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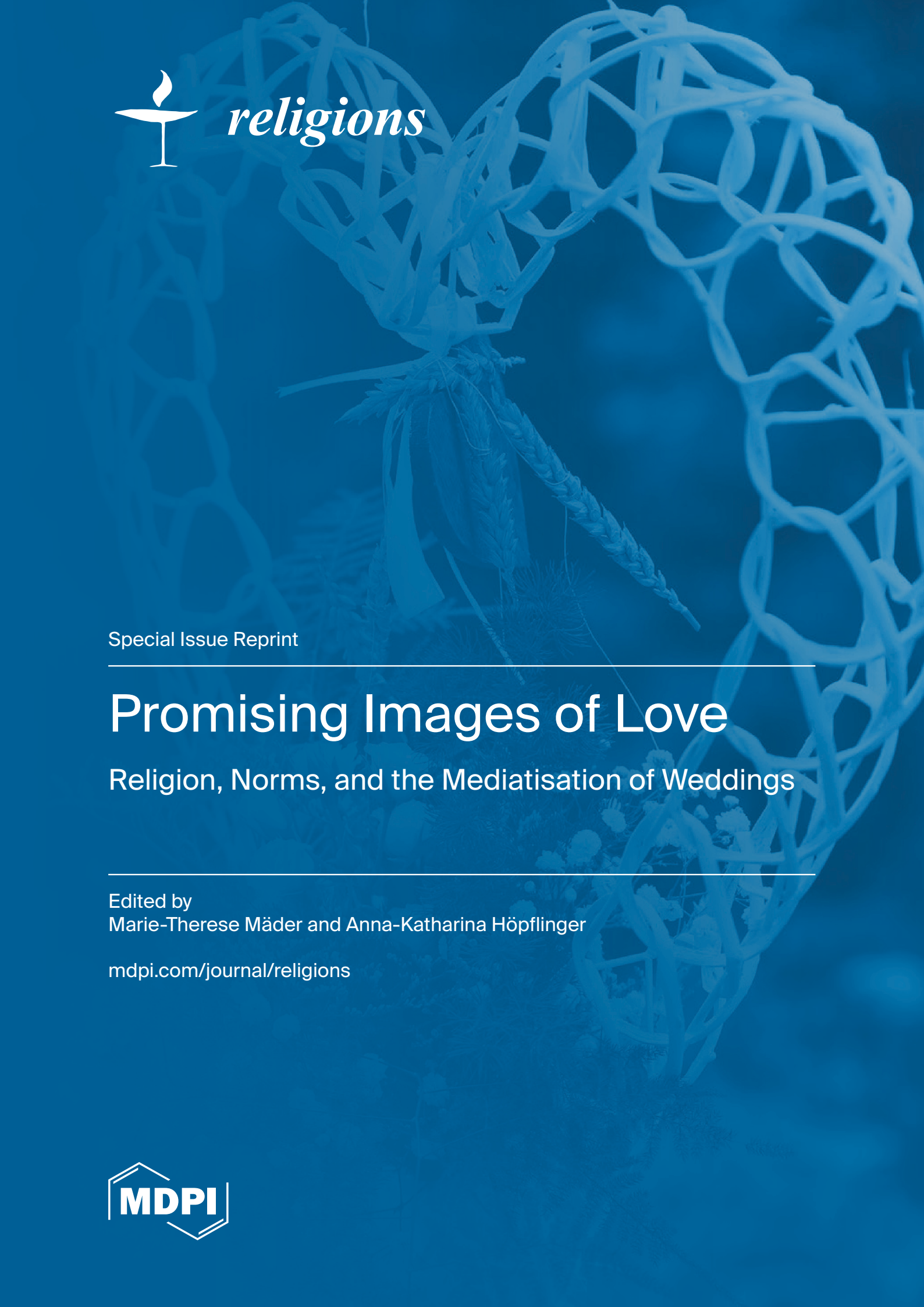

Special Issue Reprint

Promising Images of Love

Religion, Norms, and the Mediatisation of Weddings

Edited by
Marie-Therese Mäder and Anna-Katharina Höpflinger

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Promising Images of Love: Religion, Norms, and the Mediatisation of Weddings

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Guest Editors

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About the Editors

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Editorial

Religions, Norms, and the Mediatisation of Weddings

Marie-Therese Mäder [1,*] and Anna-Katharina Höpflinger [2]

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Finally, after more than an hour of impatiently waiting, the wedding couple enters the hall where the reception with 160 guests takes place. The guests, a mix of Algerian, Palestinian, and Swiss relatives and friends, begin to make high, trilling celebratory sounds, fluttering their tongues and lips while moving their fingers against their mouths, filling the room with joyful cheers for the newlyweds. The wedding photographer follows the couple closely, a challenging task among all the excitement. Amid the joyful noise, many guests raise their smartphones to capture the couple's first appearance. The bride, in her white dress, and the groom, in his tuxedo, walk slowly, as if instructed not to rush so that both the professional photographer and the many amateurs can take their pictures. A Palestinian music group, dressed in traditional clothing, forms an honour guard for the couple. The celebration I attended in German-speaking Switzerland on 15 January 2025 confirmed this fact: the newlyweds are the shooting stars of the evening.

Weddings and photographs have long been intertwined, shaping and regulating each other. One might even suggest that without a picture, it scarcely feels as though the wedding truly happened. Yet, as this volume demonstrates, a wide range of other media such as clothing, food, music, and architectural settings also play a crucial role in this rite of passage (Höpflinger 2014). In a broad sense, media are thus understood to encompass not only images but also material and sensory dimensions. Accordingly, the communicative function of media is extended by their experiential and affective qualities. As David Morgan argues, "media have come to be understood as technologies of sensation, as embodied forms of participation in extended communities joined in imagination, feeling, taste, affinity, and affect" (Morgan 2013, p. 347). Building on this understanding, this volume examines the mediated dimensions of weddings from an interdisciplinary perspective, illuminating the complex interplay of symbols, materials, aesthetics, and cultural–religious practices in both past and present contexts. By placing a particular emphasis on religion, a dimension largely overlooked in existing wedding research, it addresses a notable gap in the field.

Weddings are a melting point of cultural production in which institutions, norms, and individual preferences interact (Höpflinger and Mäder 2018). It is a rite of passage from single to married life, a state in which a defined procedure regulates the interactions between the wedding couple and its wedding party. Arnold van Gennep discerns three steps in this rite of passage: preliminal, liminal, and postliminal rites. Different rites are carried out in each step: First, the individuals are separated from the previous world, the community, and each other (preliminal rites). They are now in a liminal phase before they are incorporated in postliminal rites to be transformed to their new status (Van Gennep 2019, p. 120). "To marry is to pass from one group of children or adolescent into an adult group, from a given clan to another, from one family to another, and often from one village to another" (Van Gennep 2019, pp. 123–24). The wedding party accompanies the couple in this transformation that takes place on different levels. In some countries and cultures, the

bride changes her surname and adopts that of her husband, or vice versa. In some religious traditions, the husband becomes the head of the future family, while the wife is considered subordinate to him, while in others, the marital relationship is framed in terms of a more equal partnership.

