. These poetic texts are at the center of all later knowledge about the Western Zhou ancestral ritual, be it in the format of direct commentary on the songs or in the accounts of the "three ritual classics" (*san li* 三禮)—the *Rites and ceremonies* (*Yili* 儀禮), the *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhouli* 周禮) and the *Book of rites* (*Liji* 禮記)—that were composed hundreds of years after the fall of the Western Zhou.³ As these classical texts partly rely on the earlier songs and partly introduce knowledge that seems to reflect only post-Western Zhou developments

³ The primacy of the poetic texts vis-à-vis the ritual classics has been noted in particular with respect to the song "Thorny caltrop" (Chuci 楚茨, Mao 209) that provides the most complete description of an ancestral sacrifice (see below). Qing scholars such as Yao Jiheng 姚際恆 (b. 1647) and Fang Yurun 方玉潤 (1811–1883) have argued that specifically the *Yili* draws most closely on the information given in the song; see Yao Jiheng, *Shijing tonglun* (Beijing, 1958), 11.231; Fang Yurun, *Shijing yuanshi* (Beijing, 1986), 11.431. More recently, Lothar von Falkenhausen has elaborated further on the issue: see his "Reflections on the political role of spirit mediums in early China: the *wu* officials in the *Zhou Li*," *Early China* 20 (1995), p. 297; "Issues in Western Zhou studies: a review article," *Early China* 18 (1993), 148–50; and *Suspended music: chime-bells in the culture of Bronze Age China* (Berkeley, 1993), pp. 25–32. On the "Three rites," see the chapter in Volume Two by Michael Puett.

of the ancestral sacrifice, they are neither independent nor reliable sources to explain and elaborate upon the brief accounts contained in the hymns proper.⁴ With regard to the Western Zhou ancestral sacrifice, the three ritual classics are therefore best understood as our earliest commentary on the primary accounts found in the early layers of the *Songs and Documents*—a commentary that reflects not only ancient knowledge but, and perhaps primarily, an idealizing and systematizing Eastern Zhou imagination of the early Western Zhou as the fountainhead of classical Chinese religion, social order and cultural accomplishment. This imagination is decidedly diachronic, fusing genuine historical knowledge of the Western Zhou with subsequent developments of religious practice and cultural projection.

At the same time, as will be argued in more detail below, even the presumably earliest hymns and speeches from the *Songs* and the *Documents* may, to a considerable extent, be idealizing artifacts in their own way. On the one hand, their radically abbreviated descriptions of religious practice are completely integrated into an early ideal of commemoration that is as much political as it is religious. On the other hand, even the earliest texts reflect linguistic and intellectual developments that, when compared to the data available from bronze inscriptions, postdate the early Western Zhou reigns. Thus, these texts were either partially updated or wholly created not by the sage rulers of the early Western Zhou but by their distant, late-Western or early Eastern Zhou descendants who commemorated them. In the case of the *Documents*, this is true not only for those speeches that have long been recognized as postdating the Western Zhou—for example, King Wu's 武 (1049/45–1043 BC)⁵ "Exhortation at Mu" (Mu shi 牧誓), purportedly delivered at dawn before the decisive battle against the Shang, but clearly a post-Western Zhou text—but also for the 12 speeches that have been generally accepted as the core *Documents* chapters from the reign of King Cheng (1042/35–1006 BC), including the regency

⁴ Unfortunately, all standard accounts of the Western Zhou ancestral sacrifice can be faulted for ignoring this problem in dealing with the sources. For example, Henri Maspero, *China in antiquity*, trans. Frank A. Kierman, Jr. (Amherst, 1978), notes that his reconstruction of Zhou ancestral sacrifices (pp. 150–54) is based on "Thorny caltrop" and "fleshed out with the aid of various chapters" (428–29, n. 46) from the three ritual canons.

⁵ All dates of Western Zhou kings are taken from Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Sources of Western Zhou history: inscribed bronze vessels* (Berkeley, 1991), p. xix.

of the Duke of Zhou 周公 (1042–1036 BC).⁶ In other words, all our transmitted sources that speak about the early Western Zhou are likely later idealizations that arose in times of dynastic decline and from a pronounced sense of loss and deficiency: first in the middle and later stages of the Western Zhou, that is, after King Zhao's 昭 (r. 977/75–957 BC) disastrous campaign south;⁷ and second in the time of Confucius (551–479 BC) and the following half millennium of the Warring States and the early imperial period.

Furthermore, the royal hymns and speeches have come to us through multiple layers of textual redaction that extended over many centuries into Han times (206 BC–220 AD) and beyond.⁸ In general, the case of the speeches is more problematic than that of the hymns. While the *Songs* were largely stable in their archaic wording since at least the late 4th century BC, regardless of their high degree of graphic variants in early manuscripts and profound differences in interpretation,⁹ the text

⁶ See below for the 12 speeches. The argument for the authenticity of these speeches is outlined in Herlee G. Creel, *The origins of statecraft in China*, vol. 1, *The Western Chou empire* (Chicago, 1970), pp. 447–63, and re-iterated in Shaughnessy, “*Shang shu* 尚書 (*Shu ching* 書經),” in *Early Chinese texts*, ed. Michael Loewe (Berkeley, 1993), p. 379. However, Kai Vogelsang, “Inscriptions and proclamations: on the authenticity of the ‘gao’ chapters in the *Book of documents*,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 74 (2002), pp. 138–209, has raised serious doubts about Creel's conclusions; instead, his sophisticated and detailed study (and recent works by others cited there, including by He Dingsheng 何定生 and Vassilij M. Kryukov) suggests a late Western Zhou or early Chunqiu date for the early layers of both the *Songs* and the *Documents*. A similar argument is advanced in Kern, “The performance of writing in Western Zhou China,” in *The poetics of grammar and the metaphysics of sound and sign*, eds Sergio La Porta and David Shulman (Leiden, 2007), pp. 109–76.

⁷ Shaughnessy, “Western Zhou history,” in *The Cambridge history of ancient China: from the origins of civilization to 221 B.C.*, eds Michael Loewe and Edward L. Shaughnessy (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 322–23; Li Feng, *Landscape and power in early China: the crisis and fall of the Western Zhou, 1045–771 BC* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 93–95.

⁸ William H. Baxter has called the *Songs* “a Zhou text in Han clothing, both its script and, to some extent, its text have been influenced by post-*Shijing* phonology”; see Baxter, “Zhou and Han phonology in the *Shijing*,” in *Studies in the historical phonology of Asian languages*, eds William G. Boltz and Michael C. Shapiro (Amsterdam, 1991), p. 30. See also Baxter, *A handbook of Old Chinese phonology* (Berlin, 1992), pp. 343–66. In fact, there is some indication that the orthographic standardization of the *Songs* continued much beyond the Han.

⁹ A series of recently excavated manuscripts with *Songs* quotations suggests an overall phonological stability between the text from at least the late 4th century BC onward and the received *Mao Songs* 毛詩 that we have in Zheng Xuan's (127–200) *Mao Shi Zhengjian* 毛詩鄭箋. Because of the basic monosyllabic nature of the classical Chinese language and its large numbers of homophones, this is not to say that those who in the early period occasionally wrote down parts of the *Songs* necessarily agreed in every case on the word behind the many different graphs that could be used to write it; see Baxter,

of the *Documents* was still much in flux far into Han times.¹⁰ However, despite these editorial interventions, the early layers of the received *Songs* and *Documents* display an archaic diction in lexical choices and ideology that in general fits well with the epigraphic evidence from late (but not early) Western Zhou and early Springs and Autumns (*Chunqiu* 春秋) period (722–486 BC) bronze inscriptions.¹¹

Distinct and independent from the transmitted texts of the *Songs* and the *Documents*, the by now very large number of excavated Western Zhou bronze inscriptions are available to us in their original shape. The reference work *Jinwen yinde* 金文引得¹² lists 5,758 distinct inscriptions, cast in altogether 9,916 bronze artifacts, for the late Shang and Western Zhou periods, with the vast majority apparently cast at the Zhou royal court. Since the publication of *Jinwen yinde* in 2001, numerous new finds, some of them spectacular, have been added to

A handbook of Old Chinese phonology, pp. 358–60; Kern, “Methodological reflections on the analysis of textual variants and the modes of manuscript production in early China,” *Journal of East Asian Archaeology* 4.1–4 (2002), 143–81; and Kern, “The *Odes* in excavated manuscripts,” in *Text and ritual in early China*, ed. Martin Kern (Seattle, 2005), pp. 149–93. Thus, the *Mao* commentary, through its particular graphic choices and the glosses it attached to them, may indeed have changed the earlier meaning of the text; see Kern, “Excavated manuscripts and their Socratic pleasures: newly discovered challenges in reading the ‘Airs of the States,’” *Études Asiatiques/Asiatische Studien* 61.3 (2007), 775–93. However, textual ambiguity was a far more serious problem with the “Airs of the States” (Guofeng 國風) section of the *Songs* than with the ritual hymns related to the ancestral sacrifice.

¹⁰ On the case of *Documents* quotations across a range of received early texts, see Chen Mengjia, *Shangshu tonglun* (Beijing, 1985), pp. 11–35; Liu Qiyu, *Shangshu yuanliu ji chuanben kao* (Shenyang, 1997), pp. 4–24; Qu Wanli, *Shangshu yiyen huilu* (Taipei, 1983); Chen Hung Kan and Ho Che Wah, *Xian Qin Liang Han dianji yin* ‘*Shangshu*’ *ziliao huibian* (Hong Kong, 2003); also Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and authority in early China* (Albany, 1999), pp. 106–07 (with further references), and David Schaberg, *A patterned past: form and thought in early Chinese historiography* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 72–80. Likewise, the comparison of *Songs* and *Documents* quotations in the “Ziyi” 繹衣 manuscripts in the Guodian and Shanghai Museum (ca. 300 BC) with their counterparts in the received *Liji* 禮記 as well as in the received *Songs* and *Documents* shows the remarkable difference in stability between the two types of ancient texts; see Kern, “Quotation and the Confucian canon in early Chinese manuscripts: the case of ‘Zi Yi’ (Black robes),” *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 59.1 (2005), 293–332. The general textual instability of the *Documents* is all the more remarkable as they are traditionally believed to have been “writings” (*shu* 書).

¹¹ See Vogelsang, “Inscriptions and proclamations,” and Kern, “The performance of writing in Western Zhou China.”

¹² Huadong shifan daxue Zhongguo wenzi yanjiu yu yingyong zhongxin, *Jinwen yinde* (*Yin-Shang Xi-Zhou juan*) (Nanning, 2001). The second volume of *Jinwen yinde*, published in 2002, lists 1692 distinct inscriptions on 2253 bronze artifacts from the Eastern Zhou period. In the present chapter, all references to *Jinwen yinde* (hereafter: JWYD) are confined to the first volume.

the record. Untouched by later editorial change, the bronze texts provide not only the best linguistic, historical and ideological standards against which the *Songs* and the *Documents* have to be measured and dated; they also provide pristine contemporaneous evidence for the Western Zhou ancestral sacrifice itself. While their information about specific ritual procedures is not nearly as detailed as in the hymns and speeches (to say nothing of the much later elaborations in the ritual classics and other texts), they nevertheless open a window into some very specific evidence of court ceremony, present us with the very artifacts that were used for sacrificial offerings, and allow us to chronologically stratify important historical developments in Western Zhou ritual practice and ideology between the early (ca. 1045–957 BC), middle (956–858 BC) and late (857–771 BC) periods of the dynasty. Especially the last point is critically important, as it helps us to rethink some of the central tenets of Western Zhou religion. To raise some specific examples, none of them trivial: in the early hymns and speeches from the *Songs* and the *Documents*—and far more so in later sources—the interrelated notions of “Son of Heaven” (*tianzi* 天子) and “Mandate of Heaven” (*tianming* 天命) appear as singularly central and critical to the political legitimacy and religious underpinnings of early Western Zhou rule. Neither term, however, appears with any frequency in early Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, that is, during the reigns of kings Wu, Cheng, Kang (1005/3–978 BC), and Zhao. In the corpus of the *Jinwen yinde*, the royal appellation “Son of Heaven” appears 13 times (in a total of just eight inscriptions) in the early period, 61 times in the middle period, and 84 times in the late period—differences that are perhaps not entirely explained by the overall disparity in the number and length of inscriptions from the early to the late Western Zhou. The royal “Mandate of Heaven” appears twice in the early period—each time as the “great mandate” (*daling* 大令)¹³—twice in the middle period,¹⁴ but five times in the late period.¹⁵ Moreover, it is not the case that *di* 帝 (“god”), the high deity of the late Shang, was particularly present in early Western Zhou inscriptions: it appears there four times, but also five

¹³ In the *Da Yu-ding* 大盂鼎 (JWYD 4024: *daling* 大令) and the *He-zun* 何尊 (JWYD 2117: *daling* 大令).

¹⁴ *Yuan bo Dong-gui* 袁伯敦鬲 lid (JWYD 5039: *tianming* 天命), *Ban-gui* 班簋 (JWYD 5061: *tianling* 天令).

¹⁵ *Mao gong-ding* 毛公鼎 (JWYD 4027: *tianming* 天命), *Guai bo Gui Peng-gui* 乖伯鬲簋 (JWYD 5056: *tianming* 天命), *Shi Ke-xu* 師克盃 (JWYD 5263: *daling* 大令), *Shi Xun-gui* 師詢簋 (JWYD 5062: *tianling* 天令), *Hong-gui* 匭簋 (JWYD 5049: *ling* 令).

times (in four inscriptions) in the middle period, and seven times (in six inscriptions) in the late period. Kings Wen (1099/56–1050 BC) and Wu—in transmitted sources the founding heroes of the Zhou dynasty and complementary paradigm of the civil (*wen* 文) and martial (*wu* 武) forces—are rarely evident in Western Zhou inscriptions at all: King Wu (without King Wen) appears in a mere six inscriptions from the early period and three more from the middle period; King Wen is mentioned in four early texts and three from the middle period. Remarkably, however, as the formulaic pair “King Wen and King Wu” (*Wen Wu* 文武), they never appear early on: once during the middle period,¹⁶ but in six late Western Zhou bronze inscriptions. While two early inscriptions mention the two kings separately,¹⁷ it appears that their ideal image as the primordial double ancestors who through their succession and complementary virtues had established the dynasty became formulaic only centuries after their demise, that is, at the time when the dynasty itself was heading toward collapse.¹⁸ Furthermore, the formulaic commemoration of the two early rulers is directly tied to the mention of the heavenly “mandate”: of the nine inscriptions that speak of the “mandate,” five also include “King Wen and King Wu,”¹⁹ two mention the two kings separately,²⁰ one refers to King Wen alone,²¹ and only one inscription mentions neither king.²² In other words, the memory of the founding rulers, the claim that they had received their right to rule directly from Heaven, and the very notion of the ruler being the “Son of Heaven” take on particular urgency only toward the end of the Western Zhou, some 200 years after the death of King Wu. While the archaeological record has significantly grown since the *Jinwen yinde* listing of 5,758 distinct inscriptions, and while this record will never fully reflect the actual number of inscribed bronze vessels cast during Western Zhou times, the sample is substantial enough to provide a reliable view of general trends. This view challenges the accounts from transmitted texts and provides

¹⁶ *Shi Qiang-pan* 史牆盤 (JWYD 5411).

¹⁷ *He-zun* and *Da Yu-ding*.

¹⁸ I owe initial suggestions to the general frequency of terms and names to Olivier Venture (personal communication and unpublished work in progress). The numbers I am noting come from my own perusal of *Jinwen yinde*; depending on their choice of sources, other scholars may arrive at slightly different numbers.

¹⁹ *Mao gong-ding*, *Guai bo Gui Jiang-gui*, *Shi Ke-xu*, *Shi Xun-gui*, *Hong-gui*.

²⁰ *He-zun* and *Da Yu-ding*.

²¹ *Ban-gui*.

²² *Yuan bo Dong-gui*.

us with a new, chronologically stratified, and therefore historically far more sophisticated perspective on the political and religious ideology and practice of the some 275 years of the Western Zhou.

