CHAPTER NINE

THE MEMORY OF THE ŌMI CAPITAL

Am I perhaps
a person from the past
that the old capital
of the rippling waves
I should feel sad to see?

It is unclear why Tenchi left the Yamato capital in 667 and moved his government to the southern shores of Lake Biwa, but most historians agree it was probably due to fear of invasion from the continent after the defeat at the Battle of the Paekchon River in 663.² In any case, the Ōmi capital lasted only four years. Tenchi died three years after the move, and the following year, after Prince Ōtomo’s 大友皇子 (648–672) defeat in the Jinshin Rebellion of 672, Tenmu moved the capital back to Asuka. Archaeological evidence suggests that the Ōmi capital was neither destroyed nor left to ruin, but deliberately dismantled.³ For a capital that lasted such a short period of time, the Ōmi court would play a remarkably large role in the eighth-century political and cultural imagination. In the mid-eighth-century Sinic poetry anthology Kaifūsō, Tenchi’s Ōmi capital is celebrated as the origin of imperial literary culture. Its portrayal in the Man’yōshū, on the other hand, is somewhat more ambivalent: for the Jitō court, the Ōmi capital was a problematic topic given that on the one hand, the present political order was the product of a war that had been waged on the Ōmi capital, and on the other, the Ōmi sovereign, Tenchi, was Jitō’s father. In this chapter I explore the complex position of the Ōmi capital within the narrative of imperial history in the first two volumes of the Man’yōshū.

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¹ MYS I: 32, by Takechi Furuhito (or Kurohito). 古人尒和礼有哉樂浪乃故京乎 見者悲寸 (inisipe no pito ni ware are ya sasanami no puruki miyako wo mireba kanasiki).
² See chapter 1.
One reason that the Ōmi capital became such an important cultural and political symbol in the eighth century is that it was associated with Tenchi and his lineage. In theory, in each volume of the *Nihon shoki* the main protagonist is the present sovereign, around whom all actions revolve. In practice, however, the volumes from Kōgyoku to Tenchi are structured by a plotline that focuses on the figure of Naka no Ōe 中大兄, as crown prince and culminates with his accession as the sovereign known as Tenchi at the Ōmi capital only three years before his death. Tenchi is first mentioned after Jomei’s accession as Jomei’s eldest son and is called Prince Kazuraki.\(^4\) He appears again at the very end of the Jomei volume where he is referred to posthumously as the eastern palace prince Hirakasu Wake 東宮開別皇子 and is described as leading the eulogies for the temporary burial rituals of his father Jomei at the age of sixteen.\(^5\) He does not appear again until two thirds through the Kōgyoku volume, when he is called Naka no Ōe\(^6\) and is sought out by Nakatomi no Kamako (Kamatari) as a potential “wise ruler” 哲主 capable of restoring the “order of ruler and subject, of older and younger” 君臣長幼之序 that has been destroyed by Soga no Iruka’s designs on the state. Kamatari advises Naka no Ōe to ally himself with Soga no Kurayamada no Ishikawa Maro 蘇我倉山田石川麻呂 (d. 649), and the three of them conspire to assassinate Iruka at a ceremony in which “the three Han” 三韓 (the three Korean kingdoms) present tribute before the empress. When the time comes, Ishikawa Maro and the other conspirators hesitate, and Naka no Ōe is the only one who decisively steps forward and kills Iruka.\(^7\)

This is, needless to say, almost certainly an eighth-century fictional account meant to highlight Naka no Ōe’s heroism and Kamatari’s wisdom. In fact, the *Nihon shoki* narrative itself provides several clues that suggest a different story. It is quite evident from the disposition of the participants at the tribute ceremony, for instance, that Kōgyoku’s crown prince was not Naka no Ōe but his half-brother Furuhito no Ōe. It is also somewhat suspicious that Kōgyoku’s successor, her brother Prince Karu, is mentioned nowhere in the narrative of the coup. According to the

\(^4\) See SNKZ *Nihon shoki* 3: 38–9.
\(^5\) Ibid., 50–51. “Eastern prince” is a title of the crown prince. “Hirakasu Wake” was Tenchi’s posthumous name as sovereign.
\(^6\) Ibid., 84–7.
\(^7\) Ibid., 98–105.