A Regulated Transformation

Wedding traditions and customs are handed down and continually adapted to societal changes, as seen with same-sex marriage, which has been legalised in many countries in the 21st century, while others have yet to follow (HRC 2025). At the same time, the rite of passage conserves, revives, and introduces traditional practices from different cultural–religious contexts, like the white wedding dress or the fasting of the couple during the ceremony. It is often difficult to say where these symbolic practices originate. However, it is remarkable how intensely weddings apply symbolic communication to represent and visualise the transformation of the involved people from one state to another. Biologically, they stay the same, but socially, politically, legally, culturally, and religiously, they are not. The legal status may include, depending on the country's law, that the couple become one tax entity, and the line of succession will change through marriage.

The transformation is not limited to these state-regulated aspects. In many religious and cultural contexts, marriage also entails a fundamental shift in both self-understanding and public perception from being a single individual to being part of a unified couple, with meanings that vary depending on the society in which the partners live. In many religious traditions and communities, marriage is regarded as the sole legitimate context for cohabiting with a partner in a sexual relationship, like in orthodox Judaism, Muslim communities, or in the Roman catholic church. Latter-day Saints even expect their members to marry (beyond death) because it is the most recognised lifestyle that enables the couple to enter into heaven with their offspring (Mäder 2024b). The idea that only a married person has reached one of the main goals in their lives is still widespread.

The wedding rite usually adheres to a familiar sequence of actions, though they may also incorporate less common ritual elements. In religious contexts, the ceremony itself is characterised by fixed participant roles and a high degree of regulation, which guarantees that each person understands their role within the ritual. A religious specialist, such as a priest, an imam, or a rabbi, usually guides the couple through the rite in the venue of the ceremony. Increasingly, however, religious weddings also take place outdoors, on beaches or in gardens. Civil weddings are conducted by a registrar, typically in a representative building or room that is festively decorated with floral arrangements. In both settings, the procedure is largely prescribed by the respective institution, religious or civil, with only a few elements that can be adapted to personal preferences. Family and friends typically recognise the ritual sequence from previous weddings or from their own. Their presence is not only an act of support for the couple, but also a moment in which they remember and, in a sense, might reaffirm their own wedding. The experience of the wedding, with their memory refreshed and supported by photos and videos afterwards, maintains the tradition but also mixes cultures and religions in a plural society (Mäder 2024c). It is therefore not surprising that, in the "Global North", civil and religious weddings across different traditions share similar symbols, such as the exchange of rings or the first kiss. These moments become essential subjects for photographic capture (Mäder 2024a).

The Mediatisation of Wedding Norms

The current reprint, "Promising Images of Love: Religion, Norms, and the Mediatisation of Weddings", focuses on wedding media and the mediatisation of weddings and religion. It examines the role of media in wedding festivities, specifically how they take

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part in meaning making, identity, and ritual transformation processes (Bezner 2002). The term media is understood broadly and plays a central role in communication processes, making it essential in religious practices in which the transcendent realm is constructed within the immanent here and now. In weddings, media encompass audio–visual forms such as photos, videos, paintings, and music. Material media also play a significant role: the wedding dress, the banquets, the wedding cake, and the architecture of the ceremony venue are all important elements to which considerable attention is devoted beyond just the preparation phase (Ouellette 2018). All of these forms of wedding media rely on specific technologies and practical knowledge. They contribute to the communicative processes through which weddings produce meaning, processes that are deeply intertwined with sensory perception (Pink 2022).

This media perspective is based on the scholarly paradigm of mediatisation (Bolin and Kopecka-Piech 2023; Kopecka-Piech 2022; Couldry and Hepp 2013; Cui 2019; Thomas 2015). It assumes that media communication and the media practices of individuals and communities shape and transform each other in reciprocal ways. People use media to express themselves in meaning-making practices; simultaneously, the media shape how people communicate in cultural and religious contexts. Wedding rites are therefore strongly mediatised, as each medium involved carries its own symbolic narrative: from the white dress denoting the bride's innocence, to the flower bouquet symbolising fertility, to the rings that mark the couple's new and eternal marital status. The ceremony venue itself signifies either the religious or civil sphere, while the banquet with music and dance offers a space to celebrate the transformation and to bring together the two families and social circles. Each of these media contributes its own story to the rite of passage. Wedding couples around the world connect through similar symbols like the wedding ring and the white dress and form a community with which they bond. In doing so, they reproduce cultural–religious norms that convey particular values (Strano 2006). These norms and values circulate not only among couples themselves, but also through the entertainment industry, for example, in wedding shows and films (Mbunyuza-Memani 2018; Hefner 2016; Segrin and Nabi 2002; Ingraham 2008; Boden 2001).

A Gendered Rite of Passage

Gender functions as an organising category throughout all stages of the rite: during preparation, ceremony, reception, and even the final moments of the celebration, participatory roles are commonly distributed according to gendered norms. In several cultures and religious traditions, a heteronormative binary paradigm has been or is dominant (Fetner and Heath 2016). Weddings therefore constitute a productive cultural–religious arena not only for reproducing gender norms, but also for challenging and renegotiating them (Lieu 2014). Wedding couples can easily play with these heteronormative codes by wearing the white bridal dress or the black smoking in different roles (Kimport 2012). By doing so, they question traditional values and reinterpret binary gender roles in the wedding rite. This chain of rewriting traditions with its norms and values shows how the past is connected with the present and reaches out to the future. Marc A. Ouellette notes that weddings take part in this process and even describes them as advertisements for future weddings and their norms, with photographs actively contributing to this function:

> . . . since weddings are part of the advertising for weddings, the pictures become part of that recursive operation. The bride (especially) and the groom become the advertising for their own consumption in a clear cause-effect reversal. They are being sold a packaged version of themselves. (Ouellette 2018)

Visual media play a central role in the handing down of wedding traditions and gender ideals. Couples and their guests remember the event by looking at photographs and videos.

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They not only meet their younger selves in the photos but also family members that might have passed away. The wedding dress, the flower bouquets, the ceremony, the wedding reception, and everything else is captured in these pictures. The rite of passage is thus stored in these wedding media forever and partly brought to life when the photographs are viewed.

Contributions to This Issue

We open this reprint with Carla Danani's "Marriage as Institution", which sets the theoretical foundation by exploring marriage as both a constraining structure and a fertile ethical space for human flourishing. The focus then moves into the contemporary political arena with Sabine Exner-Krikorian's "The Introduction of Same-Sex Marriage in Germany–A Question of Conscience and/or Faith?", which investigates how political and religious actors frame same-sex marriage through discourse strategies of conscience, showing how institutional norms enter public debate.

The reprint then widens its lens to diverse cultural and geographical perspectives. In "Six Rites of Allied Harmony", Yu Wu and Zhidiankui Xu trace the Confucian shaping of ancient Chinese wedding rites across dynasties, while Atila Kartal, in "Cultural Codes of Marriage Rituals in Anatolia", reveals how Islamic marriage, oral tradition, and ritual practice culminate in evolving interpretations of kinship and continuity. Turning to gender and sexuality, Benedikt Bauer's "Wedding, Marriage, and Matrimony" offers church-historical case studies from the Reformation to the Moravian tradition, showing how concepts of marital union are mediated and regulated through gendered imagery. From there, Jörg Wettlaufer's "Visual Representations of Weddings in the Middle Ages" looks further back into history, uncovering how medieval visual sources reveal legal, religious, and social norms embedded in wedding rituals.

