

practices. Many of these are unrevealed in the world below—or at least were so when the *Purple Texts* was written, for this listing provided material for Yang Xi's later imitators.

Despite such reassurances, the level of anxiety seems to have remained high. Was it possible to know just what ranking one would reach in the future world or in the heavens? An answer, of sorts, to this question, too, was forthcoming. After detailing the texts of Shangqing and the Perfected ranks to which one might aspire through following their practices, the *Purple Texts* goes on to list "marks of Transcendence"—bodily signs that one is destined for higher things. To the modern reader, these will seem bizarre. It should be remembered, though, that in a corporate society where individualistic expression tended to be discouraged in favor of ritualistic conformity, it was natural that various means of judging the true, but necessarily concealed, character of a person should have taken on importance. Prominent among these was the art of physiognomy: judging the character and "fate" of people through oddities of appearance, the shape and size of their features, the placement of moles, and so forth. During the Han period, when this art seems to have been much developed, handbooks of physiognomy were written, and the histories of the period spend at least a sentence or two in their biographies to describe the subject's appearance as it relates to inner character. Particularly marked were the physical oddities ascribed to ancient culture heroes and emperors. Yao was said to have had square eyes; the sage-king Yu, queller of the world flood, had hairless shins as the result of his labors and walked with a limp; and even Confucius was said to have had ponderous brows, like mounds on top of his head—a sign of sagacity.

The "marks of Transcendence" fit into this tradition. Apparent marks as well as those hidden signs that could be known only to the spirits are here related to moral character and to the condition of one's book of life in the various heavens. Some of these characteristics were ascribed to Shangqing Perfected of the recent past (Lady Wei was said to have possessed purple viscera and "phoenix bones," and Lord Pei had the mark of a constellation on his back), while others may have belonged to Yang and the Xus, if only we knew where to look.

The predictions of the *Purple Texts* were to play a role of extreme importance in the development of apocalyptic thought during the Six Dynasties period. Its description of Li Hong and the Azure Lad found echoes in a number of later texts, including Buddhist texts written in China. Just as the alchemical passages found in this scripture seem to have taken on various roles of their own, so the account of the Sage Lord's imminent arrival blossomed in other texts. The account given here, though, seems intended to introduce the other scriptures of Shangqing, together with their practices and requirements, as much as to warn of the coming disasters. The text betrays little sense of urgency concerning the nearness of the time, much more concerning the necessity of maintaining fidelity to the deities. The Sage Lord is less terrifying as harbinger of the apocalypse than as overseer of human deeds who warns: "From above the Grand Barrens or within the Mystic Void I observe you as closely as your eyes regard your own nose." It is to this moral aspect of the *Purple Texts* that we now turn.

Morality and Proper Conduct

The moral aspects of Shangqing Daoism have not been subjected to modern study, outshone as they are by the literary pyrotechnics devoted to visualization practice and the description of paradises. Nevertheless, there is a strong moral component to this scripture. Elements of this moral message are similar to the messages of Confucian and Buddhist scripture, but the mix is characteristically Daoist and of particular interest for that reason.

In general, the approach of the Shangqing texts to moral instruction seems identical to that found in the *Xiang'er* commentary: rather than instruct people in moral absolutes or give them lists of rules, one need only remind them of the spirits' oversight of their actions and they will act morally, even in the most secret recesses of their thoughts. Celestial supervision is carried out by spirits at every level of the hierarchy. The ultimate overseer, as evidenced in the passage cited earlier, is the Sage Lord, but the spirits of the body report on one's deeds as well. On the autumnal equinox, we are told in the closing pages of the scripture, the spirits report one's trans-