The gradually emerging memory of “King Wen and King Wu” in conjunction with the notions of the heavenly mandate and of the ruler as the “Son of Heaven” reflects an increasingly coherent and solidified imagination of the beginnings of the dynasty and its original legitimacy. It appears that such an imagination became ever more important in response to the gradual political and military decline of the dynasty over its last century.²³ The commemoration of origin, and with it of the religious legitimacy of the entire dynasty, created an ideal past as a parallel reality to an actual experience of loss and decay. When Confucius and his followers began to enshrine the ideal past in an ideal body of texts—later called the *Five Classics* (*Wu jing* 五經), with the *Songs* and the *Documents* at its historical core—they unknowingly preserved not the cultural, political and religious expression of the early Western Zhou but only its subsequent, and already highly idealized, commemoration.

From this perspective, to rely on even the earliest transmitted sources has become problematic for various aspects of Western Zhou cultural history, but especially so with regard to the ancestral sacrifice, the central arena of dynastic commemoration and hence the very place in which the idealization of the early Western Zhou rulers and their reigns was performed and perpetuated. Specifically, the hymns and speeches in the *Songs* and *Documents* traditionally attributed to the early reigns appear now as artifacts in the context of late Western Zhou commemorative culture, if not later, that extended across both the ancestral sacrifice and the royal banquets, as we shall see. For some of the hymns—especially the 40 “Eulogies of Zhou”—this means merely a somewhat later date, as they had always been seen as songs for the ancestral sacrifice and hence utterances of commemoration. The implications for the purportedly early Western Zhou royal speeches are more profound: instead of being the authentic utterances of the early kings, they are better viewed as expressions through which these kings were imagined and commemorated by later generations. This scenario still leaves room for an historical core of the speeches underlying their later creation or re-creation; at the same time, it situates the received form and particular ideology of

²³ Li Feng, *Landscape and power in early China*, is now the authoritative treatment of this period.

the early *Documents* speeches within the specific needs and purposes of late Western Zhou religious and political practice. With regard to the *Documents*, this would be the only reconstructed context of such practice. For the speeches as original utterances by the early Western Zhou kings, no institutional framework exists to explain its early history of recording, transmission and circulation except for some vague assumptions about merely archival preservation. However, considering the speeches' exalted status as the words of the early kings and, as such, expressions of ideal rulership from the past, the scenario of having them shelved away in some archive seems less than compelling.

I will therefore suggest that we consider the early speeches as genuinely performative at their core—that is, texts for formal recitation—that had their place, and were preserved and perpetuated, within the institutions of religious and political commemoration from mid-Western Zhou times onward. In this hypothesis, the speeches may appear somewhat less reliable as verbatim records of the early Western Zhou, but they gain dramatically in terms of their public presence during the following reigns.²⁴ Their rhythmic diction, solemn formulaic gesture, and selective lexicon place them side by side with the *Songs* and early bronze inscriptions and present the foundational narrative of the Zhou as a dialogue between past and present: in the speeches—however retrospectively edited or reconstructed—the kings had once addressed their people and successors; in the hymns of the ancestral sacrifice and royal banquet, they were, in turn, praised by their descendants. In this dialogical relationship, the speeches would have maintained their charismatic presence, proclaiming the very foundational deeds that these sacrifices and banquets were intended to commemorate.²⁵ The hymns, speeches

²⁴ I am not sure, however, whether or not we should go so far as Henri Maspero who proposed to take them as “libretti” that accompanied and guided the dances during the ancestral sacrifices; see Maspero, *China in Antiquity*, pp. 274–76. One instance of the relation between the speeches and actual performances may be the case of the *Documents* chapter “Testamentary charge” (Gu ming 顧命) and several of the early *Songs*; see *Fu Sinian quanji* (Taipei, 1980), vol. 1, pp. 204–33, and Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Before Confucius: studies in the creation of the Chinese classics* (Albany, 1997), pp. 169–74; see also C.H. Wang, *From ritual to allegory: seven essays in early Chinese poetry* (Hong Kong, 1988), pp. 18–20. In any case, I disagree with Maspero (and Shaughnessy) on the—to my mind anachronistic—idea of individual literary authors or even a “solitary poet” (Shaughnessy) at the Western Zhou royal court; instead, I see the hymns, speeches and inscriptions as the work of ritual specialists who composed these texts in an institutional framework.

²⁵ The ancestors, through the medium of the impersonator (*shi* 尸), were speaking during the ancestral sacrifice; see Wang, *From ritual to allegory*, pp. 37–51.

and inscriptions share an abundance of common ideas and expressions, including a strong emphasis on central concepts expressive of lineage continuity, such as the "virtuous power" (*de* 德) of the dynasty that accumulated over generations.

The ideological consolidation of the Western Zhou that is directly reflected in the language employed in the ancestral temple occurred parallels, and most likely in conjunction with a sweeping range of mid- to late Western Zhou ritual and administrative reforms. In this process, the ceremonies at the ancestral temple evolved from close and intimate kinship sacrificial rites to rituals of broader socio-political representation. The religious title "Son of Heaven" was asserted ever more forcefully at a time when the Zhou ruler's religious aura began its irrevocable decline toward a largely ceremonial function in the multi-state world of the Eastern Zhou.

While a more historically nuanced picture of Western Zhou religious practice emerges only from the bronze inscriptions, it remains vitally important not to regard them as primary historical records or archival accounts. Like the hymns and speeches, they do not simply document historical facts, including ritual practices, in a disinterested fashion; they were created to function in specific ceremonial contexts—first among them the ancestral sacrifice—that were simultaneously religious and political in nature. The inscriptions were cast into elaborate ritual vessels that were "quite probably, the most accomplished, expensive, labor-intensive, and beautiful human-made things their owners and handlers had ever seen."²⁶ They were aesthetically shaped, endowed with rhetorical purposes, strictly selective in the information they were meant to provide, and they served the political and religious interests of those who produced and possessed them. One characteristic that separates them from historical records prepared for an unspecific group of later readers is their unabashedly tendentious, even propagandistic nature. Their original audience was not some anonymous present or future public but a limited group of insiders who directly or indirectly participated in the lineage ideology of the Zhou royal house. They were either members of this house or of subordinate lineages that derived their own political legitimacy from the dynasty. Couched in relentlessly eulogistic diction and, if necessary, undisturbed by histori-

cal facts that contradicted their own account, these are the texts with which an ancient community created its common narrative of memory and agreed upon a common origin and identity. Thus, Western Zhou bronze inscriptions mentioning military affairs record only victories;²⁷ and while the famous Shi Qiang-pan 史墙盘 inscription of ca. 900 BC praises King Zhao for having subdued the southern people of Chu 楚 and Jing 荆, other historical sources inform us that the royal expedition south suffered a crushing defeat that destroyed the Zhou army and even left the king dead.²⁸ The fact that a royal scribe of highest rank was granted a wide and shallow water basin inscribed with a text that was as prominently displayed as it was historically inaccurate merely two generations after King Zhao's death shows that the true question answered by the inscribed narrative was not, "What has happened?" but, "What do we wish to remember?" The distinction is one between history and memory, defined by differences in agency, perspective and participation. The narrative of memory does not present different sides, nor does it speak to different groups—it is a first-person narrative: in *our* memory, *we* are recalling what is important to *us*: *we* speak, and *we* speak to ourselves. In both hymns and speeches, this perspective is consistently emphasized through the intense use of first and second person pronouns.

The Western Zhou ancestral sacrifice thus served a range of religious and social functions: it created the space where the ancestral spirits could mingle with the living, receiving sacrifices from their descendants and conferring their blessings on them in return. The living were not separated from their forebears, and the dead were not gone. The spirits, thought to be dwelling "on high" (*shang* 上) or in Heaven (*tian* 天), would in regular intervals descend to the sacrificial offerings, each time renewing their presence as the source of dynastic life and power. Second, the ancestral sacrifice constituted and perpetuated the identity and purpose of the living; for the Zhou king, it provided the historical basis and political legitimacy for the right to rule. Third, by its nature of "multi-media happenings"²⁹ that involved converging patterns of song, music, dance, fragrance, speech, material artifacts and sacrificial offerings, the sacrifice embodied the cultural practices of elite life; connected to the ideology of

²⁶ Lothar von Falkenhausen, "Late Western Zhou taste," in *Études Chinoises (Mélanges de Sinologie offerts à Monsieur Jean-Pierre Diény [1])* 18.1-2 (1999), p. 146.

²⁷ Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Sources of Western Zhou history*, pp. 176-77.

²⁸ Shaughnessy, "Western Zhou history," pp. 322-23.

²⁹ Falkenhausen, "Ritual music in Bronze Age China: an archaeological perspective," (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1988), p. 693.

ancestor worship, it presented—at least according to its rhetoric—these practices as the perpetual repetition and continuity of the patterns established and handed down by the ancestors. Fourth, by expressing control over both cultural and material resources, and by gradually establishing sets of sumptuary rules, the ancestral sacrifice was the primary institution to express, legitimize and enforce social hierarchy and solidarity. Fifth, it marked both sacred space and time: while the space of the ancestral temple was considered the very essence of the lineage (and in the case of the king, of the dynastic polity altogether), the regular observation of daily as well as seasonal sacrifices helped to forge a religious rhythm for the calendar year. Sixth, the ancestral sacrifice was not only oriented toward the past, opening a line of communication even to the ancestral spirits from the remote past; it also emphatically expressed the promise that the past would continue into an everlasting future. This idea was made visible in the role of the impersonator (*shi* 尸), in which an adolescent member of the family served as the medium for the ancestral spirits, and it is expressed in the closing formula of the vast majority of Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, “may sons of sons, grandsons of grandsons, forever treasure and use [this sacrificial vessel]” 子子孫孫永寶用.³⁰ And finally, the ancestral sacrifice was directly connected to other ritual, social and political activities, among them banquets and ceremonies of administrative appointment. In these combined functions, the ancestral sacrifice was at the very center of Western Zhou social, religious and political activities.

Remarkably, our entire knowledge of Western Zhou religion, as far as it can be traced to contemporaneous sources (as opposed to the accounts in the ritual classics and other texts that date centuries later), comes from sources that themselves are directly tied to the sacrifice, that is, from bronze inscriptions and the royal hymns and speeches from the *Songs* and the *Documents*. In fact, of all its manifestations of writing during the Western Zhou period, the Chinese tradition has chosen to preserve only a very limited body of strictly ritualistic texts, that is, the hymns and speeches. Furthermore, for writing, the Western Zhou elites restricted the use of the precious, non-perishable material of bronze to texts that in their overwhelming majority were presented in the ances-

tral ritual—a fact that speaks eloquently to the significance of writing for ritual display and religious purpose. While circumstantial evidence strongly suggests the presence of writing in administrative, economic, legal and other pragmatic contexts, this writing was not preserved in the ways the inscriptions (through durable material) and the hymns and speeches (through tradition) were. Phrased the other way around, without the institution of the ancestral sacrifice, none of the earliest sources would have come into existence or have been transmitted the way they were. It also appears that the practice of writing as textual display evolved primarily within the setting of the ancestral sacrifice over the course of the Western Zhou dynasty.

In making the best use of our earliest sources for the ancestral sacrifice—while maintaining a strict distinction with later, much more systematizing and elaborate accounts—they need to be recognized as artifacts of the very ritual procedures they are speaking about. This perspective exposes the biases noted above, yet it also instructs us to consider the inscriptions, hymns and speeches as aesthetic objects, elaborate and complex in terms both linguistic and material, where aesthetic form and propositional meaning cannot be imagined separate from each other; to grasp the function of text and the construction of meaning in the ancestral sacrifice, both demand the same degree of close attention. Thus, it is largely from the patterns of a sacrificial hymn such as “Thorny caltrop” (Chuci 楚茨; Mao 209), or of a series of six hymns that constitute the “Great martiality” (Dawu 大武) dance suite—representing the military conquest of the Shang—that we can tentatively reconstruct some of the actual steps in a real sacrificial performance.³¹ What is more, some of the aesthetic features have come to inform us about historical developments on which the texts, both contemporaneous and later, remain silent: it is on the basis of changing patterns in the shapes and ensembles of different types of bronze artifacts that Jessica Rawson has been able to identify a mid- to late Western Zhou “ritual reform” that seems to have involved a fundamental shift in the practice and ideology of the ancestral sacrifice. Among other changes, the transition in emphasis from alcohol to food offerings, and from a small and intimate setting of the sacrifice to one of a larger audience

³⁰ Xu Zhongshu, “Jinwen guci shili,” *Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philology* 6.1 (1936), 1–44, has estimated that 70–80 percent of all bronze inscriptions end with this formula.

³¹ On “Great martiality,” see Sun Zuoyun, “Shijing yu Zhou dai shehui yanjiu,” (Beijing, 1966), pp. 239–72; C.H. Wang, *From ritual to allegory*, pp. 12–18; Edward L. Shaughnessy, *Before Confucius*, pp. 166–69. For a more skeptical assessment, see Shirakawa Shizuka, *Shikyō kenkyū* (Kyoto, 1981), pp. 339–48.

beyond the immediate lineage members—a transition that also included significant changes in the nature of textual display—would not have been recoverable from transmitted texts.

The space of the ancestral sacrifice

The location of the Western Zhou ancestral sacrifice was a dedicated space, the ancestral temple. According to transmitted sources, it was there that the head of a lineage addressed his ancestral spirits through regular offerings and prayers and that he received their blessings and the “virtuous power” (*de* 德) they had accumulated over generations. Warring States and early imperial texts contain elaborate descriptions of the temple and refer to it primarily as *miao* 廟 (“temple”) or *zongmiao* 宗廟 (“lineage temple”); the three ritual classics in particular provide extensive information about its multi-layered architecture in conjunction with the rituals performed within it. According to these traditional sources, the temple embodied the very essence of the lineage and, in the case of the Zhou king, of the dynasty altogether. Archaeologists and art historians have attempted to interpret excavated building foundations as those of large-scale temple complexes. In another step, these interpretations have led to complex drawings of the presumed—and long lost—temple architecture above ground, complete with courtyards and roofed buildings of multiple chambers.³² In similar fashion, scholars of Chinese religion have suggested reconstructions of the actual ceremonies in the temple, relying primarily on the three ritual classics and other late sources, including Han and Tang commentaries on the *Songs* and the *Documents* that again are based on the same ritual classics.³³

Impressive and inspiring as these reconstructions are, they tend to draw on an extremely diverse body of far later sources and are difficult to substantiate from the available early evidence. To reconstruct above-ground architecture from building foundations is bold, and nothing in these foundations of pounded earth proves that the building they

³² For a recent summary of this scholarship, see Wu Hung, *Monumentality in early Chinese art and architecture* (Stanford, 1995), pp. 77–88; see also Qin Zhaofen, *Shang Zhou shiqi de zuxian chongbai* (Taipei, 2003), pp. 20–45.

³³ See, e.g., Maspero, *China in Antiquity*, pp. 147–58, or Zhang Hequan, *Zhoudai jisi yanjiu* (Taipei, 1993).

supported was indeed an ancestral temple.³⁴ Furthermore, the ritual classics—none of which predate the late Warring States period—are not reliable descriptions of buildings and accounts of religious practices from more than half a millennium earlier; instead, they must be understood as composite, diachronic and normative idealizations from those who imagined an age long gone by. None of the early layers of the *Songs* and *Documents* provides any description of an ancestral temple, nor does a single Western Zhou bronze inscription, and even the term *miao* appears just once in the entire 12 early chapters of the *Documents*,³⁵ in only three of the “Major court hymns,”³⁶ and in only one of the “Eulogies of Zhou”—“Clear temple” (Qing miao 清廟, Mao 266), the paradigmatic sacrificial hymn purportedly in praise of King Wen. Of the mere 23 inscriptions in the *Jinwen yinde* that mention *miao*, 20 are from the middle and late Western Zhou periods, and 19 of them follow the same formula as in, for example, the late Western Zhou Da Ke-*ding* 大克鼎 tripod: “The king was in (the capital) Ancestral Zhou. At dawn, the king entered the *miao* of [his ancestor, King] Mu.”³⁷ This brief remark is followed not by an account of his sacrifice in the temple but by an extensive description of an appointment ceremony in which the king commanded a subject to take up a certain position and bestowed on him the insignia for the task. In the entire *Jinwen yinde* corpus, only one late Western Zhou inscription—the brief Nangong yousi-*ding* 南公有司鼎 text—mentions the *miao* in conjunction with sacrificial offerings: “The officer Nangong made [this] precious tripod. May he [enjoy] ten thousand years. [May] sons of sons, grandsons of grandsons forever treasure and use [it] to make offerings in the lineage temple.”³⁸

The Nangong inscription leaves no doubt that *miao*—here even as *zongmiao*³⁹—refers to the ancestral temple where sacrifices were presented. This is further corroborated by the reference to the temple of King Mu in the Da Ke-*ding* inscription: as King Mu was already dead—Mu

³⁴ As pointed out by Li Feng, “Offices’ in bronze inscriptions and Western Zhou government administration,” *Early China* 26–27 (2001–02), p. 13.