Finally, the reprint turns to the contemporary lived experience of weddings through the lens of mediatisation. Paul Löffler's "The Wedding and Its Medialization" offers a psychoanalytical perspective on weddings as sites of social identification, where media practices actively shape the ritual and the self-understanding of its participants. Extending this understanding of mediatisation into physical space, Mariateresa Giammetti's "Inter-Religious Architecture for Wedding Spaces" demonstrates how architectural environments, whether religious, civil, or interfaith, mediate and structure the ritual experience, influencing identity and community formation. The reprint closes with Marie-Therese Mäder's "For Ever and Ever the Perfect Wedding Picture", which shows how wedding photography merges religious and secular aesthetics and creates a "visual enchantment" that continues to shape both memory and meaning. Taken together, these contributions reveal weddings as rich media ecologies that integrate environment, image, affect, and identity in contemporary cultural–religious life.

Looking Ahead: Future Research Directions

Future research on the mediatisation of weddings and religion should expand beyond European contexts and engage more deeply with "Global South" traditions to capture the global diversity of ritual practices. Comparative interreligious and transcultural studies are particularly promising as they can illuminate how different communities adapt and transform wedding rituals through media. Social media constitutes a further, distinct area of inquiry. Its growing use in wedding contexts fundamentally reshapes both the perception and documentation of these rites of passage. Social media posts diverge markedly from traditional wedding photographs, which are designed for durability and long-term retrieval. The ephemeral nature of these digital artefacts is likely to transform practices of remembrance, memory formation, and intergenerational transmission. Emerging tech-

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nologies also call for systematic investigation: the increasing use of AI in wedding image production raises questions about authenticity, aesthetics, and the reshaping of visual norms. Moreover, intersectional perspectives including race, class, gender, and migration remain crucial in understanding how power structures shape access to wedding media, influence representational styles, and produce differentiated experiences of the wedding rite. Together, these directions open a rich field for analysing how mediatisation continues to transform one of the most symbolically charged rituals across cultures.

Data Availability Statement: The original data presented in the study are partly available in zenodo. For more information see https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101024115, accessed on 10 December 2025.

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Article

Marriage as Institution

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Abstract: The text develops philosophical considerations on the "institutional" dimension of marriage. First of all, the meaning of "institution" is problematized, as it is so much disputed and controversially interpreted today. On the one hand, in fact, it is circumscribed to denote a repressive reality—restraining, delaying, even disciplining—considered necessary and rescuing by some scholars, yet harmful and dangerous by others. On the other hand, accentuating its verbal form, "institution" is also understood in terms of movement, as the novelty that results from the act of instituting, as a discontinuity that opens a field of possibilities. Paul Ricœur considers institutions as part of the ethical tripod, i.e., of the ways through which human beings can flourish. In the context of these divergent understandings, this paper secondly considers the possibility to speak of marriage as an institution and to take marriage rituals as an example both of rite of passage and aggregation rituals. Bourdieu says that the separation achieved in rituals has a "consecrating" effect. Third, the paper questions whether functional and symbolic changes in marriage and marriage rituals can affect their institutional status and problematize their consequences.

Keywords: marriage; institution; ritual; wedding; function; relationship; ethics

1. Introduction

The text reflects on the possibility and the ways in which marriage can generally be understood as an institution. It, therefore, assumes the concept of "institution" before any qualification, that is, in its elementary signification, on the basis of which it then receives different declinations and sees its horizon of meaning thicken as a social, juridical, religious, and economic reality. We understand it, therefore, as an anthropological, quasi-transcendental fundamental, which variously occurs in its modes of giving itself. This does not mean that those adjectives are taken as irrelevant. They even express very different contents within different frameworks and thus come to reverberate the meaning of marriage as an institution in a very kaleidoscopic manner. But the text will not be able to articulate these aspects, which requires not only a multi-layered approach that I do not have at my disposal but also a patient weaving of the connections traceable in synchronic and diachronic order, which is impossible within the perimeter of this study.

Over the centuries, the 'matter' of the marriage institution has changed. In what we call the contemporary West (however vague the notion may be), what previously displayed the connotations of a patriarchal, pro-creation-based relationship has come to be reconfigured as a nuclear monogamous relationship based on feeling. Today, the picture is marked by lively conflicts of interpretation, with respect to the gender constitution of the couple, to the semantic arc covered by the reference to the sentimental dimension, and to the dimension of parenthood that the disengagement from the procreative essence and the insistence on the sentimental dimension itself bring with them. This insistence, moreover, has gone hand in hand with the contemporary (but already Romantic) divarication (and not just differentiation) between eros and nomos and with the markedly individualistic character of social evolution. Sexuality, in turn, in its decoupling from procreation, is often incoherently and unilaterally led back to the sphere of individual pleasure or to that of affective communication. In the trace of such transformations, albeit fluid and with

uncertain outcomes, one can read the shift in priority from a social pertinence of marriage to an individual (not necessarily narcissistic) pertinence.

At first sight, in the eyes of some, this seems to bring with it the disappearance of marriage as an institution. A closer examination of the connection may show rather that it is the crisis of a model, which in the emergence of new contents of meaning and in the onset of unprecedented tensions ramp up possibilities for revisions and new forms that may also open the ways to a more human world. The institution, as such, does not then seem to become an ornament to be disposed of, but can be configured as a condition of possibility to make marriage lean beyond the narcissistic solitarian or dual sphere: a counterbalance of form to the affective content, which brings the relationship to the complexity of thirdness.

2. Approaching Institutions

"Institution" is a word that powerfully combines the meanings of the act (or event) of establishing and the result of this act ("institution" as that which has been instituted).

Merleau-Ponty clearly points out this complexity and says that "Therefore by institution, we were intending [. . .] those events in an experience which endow the experience with durable dimensions, in relation to which a whole series of other experiences will make sense, will form a thinkable sequel or a history—or again the events which deposit a sense in me, not just as something surviving or as a residue, but as the call to follow, the demand of a future" (Merleau-Ponty [2003] 2010, p. 77). It is from the 1950s onwards that Merleau-Ponty develops this concept, working from the Husserlian concept of *Stiftung* (which has also been translated as "foundation" or "instauration"), which indicates the first act by which consciousness acquires and "founds" a certain objective meaning, which then remains as a stable and permanent achievement in its experience (Husserl 1950, p. 141; Terzi 2016).

The term comes into play, in Husserl's elaboration of genetic phenomenology, to express a dynamic found both at the level of the formation of singular consciousness and its *habitus*, and at the level of historicity, where *Stiftung* (more precisely *Urstiftung*) indicates the original establishment of a formation of historical meaning that then remains available as tradition. It is an inseparable nexus between, on the one hand, an establishing that opens up a field that goes beyond the movement of the establishing itself, reinscribing it in itself and, on the other hand, the being marked off this field with the trace of that happening by which it was opened. The question is to find ways of inhabiting that connection or to try to undo it, to recognize it, and to exercise multiform practices to handle it.

Roberto Esposito highlights the constitutive ambivalence of the category "institution", which has been applied with opposing and heterogeneous meanings.

In one respect, there is a coercive conception of the institution, which leads both to a "katechonic" interpretation of it, considering institutions oriented towards the necessary maintenance of order, and to the opposite messianic option for its dissolution. Esposito considers that even if authors like Sartre, Bourdieu, and Foucault cannot be ascribed, as such, to either the katechonic or the messianic side, however, a generally negative evaluation of the institution remains at the bottom of their perspective. Moreover, a large part of contemporary philosophy, regardless of the political stance of the interpreters, shares this position. He clarifies that if left-wing thinkers, such as Sartre and Marcuse, see the institution as an inertial element destined to block the free development of subjectivity, conservative authors such as Schmitt and Gehlen see it as a necessary immune/protective/defensive barrier to give stability to a human experience otherwise prone to ungovernable impulses. The function of institutions is, for them, to compensate for human-specific indeterminacy through a series of unreflective mechanisms (from another perspective; Bourdieu speaks about habitus; and for Goffman, Berger, and Lukmann, institutions are artificial devices necessary to compress natural human tendencies) (Esposito 2022, p. 11).