³⁵ At the end of “The testamentary charge” where the “many lords” (*zhuhou* 諸侯) “went out the temple gate” 出廟門. It should be noted that this passage concludes the narrative, but is not part of an actual speech.

³⁶ “Mian” 縣 (Extended, Mao 237), “Si zhai” 思齊 (Reverential, Mao 240), “Song gao” 崧高 (High and lofty, Mao 259).

³⁷ JWYD 4023: 王在宗周。旦，王格穆廟。

³⁸ JWYD 3904: 南公有司作尊鼎。其萬年。子子孫孫永寶用享于宗廟。

³⁹ The only time the term *zongmiao* appears in JWYD.

is his posthumous temple name—his *miao* was the place where he received sacrifices. Two other Western Zhou inscriptions mention the temple of King Kang,⁴⁰ five the “temple of Zhou” (*Zhou miao* 周廟),⁴¹ and one the “offering temple” (*xiangmiao* 享廟);⁴² while others speak of the “great temple” (*taimiao* 太廟 or *damiao* 大廟).⁴³ On the other hand, the function of the ancestral temple was not confined to offering sacrifices: especially from mid-Western Zhou times onward, when the appointment ceremony became a court ritual of central importance, the temple was also the site of administrative and diplomatic activities; or more precisely, the same location functioned as both temple and administrative office.⁴⁴

The double function of the *miao* as a site for presenting offerings to the ancestors and for announcing administrative or political appointments becomes further apparent in two other terms that also denoted the site of ancestral offerings and appear with far greater frequency in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions: *gong* 宮 (“palace”) and *shi* 室 (“chamber”; also as *taishi* 太室 [“grand chamber”]).⁴⁵ In many inscriptions, *gong* or *shi* designates the same site that elsewhere is called *miao*, while in others, *gong* is clearly a larger structure that included either a *shi* or a *miao* (or even another *gong*).⁴⁶ These smaller units were without doubt places of ancestral worship, but so were most, if not all, of the larger *gong*, especially those in the Zhou capital. (A small number of inscrip-

tions seem to refer to *gong* elsewhere in the Zhou realm.)⁴⁷ Thus, as Tang Lan has argued, the “Palace of Kang in Zhou” (*Zhou Kang gong* 周康宮)—the single most often mentioned *gong* in bronze inscriptions—was the ancestral temple of King Kang;⁴⁸ two (related) early Western Zhou inscriptions, the *Ze ling-fangzun* 夙令方尊 and the *Ze ling-fangyi* 夙令方彝,⁴⁹ both state that a sacrificial bull was “used” (that is, offered) in the *Zhou Kang gong*.

Jinwen yinde lists *Zhou Kang gong* in 21 inscriptions; another eleven texts mention either *Zhou Kang Mu gong* 周康穆宮, *Zhou Kang Zhao gong* 周康昭宮 or *Zhou Kang La gong* 周康剌宮. Following Tang Lan’s analysis, these phrases point to the larger temple of King Kang that housed, as smaller units, the temples of subsequent rulers, including those named here, that is, kings Mu, Zhao and Li (857/53–842/28 BC).⁵⁰ The “palace of Kang” was thus on a par with the “capital palace” (*jingong* 京宮) and likely synonymous with the “palace of Zhou” (*Zhou gong* 周宮). On the other hand, the term *zongshi* 宗室 (“ancestral chamber”) was used by the nobility—but not by the kings—throughout Western Zhou as the site of their ancestral sacrifices, such as in the *Zhong yinfu-gui* 仲殷父簋 inscription of the late Western Zhou: “Zhong yinfu has cast [this] tureen to use it morning and evening to make sacrificial offerings in the ancestral chamber. May sons of sons, grandsons of grandsons, forever treasure and use [it]!”⁵¹

The number of early Western Zhou bronze inscriptions that mention the royal ancestral temple or any royal *gong* is very limited, making it impossible to grasp in any detail either the design of an actual temple or the overall system of the sacrifice ritual involving the ancestors from high antiquity and the first three kings—Wen, Wu, and Cheng—of the dynasty.⁵² Furthermore, as noted above, kings Wen and Wu are barely mentioned in early inscriptions, and neither is King Cheng. (Remarkably different from kings Wen and Wu, who were commemorated throughout the Western Zhou and perhaps increasingly after the early period, King

⁴⁰ JWYD 4000, 5021.

⁴¹ JWYD 2158, 3962, 4007, 4026, 5409.

⁴² JWYD 3966.

⁴³ JWYD 4996, 5018, 5033, 5051.

⁴⁴ See Li Feng, “Offices’ in bronze inscriptions and Western Zhou government administration,” pp. 3–14, for the argument that *gong* 宮—a term meaning both “palace” and “temple”—denoted a government office.

⁴⁵ In my counting of the inscriptions in JWYD, *shi* refers in sixteen inscriptions explicitly to the site of sacrificial offerings, while *gong* does so in ten.

⁴⁶ The best discussion of the ancestral temple is still Tang Lan, “Xi Zhou tongqi duandai zhong de ‘Kang gong’ wenti,” *Kaogu xuebao* 1962.1, 15–48. Rarely, and only in mid- and late Western Zhou times, even the larger and the included smaller structure are both called *gong*. The first—the mid-Western Zhou Wang-gui 望盃 (5019)—mentions the “new palace of the Kang palace of Zhou” (*Zhou Kang gong xin gong* 周康宮新宮), which Tang Lan, p. 23, identifies as the temple of King Mu. The remaining three inscriptions (4013, 5037, 5040), all from late Western Zhou times, speak of a “palace of [King] Yi of the Kang palace of Zhou” (*Zhou Kang gong Yi gong* 周康宮猷[夷]宮); for the identification of 猷 as 夷, see Tang Lan, p. 22. Two more inscriptions (4011, 5025), also from the late period, speak of the “Grand room of [King] Yi of the Kang palace of Zhou” (*Zhou Kang gong Yi taishi* 周康宮猷[夷]太室), making it clear that the smaller units *gong* and *taishi* were interchangeable terms for the ancestral temple of King Yi.

⁴⁷ Tang Lan, “Xi Zhou tongqi duandai zhong de ‘Kang gong’ wenti,” pp. 30–31.

⁴⁸ Tang Lan, “Xi Zhou tongqi duandai zhong de ‘Kang gong’ wenti.”

⁴⁹ JWYD 2119, 2159.

⁵⁰ Tang Lan, “Xi Zhou tongqi duandai zhong de ‘Kang gong’ wenti,” takes 剌 as referring to King Li.

⁵¹ JWYD 4848.

⁵² JWYD includes two references to the royal *miao* (3962, 4026), four to the royal *shi* (2109, 2117, 4003, 5012), and seven to the royal *gong* (2119, 2159, 2828, 3968, 3994, 3998, 4901).

Cheng is mentioned in only three mid-Western Zhou inscriptions and in none thereafter.)⁵³ Our sources change dramatically with the beginning of the middle period of the dynasty, that is, after the reign of King Zhao when altogether more than 200 inscriptions mention the royal “palaces” (*gong*), “chambers” (*shi*) and “temples” (*miao*). From this rich evidence, two phenomena stand out: first, the overall organization of the temple system; and second, the fusion of religious and administrative functions in these “palaces,” “chambers” and “temples.” As noted above, the single most often mentioned site is that of the *Kang gong*, or “(posthumous) palace of King Kang,” that together with the “capital palace” (*jinggong*) served as one of the two central temples of dynastic worship. According to Tang Lan—a view to some extent supported by inscriptional evidence—the *jinggong* housed temples for five ancestors preceding King Kang: Taiwang 太王 (grandfather of King Wen), Wang Ji 王季 (father of King Wen) and kings Wen, Wu and Cheng.⁵⁴ The *Kang gong* hosted five other ancestors as well: kings Kang, Zhao, Mu, Yi 夷 (865–858) and Li.⁵⁵ It should be noted, however, that the *jinggong* (once also as *jingshi* 京室 [“capital chamber”]) appears in only three *Jinwen yinde* inscriptions, all from the early Western Zhou: the Ze ling-fangzun and the Ze ling-fangyi⁵⁶ of King Zhao’s reign and the He-zun 何尊⁵⁷ possibly from King Cheng’s reign. Considering that the *Kang gong* was established under King Zhao and greatly expanded under the following rulers, it is not clear that the *jinggong* retained its early eminent position. Instead, its central function may have been gradually absorbed by the *Kang gong*.

The changes of the ancestral temple system fall precisely in the period of the mid- to late Western Zhou ritual and administrative reforms. The pre-eminent function of the *Kang gong*, which signals a new beginning

⁵³ King Cheng is mentioned in five inscriptions (JWYD 3232, 3906, 3975, 4026, 5047) from the early period and three more from the middle period (1806, 2157, 5411).

⁵⁴ For the discussion of *jinggong*, see Tang Lan, “Xi Zhou tongqi duandai zhong de ‘Kang gong’ wenti,” pp. 17–18. This sequence of early ancestors differs only partly from the one given in the “Great capture” (Shifu 世俘) chapter of the *Remnant Zhou Documents*; see Huang Hualxin et al., *Yi Zhoushu huijiao jizhu* (Shanghai, 2007), p. 424; the chapter is possibly of late Western Zhou origin.

⁵⁵ These are the central conclusions in Tang Lan, “Xi Zhou tongqi duandai zhong de ‘Kang gong’ wenti.” In Tang Lan’s scheme, however, it remains unclear where kings Gong 恭 (917/15–900), Yi 懿 (899/97–873) and Xiao 孝 (872?–866) were hosted.

⁵⁶ JWYD 2119, 2159.

⁵⁷ JWYD 2117, which has *jingshi*.

in the Western Zhou ancestral sacrifice, developed only over time. The temple was established in the reign of King Zhao—when it certainly did not surpass the significance of the *jinggong*—and then greatly expanded over subsequent generations (during which the *jinggong* is no longer mentioned). The two ancestors most frequently mentioned as having their sacrificial sites in the *Kang gong* are kings Zhao and Mu; in addition, kings Li and Yi are noted. Such a temple, with a primary ancestor at the center and chambers (*gong*, *shi*, *miao*) for subsequent ancestors integrated in his temple, is described in great detail in Warring States and early imperial sources. According to these later texts, eminent among them the *Book of rites*, the chambers of these subsequent ancestors were arrayed in generational order, alternating to the right and left of the central axis of the temple and leading to the innermost center where the shrine of the primary ancestor was positioned; each ancestor was represented by a wooden tablet with his name inscribed. Thus, upon entering the temple, one would proceed forward toward the center but thereby also backward in time: When a king died, the tablet of the first of these secondary ancestors, residing on the left side position closest to the primary ancestor, was removed, and the tablets of his successors would all move up by one position (thereby each switching from right to left or left to right) to make space for the new ancestor who assumed the most junior position at the very end of the line, that is, on the right side close to the temple entrance.⁵⁸ This system, known as the *zhaomu* 昭穆 order, included a total of either six or eight generations in addition to the primary ancestor (who was not removed). While there is no evidence in Western Zhou bronze inscriptions to support these numbers or the specific spatial layout of the temple,⁵⁹ the name of the system—*zhaomu*—is striking in light of the fact that kings Zhao and Mu (written with the same characters: 昭穆) are indeed the first pair of ancestors that according to Western Zhou bronze inscriptions have their chambers in the temple of King Kang. Traditional scholars

⁵⁸ For schematic representations of this order, see Wu Hung, *Monumentality in early Chinese art and architecture*, pp. 81–82.

⁵⁹ Tang Lan, “Xi Zhou tongqi duandai zhong de ‘Kang gong’ wenti,” pp. 22–27, points out that the inscriptions suggest a total of five ancestors each in the *jinggong* and *Kang gong*, not seven or nine. Furthermore, the arrangement of ancestors in the *jinggong* and *Kang gong* also seems at variance with the accounts in later literature that would include, for example, the remote ancestor of high antiquity, Lord Millet (Houji), in the temple.

have paid no attention to this fact, as their accounts saw the *zhaomu* system in place long before King Kang, namely, already beginning with the dynastic founders. The primary evidence from bronze inscriptions, however, suggests that a new temple organization, now with King Kang's temple at the center, was established as part of the overall mid- to late Western Zhou ritual reforms. This new organization must have begun after the death of King Zhao (that is, during the reign of King Mu), as he was the first to receive a chamber in the *Kang gong*; next came King Mu. As a continuous system, the *zhaomu* order was then fully realized when the following pair of rulers, kings Gong 恭 (917/15–900) and Yi 懿 (899/97–873), had their chambers aligned with those of kings Zhao and Mu. In other words, the evidence from bronze inscriptions allows us to hypothesize that the term *zhaomu* should be explained as based on the (posthumous temple) names King Zhao and King Mu and that the *zhaomu* system of the Zhou ancestral temple emerged only with the mid- to late Western Zhou ritual reforms.

The same context of ritual and administrative reform explains also the other remarkable phenomenon of the ancestral temple that has become fully apparent only from the bronze inscriptions: the fusion of religious and administrative practices. As noted above, nearly all references to the *miao* in mid- and late Western Zhou bronze inscriptions (the period when these references become frequent enough to allow for meaningful interpretation) point not to the offering of ancestral sacrifices but to the performance of appointment ceremonies during which the king bestowed a new position, complete with a wealth of ritual insignia, on an appointee. To date, more than 100 bronze inscriptions are known that explicitly mention the appointment ceremony, and several of them provide a fairly full account of this ritual, such as the Feng(?) - *ding* 馯鼎 inscription of 97 characters, composed in 809 BC:

It was the 19th year, the fourth month, after the full moon, the day *xin-mao*. The king was in the Zhao [Temple] of the Kang Palace. He arrived at the Grand Chamber and assumed his position. Assisted to his right by Intendant Xun, [I,] Feng(?), entered the gate. [I] assumed [my] position in the center of the court, facing north [toward the king]. Secretary Liu presented the king with the written order. The king called out to the Secretary of the Interior, [?], to announce the written bestowal to [me,] Feng (?): "[I bestow on you] a black jacket with embroidered hem, red kneepads, a scarlet demi-circlet, a chime pendant, and a bridle with bit and cheekpieces; use [these] to perform your service!" [I] bowed with my head touching the ground. [May I] dare in response to extol the Son of Heaven's greatly illustrious and abundant blessings and on account of

this make for my August Deceased Father, the Elder Zheng(?), and his wife Zheng [this] precious tripod! May [I enjoy] extended longevity for ten thousand years! May sons of sons, grandsons of grandsons, forever treasure [this tripod]!⁶⁰

Without going into the intriguing details of the appointment ceremony, it should be noted that this appointment, and certainly hundreds like it, was made in a highly standardized ritual routine that remained stable throughout mid- and late Western Zhou times; as such, it also has found its reflection in one of the "Major court hymns," "The Jiang and the Han" (Jiang Han 江漢, Mao 262). Most significantly, it took place in the royal ancestral temple, that is, within the purview of the king's ancestral spirits. The standardized terms used in this ceremony include the royal "written order" (*lingshu* 令書) as well as the "announcement of the written bestowal" (*ceci* 冊賜) or "announcement of the written mandate" (*ce ming* 冊命/*celing* 冊令). The mandate or bestowal was pronounced orally and at the same time given to the appointee in writing on bamboo slips. On this basis, the appointee was then entitled to have an inscribed bronze vessel cast that gave an account of the appointment and was henceforth used by the appointee to sacrifice to his ancestors (and by his descendants to sacrifice to him in the future).⁶¹ The terminology of "mandate" (*ming* 命) and "order" (*ling* 令) used in this context, and in the space of the ancestral temple, was not accidental: precisely at the time when in bronze inscriptions, but probably also in the royal speeches preserved in the *Documents*, terms like "Son of Heaven" and "Mandate of Heaven" became a staple of political ideology and religious representation, the appointment ceremony, performed at the site of the king's ancestral worship, saw him extending his own

⁶⁰ JWYD 4008. For a full discussion of the appointment ceremony, this particular text, and a series of related inscriptions, see Kern, "The performance of writing in Western Zhou China," in *The poetics of grammar and the metaphysics of sound and sign*, eds Sergio La Porta and David Shulman (Leiden, 2007), pp. 140–51 (with further references to recent scholarship); see also Chen Peifen, "Fan you, Feng(?) ding ji Liang Qi zhong mingwen quanshi," *Shanghai bowuguan jikan* 2 (1982), 17–20; for further study of the appointment ceremony, see Chen Hanping, *Xi Zhou ceming zhidu yanjiu* (Shanghai, 1986), p. 26.