Esposito asserts that at the origin of this line of interpretation is Freud's thesis of civilization civilization as the inhibition of primary drives. "Civilization" defines the set of institutions serving both the purpose of protecting us from nature and regulating our

relationships with others. Therefore, institutions embody powers, exercise commands, and impose sanctions, without which humanity would implode. All we have to do is to adapt ourselves to this "discomfort", sacrificing part of our freedom. Indeed, to make them more effective, we must automatically obey the institutions, without even realizing we are doing so; although created by human beings, they acquire a natural dimension—almost a second nature, more rigid than the first—that inhibits the possibility to criticize them. They are, at the same time, the system of rules that govern the community and the power that compels respect for them. In different forms, institutionalization itself is violence, but revealing, on the one hand, a violence that precedes it and which it interrupts (primitive violence or terror), and, on the other hand, a violence that opposes it (corruption) (Bojanić 2012, pp. 89–90).

The social movement's opposition towards institutions—theorized especially since 1968—radicalizes the repressive interpretation of them, even if from the opposite point of view of an "affirmative ontology". If any institution is by its very nature coercive and exclusionary, if in any case, it functions as an inhibition of the free development of human beings, but there is no evil to be kept under control, then there is nothing left but to fight any institution at its root. They are not only useless but harmful. Hence, the value of immediacy must be affirmed against the mediation of institutions. Esposito concludes the following: "along this line of thinking, an authentic community is not qualified by its social bond but by its disintegration. The political or, better yet, the "impolitical" outcomes of this reasoning are plain for all to see today" (Esposito 2022, p. 13). Eventually, the total fluidification of a relationship requires the elimination of the relationship itself.

In *The Problem Problem of the Foundation Foundation of Moral Moral Philosophy Philosophy*, a text first published in French in 1975 and later in 1978 in an enlarged English version, Paul Ricœur proposes a very different conception of institution and Esposito points out that this is a very different voice. The French philosopher developed his own position in *Soi même come un autre*, where he defines the ethical intention "as aiming at the 'good life' with and for others in just institutions" (Ricœur [1990] 1992, p. 172). Therefore, "what fundamentally characterizes the idea of institution is the bond of common mores and not that of constraining rules" (Ricœur [1990] 1992, p. 194).

While Ricœur institutions must be included in the horizon of ethics, which conversely in the first instance does not include law, they are elements of the conceptual network that allows an ethic to be constituted (Ricœur [1975] 1978, p. 176), because "ethics is the movement between nacked and blind belief in a primordial 'I can', and the real history where I attest to this 'I can'" (Ricœur [1975] 1978, p. 177). He explains his conception by taking as his starting point the notion of self-determination of freedom and the requirement for a human being to give oneself a real history in real work. It is important because if one believes oneself not to be free, they also believe other people are not free.

Ricœur affirms the following: "the whole problem of ethics is born from the question, what does it mean for someone to attest to his freedom?" (Ricœur [1975] 1978, p. 177). However, "we truly enter into a problem of morality when we posit freedom in the second person, as the willing (voloir) of the other's freedom, the willing that your freedom might exist" (Ricœur [1975] 1978, p. 178). The negative aspect of obligation proceeds from the positive aspect of this recognition: Let your freedom exist! When the first positing of freedom experiences the limit constituted by the self's very inappropriateness to itself (one actualizes oneself through acts which are inadequate to one's existence), the second step meets the opposition of the freedom to another freedom. "Limit now signifies conflict" (Ricœur [1975] 1978, p. 179). He explains that the point of departure gives the principle of ethics, but not yet the content, which is the actualization of my freedom through your freedom and of your freedom through my freedom. This actualization has a specific history which has a history of conflict but does not imply "the exclusive emphasis on the idea of a struggle, in favor of a search for more peaceful experiences of recognition" (Ricœur [2004] 2005, p. 186). It is here that Ricœur introduces the word institution, in order to point

to the mediation between two freedoms: it is the mediation of "a neutral term", "in the third person", which has a status of "quasi objectivity".

The central point is that "no one is situated or can situate himself at the zero point of ethics" (Ricœur [1975] 1978, p. 180): choices, preferences, and valuations move in a historicity which precedes them and inscribes the action in an already open horizon of meaning. Ricœur mentions phenomena like Husserl's milieu of passive synthesis which have already taken place, like Humboldt's new *energia* which is already confronted with acquired *erga*, and like language itself which is prior before one begins to speak. He explains this factor of passivity, clarifying that human beings "can only act through structures of interaction which are already there and which tend to unfold their own history which consists of inertias and innovations which themselves are sedimented in their turn" (Ricœur [1975] 1978, p. 181).

There is no actualization, no history of freedom without the mediation of structures of interaction which are a "neutral term", the "nonperson" between people. Ricœur provides two reasons to introduce the term institution here. On the one hand, it leads back to a *Urstiftung*—a primordial mythical founding—"so that institution signifies that I am already within the instituted". On the other hand, "institutions found freedoms" (Ricœur [1975] 1978, p. 181), because they can posit themselves only by passing through an instituted-instituting which is a neutral term, the ethical mediation. Immediacy without any intermediary is only a dream. The moment of exteriority means that "the greatest part of our social life consists of coordinating roles, services, labor and work which are only slightly personalized" (Ricœur [1975] 1978, p. 181).

Ricœur exemplifies what he means by considering at first the notion of value. An act of evaluation proceeds from the will and actualizes one's freedom, but then one passes from evaluating to considering something as worthy of value: an element of recognition and not just of simple evaluation is at stake. What is "valuable" cannot be derived from the subjective evaluation of the evaluator, but neither can it be derived from the relationship between the evaluator and what is evaluated: rather, it presents itself as that which mediates, that in which the recognition of what is evaluated as something valuable can take place (Ricœur [1975] 1978, pp. 182–83). Ricœur says the following: "there are already institutions and a social order. The concept of 'value' is a 'mixed concept' which assures the compromise between the desire for freedom of individual consciousness and the situations which are already qualified as ethical situations" (Ricœur [1975] 1978, p. 183); there is always "an already sedimented institutionalized state of affairs" (ibid.): he uses the term "support" and "deposit", which has a "mixed status" that manifests itself in the "substantialization of value predicates". Certainly, since the example here concerns the term value, which is entirely positive in this case, any aspect of interdiction and of constraining does not emerge.

However, even if a "poetics of the will" (Ricœur [1975] 1978, p. 192) would prefer valuable and desirable to coincide, for human beings this does not always happen. When this does not happen, the desirable shows itself in the form of a rule or discipline. Ricœur notes that "the essence of the prohibition is not to positively designate what is preferable, but to negatively designate what is deviant as what is not to be done" (Ricœur [1975] 1978, p. 184). When it happens that what is desirable is separated from what is preferable, "the 'you should' begins to triumph over me as something alien to me, something other than me" (Ricœur [1975] 1978, p. 184). But what prohibition positively refers to is the desire to be a will, a not dispersed will, "a will in the face of desires" (Ricœur [1975] 1978, p. 184). It is "by means of a rational exchange between wills which include a specific moment of universality that the will educates itself to rationality"; therefore, the norm is also the exit from the arbitrariness of each individual being (Ricœur [1975] 1978, p. 185).

In what sense can all this have relevance to marriage, which instead seems to concern the vis-á-vis relationship par excellence?

The journey through Ricœur's reflection allows us to highlight almost all of these three aspects.

Every human act is necessarily immersed in a collective acting that precedes it, offering it a deposit of meanings and conferring significance on it. Thus, every affective and sexual relationship—that is not only thought or imagined, but also lived—is realized as a relationship which is removed from pure precedence and is inscribed within a collective acting, in some way within a sociality, a culture, a tradition, in which marriage is already given as its own possibility. Taking on this form, institutionalizing itself precisely as marriage does not seem to analytically lead to repetition (there is an idiom that speaks of marriage as the "tomb of love"), but it implies a certain stability that may mean the possibility of projection into the future. No predetermined outcomes can be deduced from entering into an "institution": rather, it seems to demand an interpretation of the "consignment", and to open possible new configurations.

The institutionalization of the relationship, moreover, implies in a twofold sense the irruption of "third parties".

On the one hand, the institutional configuration offers the spouses themselves the possibility to prevent the "other", who is the "you" of the affective–sexual relationship—perhaps the most intimate of relationships and, therefore, among the most engaging and risky one—from collapsing into being only "my Thou". In a certain sense, every "you" is always someone's "you", and therefore runs the risk of being subsumed into the "I" whose "you" it is. In the institution of marriage, the "you" has the possibility to be the "you" of a "me" who never can properly name it "my". Institutional mediation, as mediation whereby one always marries "in front of someone", can preserve the one and the other of the relationship from being resolved to the "Thou of mine". The other is not simply the object of my desire, what I want or I think she/he is, and the institutions offer just the field in which one remains irreducible to the relationship with the I of which one is the "you". One can preserve oneself as a "you" that remains, for the other I, an irreducible other. So to speak, the "you" remains as much a he/she, a third person, and the institution preserves (should it preserve? here the distinction between just institutions and those that do not do justice arises) the "Thou" as unavailable, making it "a third" for the I for whom it is also a "Thou". In this sense, the institution mediates because it is "impersonal", so that one can pass to the "we" without making it either a sum or a fusion of the ones (Ricœur [1975] 1978, pp. 321–22).

Finally, marriage, as an externalization of the affective–sexual relation which, in its historicity, is substantiated by the deposit of meanings of the historical-collective acting of its own time and place, involves other "thirdnesses". It loses the contours of the vis-á-vis relationship because it implies the restructuring of former family ties, which come to include new families; it involves the social groups of origin and new social relations. The "we" instituted is a new reality for "whoever".

It is clear that I do not mean here, when speaking of 'third' and 'thirdness', the institution itself (as for instance in Pierre Legendre); rather, it is the performative medium that makes thirdness possible. Indeed, as a thirdness, it also takes up and reinterprets the identity of those who marry: that medium—if not disregarded—deconstructs egotistical settings and makes each one, in the recognition received from the others and through alienation in the 'we', a transcendent not only for the other but also for oneself. Each one is given back to oneself as unavailable for oneself to submit to the other, leaning beyond the mere and contingent goodwill of recognizing the other as a partner in the relationship.

Of course, it is also the case that many unitive mechanisms covered by the rhetoric of love and institution are nothing more than mechanisms of devious, sometimes deceptive, control, even the cause of suffering. But this only says that the institutional passage is not a magical guarantee, so much as the opening of a condition of possibility for a new experience.

Eventually, it must also clearly be acknowledged that marriages are substantiated by symbolic, cultural, social, juridical, economic, and religious connotations which are very different in different contexts. These are not irrelevant characters, but qualifying ones. For religions, for instance, the experience of marriage has to do with the sacred. In the sphere

of Christianity (albeit in the permanent differences between the various confessions), for instance, the articulation of the 'natural marriage' (or 'of creation') in the 'marriage in the Lord' is not only understood as a 'ratification' that perfects the creaturely design but a leap on a Christological level (Tagliaferri 2008, p. 141).

Without being able to consider, in this work, the many variations that institutions, and marriages in particular, can bear (we shall quickly return to this in the last paragraph), a question must, nevertheless, be raised as a criterion for critical oversights on historicity. Let us again refer to the words of Paul Ricœur: "Je pense donc que la pierre angulaire d'une philosophie sociale est celle-ci: repenser toutes les institutions en fonction d'un unique critère: la réalisation et l'épanouissement de la liberté. L'institution n'est rien en soi; elle vaut pour les hommes; je définirai volontiers l'institution: l'ensemble des règles applicables aux rôles et aux comportements sociaux, permettant à la liberté de chacun de se réaliser sans nuire à celle des autres" (Ricœur 1971, p. 201).

Institutions, even if we argue them quasi-transcendentality, should not be exempted from the question of whether they are just or unjust.

3. Marriage and Wedding, Institution and Rituals

When we think of institution in the complex sense, we have tried to articulate between consignment and inventive openness; marriage emblematically seems to show that it lives off the chiasmatic inextricable nexus between narrativity and rituality, calling into play "third parties". This happens in a biographical and historical sense and both from the point of view of the very existence of the institution itself and for those who are involved with it. There are many different interpretations of ritual, from Emile Durkheim's and Bronislaw Malinovski's functional interpretation to Clifford Geertz's semantic interpretation, from the one that focuses on the concept of performance (Rappaport 2002; Turner 1982) to the more recent microsociological (Randall Collins) and cultural sociology (Jeffrey Charles Alexander) interpretations. This is not the place for such a discussion, certainly due to both the problematic nature of the ritual itself and its very fruitfulness. Nevertheless, it seems to us central to propose its heuristic value: a kind of institutionalization that acts in an anti-institutional sense by continually re-admitting tradition and law into the condition of a nascent state (Tagliaferri 2009, p. 464).

Rituals are relevant because they are "tools" for the implementation of potential spaces for living. They mediate differences and put them "into play" by negotiating the boundaries that separate them but without them being either eluded or eliminated. Ritual performance generates a "meta-communicative context" (Bateson 1972), in which individuals give rise to a world of "as if", an "imagined" world, based on the sharing of a "might be" (Turner 1969, 1982). According to Rappaport (2002), the formal properties of ritual make it possible for covenants to arise independently of the sincerity of subjective adherence.

Taking part in a wedding ceremony, for example, means accepting the order related to it and at the same time realizing it, regardless of what the participant's inner status is (Rappaport 2002, pp. 181–82). In this way, ritual gives rise to a process that leads from the "private" to the "public", from the "I" to the "we"; through it, the sharing of social meaning, and thus of a commitment to be, to act in a certain way, is both created and manifested.

Many scholars consider it a specific feature of ritual that it is a symbolic action: it deals with symbols, which it enacts in the course of particular performances. Victor Turner investigated, in depth, the aspects of ritual symbolism, which, for him, have a fundamentally dynamic nature. In rituals, the "symbolic" is not merely functional to represent and reproduce the existing order, but becomes a tool through which social actors alter and transform the relationships within which they are engaged. The semiotic power of ritual symbolism resides, according to Turner, in the fact that its symbols—especially those he defines as "dominant" (Turner 1967, pp. 20–22)—although subject to disparate and even conflicting interpretations—create a shared space, open to creativity and experimentation. In "playing" at simulating a "different" reality, participants in the ritual actively manipulate

the symbols of their cultural sphere, which, therefore, shows itself as an open system enabling individuals to transform the world around them.