⁶¹ See Virginia Kane, "Aspects of Western Chou appointment inscriptions: the charge, the gifts, and the response," *Early China* 8 (1982–83), 14–28; Constance A. Cook, "Scribes, cooks, and artisans: breaking Zhou tradition," *Early China* 20 (1995), 241–77; Chen Hanping, *Xi Zhou ceming zhidu yanjiu*; Wong Yin-wai, *Yin Zhou qingtongqi shangci jinwen yanjiu* (Hong Kong, 1987); Falkenhausen, "Issues in Western Zhou studies," pp. 156–67.

mandate—received from Heaven as well as from his ancestors—to those in charge of administering his realm.⁶² There was, in other words, no strict division between the religious and the political: the latter was represented as an extension of the former, and both were performed in a space that, as I will argue in further detail below, was initially conceived of as primarily religious but that over the course of the Western Zhou gradually accommodated also administrative and political purposes. Its basic ideological construction, however, remained continuous: as the king received his mandate from the spirits and extended it downward to his officials, he received their reports and presented his political and military feats both “vertically” to his ancestors and “horizontally” to his political community.⁶³ A trace of this extended connection between the spirits on the one hand and the king and his officers on the other can be grasped in the first and paradigmatic “Eulogy of Zhou,” the hymn “Clear temple” addressed to King Wen:

Ah! Solemn is the clear temple,
Reverent and concordant the illustrious assistants.
Dignified, dignified are the many officers,
Holding fast to the virtue of King Wen.
Responding in praise to the one in Heaven,
They hurry swiftly within the temple.
Greatly illustrious, greatly honored,
May [King Wen] never be weary of [us] men!

The sacrificial hymns

More than any other textual corpus, the “Eulogies” and “Court hymns” that in Eastern Zhou times were canonized in the *Book of songs* and have been transmitted through the ages give account of the various aspects of the Zhou ancestral sacrifice. The 31 “Eulogies of Zhou” are very short pieces—20 of them less than 50 characters long—and are believed to be the sacrificial hymns through which the Western Zhou rulers addressed

⁶² For a thoughtful analysis of the “mandate” in early China, see David Schaberg, “Command and the content of tradition,” in *The magnitude of Ming*, ed. Christopher Lupke (Honolulu, 2005), pp. 23–48.

⁶³ See the “Great capture” chapter of the *Remnant Zhou documents*; see Huang Huaixin et al., *Yi Zhoushu huijiao jizhu*, p. 423, where King Wu enters the temple and presents his accomplishments in ordering the realm to his ancestors; see also the same chapter, p. 442.

their ancestors, the early kings from King Wen to King Kang. In addition, the 31 “Major court hymns” provide the master narrative of early Zhou history and culture; presumably performed at royal banquets, they also contain a certain number of references to the sacrifices, and so do a small group of songs from the 74 “Minor court hymns.” While all the “Court hymns” are distinguished by their regular tetrasyllabic meter, orderly rhymes, stanzaic divisions, overall length and extensive narrative structure, many of the “Eulogies of Zhou” are notably lacking in these features and for this reason have been understood—rightly or wrongly—as genuinely archaic.

The “Eulogies of Zhou” inform us in different ways about the Western Zhou ancestral sacrifice. A number of them appear directly addressed to the ancestors but provide little description of the sacrificial ritual; others seem to exhort the princes present during the sacrifice; and yet others give brief accounts of the sacrificial performance. The hymns speaking directly to the ancestors include the above-quoted “Clear temple” as well as the one directly following it, “It is the Mandate of Heaven” (Wei tian zhi ming 維天之命, Mao 267):

It is the Mandate of Heaven,
How majestic and not ending!
Ah, greatly illustrious—
How pure the virtuous power of King Wen!
[His] fine blessings flow to us in abundance,
May we receive them!
[He who] grandly gives us favors is King Wen—
[His] distant descendants will strengthen them.

By contrast, the hymn “Brilliant and cultured” (Lie wen 烈文, Mao 269) eulogizes the king’s rule and addresses the assembled lords he has enfeoffed. Presumably presented in the temple, it informs the ancestral spirits about the king’s continuation of their model of rulership and exhorts his subordinates and future generations to follow their—and his own—example, remembering the past and extending its model into an indefinite future:

The brilliant and cultured [ancestral] lords and rulers
Have bestowed [on us] these blessings and favors.
[Their] kindness to us has been without limits—
Sons and grandsons will preserve it.
There are no fiefs that are not in your land,
It is the king who shall be honoring them.
Remember these great accomplishments [of the past],

Continuing and extending, may [you] revere them as august.
 Truly valorous [the king] is indeed as a man,
 In all four quarters, may [you] follow him.
 Greatly illustrious is indeed [his] virtuous power.
 The hundred lords, may they regard it as [their] model—
 Oh, the former kings are not forgotten.⁶⁴

While different in perspective, both songs—and also “Clear temple”—display the principal concern of the ancestral sacrifice: the hymns commemorate the former rulers as models, and they conclude with the promise that future generations will continue to emulate them. A third type of hymn celebrates the very ritual act in which it is performed, thus representing and doubling the ancestral sacrifice in language. A song like “There are blind musicians” (You gu 有瞽, Mao 280) re-affirms the actions of the assembled community, asserts the presence of the spirits and creates a durable and repeatable linguistic memory of the ceremony itself:

There are blind musicians, there are blind musicians,
 They are in the courtyard of the Zhou [temple].
 [We] have set up the boards, we have set up the vertical posts [for bells and drums],
 With raised flanges, planted feathers,
 The [small] responding and introducing drums, the [large] suspended drums,
 The [little] hand drums, chime stones, rattles, and clappers—
 All prepared and now played.
 The panpipes and flutes are all raised—
 Huang-huang is their sound.
 Solemn and concordant [their] harmonious tune—
 The former ancestors, these are listening!
 Our guests [the ancestors] have arrived,
 For long [they] observe this performance.

Finally, a series of six of the “Eulogies of Zhou” has been reconstructed as a suite that, accompanied by dance, mimetically represented King

⁶⁴ Like James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. IV, *The She King* (Taipei, 1985), pp. 572–73, I follow the earliest commentators who understand the song as an exhortation to the princes (though my translation differs decidedly from Legge’s). I disagree with Bernhard Karlgren, *The Book of odes* (Stockholm, 1950), pp. 240–41, and Shaughnessy, *Before Confucius*, p. 176, who take the song as addressed to the ancestors.

Wu’s conquest of the Shang.⁶⁵ “Martial” celebrates King Wu as successor to King Wen and conqueror of the Yin (Shang):

How august was King Wu—
 Truly valorous was his brilliance!
 Verily cultured was King Wen—
 [He] could open [the path] for those who came after!
 [King] Wu, the successor, received it,
 [he] vanquished Yin and ended their murderous cruelty.
 Accomplished and secured is your feat!

On the whole, the “Eulogies of Zhou” offer limited description of the ancestral sacrifice in which they were purportedly performed. Like “There are blind musicians,” the hymn “Strong and valorous” (Zhi jing 執競, Mao 274) briefly mentions the musical instruments, but this time with a series of onomatopoeic reduplicatives that then blend in with the description of the blessings received in response from the ancestors:

The bells and drums go *huang-huang*,
 The chime stones and flutes go *jiang-jiang*,
 The blessings sent down are *xiang-xiang*.
 The blessings sent down are *jian-jian*,
 The awe-inspiring demeanor is *fan-fan*.
 [The spirits,] they are drunk, they are satiated—
 Blessings and fortune come in return!

Here, an important performative element of the sacrificial hymns becomes visible, namely, their euphonic qualities that contribute to the overall aesthetic experience of the ritual performance. Not only does “Strong and valorous” array five reduplicatives in a row, in each line occupying two out of four characters, the lines also constitute two rhyme sequences that in the translation are separated by the line space (*huang-jiang-xiang* versus *jian-fan* [“return”] -*fan*). In other words, “Strong and valorous” employs language in a distinctly euphonic way—not merely in the onomatopoeic representation of musical sound but also in “describing” the blessings received from the ancestors. In bronze inscriptions, these binomes begin to emerge only in mid-Western Zhou times, and here in particular in inscriptions of bronze bells where they are used to

⁶⁵ See note 31 above. The six hymns are “Great Heaven has a defined mandate” (Hao tian you cheng ming 昊天有成命, Mao 271), “Martial” (Wu 武, Mao 285) “Joyous” (Ban 般, Mao 296), “Zhuo” 酌 (Mao 293), “Fierce” (Huan 桓, Mao 294), “Bestowing” (Lai 賚, Mao 295).

describe the bells' sounds. Moreover, judging from the archaeological record, bells themselves became prominent ritual paraphernalia only during the middle period of the dynasty and hence provide a likely *terminus post quem* for a song like "Strong and valorous."⁶⁶

The same use of language, including stanzaic division, also appears in "Harmonious" (Yong 雝, Mao 282), a song that provides further detail on the sacrifice.

Those who are coming are *yong-yong* (harmonious),
As they arrive, they are *su-su* (solemn)
Assisting are the lords and princes,
The Son of Heaven is *mu-mu* (majestic).

Ah, [as we] offer the large bull
Assist me in setting forth the sacrifice!
Come, oh, my august father,
Comfort me, the sacrificing son!⁶⁷

Of embracing wisdom he was as a man,
Of cultural and martial virtue he was as a ruler.
He even appeased Great Heaven,
And could create prosperity for those who came after.

Comfort us with extended longevity,
Increase us through profuse favors!
Having regaled the brilliant father,
[I] also regale the cultured mother.

Like other hymns among the "Eulogies," "Harmonious" mentions a ritual community that at the Zhou royal court also included the lords and princes. Likewise, in "Now appearing" (Zai xian 載見, Mao 283), the king leads his illustrious guests when sacrificing to his ancestors. These lords have received their positions from the Zhou king and thus "assist" him in his sacrifice to his ancestors, who, ultimately, have secured the dynastic mandate from Heaven. The hymn, and with it the order of the ancestral sacrifice, thus reflects a hierarchical system that was at

⁶⁶ For the bells of the Zhou ancestral sacrifice, see the magisterial treatment by Lothar von Falkenhausen, *Suspended music: chime bells in the culture of Bronze Age China* (Berkeley, 1993), and the essays collected in Jenny F. So, ed., *Music in the age of Confucius* (Washington, D.C., 2000).

⁶⁷ Here and below, I translate *xiao* 孝 as "to sacrifice"; in Western Zhou times, the term denotes one's sacrificial service to the dead, not—as in later usage—filial behavior to one's living parents; for extensive references, see Kern, "Shi jing songs as performance texts: a case study of 'Chu ci' ('Thorny caltrop)," *Early China* 25 (2000), p. 87, note 131.

once religious and political with Heaven as its apex and the subordinate lords and princes at the end.

In the scenario of "Harmonious," both male and female ancestors are honored, a point also expressed in "Abundant harvest" (Feng nian 豐年, Mao 279) and "Now clearing away" (Zai shan 載芟, Mao 290) and frequently mentioned in the later ritual classics. The most substantial offering they receive is a bull,⁶⁸ other hymns mention a ram and a bull,⁶⁹ fish,⁷⁰ as well as grain and ale.⁷¹ The ancestors are presented with music⁷² and feasted until they are "drunk" and "satiated"⁷³—in exact parallelism to the subordinate rulers and princes who are regaled at the royal banquets. Whereas the guests at the banquet confirm their allegiance to the king, the ancestors at the sacrifices send down their blessings, as in "Now appearing":

[The king] leads [his guests] to appear before the glorious father,⁷⁴
To sacrifice, to make offerings,
To increase extended longevity,
That [he] forever may preserve!
Splendid indeed are [the ancestors'] many favors,
Brilliant and cultured [his ancestral] lords and rulers;
Comforting [him] with manifold blessings,
Making [him] perpetuate [his] brightness in pure benison.

The connection between banquet and ancestral sacrifice as the two primary sites of religious and political practice and communication becomes particularly visible in the "Court hymns" as well as in the "Eulogies" of Lu and Shang, all of which can only be dated toward the end of the Western Zhou or later.⁷⁵ While traditionally understood to

⁶⁸ Also in "Good ploughs" (Liang si 良耜, Mao 291).

⁶⁹ "We bring forward" (Wo jiang 我將, Mao 272); "Silk robes" (Si yi 絲衣, Mao 292).

⁷⁰ "Submerged" (Qian 潛, Mao 281).

⁷¹ "Now clearing away"; only grain in "Good ploughs"; only ale in "Silk robes."

⁷² "Strong and valorous," "There are blind musicians."

⁷³ "Strong and valorous."

⁷⁴ Following traditional commentaries, *zhao kao* 昭考 is here usually understood as the first ancestor in the *zhaomu* system, that is, King Wu; see the extensive note in Bernhard Karlgren, *Glosses on the Book of odes* (Stockholm, 1964), pp. 157–58 (# 1102). However, considering the likely mid-Western Zhou date for the emergence of that system as well as the uncertainty in dating the present song, I refrain from this interpretation and instead translate *zhao* literally.

⁷⁵ Although the early commentarial tradition has attributed the first 18 of the 31 "Major court hymns" to the Duke of Zhou, the highly standardized and elaborate

be banquet songs, these sections of the *Songs* contain substantial references to the ancestral sacrifice and provide significantly richer descriptions of its process than the "Eulogies of Zhou." Unlike the latter, the "Major court hymns" are very extensive pieces—some of them several hundred characters long—that present the broad foundational narrative of the origin and early development of Zhou civilization. While it is unclear whether or not any of these hymns were performed in the ancestral sacrifice, their grand narrative of the Zhou must have pervaded the sacrifice as well as other ritual performances at the Zhou court. According to much later sources, beginning with the idealized account of the Zhou ritual order as expressed in the *Rites of Zhou*, the various forms of court ritual—ancestral sacrifices, diplomatic banquets, capping ceremonies, and so on—were interconnected by the continuous use of identical or closely related musical performances, dances and texts.⁷⁶ Most importantly, the "Eulogies" and "Court hymns" shared the same principal ideology of the latter, that is, the commemoration of the past as a model for the present and the future.

In both "Eulogies" and "Court hymns," this common orientation was primarily directed at the ancestors, and here most importantly at King Wen. He is explicitly mentioned in seven of the "Eulogies of Zhou"⁷⁷ and implied in others; in the "Major court hymns," a group of five songs⁷⁸ have been identified as the master narrative of the life of King Wen. In addition, the first of the "Major court hymns" is titled "King Wen" (Wen wang 文王, Mao 235) and another one "King Wen has fame" (Wen wang you sheng 文王有聲, Mao 244); both are entirely devoted to his praise. Finally, King Wen is further mentioned in two more "Major court hymns,"⁷⁹ and the "Mandate of Heaven" is closely associated with him throughout.⁸⁰

linguistic form of these hymns seems to rule out such an early date of composition. The "Eulogies of Lu" and "Eulogies of Shang" have long been recognized as postdating the Western Zhou.

⁷⁶ For references, see Kern, "Shi jing songs as performance texts," pp. 98–99.

⁷⁷ "Clear temple," "It is the mandate of Heaven," "They are clear" (Wei qing 維清, Mao 268), "Heaven created" (Tian zuo 天作, Mao 270), "We bring forward," "Martial" and "Bestowing."

⁷⁸ "Great brightness" (Da ming 大明, Mao 236), "Extended," "August indeed," "She bore the folk" and "Duke Liu" (Gong Liu 公劉, Mao 250).

⁷⁹ "Reverential" and "Vast" (Tang 蕩, Mao 255).

⁸⁰ In "King Wen," "Great brightness," "August indeed," "Admirable and delightful" (Jia le 嘉樂, Mao 249) and "Vast." Wang, *From ritual to allegory*, pp. 73–114, compares the narrative of King Wen as told in the "Major court hymns" to the epics of early Greece.