The very reality of ritual, moreover, derives from its "corporeality", understood as an original, pre-linguistic way of relating to the world (Tagliaferri 2009, p. 99). What is crucial in ritual is not what is "thought" or "believed", but what is performed (Terrin 1999, p. 162).

Considering in particular, a wedding celebration, it can be interpreted as a rite of passage. Van Gennep subdivided them into rites of separation (e.g., funerals), rites of transition (e.g., birthdays), and rites of aggregation (van Gennep [1909] 1960, pp. 115–45). A wedding can be considered an example of an aggregation ritual, but it may also include the other subtypes (it is a separation rite, too). In addition, a wedding may be combined with other types of rituals (e.g., throwing rice is a fertility rite). A wedding ritual can be understood also in terms of role transition. It serves as a reinforcer of the transition to the new role of being married and works in two complementary ways: it reduces uncertainty about the new roles that people will occupy, and it provides approval for norm-guided behavior (Kalmijn 2004).

One can consider the wedding party, the religious ceremony, the honeymoon, the celebration of the anniversary, and so on. They all are embedded in specific time-places and can take different forms: from parties with hundreds of guests to short-lived events consisting of just a few signatures. They all involve issues such as clothes, the choice of the venue and its setting, the postures and positioning of the people attending, and activities for photographic or film documentation. More and more social media are also involved: in the digital era, it seems that they are co-producing—more than only re-producing—the event. This is a relevant question that Marie-Therese Mäder's Marie Curie Fellow research work "Promising Images of Love" focused on (Mäder 2024). Wedding customs are often passed down from one generation to the next: they are also formulated in etiquette books, popular magazines, and special wedding journals—one can look at them in trade fairs and television broadcasts. There are really trends in marriage rituals, even if some variables have changed over time (e.g., cohabitation and age at marriage).

A wedding, like other rites of passage, acts as a role reinforcer and, at the same time, following Pierre Bourdieu's (1982) concept, we can name it "acte inaugural d'institution".

Bourdieu points out the social function of rituals and the social significance of the line, the boundary, whose crossing and transgression are enabled by them. Rituals institute a lasting difference between those whom the ritual concerns and those whom they do not concern. This is why Bourdieu considers rituals more than involving passages: he would prefer to speak of rites of consecration, rites of legitimation, or rites of institution (giving this word an active meaning).

To speak of "institutional rites" indicates that rites tend to consecrate or legitimize. This does not mean a mere conservative acting. By solemnly marking the crossing of a line that establishes a fundamental division in the social order, a rite draws attention to the passage but the very important question here is the line. It is to take into account the symbolic effectiveness of "institutional rites", and the power they have to act on reality by acting on the representation of reality. Bourdieu says that to "institute" is to assign an essence, a competence, to impose "a right to be" that is "a duty to be". It is to signify to someone what one is and that one must behave accordingly; it also means imposing limits.

Moreover, the function of boundaries is both to discourage the temptation to cross over, to transgress, but also the temptation of desertion or resignation. To permanently discourage the temptation to deviate, the difference should be naturalized; it should become a second nature through a kind of incorporation in the form of habitus. He says that instituting rites are acts of "social magic" and "des actes de magie sociale aussi différents que le mariage ou la circoncision, la collation de grades ou de titres, l'adoubement du chevalier, la nomination à des postes, des charges, des honneurs, l'imposition d'une griffe, l'apposition d'une signature ou d'un paraphe, ne peuvent réussir que si l'institution, au sens actif d'acte tendant à instituer quelqu'un ou quelque chose en tant que dotes de tel ou tel statut et de telle ou telle propriété, est un acte d'institution en un autre sens, c'est-à-dire

un acte garanti par tout le groupe ou par une institution reconnue: lors même qu'il est accompli par un agent singulier, dûment mandaté pour l'accomplir et pour l'accomplir dans les formes reconnues, c'est-à-dire selon les conventions tenues pour convenables en matière de lieu, de moment, d'instruments, etc., dont l'ensemble constitue le ritual conforme, c'est-à-dire socialement valide, donc efficient, il trouve son fondement dans la croyance de tout un groupe (qui peut être physiquement présent), c'est-à-dire dans les dispositions socialement façonnées à connaître et à reconnaître les conditions institutionnelles d'un rituel valide (ce qui implique que l'efficacité symbolique du rituel variera—simultanément ou successivement—selon le degré auquel les destinataires seront plus ou moins préparés, plus ou moins disposés à l'accueillir)" (Bourdieu 1982, pp. 62–63).

The performative force of rituals is involved with the context in which they happen, with the recognition that certain "institutional act" receives. This means stability but also change, both of which are rooted in functions and meanings, esthetic experience, symbolic efficacy, and power relations. There are always third parties involved. In marriage rituals, the bride and groom confirm their decision to be married to each other via a third party in front of which one is married: be it the social group, the law of a State, or the church and God (Kalmijn 2004, p. 584).

4. Indeterminacy and Changing

When we think of institutions in the complex sense, we have tried to articulate between consignment and inventive openness. To consider the many different forms within the same institution Francesco Guala (2016) suggests articulating between token and type: a specific solution in some place in a time is (only) a particular instantiation (token) of the type of institution that one calls 'marriage'.

He proposes to consider the Florentine marriage during the thirteenth century: it is as a token because it is a specific contractual solution, a historical instantiation of the general institution of marriage (the type). One cannot derive from it what "marriage" in general is. Moreover, "to find out what marriage is in general—what marriage is as a type—we need to focus on the coordination problem as a whole, rather than on its specific solutions, because institution types are defined functionally, by reference to their goal or to the problems they solve. Since the same goal can be attained in many ways, the study of specific institutions tells us more about the specific solutions than about what they have in common. What all the institutions share is that they are solutions to the same problems, or equilibria of the same class of games" (Guala 2016, p. 196). He clarifies that "by means of 'institution-type' and 'institution-token' I am trying to distinguish different levels of ontological analysis using the limited linguistic resources of contemporary philosophy and social science. The important point, in any case, is that we cannot determine what marriage is (the type) simply by generalizing across a sample of token institutions, because the sample may be inadequate" (Guala 2016, p. 198).

However, the consideration that "by observing different solutions to the same problems of coordination, we are alerted to the fact that we are dealing with a game that has multiple equilibria" raises another question, namely whether we are really referring to the same problems of coordination.

Even more, we can ask ourselves to what extent the coordination problems that a certain institution solves can change in order for it to continue to be understood as the same institution. How "stressed" can an institution be by removing or inserting practices, so that we can continue to talk about the same institution? People can use, or will use in the future, different institutions to solve their coordination problem. Guala states that only scientists have the epistemic authority to affirm what marriage really is. He adds that normative factors and considerations play a legitimate role only when token institutions are concerned. Therefore, insofar as institutions are regulated by the law, "what a judge can do is to adjudicate whether the introduction of a certain concept in our legislation is compatible with the higher principles that are codified in the constitution" (Guala 2016, p. 203). However, he concludes, "neither the courts nor people's normative convictions

determine what marriage is as a social institution. The claim that heterosexual marriage is the only kind of marriage qua social kind must be adjudicated by scientific experts who are able to assess the claim in light of the best theories and empirical data that are currently available" (Guala 2016, p. 205). The conclusion seems to configure a position that is not only realist but also fundamentally settled on static essentialism, which assumes that social facts can be considered in the same way as natural facts, which experts can discover more and more in depth in their many dimensions, features, and expressions. What really are the functions that characterize marriage? Is it really neutral and objective to say "the institution of marriage regulates the behavior of two or more individuals who pool their resources to raise kids, manage property, and help each other in many different ways" (Guala 2016, p. XXIV)?

What makes something a marriage rather than, to say, a mere team or a group? It claims identification criteria. In the case of a functionalist approach, it requires identifying the specific function it has and, if it is a coordination problem, which coordination practices it should coordinate (it does matter what is on or not on the list), who can be involved in it and who is left out. This is not just a metaphysical problem, it has practical and political implications.

Moreover, although the meaning of "marriage" may be partly indeterminate, we are currently provoked not only to distinguish fair from unfair marriages, considering the ways in which coordination equilibrium occurs within and the quality one has with regard to the relations among the subjects the institution coordinates, but also to ask how much marriage can change by remaining the same institution (Guala and Hindriks 2020). The question does not only regard the extension of the right to marry to gay and lesbian people but also the functions people reserve for their marriage and the meanings invested in it.

Functions and social acts that fill them have both real and symbolic existence. The functionalist view highlights that institutions fill vital functions without which the existence of society is inconceivable, but institutions should not only be understood on the basis of this role, they are inextricably tied to the symbolic. This does not mean that real acts, whether individual or collective ones—work, consumption, war, love, and child-bearing, the innumerable material products without which no society could live—are (always, directly) symbols, but all of these, however, would be impossible outside of a symbolic network (Castoriadis [1975] 1987, p. 117). Cornelius Castoriadis asserts that institutions cannot be reduced to the symbolic, but each institution constitutes a particularly symbolic network. A symbolic system consists of "relating symbols (signifiers) to signifieds (representations, orders, commands or inducements to do or not to do something, consequences for actions—significations in the loosest sense of the term) ['Signifier' and 'signified' are taken here and in what follows *latissimo sensu*] and in validating them as such, that is to say in making this relation more or less obligatory for the society or the group concerned" (Castoriadis [1975] 1987, p. 117). Institutions "can be neither described nor understood in their very functionality except in relation to intentions, orientations, chains of significations, which not merely escape functionality but to which functionality is, in large part, subservient" (Castoriadis [1975] 1987, p. 136).

Castoriadis also stresses the imaginary component of every symbol and of every symbolism. "Imaginary" means "something 'invented'—whether this refers to a 'sheer' invention ('a story entirely dreamed up'), or a slippage, a shift of meaning in which available symbols are invested with other significations than their 'normal' or canonical significations ('What are you imagining now?' says the woman to the man who is chiding her for a smile she exchanged with someone else). In both cases, it is assumed that the imaginary is separate from the real, whether it claims to take the latter's place (a lie) or makes no such claim (a novel)" (Castoriadis [1975] 1987, p. 127). Therefore, "the institution is a socially sanctioned, symbolic network in which a functional component and an imaginary component are combined in variable proportions and relations" (Castoriadis [1975] 1987, p. 132). An institution enters a crisis when it loses its symbolic character, where the latter presupposes "the capacity of positing a permanent connection between two terms

in such a way that one 'represents' the other" (Castoriadis [1975] 1987, p. 127). When the significations attached to an institution diverge from the expression of the functions it is intended to coordinate, it may happen that it develops a form of autonomy from social life such that the institution no longer promotes a set of relations between its members and social life.

Symbolic transformations are not neutral for the institution's very functioning: the chains of meanings attributed to marriage, for instance, can imply a re-selection (inclusion and exclusion) or dismission of practices to be involved and coordinated. Conversely, the introduction of new practices can become so invasive that they can cannibalize others or transmute previous meanings. A form of alienation may thus be produced whereby the institution is experienced as discarding its previous (original?) coordinating functions or being incapable of taking on new ones.

Currently, the marriage institution seems really very stressed. There are many reasons, ranging from socio-economic contextual changes, like the new roles of women and their increasing independence, to cultural ones, like the sexual revolution since the late 1960s and, currently in the spotlight, the question of gender. Marie-Therese Mäder's research work "Promising Images of Love" has the merit of focusing on a so far scarcely considered aspect, that is nevertheless, of central importance: the impact of the digital revolution with its widespread "mediatization". The living milieu has been changed, bringing within it transformations in life forms and institutions.

The primary concern, then, with regard to marriage as with any institution, must be to exercise a critical vigilance that unmasks its potential to be structured in ways that offend people, injure their dignity, harm their rights, abuse their fragility, and reduce their space for autonomous decision-making and freedom. Moreover, it is a matter of fostering the taking up of the question of marriage in the public sphere in a non-reductionist manner and, therefore, not abdicating from seeking to question the ways of a fuller flourishing of the human. Today, in our cultural context, a strong social negotiation is underway: it radicalizes the affective dimension, on the one hand, and subsumes the procreative aspect in a broader concept of parenthood, on the other hand (one that struggles to consider duration but does not renounce the instituting rituality). While the risk is certainly the recurrent one of "narcissistic marriage", a hospitable free zone is also open to the recognition of the wholeness of the human and its consideration "always as an end and never as a means". To promote that horizon and avoid this danger, the reference to the marriage institution cannot be understood as a mere form of boundary. Rather, it must constitute the openness to "thirdness", through which, in many ways, it is possible to work out a generative perspective. This encompasses the perception of surplus, about which those who marry cannot say where it comes from, which they cannot know from the beginning where it will lead, and which, precisely, finds its place in marriage while also sustaining it.

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Article

The Introduction of Same-Sex Marriage in Germany—A Question of Conscience and/or Faith? A Case Study

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Abstract: On 30 June 2017, the German Bundestag voted in favor of the introduction of marriage for same-sex couples—a historic moment. Only a few days earlier, the then Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel had released the vote as a decision of conscience and thus dissolved the usual underlying factional compulsion—does this mean that rights for homosexual people are a question of personal conscience and values? Such a localization arouses the interest of religious studies to investigate how the discourse actors from the fields of politics, church and society formulate the decision of conscience as a discursive strategy in the negotiation process of same-sex marriage in Germany argumentatively and which positionings as well as descriptions of others and themselves are derived from this. The starting point is a modernity in which the actors move, understand and articulate themselves. This understanding of modernity is based on the process of a vertical transfer (Gladigow) of sociological theories of religion, among others, whereby narratives of secularization, overcoming religion (as a necessary precondition of modernity) and narratives of an opposition of religious vs. secular or religious vs. homosexual reappear as positions and arguments in the discourse. Using the approach of discursive religious studies (von Stuckrad) in conjunction with sociological discourse analysis (Keller), these processes of positioning, demarcation and negotiation based on the premises of modernity will be analyzed for the period from 2013 to 2017 on the basis of the public debate on religious, political, and social actors in Germany.