Yet not only is King Wen, along with other specific ancestors ending with King Kang,⁸¹ commemorated as a model in both "Eulogies" and "Hymns"; many of these songs speak also in general terms of continuing the accomplishments of former rulers, of the "former statutes" (*jiudian* 舊典), of the "former times" (*jiu* 舊) or of the "ancient men" (*gu zhi ren* 古之人).⁸² Perhaps most remarkable, though, is the fact that the sacrificial rites themselves are explicitly presented as remembered rites where the act of commemorating is itself modeled after an earlier commemoration. In this way, the ancestral sacrifice itself was a manifestation of continuity and repetition: each new performance addressed to one's ancestors was a reenactment of what these ancestors had represented to their own progenitors. Every new performance was then also a model for the new generation of descendants, as expressed in the exhortation already cited, "may sons of sons, grandsons of grandsons forever treasure and use [this vessel]" that closes about 80 percent of all longer inscriptions. This closing "memory formula" asks the descendants not only to keep the vessel but also to use it, that is, to continue the commemorative sacrifices as they have always been continued. The vessel itself embodied the continuity of the sacrifice.

Significantly, this explicit invocation of past ritual practice appears in both "Eulogies" and "Hymns": "Since times of old, what have we done 自昔何爲?" is the phrase in line three of the "Minor court hymn" "Thorny caltrop"; "Truly—our sacrifices are like what 誕我祀如何?" is its equivalent in the "Major court hymn" "She bore the folk." In both cases, the question introduces a formulaic recital of the orderly agricultural preparations for the sacrifice as it has continued from antiquity to the present. Likewise, the "Eulogy of Zhong" "Now clearing away" 載芟 closes by saying, "It is not [merely] here what we have here; / it is not [merely] now what is now; / since ancient times, it is like this" 匪且有且, 匪今斯今, 振古如茲. In a sacrificial eulogy, the memory formula self-referentially speaks of the very ritual act in which the song is performed; in a banquet hymn, it relates the feasting of the royal

⁸¹ King Cheng is eulogized in "Successors" (Xia wu 下武, Mao 243), "Great Heaven has a defined mandate," "Strong and valorous" (here together with King Kang), and "Ah!" (Yi 噫嘻, Mao 277).

⁸² For the "Major court hymns," see "King Wen," "Successors," "King Wen has fame," "She bore the folk," "Admirable and delightful," "Meandering slope" (Quan a 卷阿, Mao 252) and "Shao the Great" (Shao min 召旻, Mao 265); for the "Eulogies of Zhou," see "It is the mandate of Heaven," "Brilliant and cultured," "We bring forward," "Pitiable I am, the small child" (Min yu xiao zi 閔予小子, Mao 286), "Now clearing away," "Good ploughs," "Zhuo," "Pierce" and "Bestowing."

guests to the ancestral offerings. Not by accident, the spirits were also referred to as "guests," as in "There are blind musicians" cited above. The close connection between sacrifices and banquets is most explicit in a number of banquet hymns that seem to oscillate between the two ritual occasions. This is particularly true of several of the extensive "Eulogies" of Lu and Shang⁸³ but also of several court hymns,⁸⁴ as in stanza four from "Heaven protects" (Tian bao 天保, Mao 166) where the guests at the banquet address their royal host:

Auspicious and pure are the oblations,
 These you use for sacrifices and offerings.
 [You perform] the summer, spring, winter and autumn sacrifices
 To the [ancestral] rulers and former kings.
 The [ancestral] lords say: "For you [we] predict
 Longevity of myriad years without limits!"

Complementing the "Eulogies of Zhou," the "Major" and "Minor court hymns" together with the "Eulogies" of Lu and Shang offer many of the bits and pieces of information on the ancestral and other sacrifices that subsequently were systematized and elaborated upon in the ritual classics as well as in the great works of Eastern Zhou narrative historiography, the *Zuo commentary* (*Zuozhuan* 左傳) and the *Discourses of the states* (*Guoyu* 國語). To begin with, both Heaven and the royal ancestors (residing in Heaven) received regular seasonal offerings. It is not clear how these sacrifices differed in nature, but they are referred to by distinct names (as in "Heaven protects" just cited).⁸⁵ In addition, sacrifices were performed at the altar of the soil (*she* 社) and to the cosmic spirits of the four directions (*sifang* 四方),⁸⁶ to Lord Millet (Houji 后稷),⁸⁷ at the border altar (*jiao* 郊), to the "Powers above and below" (*shangxia* 上下)

⁸³ Most clearly in "Closed temple" (Bi gong 闕宮, Mao 300), "Ample" (Na na 那, Mao 301), and "Brilliant ancestor" (Lie zu 烈祖, Mao 302).

⁸⁴ Especially "When the guests first sit down on their mats" (Bin zhi chu yan 賓之初筵, Mao 220), "The foot of the Han hill" (Han lu 旱麓, Mao 239), "She bore the folk" (Sheng min 生民, Mao 250), "Rushes in rows" (Hang wei 行葦, Mao 246), "We are drunk" (Ji zui 既醉, Mao 247) and "Wild ducks" (Fu yi 鳧鷖, Mao 248).

⁸⁵ The seasonal sacrifices are also noted in "Thorny caltrop," "Closed temple," "Ample," and "Brilliant ancestor," while "When the guests first sit down on their mats" mentions seasonal banquets.

⁸⁶ "Extensive fields" (Fu tian 甫田, Mao 211), "Large fields" (Da tian 大田, Mao 212), "Cloud river" (Yun han 雲漢, Mao 258), "August indeed" (Huang yi 皇矣, Mao 241), "Closed temple."

⁸⁷ "Closed temple."

and to the Lord on High (*shangdi* 上帝, or *di* 帝, residing in Heaven);⁸⁸ traveling or marching on military campaign, one made offerings to the spirits of the road⁸⁹ and to those of a newly conquered territory.⁹⁰ In short, the *Songs* inform us about a host of deities and the sacrifices they received, yet their overall emphasis remains on the ancestral sacrifice. Like the "Eulogies of Zhou," they mention grain (especially millet), ale, rams, pigs and bulls for the offerings,⁹¹ including the fat and hair of the sacrificial victims.⁹²

The richest account of the Zhou ancestral sacrifice comes from the "Minor court hymn" "Thorny caltrop" that deserves to be quoted in full. The hymn comprises 72 tetrasyllabic lines divided into six stanzas of equal length. Every stanza except the fifth begins with a new rhyme, and additional rhyme changes occur in stanzas four, five and six. In the following, I indicate the rhymes in square brackets; moreover, as I believe the song preserves the polyvocal perspectives of a sacrificial performance, I indicate the individual voices throughout the translation. This arrangement will show that changes of rhyme indicate actual shifts of voices in the ritual communication among the participants, or shifts in the direction or perspective of speech.⁹³ In my analysis, the text contains genuine utterances from an early ancestral sacrifice interspersed with brief narrative elements. This construction suggests not a genuine performance text sung in the ancestral sacrifice but a more complex textual artifact: a versified commemorative narrative that aims to preserve the authentic expressions of an earlier sacrifice while also providing guidance for an audience, certainly postdating the Western Zhou, that was no longer familiar with the original sacrificial practice. Initially, the ancestral sacrifice had been the occasion for which the ritual language of the "Eulogies" and "Court hymns" had been created; now, the sacrificial order itself was preserved only in these texts.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ "Cloud river," "August indeed," etc.

⁸⁹ "The multitudinous folk" (Zheng min 烝民, Mao 260), "The Marquis of Han is grand" (Han yi 韓奕, Mao 261).

⁹⁰ "August indeed." Cf. the chapter by Kominami Ichiro in this volume.

⁹¹ "Thorny caltrop," "This Southern Mountain" (Xin nan shan 信南山, Mao 210), "Extensive fields," "Large fields," "She bore the folk," "When the guests first sit down on their mats," "Closed temple."

⁹² "This Southern Mountain," "She bore the folk."

⁹³ For the full analysis and detailed annotation of the song see Kern, "Shi jing songs as performance texts," from which much of the following discussion is drawn.

⁹⁴ With this, I have decided to depart from my earlier analysis published eight years

Stanza 1:

[Invoker addressing the impersonator(s) of the ancestor(s) on behalf of the descendant:]

"Thorny, thorny is the caltrop—
So [we] remove its prickles. [A]
Since times of old, what have [we] done?
We plant the paniced millet, the glutinous millet: [A]
Our paniced millet is abundant, abundant,
Our glutinous millet is orderly, orderly. [A]
Our granaries being full,
Our sheaves are in hundreds of thousands. [A]
With them, [we] make ale and food: [A]
To offer, to sacrifice, [A]
To assuage, to provision, [A]
To pray for radiant blessings!" [A]

Stanza 2:

[Invoker addressing the descendant:]

"Dignified, dignified, processional, processional—[B]
[You] have purified your oxen and sheep, [B]
Proceeding to the winter sacrifice, the autumn sacrifice. [B]
Some flay, some boil, [B]
Some arrange, some present. [B]
The invoker sacrifices inside the temple gate, [B]
The sacrificial service is greatly shining. [B]
The ancestor(s), these [you] make to return, [B]
The divine protector(s), these [you] feast. [B]
The offering descendant shall have benison! [B]
[He will be] requited with great blessings—
Ten thousand years longevity without limit!" [B]

Stanza 3:

[Invoker addressing the descendant:]

"The furnace managers are attentive, attentive, [C]
Making the sacrificial stands grand and magnificent: [C]
Some [meat] is roasted, some is broiled. [C]
The noble wives are solemn, solemn, [C]
Making the plates grand and numerous. [C]
With those who are guests, with those who are visitors, [C]
Presentations and toasts are exchanged. [C]

ago where I took the song as a genuine performance text. I now see it as part of Eastern Zhou commemorative culture.

Rites and ceremony are perfectly to the rule, [C]
Laughter and talk are perfectly measured. [C]
The divine protector, he is led to arrive, [C]
He will requite [you] with great blessings—
Ten thousand years longevity will be [your] reward!" [C]

Stanza 4:

[Principal descendant:]

"We are greatly reverential, [D]
Form and rites are without transgression." [D]

[Narrative comment]

The officiating invoker invokes the [spirits'] announcement,
He goes and presents it to the offering descendant:

[Invoker addressing the descendant on behalf of the ancestors:]

"[You] have made fragrant and aromatic the offering sacrifice, [A]
The spirits enjoy the drink and food; [A]
[They] predict for you a hundred blessings. [A]
According to the [proper] quantities, according to the [proper] rules,
[A]
[You] have brought sacrificial grain, [you] have brought glutinous millet, [A]
[You] have put them in baskets, [you] have arranged them, [A]
Forever [the spirits] bestow on you the utmost, [A]
This ten-thousandfold, this hundred-thousandfold!" [A]

Stanza 5:

[Principal descendant (?):]

"Rites and ceremony are completed, [A]
Bells and drums have given their warning." [A]

[Narrative comment]:

The offering descendant goes to his place,
The officiating invoker delivers the announcement:

[Invoker addressing the impersonator(s) of the ancestor(s) on behalf of the descendant:]

"The spirits are all drunk— [E]
The august impersonator(s) may now rise!" [E]

[Narrative comment]:

Drums and bells escort the impersonator(s) away;
 And so the divine protector returns. [F]
 The many attendants and the noble wives
 Clear and remove [the dishes] without delay. [F]
 The many fathers and the brothers
 All together banquet among themselves. [F]

Stanza 6:

[Narrative comment]:

The musicians all come in to perform, [G]
 To secure the subsequent fortune. [G]

[Invoker addressing the descendant:]

"Your viands have been set forth, [B]
 Without resentment, all are happy!" [B]

[Male clan members addressing the descendant:]

"[We] are drunk, [we] are satiated; [H]
 young and old, [we] bow [our] heads. [H]
 The spirits have enjoyed the drink and food,
 They cause you, the lord, to live long!" [H]

[Invoker addressing the descendant:]

"Greatly compliant, greatly timely
 is how you have completed [the rites]. [I]
 Sons of sons, grandsons of grandsons,
 Let them not fail to continue these [rites]!" [I]

The song confirms much of the information already gleaned from the "Eulogies" and other "Court hymns," such as the nature of the sacrificial offerings, the notion of seasonal sacrifices, the feasting of the offerings and the reception of their blessings in return; it also mentions the presence of music and briefly describes a concluding banquet that was still conducted under the purview of the ancestral spirits. It shows the ancestral sacrifice as a communal affair where members of the family, guests, and ritual officials fulfilled their prescribed roles, including the impersonator(s)—one or more young members of the family—that, once inebriated, spoke in the tongues representing the ancestral spirits.

The polyvocal structure of the text cannot be accidental but bespeaks the effort to recapture the religious drama performed in the Zhou ancestral temple. What counted in the recollection of this drama was not individuals but roles. None of the participants are named, but all have functions, thus demonstrating the decidedly non-historical but generic

nature of the hymn. "Thorny caltrop" encapsulates not any particular performance but the blueprint and essence of all such performances. By contrast, bronze inscriptions frequently do name their patrons and also the ritual officials in the appointment ceremonies. The act of having a bronze vessel cast reflected the merits of a particular individual for whom it apparently was important to historicize the ceremony by referring to the appointment ceremony not merely as a royal institution but to one particular instantiation of that institution, complete with the names of those present—a phenomenon that reflects a strong concern with the continuity of memory over future generations but perhaps also the contractual dimensions of a royal appointment.⁹⁵

Most important for a generic account of an ideal ancestral sacrifice, "Thorny caltrop" mimetically represents the perfect ritual order as the order of its language. The song is composed of a tight aesthetic fabric featuring an exceptionally intense use of rhyme, the first-person plural pronoun, onomatopoeic reduplicative binomes and a staccato-like syntactic line pattern AXAY where "A" is a particle repeated in the first and third position and followed by two different verbs in the second and fourth position. Such patterning is not evenly distributed across early poetry; the "AXAY" structure is almost exclusively confined to the ritual hymns in the *Book of songs* (compared to the "Airs of the states" in the same anthology)—especially the "Major court hymns"—and so is the intensity with which the reduplicatives follow upon one another.⁹⁶ Especially among the 31 "Major court hymns" there is rarely a song that does not display several of the features noted above; compare the following stanzas of "August indeed!" that celebrates the foundation of the Zhou dynasty together with its founding heroes. For illustration, I emphasize in bold the words that are repeated in the original:

He cut **them** down, he removed **them**,
Those standing dead trees, **those** fallen dead trees;
 He dressed **them**, he levelled **them**,
Those clumps, **those** lines;
 He opened **them** up, he cleared **them**,
Those tamarisk trees, **those** *qu* trees;
 He bared **them**, he scraped **them**,
those wild mulberry trees, **those** mountain mulberry trees.

(Stanza two, ll. 1–8 of 12)

⁹⁵ Kern, "The performance of writing in Western Zhou China," p. 151.

⁹⁶ Kern, "Shi jing songs as performance texts," pp. 106–09.

It is indeed this Wang Ji;
 The Lord measured his heart:
 Serene he was in the fame of his **virtuous power**.
 In his **virtuous power**, he was able to make **shining bright**;
 He was able to make **shining bright**, he was able to distinguish;
 He was able to lead, he was able to rule.
 He governed as king over this great state,
 He was able to enforce submission, he was able to enforce concordance.

(Stanza four, ll. 1–8 of 12)

The engines of assault were strong, strong,
 the walls of Chong were high, high.
 Captives to be questioned came in procession, procession,
 Cut-off ears were presented calmly, calmly.
 These he offered at the war sacrifice, these he offered at the conquest sacrifice.
 These he brought forward, these he appended.
 Within the four quarters, there was none who affronted him.
 The engines of assault were powerful, powerful,
 The walls of Chong were towering, towering.
 These he attacked, these he assailed,
 These he put to an end, these he exterminated.
 Within the four quarters, there was none who opposed him.
 (Stanza eight, ll. 1–12 of 12)⁹⁷

The overall rhythmic repetition is an aesthetic principle integral to these generic songs. Within the confines of the tetrasyllabic line (itself a basic measure of standardization and regularity), this repetition shows continuous variation that is tightly controlled, never transgressing into unpredictable or aberrant patterns: end-rhymes abound but in different phonetic categories; the "AXAY" rhythm is pervasive but can be produced through many different choices for the repeated "A" syllable; various words may be repeated at the beginning of each line, in the second or third position, or at the beginning of each stanza; the repertoire of reduplicatives is unlimited; whole line patterns can be repeated within a stanza or in the same position of different stanzas, but such repetitions are different in every song. In short, no two of the ritual hymns are nearly identical, but all are similar. Due to their strictly formulaic and modular composition, intertextuality is pervasive among the ritual hymns preserved in the *Songs* and even more so among mid- and late

⁹⁷ Compare Karlgren, *The Book of odes*, pp. 193–96; Legge, *The She king*, pp. 368–73.

Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, where identical phrases and entire lines are ubiquitous.⁹⁸

As rhythmic repetition is a feature of the single ritual performance as well as of the sequence of performances, its linguistic form manifests itself within a single hymn while simultaneously relating this hymn to the entire repertoire. This overall formal coherence is further enhanced by the fact that in virtually every text several of the patterns noted above occur in conjunction and rapid alternation. They are intertwined and overlap; they appear in recursive loops or parallel linear structures; they create a dense and multi-layered texture that resonates between lines, stanzas and whole songs. Their rich, tangible language embodies the Zhou institutions of cultural memory—sacrifice and banquet—and expresses cultural coherence, genealogical reproduction and political authority.

The features of the "Eulogies" and "Court hymns," and the ways in which they blend language and performance, are not unique to Zhou China but have been identified and analyzed by anthropologists and linguists in other cultures as well. According to these studies, there is a striking overlap between the language of poetry, the aesthetics of ritual, and the ideology of memory. Stanley J. Tambiah has offered a useful description of ritual as

a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication. It is constituted of patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement are characterized in varying degree by formality (conventionality), stereotypy (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition).⁹⁹

While in this definition, condensation refers to "the sense of total fused experience"¹⁰⁰ created through multiple media, and thus operates on the level of the individual performance, the other three aspects of ritual—formality, stereotypy and redundancy—apply both to the aesthetic structure inherent in the single performance and to the sequence of

⁹⁸ For the *Songs*, see W.A.H.C. Dobson, *The language of the Book of songs* (Toronto, 1968), pp. 247–64, and Kern, "Shi jing songs as performance texts," pp. 103–06. For the inscriptions, see Falkenhausen, "Issues in Western Zhou studies," pp. 155, 163–64, 168–71, and Jessica Rawson, *Western Zhou ritual bronzes in the Arthur M. Sackler collections* (Cambridge, 1990), vol. IIA, p. 93.

⁹⁹ Tambiah, *Culture, thought, and social action: an anthropological perspective* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 128.

¹⁰⁰ Tambiah, *Culture, thought, and social action*, p. 165.

performances of the same ritual at defined intervals. Indeed, the fact that a ritual performance is seen not as a single occurrence but as a member in a continuous chain of such occurrences is basic to its meaning and aesthetics. For a strong feature “contributing to the sense of total fused experience,” Tambiah points to “the hyper-regular surface structure of ritual language: the poetic devices such as rhyme, meter, assonance, and alliteration generate an overall quality of union and a blurring of grammatical boundaries.”¹⁰¹ Likewise, Jan Assmann, writing about the creation and perpetuation of cultural memory, has noted:

It can be taken as general knowledge that poetic formation serves primarily the mnemotechnical purpose of putting identity-securing knowledge into a durable form. We are by now equally familiar with the fact that this knowledge is usually performed in the form of a multi-media staging which embeds the linguistic text undetachably in voice, body, miming, gesture, dance, rhythm, and ritual act... By the regularity of their recurrence, feasts and rites grant the imparting and transmission of identity-securing knowledge and hence the reproduction of cultural identity. Ritual repetition secures the coherence of the group in space and time.¹⁰²

Along the same line, Paul Connerton emphasizes that “all rites are repetitive, and repetition automatically implies continuity with the past.”¹⁰³ In other words, ritual itself, on account of its repetitive and formalized nature, is a function of commemoration: a performance is the repetition of an earlier performance. Thus, the repetitive and formalized nature of ritual is rendered explicit through the regularity of rhythmic structure within and beyond the single performance. Each performance exposes its own aesthetic structure as the embodiment of the continued presence of the past. While expressing a specific master narrative of the past—in the “Major court hymns” most prominently the story of King Wen—the ritual performance, in conjunction with its propositional contents, constitutes a formal claim of continuity with the past.

The Zhou sacrifices and banquets were thus the ritual performance par excellence: their religious proposition—the commemoration and emulation of an ancestral model—converged with the formal structure

¹⁰¹ Tambiah, *Culture, thought, and social action*, p. 165.

¹⁰² Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich, 1992), pp. 56–57 (my translation); see also pp. 143–44.

¹⁰³ Paul Connerton, *How societies remember* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 45.

of its repetitive form. Furthermore, it not only exalted the ancestors as models to follow but through its correct and successful performance also transformed the pious descendant—the host of the sacrifice and banquet—into a rightful successor and hence ideal future ancestor to be venerated by subsequent generations.¹⁰⁴ By this logic, the correct performance of the ancestral sacrifice served as a touchstone of political legitimacy; in post-Western Zhou times, the idealized history of past rulership was envisioned as an idealized history of ritual.

In their analysis of ritual language, anthropologists and linguists alike have emphasized its formalized, restrained and repetitive patterns that show the verbal expression to tally with the aesthetic structure of ritual performance as a whole. The language of the Zhou ancestral sacrifice is prescribed and predictable; it does not furnish new information but, on the contrary, circulates within the performance what is already known. Maurice Bloch has characterized ritual speech as “formalised” and “impoverished language,” as the “language of traditional authority” where “many of the options at all levels of language are abandoned so that choice of form, of style, of words and of syntax is less than in ordinary language.”¹⁰⁵ Bloch holds that “religion uses forms of communication which do not have propositional force” and that in a song, “no argument or reasoning can be communicated... *You cannot argue with a song.*”¹⁰⁶ Likewise, Emily Ahern speaks of a “restricted code,” guarded by strict intertextuality;¹⁰⁷ Anthony F.C. Wallace has coined the classical formula of “communication without information”;¹⁰⁸ and Wade T. Wheelock has noted that ritual speech

is most often a fixed and known text repeated verbatim for each performance, and the constituents of the immediate ritual setting, to which the language of the liturgy will make frequent reference, are generally standardized and thus familiar to the participants, not needing any verbal

¹⁰⁴ I have dealt with these features on several occasions; see Kern, “*Shi jing* songs as performance texts,” pp. 55–76; *The stele inscriptions of Ch’in Shih-huang: text and ritual in early Chinese imperial representation* (New Haven, 2000), pp. 119–54; Ke Mading 柯馬丁 (Martin Kern), “Zuowei zhuixiang de shi: *Shi ji qi zaoqi quanshi*,” *Guoxue yanjiu* 16 (2005), 329–41.

¹⁰⁵ Bloch, “Symbols, song, dance and features of articulation: is religion an extreme form of traditional authority?,” *European Journal of Sociology* 15.1 (1974), pp. 60–61.

¹⁰⁶ Bloch, “Symbols, song, dance and features of articulation,” p. 71.

¹⁰⁷ Emily Ahern, *Chinese ritual and politics* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 54–55.

¹⁰⁸ Anthony Wallace, *Religion: an anthropological view* (New York, 1966), p. 233.

explication. Therefore, practically every utterance of a ritual is superfluous from the perspective of ordinary conversational principles.¹⁰⁹

The question of meaning extends beyond the verbal utterances to the entire ritual performance; meaning is constituted “not in terms of ‘information’ but in terms of *pattern recognition* and *configurational awareness*” achieved through restraint and the orchestrated use of “redundancy and recursive loops” (Tambiah).¹¹⁰

It is from these perspectives that songs like “Thorny caltrop” as well as the “Major court hymns” in general embody the purposes and aesthetics of the mid- and late Western Zhou royal sacrifices and banquets—even while possibly postdating the fall of the Western Zhou. Unlike the prose accounts of the ritual classics, they preserve the deep structure of the earlier ritual performances as the structure of text. The same, I will argue, is true for the speeches that the *Book of documents* attributes to the early Zhou rulers.

The royal speeches

If recent studies are any guide,¹¹¹ the scholarly consensus on the Zhou royal speeches included in the *Book of documents* may be about to change. Much of traditional scholarship has been concerned with the early history of the *Documents* as a book, exploring the situation of the text in Han times and the problem of the inauthentic pseudo-Kong Anguo 孔安國 “ancient-character” (*guwen* 古文) version.¹¹² In addition, a number of chapters have been dated to Warring States, Qin, and even Han times, and there is universal agreement that the speeches attributed to pre-Zhou rulers are post-Western Zhou fabrications. The one part of the text whose purported early date seems to have survived more or less unassailed are the 12 speeches attributed to the early Western Zhou rulers: “The great announcement” (Da gao 大誥), “The announcement to Kang” (Kang gao 康誥), “The announcement about alcohol” (Jiu gao

¹⁰⁹ Wade Wheelock, “The problem of ritual language: from information to situation,” *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 50.1 (1982), p. 56.

¹¹⁰ Tambiah, *Culture, thought, and social action*, p. 139.

¹¹¹ See note 6 above.

¹¹² See Michael Nylan, *The five “Confucian” classics* (New Haven, 2001), ch. 3; Nylan, “The *ku wen* documents in Han times,” *T’oung Pao* 81 (1995), 25–50; Shaughnessy, “*Shang shu* 尚書 (*Shu ching* 書經).”

酒誥), “The timber of the Zi tree” (Zi cai 梓材), “The announcement of Shao” (Shao gao 召誥), “The announcement about Luo” (Luo gao 洛誥), “The numerous officers” (Duo shi 多士), “Against luxurious ease” (Wu yi 無逸), “Prince Shi” (Jun Shi 君奭), “The numerous regions” (Duo fang 多方), “The establishment of government” (Li zheng 立政) and “The testamentary charge” (Gu ming 顧命).

The claim that the speeches come from the time of their purported speakers is supported by nothing but the pious claim of tradition. In addition to and independent from linguistic challenges that have been mounted recently,¹¹³ I will argue below that the speeches fit with the “Major court hymns” and the mid- to late Western Zhou historical context of commemorative culture as it can be reconstructed from bronze ritual paraphernalia and their inscriptions.¹¹⁴ Moreover, this conclusion is in line with other parts of the *Documents* as well as with early Chinese historiography in general. As Creel has pointed out, the “Exhortation at Mu,” purportedly spoken by King Wu to his troops before their conclusive victory over the Shang, has long been recognized as a post-Western Zhou fabrication.¹¹⁵ Likewise, all the *Documents* speeches attributed to pre-Zhou rulers are without doubt products of Eastern Zhou times, that is, constructed or reconstructed speeches that may contain some historical knowledge but are fundamentally texts through which the Chinese rulers of high antiquity were imagined and became memorable. Thereafter, as David Schaberg has shown especially for the *Zuo commentary*, imagined speech was a primary rhetorical device in Eastern Zhou historiography,¹¹⁶ and so was imagined song in historical writings from Eastern Zhou through Han times.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Vogelsang, “Inscriptions and proclamations: on the authenticity of the ‘gao’ chapters in the *Book of documents*,” with further references to other studies. As Vogelsang acknowledges, there is no question that his detailed account of words and phrases in the speeches is bound to contain individual mistakes; moreover, his study proceeds from the questionable premise that the present versions of the speeches—which he then compares to Western Zhou bronze inscriptions—represent more or less accurately their original form, an assumption that few scholars would share. Yet even if only a sizable minority of his specific observations were acceptable (which, to my mind, they are), the evidence against an early Western Zhou date for the speeches would still be impressive.

¹¹⁴ It is not clear whether or not Vogelsang wants to date the speeches firmly into the Spring and Autumn period; in my own opinion, a late Western Zhou date remains possible.

¹¹⁵ Creel, *The origins of statecraft in China*, pp. 455–56.

¹¹⁶ Schaberg, *A patterned past*.

¹¹⁷ David Schaberg, “Song and the historical imagination in early China,” *Harvard*

At stake with all these utterances was not Ranke's "wie es eigentlich gewesen ist" ("how it really was") but—far more important—how the course of history was driven by moral force, who the moral agents of history were, and what kinds of utterances might have plausibly expressed the intentions of these cultural and political heroes at critical moments of political history and personal experience. In this, it was not a general past that was preserved but its selective reconstruction and reorganization as memory; in Jan Assmann's words:

The past coagulates around symbolic figures to which remembrance attaches itself. . . . For the cultural memory, not the factual but only the remembered history counts. One also could say that in the cultural memory, factual history becomes transformed into remembered history and hence into myth. Myth is a founding story, a story that is told to illuminate a present from its origins. . . . Through remembrance, history turns into myth. By this, it does not become unreal but, on the contrary and only then, reality in the sense of a continual normative and formative force.¹¹⁸

In particular, religious celebrations of founding myths, such as the commemoration of the Israelite exodus in the Passover, are often performed in communal feasts. Here, the identity of the commemorating group is affirmed through reference to its shared past, and its collective identity is communicated in a ceremonial setting where remembrance "coagulates into texts, dances, images, and rites."¹¹⁹

Placing the origins and performance of the 12 Western Zhou speeches in mid- to late Western Zhou commemorative culture—or possibly even thereafter—befits them both conceptually and historically. Like the "Major court hymns," they commemorate, in however ritualized and seemingly impersonal an idiom, the early Zhou kings and their feats. Far beyond whatever historical information they provide, their first and foremost concern is the representation of their charismatic speakers at historically significant moments. In the speeches, the early rulers are at once generic paradigms of virtue and, as the actual moral agents of history, speak in an intensely personal idiom, rich with exclamations and first-person pronouns; they also are at once individualized as specific kings and generalized as models to emulate. Second, the speeches fit precisely into the historical context of mid- and late Western Zhou

times when the practice of the ancestral sacrifice was expanded into a much broader culture of commemoration that increasingly fused religious service with political purpose. This is the time of the grand commemorative banquet hymns as well as of court rituals that were no longer addressed to a small group of clan members but to a much broader political elite; when the appointment ceremony was one of the central activities in the ancestral temple, extending the king's "Mandate of Heaven" to those whom he commanded to take up administrative positions; when new and significantly larger types of bronze vessels and bells served not merely commemorative rituals—sacrifices and banquets—but at the same time also the conspicuous display of inscribed text; and when the early kings, now transformed into cultural and political icons, appear with increased frequency in such inscriptions. Furthermore, as noted above, to understand the early speeches as the products of commemorative culture places them not outside but in the mainstream of early Chinese historiographic practice—a practice fully visible even within the *Book of documents* itself, that is, both for King Wu and the extended line of pre-Zhou rulers altogether. In short, linguistic evidence, historical context and conceptual considerations on the nature and practice of cultural memory all converge in the argument for, at the earliest, a mid- or late Western Zhou date for the 12 speeches, and for their genuine place in the sacrifices and banquets of royal commemoration and political identity.¹²⁰ While it is impossible to state exactly how the speeches were performed in these contexts, their solemn rhythm and highly stylized diction easily lent themselves to formal declamation.

While the literary structure of the early royal speeches is not nearly as unified as that of the sacrificial hymns, it is far from ordinary language. The 12 speeches do not use rhyme but show a preference for rhythmic patterns, repetitions of various kinds, frequent exclamations like "Alas!" 嗚呼 at the beginning of a paragraph, catalogues (as in lists of dignitaries and functionaries) and the regular use of fixed formulae such as "I, the small child" 予小子 that are also familiar from bronze inscriptions. In Confucius' times, the *Documents* were considered to be linguistically—and in prestige—on a par with the *Songs*, as both related

Journal of Asiatic Studies 59 (1999), 305–61; Kern, "The poetry of Han historiography," *Early Medieval China* 10–11.1 (2004), 23–65.

¹¹⁸ Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, p. 52 (my translation); see also pp. 75–78.

¹¹⁹ Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, p. 53 (my translation).

¹²⁰ While one might, of course, allow that the speeches were composed only in Eastern Zhou times—after all, the commemoration of the Zhou origins did not end with the Western Zhou—it is not necessary to insist on such a later date. Thus, I consider the mid- to late Western Zhou date for the speeches a terminus post quem.

to the high idiom of ritual expression: in Analects (7/18), Confucius is quoted as saying that for (the recitation of) the *Songs*, the *Documents*, and matters of ritual, he used *yayan* 雅言 (“elegant standard speech”—as opposed to colloquial speech). The overall diction of the early speeches is one of ceremonial gravity and solemnity, as may be illustrated with the latter half of the “Many officers” (Duo shi 多士). Here, the Duke of Zhou is said to address the officers remaining from the overthrown Shang (Yin) dynasty. Following the Duke’s outline of the failures of the previous dynasty, he urges the officers to now serve the Zhou. Three words are densely repeated throughout the passage: the emphatic particle *wei* 惟 (“only”; “it is this”), here translated as “indeed”;¹²¹ the first-person pronouns *yu* 予, *wo* 我 and *zhen* 朕, and the second-person pronoun *er* 爾. As no pronoun (or explicit subject) is required in classical Chinese, their heavy use—a feature typical of liturgical speech¹²²—is a conscious stylistic choice that adds rhythm, intensity and a rhetorical emphasis on personality to the speech. In the following arrangement, I am parsing the text according to its rhythmic divisions and marking in bold the explicit pronouns as well as the particle *wei* 惟 here translated as “indeed.”

The king said: Ah!
I declare to **you**, the many officers:
I, indeed for these [afore-mentioned] reasons, have transferred and settled you in the west;
It is not that **I, the One Man**, in holding up my virtuous power, make you restless.
This **indeed** is the mandate from Heaven—do not go against it!
I do not dare to be tardy—do not resent me!
Indeed it is **you** who know
That **indeed** it was the forefathers of Yin
Who had documents, who had statutes
To show how Yin superseded the mandate of Xia.
Today, **you** further say:
“The [officers of] Xia were promoted and chosen at the [Shang] royal court,
Had duties among the hundred officials.”

¹²¹ I am aware that this is not the standard translation, but I consider it important also to maintain the basic identity of the word in English. While the two syntactic functions are used in free alternation, the particle often seems used primarily for emphasis and rhythmic purposes.

¹²² See Wheelock, “The problem of ritual language,” p. 50: “One of the first things that strikes one about liturgical utterances is the heavy usage of pronouns, adverbs, ellipses and the like that make reference to the immediate environment of the speaker and depend upon that context for their meaning.”

I, the One Man,
Indeed only heed and employ those of virtuous power.
Therefore,
I dare to seek **you** out
In the Heavenly city of Shang.
I, indeed, will [now] generally pardon and pity you.
It is not that I am at fault;
this is **indeed** the Mandate of Heaven!
The king said: Many officers!
Formerly, when I came from Yan
I greatly sent down commands to the folk of **your** four states;
Yet also, I brightly applied the punishments of Heaven.
I moved **you** [here,] far and distant [from the city of Shang].
Comply with your affairs and serve **our** honored [capital]—
Be greatly obedient!
The king said:
I declare to **you**, the many officers of Yin:
Now, that **I, indeed**, have not killed **you**;
I, indeed, will give this command once again.
Now **I** make a great city in this place of Luo.
I, indeed, across the four quarters have none whom I reject.
And **indeed** it is **you**, the many officers,
Who should rush to submit and hasten to serve us—
Be greatly obedient!
You, then, may have **your** land!
You, then, may be tranquil in your duties and dwellings.
If **you** can be reverential,
Heaven, indeed, will favor and pity you.
If **you** cannot be reverential,
You not only will not have **your** land—
I also will apply the punishments of Heaven
To **you** as persons.
Now **you indeed** shall dwell in **your** city,
perpetuate **your** residence.
You, then, will have duties, will have years in this place of Luo.
Your small children will then prosper,
Following **your** being moved [here].¹²³

There is no question about an overall rhythmic structure built around the use of personal pronouns, repetition and short cadences of three, four or five words that resonate with the generally tetrasyllabic meter of the *Songs*.¹²⁴ The rhythmic, repetitious diction, however, is not

¹²³ Compare James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, Vol III: *The Shoo King* (Taipei, 1985), pp. 458–63; Bernhard Karlgren, *The Book of documents* (Stockholm, 1950), pp. 55–56.

¹²⁴ In the received text of the *Songs*, more than 90 percent of all lines are tetrasyllabic;

restricted to meter. In several lines, we find the “AXAY” structure discussed above; the relentless use of pronouns is more intense than in any of the hymns (or, for that matter, in bronze inscriptions); and even within this short passage, a number of expressions and entire lines are repeated. While not showing a coherent use of rhyme,¹²⁵ a text like the one above, revealing the principal features of ritual speech, comes to life only as a performance text. In its extremely formalized diction, and in particular through its emphasis on the first-person pronoun, it exudes the royal charisma of the king as persona, political institution and ancestral model. Such charisma fits with the ideological needs of the mid- and late Western Zhou period, yet it would also have its place at any time over the following centuries.

Bronze vessels and their inscriptions

The thousands of inscribed and unscribed bronze ritual vessels that have been retrieved from tombs and storage pits were the most valuable and conspicuous artifacts of the Western Zhou ancestral sacrifice. Bronze vessels had been produced for several centuries before the Western Zhou, and the practice of casting them with inscriptions emerged in the late Shang dynasty around 1250 BC. These vessels of various shapes and sizes contained the offerings to royal and aristocratic ancestors and appear to have been produced for this purpose. In their elaborate design, sophisticated technological demands and unrivalled material expenditure, they appear fundamentally distinct from everyday objects for mundane use. As is evident even from the very short inscriptions, they were produced for the purpose of the ancestral sacrifice.

The vast majority of inscriptions from the late Shang and early

see Gao Huaping, “Guyue de chenfu yu shiti de bianqian,” *Zhongguo shehui kexue* 1991.5, 201–12, who relates this meter to the musical performances of the songs; George A. Kennedy, “Metrical ‘irregularity’ in the *Shih Ching*,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 4 (1939), 284–96. As Kennedy points out, not all lines of five or more syllables necessarily deviate from the basic four-beat pattern, as they often contain unstressed syllables that may not be musically relevant. On the other hand, several lines that are tetrasyllabic in the received *Songs* are only trisyllabic in recently excavated manuscripts; see Kern, “The Odes in excavated manuscripts.”

¹²⁵ So far, the scholarly tradition has almost entirely focused on the reconstruction of end-rhymes in Zhou texts. As a result, we may well be overestimating the importance of end-rhyme among many other euphonic devices such as meter, prosody and various sound patterns within a single line or across a sequence of lines.

Western Zhou periods contained only between one and ten characters.¹²⁶ As a rule, these texts mentioned the patron of the artifact (often merely a clan sign) and possibly its sacrificial purpose. Longer inscriptions only gradually emerged in early Western Zhou times and became increasingly frequent over the middle and later periods of the dynasty.¹²⁷ At the same time, their placement in the bronze vessels changed over time: initially hidden deep inside the vessel and hence not visible for the human eye or at least very hard to discern, the inscriptions became not only longer over time but also more prominently placed.¹²⁸ Only in the latter part of the mid-Western Zhou period did broad-surfaced vessel shapes such as *gui* 簋 and *xu* 盃 tureens or shallow tripods emerge that lent themselves to the conspicuous display of long texts.¹²⁹ Likewise, sets of large *yongzhong* 甬鐘 bells that prominently display their inscriptions on their outside became common only from the 9th century BC onward.¹³⁰ Unlike the earlier characters hidden in the depth of narrow flasks and vases for alcoholic offerings, these texts were meant to be seen; they explicitly show the vessels and bells not merely as ritual objects to feast and delight the ancestors but also as representations of memory, cast in the most durable material available.

First discovered by Jessica Rawson and later significantly elaborated upon by Lothar von Falkenhausen, the 9th century BC saw the implementation of far-reaching ritual and administrative reforms.¹³¹

¹²⁶ Feng Yicheng 風儀誠 (Olivier Venture), “Shang Zhou qingtongqi mingwen weizhi yanbian chutan,” forthcoming.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*; Venture, “Visibilité et lisibilité dans les inscriptions sur bronze de la Chine archaïque (1250–771 av. notre ère),” in *Du visible au lisible: texte et image en Chine et au Japon*, eds Anne Kerlan-Stephens and Cécile Sakai (Arles, 2006), pp. 67–81.

¹²⁹ Li Feng, personal communication.

¹³⁰ While bells are known already from late third millennium BC and musical chime-bells were already used during the late Shang period, the *yongzhong* musical bells—originally not part of the northern (including royal) ritual culture—were adopted from the south; see Lothar von Falkenhausen, *Suspended music*, pp. 158–62; for the placement of text on *yongzhong* bells, see also Feng Yicheng, “Shang Zhou qingtongqi mingwen weizhi yanbian chutan.”

¹³¹ Rawson, “Statesmen or barbarians: the Western Zhou as seen through their bronzes,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 75 (1989), 87–93; *Western Zhou ritual bronzes from the Arthur M. Sackler collections*, vol. 2, pp. 93–111, *passim*; “Western Zhou archaeology,” in *The Cambridge history of ancient China*, pp. 433–48; Falkenhausen, “Late Western Zhou taste”; Luo Tai 羅泰 (Lothar von Falkenhausen), “Youguan Xi Zhou wanqi lizhi gaige ji Zhuangbai Wei shi qingtongqi niandai de xin jiashe: cong shixi mingwen shuoqi,” in *Zhongguo kaoguxue yu lishi xue zhi zhenghe yanjiu*, ed. Tsang Cheng-hwa (Taipei, 1997), pp. 651–76; *Chinese society in the age of Confucius (1000–250 BC): the archaeological evidence* (Los Angeles, 2006), chap. 2.

With respect to the ancestral sacrifices and their bronze paraphernalia, a number of important changes can be observed: most vessels for alcoholic beverages were abandoned, with only large flasks remaining; instead, food vessels grew larger in both form and numbers, becoming arranged in extended sets that signified the increased importance of sumptuary rules; when sets of vessels and bells were inscribed, they all carried identical inscriptions; bronze bells were now introduced to the ensemble of ritual artifacts, adding the element of music to the ceremonies; minute detail in ornament was replaced by larger patterns that often included bold, even coarse, wave bands; and the calligraphy of bronze inscriptions became increasingly regular and symmetrically arranged. Altogether, an overall uniformity of design was imposed across the entire range of bronze ritual paraphernalia, and their increased size, larger ornament and arrangement in sets suggest a shift from a more private ritual of the ancestral sacrifice to one with larger numbers of participants perhaps standing at some distance.

In bronze vessel ornament, the zoomorphic *taotie* 饕餮 designs of late Shang and early Western Zhou bronze vessels gave way to abstract geometrical and highly standardized patterns that suggest significant and lasting changes not only in the production of bronze artifacts but quite likely also in religious attitudes,¹³² including a departure from what might have been shamanistic practices among the late Shang and early Western Zhou elites.¹³³ As argued by Falkenhausen, this development

intimates a fundamental religious shift in the sphere of the ancestral cult: away from 'dionysian' rituals centered upon dynamic, even frenzied movement, to a new kind of far more formalized ceremonies of 'apollonian' character, in which it was the paraphernalia themselves, and their orderly display, that commanded the principal attention of the participants.¹³⁴

The change in bronze vessel ornament did not end with the abandoning of zoomorphic design. Appearing now in large numbers, the mid- and

¹³² For a debate on how bronze ornament may signify specific meanings, see the discussions in *The problem of meaning in early Chinese ritual bronzes*, ed. Roderick Whitfield (London, 1993), especially those by Jessica Rawson, "Late Shang bronze design: meaning and purpose," pp. 67–95, Robert W. Bagley, "Meaning and explanation," pp. 34–55, and Sarah Allan, "Épiloque," pp. 161–76.

¹³³ The classical statement on this possible meaning of the *taotie* is given in K.C. Chang, "The animal in Shang and Chou bronze art," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 41 (1981), 527–54, and Chang, *Art, myth, and ritual: the path to political authority in ancient China* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 44–81.

¹³⁴ See also Falkenhausen, *Chinese society in the age of Confucius*, p. 48.

late Western Zhou vessels and bells displayed in their design a sense of standardization, repetition and restriction that matched far more closely the fundamental ideology of the ancestral sacrifice than the earlier artifacts. As Rawson notes,

while early Western Zhou bronzes seem to have varied from decade to decade and those of middle Western Zhou at least by quality of surface design, the late Western Zhou period bronzes are rigidly uniform. There seems to have been little variety either from owner to owner or from place to place over the hundred years of their use. A strong centralized control of ritual seems to have been in place... In the same way, inscriptions seem unvarying, as though a single model for the range of expression, for the contents, and for the shapes of the characters was in force... these characters seem closely dependent on early written forms and thus suggest an element of deliberate archaism. Other suggestions of archaism are seen in some vessel shapes... It would appear that this interest in the past was twofold, first in the reproduction of ancient shapes of vessel and character type, and second in the collection of older bronzes... Where the vessels [found in hoards] are late and fall into the sets just mentioned, the inscriptions are beautifully written but stereotyped in content.¹³⁵

Already in the 10th century BC, abstract, continuous patterns in multiplied relief bands gradually replaced defined individual motifs, and wave patterns "overrode the divisions between the mould sections and achieved a continuous rhythmical design."¹³⁶ After the ritual reform, when these patterns had developed into complex interlace,¹³⁷ change in bronze design was virtually halted for a full century. A "static repertoire" came into being, "limited and reiterated" and of "persistent sameness."¹³⁸ The rhythmic repetition that governed the continuous design of each individual vessel was again repeated across all such vessels.

From the perspective of the present discussion, three aspects of bronze design stand out in this description: first, compared to the often "eccentric" or "flamboyant"¹³⁹ bronzes of the early Western Zhou, a rigid restraint of expression was in place; second, these controlled patterns were in themselves emblems of the very rhythmic continuity that characterized the sum total of the ancestral sacrifice both within

¹³⁵ Rawson, "Western Zhou archaeology," pp. 438–39.

¹³⁶ Rawson, *Western Zhou ritual bronzes from the Arthur M. Sackler collections*, pp. 86, 90.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 113–23.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

¹³⁹ Rawson's terminology; see her "Statesmen or barbarians," p. 70, *passim*, and *Western Zhou ritual bronzes*, p. 35, *passim*.

a single performance and as a tradition; and third, the new restricted and thus also continuously reiterated style was explicitly evocative of the more remote past.¹⁴⁰ The archaism of late Western Zhou times is striking not only because of its own nature but also because it indicates that “Late Western Zhou aristocrats had access to earlier bronzes handed down from Early and Middle Western Zhou and kept in their ancestral temples,” and perhaps also that workshops preserved earlier models.¹⁴¹ The evidence from both tombs and hoards shows that late Western Zhou owners of bronze vessels indeed kept their older, inherited vessels alongside their own new ones. The archaizing nature of the more recent vessels must have struck the onlookers as a reference to the past, reminding them of their ancestors’ accomplishments and “the heroic times of the dynasty’s founding”;¹⁴² furthermore, “archaistic referentiality in the typology and ornamentation of ritual bronzes would have been but a minor manifestation of a consummately history-conscious ritual ideology.”¹⁴³ Thus, late Western Zhou ritual ideology of memory implied both the commemoration of the dynastic founding together with the self-representation of commemoration, expressed in strictly controlled fashion.

To this end, the form and design of the bronze vessels signified, first and foremost, their very nature as precious ritual objects together with the status of the person in whose name they were cast. As the appointment ceremony inscriptions show, the inscription was the final result of an elaborate, multi-step ceremony in which a high dignitary reported to the Zhou king, then received the royal command in a ceremony held in the courtyard of the royal ancestral temple, and finally was granted the right to have a vessel—inscribed or not—cast, most likely in the royal workshop. Having received the vessel, he was entitled to use it in his own ancestral sacrifices. If inscribed, the vessel text could be as short as noting its patron and his dedication (“I have made this vessel”); next, it could include a prayer for blessings to express the ritual use of the artifact. Further extended, it could provide an account of the patron’s merits that was probably based either on his report to the king or on

¹⁴⁰ On late Western Zhou archaism, see also Falkenhausen, “Late Western Zhou taste,” pp. 168–74.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

the king’s appointment in response.¹⁴⁴ As such, a bronze inscription would even provide an account of the appointment ceremony itself, as in the Feng(?)-*ding* inscription quoted above. The most complete versions of the ceremony (or perhaps a series of ceremonies) can be found in the magnificent inscriptions of 373 characters on the Qiu-*pan* 逯盤 water basin that is further related to other lengthy inscriptions, including those on two separate series of Qiu-*ding* 逯鼎 tripods from 786 and 785 BC, that were all found in 2003 in Yangjiacun 楊家村 (Meixian 眉縣, Shaanxi).¹⁴⁵

The religious nature of the vast majority of bronze inscriptions—some late Western Zhou examples suggest that vessels were cast for use not at the sacrifice but at the banquet—rested not in the solemn ceremonies at the royal court but in the ancestral rituals in which the inscribed vessels were then used by their patrons. Here, the text of inscription spoke both to the ancestral spirits and to the assembled family and dignitaries, reporting not only on the patron’s merits but also on their recognition by the Zhou king. To serve this purpose vis-à-vis the spirits, the vessel text included the self-referential statements of dedication and prayer, through which the patron identified himself and at the same time acknowledged his ancestors whose own virtuous deeds were now successfully continued, and who in return were asked to send down their blessings. Therefore, the inscriptions routinely referred to their bronze carriers as “precious” (*bao* 寶) or “revered” 尊 and exhorted future generations to “forever treasure and use” 永寶用 the vessel in their sacrifices to the current patron and future ancestor.¹⁴⁶ Thus, the

¹⁴⁴ This tripartite structure has been reconstructed by Falkenhausen, “Issues in Western Zhou studies,” pp. 152–56. More recently, Falkenhausen has expanded and modified his scheme to argue that the statement of dedication reflects a separate ceremony; see his “The oral subtexts of the Zhou bronze inscriptions,” paper presented at the conference “Religion, poetry, and memory in ancient and early medieval China,” Princeton University, May 2004.

¹⁴⁵ Falkenhausen, “The oral subtexts of the Zhou Bronze inscriptions”; “The inscribed bronzes from Yangjiacun: new evidence on social structure and historical consciousness in late Western Zhou China (c. 800 BC),” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 139 (1006), 239–95; and Luo Tai 羅泰 [Lothar von Falkenhausen], “Xi Zhou tongqi mingwen de xingzhi,” in *Kaoguxue yanjiu* 6 (Beijing, 2006), 343–74.

¹⁴⁶ For an extensive discussion of the prayer section, see Xu Zhongshu, “Jinwen guci shili” Hayashi Minao, “Concerning the inscription ‘May sons and grandsons eternally use this [vessel],’” *Artibus Asiae* 53.1–2 (1993), 51–58, has suggested that the final formula referred to the use of the sacrificial vessels even in the afterlife, that is, in the tombs where they were buried.

inscriptions created idealized (and highly selective) accounts of the past while also, perhaps even more importantly, projecting a prospective future memory of the present. Especially in the late Western Zhou period—that is, when the dynasty was gradually declining in stability—the aristocratic inscriptions seem to reflect an intense desire for continuity and tradition.

The bronze inscriptions of mid- and late Western Zhou times show conscious efforts toward poetic form. Especially in the wake of the ritual reforms, a greater number of inscriptions were guided by the same principles of rhyme and meter familiar from the *Songs*. The great majority of Western Zhou inscriptions include just a few graphs, but the two longest known bronze texts so far come close to 500 characters, and others contain from several dozen to 200–300 characters. All these more extensive texts fall into the range of length of the transmitted hymns. While rhyme and tetrasyllabic meter occur already among the earliest Western Zhou inscriptions,¹⁴⁷ these features become increasingly regular from the periods of kings Gong and Yi onward,¹⁴⁸ as do the calligraphy and overall visual layout (linear arrangement, spacing between graphs, etc.) of the inscriptions.¹⁴⁹ The linguistic regularity never reaches that of the “Major court hymns,” but the overall tendency toward an increased aesthetic control and more rigidly standardized, and hence narrowed, expression is unquestionable. Furthermore, the inscriptions seem to prefer largely the same rhyme categories that also dominate the ritual pieces of the *Songs*.¹⁵⁰ In my opinion, it is not inconceivable that the euphonic features of these inscriptions were brought to life through recitation.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ E.g., in the Tianwang-*gui* 天亡簋 [JWYD 5012]. See Wolfgang Behr, “Reimende Bronzeinschriften und die Entstehung der chinesischen Endreimdichtung” (PhD diss., J.W. Goethe Universität, Frankfurt, 1996), pp. 140–44, 532–55; also pp. 86–87 and 678–79 for Behr’s general conclusions.

¹⁴⁸ Behr, “Reimende Bronzeinschriften,” pp. 422–23.

¹⁴⁹ Shaughnessy, *Sources of Western Zhou history*, pp. 121–26. As Rawson, *Western Zhou ritual bronzes from the Arthur M. Sackler collections*, p. 93, has noted for the late Western Zhou, “so regular is some of the calligraphy of this time that it suggests a reform of the script used for bronze inscriptions. Although such inscriptions appear precise and circumstantial, they in fact repeat common formulae, altered slightly to fit each occasion.”

¹⁵⁰ Behr, “Reimende Bronzeinschriften,” pp. 467–70.

¹⁵¹ In a more detailed analysis, I have suggested this primarily oral nature was true even for significantly later bronze inscriptions from the early 7th and late 7th/early 6th centuries BC; see Kern, *The stele inscriptions of Ch’in Shih-huang*, pp. 59–105. Moreover,

On the whole, rhyme and meter developed over time in the earliest poetry of hymns and inscriptions. This development toward increased regularity appeared along with the consolidation of the royal institution of the ancestral sacrifice during the mid- and late Western Zhou. Earlier, less constrained aesthetic forms were replaced by a more formulaic mode of expression that reflected the gradually solidifying aesthetics of royal and aristocratic performances. Like the hymns during the last century of the Western Zhou, inscriptions were more regularly rhymed, more strict in their tetrasyllabic meter, more uniform in their calligraphy and visual arrangement, and more formulaic and intertextual in their wording; they also became increasingly generic.¹⁵²

To illustrate the regular style of mid- to late Western Zhou bronze inscriptions, two examples may suffice here. The first, shorter one, is that on the Feng bo Ju fu-*gui* 豐伯車父簋 tureen of an unspecified date. It does not include an extended narrative but is concentrated on the self-referential statement of dedication (comprising just the first line) and its extended prayer (all remaining lines). The text is completely tetrasyllabic; I indicate the rhymes in square brackets:

[I.] the Oldest of Feng, Father Ju, have made a revered *gui* tureen. [A]
Use it to pray for extended longevity, [A]
Myriad years without limit! [B]
May sons and grandsons give it continuity, [B]
May sons and grandsons treasure it, [A]
Using it to sacrifice, using it to make offerings! [B]¹⁵³

The second, longer, example is that of a bell, the Xing ren Ning-*zhong* 邢人倭鐘, dating from the mid-9th century BC. The speaker, Ning, refers to himself not by a pronoun but by his name. Again, the text is largely tetrasyllabic and rhymes with some regularity:

even the early imperial stele inscriptions of the First Emperor, dating between 219 and 210 BC, were first composed and recited and only then carved in stone. The oral performance of inscribed texts is not unusual elsewhere; for the ancient Greek example, see Rosalind Thomas, *Literacy and orality in ancient Greece* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 62.

¹⁵² As Falkenhausen, “Late Western Zhou taste,” pp. 174–75, notes for the late Western Zhou period: “As bronze decoration became more abstract, the contents of these inscriptions became more formulaic, and their literary structure became more regular. . . The ritual language of the inscriptions assumed an increasingly poetic character, with increasing prominence accorded to the rhymed prayers (*guci*) at the end of the documents. . . The specific, literal significance of the words mattered less and less.”

¹⁵³ JWYD 4913. My translation differs slightly from Behr’s, *Reimende Bronzeinschriften*, pp. 253–54.

Ning from Xing says:
 [My] illustrious and gentle cultured ancestors and august late father [A]
 Were able to give substance to their virtuous power. [A]
 They obtained purity and used generosity,
 Forever ending in auspiciousness. [B]
 Ning does not dare to disobey them. [B]
 Using his cultured ancestors and august late father [as his model], [A]
 He respectfully, respectfully holds on to their virtuous power. [A]
 Ning is elated, elated about their sagely brightness, [C]
 Approaches their place in the ancestral hall. [B]
 Thus, Ning has made for father He a grand *linzhong*[-bell]; [C]
 Use it to sacrifice in commemoration, [A]
 To delight the former cultured men. [D]
 The former cultured men [D]
 May solemnly reside above! [C]
Pang-bo, pang-bo—¹⁵⁴
 They bestow on me rich rewards, [A]
 Manifold blessings without limit! [C]
 May Ning have a myriad years! [D]
 May sons of sons, grandsons of grandsons [D]
 Forever treasure and use [this bell] to make offerings! [C]¹⁵⁵

The two inscriptions betray the regularity of a mature, codified expression. In their contents, they explicitly relate to past, present and future in a gesture that is as commemorative as it is prospective, fulfilling the obligation of worship to the ancestors while imposing it in turn on the descendants. Their choice of expression indicates the same strong sense of continuity and normativity. In both texts, the basic metrical unit is the tetrasyllabic line; rhyme is used throughout (though in less regular fashion than in the received *Songs*); the bell inscription contains a series of reduplicatives; and there is barely a line that does not have verbatim or near-verbatim counterparts in a host of other inscriptions. When this formulaic expression developed on a broader scale beginning in mid-Western Zhou times, it was matched by a parallel development toward standardization in the visual aesthetics of the ancestral sacrifice.

¹⁵⁴ A tetrasyllabic onomatopoeic expression representing the sound of the bell.

¹⁵⁵ JWYD 0083, 0078. Compare also Behr, *Reimende Bronzeinschriften*, pp. 259–63.

*Conclusion: message and aesthetics in the Western Zhou
 ancestral sacrifice*

The elaborate aesthetics of the Western Zhou ancestral sacrifice served at once the communication with the spirits of former generations and the representation of the past as foundational for the present. While inscriptions, where they drew on historical knowledge, were supported by archival records on perishable materials, they were not identical with these in either contents or purpose. The material expense and intricate design of their bronze carriers were functions of conspicuous display that marked a fundamental difference from mere administrative or historical documents. As the sacrificial food and wine vessels were distinguished from their everyday counterparts by means of elaborate form and ornament,¹⁵⁶ the sacrificial hymns differed from ordinary speech by their specific aesthetic structure.

Altogether, the hymns, speeches and inscriptions, together with the décor of the bronze vessels and all the other (now lost) visual, auditory and olfactory impressions, constituted the aesthetics of memory that governed the ritual performance and religious expression of the Western Zhou ancestral sacrifice. The different linguistic and material media were distinguished by their inherent possibilities and boundaries of expression. Yet at the same time, they operated in mutual conjunction, contributing to the same performance setting of the ancestral sacrifice. Visual and linguistic expressions were crafted from different materials by different specialists, but within the ancestral sacrifice, they were neither separate nor arbitrary as they served the common idea of worshipping and commemorating the ancestors. Therefore, one may look for traces of this ideology in the aesthetics of each set of artifacts, material or linguistic. One may also expect patterns of aesthetic convergence across the different kinds of artifacts, producing the message of the ancestral sacrifice as a multi-media performance where the various elements enhanced and intensified one another.

In the ancestral sacrifice, the past was commemorated and mimetically represented, and sacrificial hymns were performed that duplicated the ritual procedure by synchronically describing it. The sacrifices contained the hymns which in turn embodied the sacrifices, each being a replica

¹⁵⁶ Rawson, "Late Shang Bronze design," p. 92; Bagley, "Meaning and explanation," pp. 44–45.

of the other; their fusion created the arena to perpetuate, actualize and reinforce pre-existing normative patterns of speech and action. The ephemeral nature of performance became eternalized in the continuous existence of a repertoire of texts that finally transcended any particular occasion. Both hymns and inscriptions commemorated the ancestors as much as their own sacrificial ritual to serve them. Raising and answering a question like "Truly—our sacrifices are like what?" ("Thorny caltrop"), the hymnic text was the voice through which the ritual performance interpreted itself. Hymns and inscriptions contained, however abbreviated, what must not fall into oblivion: the order of culture, as embodied in the order of the sacrifice.

The Western Zhou ancestral sacrifice, therefore, was both a ritual and the model of this ritual; its increasingly uniform texts were simultaneously descriptive and prescriptive. The very phenomenon of standardization was a figure of memory: the standard to follow was always the standard from the past, preserved in continuous performances as well as in the collecting and preserving of earlier texts and artifacts. Just as bronze vessels and bells—especially those bearing inscriptions—were maintained in the ancestral temple, the hymns and royal speeches developed from individual pieces into a continuously available repertoire.

In the formal structure of the ancestral sacrifice, the textual order of songs, prayers, speeches and inscriptions was accompanied by the order of other phenomena now lost: dance, music and the sacrificial offerings that, according to all early accounts, including those of the ritual hymns themselves, were thoroughly choreographed. It is in this context that we need to imagine the appearance and function of bronze ornament. While we cannot date the "Major court hymns" with any certainty, their aesthetic features seem parallel to late Western Zhou ritual bronzes: in the hymns, the standardization of meter and stanzaic structures define the form and boundaries of all hymns in a unified fashion; within these boundaries, one notices the repetition of formulaic expression, continuous syntactic structures (binomes, the "AXAY" pattern, the repetition of specific formulae) and the dense fabric of onomatopoeic binomes and other euphonic features. In late Western Zhou bronze ornament, a strict aesthetic regime governed a limited number of sharply defined vessel shapes, continuous abstract designs of band and wave patterns, and the use of complex interlace.

The "Major court hymns" and also the royal speeches provided an idealized and highly abbreviated account of the origin of the Zhou and

the forceful personal agency of its founders. They were explicit in their ideology of commemoration, and they expressed this message not only in their contents but, on a perhaps even more fundamental level, through their aesthetic structures. As texts to be performed in the commemorative culture of sacrifices and banquets, they recalled and eulogized the feats of the ancestors and created the tightly restricted aesthetic patterns through which such praise and commemoration was to be perpetuated. The continuous repetition of the same, skillfully varied within narrowly defined boundaries of expression, is what characterizes the various textual voices in the wake of the ritual reform. In addition, like the literary patterning of the "Court hymns," the strictly conventionalized shapes and ornamentation of the bronze artifacts were both a reflection and an authoritative force of centralized, dogmatic control. Like the texts, the artifacts and their ornament were vehicles not of new information but of old, and shared, knowledge, "collective messages to ourselves."¹⁵⁷ But which messages were these? While their propositional value might be more easily extracted from the hymns and inscriptions, the ornamental patterns on the vessels and bells remind us more clearly of a crucial distinction. No uninscribed bronze artifact carried any specific historical information, but all of them conveyed the same sense of cultural and religious memory. Inscribed or not, a bronze vessel always pointed to itself as a ritual artifact, and it pointed beyond itself toward the lineage of bronze vessels—and with them to the ancestral lineage of their owners—to which it belonged. For the full last century of the Western Zhou, bronze ornament may be described as a single, continuous pattern flowing from vessel to vessel both diachronically and synchronically. The result was, more than anything else, a monument of memory that in rhythmic repetition called attention to the stability of its own tradition, rhetorically symbolized in the durability of bronze.

On their surface, the inscriptions, hymns and speeches that belonged to the same context of the ancestral sacrifice appear as historical accounts. However, while the ancestral sacrifice was defined by its reflection upon the past, it was utterly unconcerned with the vast array of historical detail undoubtedly available on perishable material. But this is not what the highly selective, highly idealizing memory presented

¹⁵⁷ According to Edmund R. Leach, *Culture and communication* (Cambridge, 1976), p. 45, "we engage in rituals in order to transmit collective messages to ourselves."

and perpetuated in the religious institution of the ancestral sacrifice was about. The issue at stake was not the past itself but the aesthetically patterned representation of its continuity in the present and future, and the communication addressed to both the ancestral spirits and one's future descendants. This memory remained alive as long as it was perpetuated in the ever renewed performance of the ancestral sacrifice and court banquets—in the words of “She bore the folk”:

Truly—our sacrifices, what are they like?
Some hull (the grain), some scoop it;
Some sift it, some tread it.
Washing it, we hear it swish, swish;
Distilling it, we see it steam, steam.
Now we consult, now we consider;
We take southernwood to sacrifice the fat,
We take a ram to flay it.
Now we roast, now we broil;
To give rise to the following year.

We load the wooden trenchers,
The wooden trenchers, the earthenware platters.
As the fragrance begins to rise,
The Lord on High is tranquil and delighted.
How good the fragrance is indeed!
Lord Millet founded the sacrifice—
Luckily, without fault or offense,
It has reached the present day.