Keywords: same-sex marriage; discourse analysis; Germany; study of religion; politics; religion; social movements; modernity; religious vs. secular

1. Introduction

Monday, 26 June 2017—the former German chancellor Angela Merkel gave an interview to the female magazine *Brigitte*, live on stage. She responded to a question from the audience on the position of her party (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) against the opening of marriage for homosexual partnerships: 'I know many people in the CDU, including myself, who are very concerned about this issue. They've been saying for a long time that the same values are being lived and yet somewhere . . .. Perhaps they grew up with the feeling that husband and wife are like marriage as we know it and the partnership is just as valuable and, of course, for those who are bound to the church, it certainly still matters. [. . .] That is why I would like to lead the discussion towards a decision of conscience rather than pushing it through a majority decision. And I hope that, despite the election campaigns, the discussion will be conducted with great respect and also with great consideration for those who find such a decision difficult. And then at some point the decision will have to be made. And now we've been in a coalition with the SPD [Social Democractic Party] for four years and we've never talked about the issue, and now suddenly during the election campaign (. . .), I also find that a bit—yes, strange.' (phoenix 2017).

This statement, in which the chancellor opened up the possibility of understanding the question of same-sex marriage as a decision of conscience, was marked as a turning point by supporters of same-sex marriage. Moreover, it represented new possibilities in terms of voting practice in the positioning on same-sex marriage. How was this the case? Because

the possibility of declaring a question, an issue or a vote to be a matter of conscience means that, in a parliamentary context, members of the Federal Parliament are no longer bound by their parliamentary group's obligations or the constraints of the parliamentary group, but can decide according to their personal conscience and ethical beliefs. This option has so far been used in Germany primarily for bioethical issues, such as stem cell research, living wills, abortion or forms of assisted suicide (Heichel et al. 2015).

The LSVD+ Federation Queer Diversity (LSVD) stated in its press release: 'Equal rights are a demand of the Basic Law (. . .) In order to get out of this unworthy blockade in a face-saving manner, the Federal Chancellor is proposing the release of the vote in parliament as a matter of conscience for members of parliament. In doing so, she is taking up a long-standing demand. The majorities in parliament for opening up marriage are there. Equal rights for all people are a requirement of our Basic Law. They will not tolerate any further postponement and require no further discussion. All the arguments have been exchanged many times over the last 30 years. The LSVD therefore calls on the Federal Government and the parties supporting it to put the opening of marriage to a vote in the German Bundestag before the Bundestag elections. We want to live in a country in which lesbians and gays are no longer discriminated! Especially when conscience speaks out, we should no longer hesitate. Following the Chancellor's U-turn, it is now in the hands of the members of the coalition to vote freely according to their conscience for an end of discrimination in the Legal Affairs Committee tomorrow.' (LSVD 2017c, author's translation)

The CDU/CSU initially planned to delay the vote until the Bundestag elections in the fall of 2017. The government partners, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), on the other hand, advocated a quick implementation of the vote during the current legislative period. On Tuesday, 27 June, the parliamentary group constraint was lifted in the Union parties CDU/CSU parliamentary group meeting for the upcoming vote in the Bundestag. The vote was based on a motion by the federal state of Rheinland-Pfalz from the Bundesrat. On Friday morning, 30 June 2017, the vote took place after another debate as the first subject on the agenda. The bill received 393 votes in favor, 226 against, and 4 abstentions, and 7 votes were not cast. The bill thus achieved the required majority. In addition to all members of the SPD, Alliance 90/The Greens and The Left Party, 75 members of the CDU/CSU also voted in favor of the bill. After 16 years of civil partnership as the legal institution for same-sex partnership, it was replaced by marriage as the legal institution, with the exception of family and parentage law regulations.

The quotations show that the actors in the discourse use different ideas that are formulated in opposition to each other. In doing so, they use different frames of reference as the basis for a decision of conscience and for their plausibility and legitimization in order to demonstrate their particular position, support or rejection of same-sex marriage. Two aspects make the process of negotiating same-sex marriage in Germany interesting from a religious studies perspective: the quotations refer to religiously based and legally based decisions of conscience and they are formulated in opposition to each other. In addition, a religious studies perspective offers the opportunity to expand the current state of research on this topic, which is primarily political science; the works of Hennig (2012) and Preidel (2015) both locate this debate in the field of moral politics, because of the clash of different fundamental convictions. According to the authors, the line of conflict runs between religious and socially liberal forces. The emotional and moral arguments of conservative Union parties and the strategy of depoliticization by handing over to the judicial level are also classified as further characteristics of moral policy conflicts (Preidel 2015, pp. 147–49). With the category of depoliticization of the problem definition through re-framing it as a decision of conscience (Heichel et al. 2015, pp. 42–45), the moral politics approach provides useful analytical categories for elaborating the strategies and positioning of political parties in the negotiation process surrounding the introduction of same-sex marriage. At the same time, from a religious studies perspective, it is important to critically question Hennig's and Preidel's drawing of the lines of conflict. They use a rather narrow concept of religion and understand religion as a source of conflict, as it defends traditional

values and is therefore opposed to liberal developments. Instead, an approach based on religious studies and discourse analysis can be used to shed light on the conditions under which such strategies for deciding on conscience arise, as well as the complex social, political and cultural dimensions that religion and homosexuality assume as polarizing constructs which are used by actors.

2. Focus: Approaches of Discourse Analysis in the Sociology of Knowledge and Religious Studies

The focus of this particular article is on the manner in which weddings mediate values that are often highly normative. Norms in this context are understood as guidelines to act by, which express specific values and justify normative acts. Also in this context, mediatization is looked at as the interaction between culture (including religion) and the media in a broad sense and the interaction of these two areas, how they adapt to and transform one another. This approach of interaction, mutual adaptation and transformation can be connected with a discourse analysis in the sociology of knowledge (WDA) according to Reiner Keller (2011) and an epistemological interest in religious studies according to Kocku von Stuckrad (2015). With WDA, discourses are reconstructed as 'processes of social construction, objectification, communication, and legitimation of structures of meaning, i.e., interpretation and action, at the level of institutions, organizations, or social (collective) actors (. . .) and the social effects of these processes (. . .) are analyzed.' (Keller 2011, p. 59). Collective actors can thus be understood as producers of statements on an institutional level. They stabilize, transform and (re-)produce the content-related structures and materiality of a discourse in the form of discursive practices together with the dispositives, i.e., the material infrastructure such as draft laws, reports or protest actions (ibid., pp. 137–39). Definitions of religion or patterns of interpretation of religion are thus the subject of discourse analysis and are not prefixed as a tool (von Stuckrad 2015, p. 435; Koch 2007, p. 46f.).

In this way, the discursive strategies of the actors involved in the discourse can be analyzed, how they produce patterns of interpretation as well as self-positionings and external positionings in the negotiations about same-sex marriage, and how they in turn use these to legitimize or make plausible their position. These patterns of interpretation can in turn contain certain norms or values, refer to them or reproduce them. This is because they are available to the actors from the social stock of knowledge and are used by them in a discourse-specific way. Thus, in the interpretive pattern, discourse actors combine different elements of meaning into a coherent and not necessarily consistent interpretive figure, which can appear in different manifest forms, such as texts, images, practices, etc. (Keller 2011, p. 108). Thus, from a religious studies and discourse analysis perspective, the following questions can be raised: how do the discourse actors from the fields of politics, church and society formulate the decision of conscience as a discursive strategy in the negotiation process on same-sex marriage in Germany argumentatively and which positionings as well as descriptions of others and themselves are derived from this?

A second aspect concerns the structure of the discourse and the view of the conditions of the contemporary negotiation process. The actors see themselves as modern and use a certain understanding of modernity in their arguments and strategies. With Gladigow's (Gladigow 1995) approach of vertical transfer, it can be assumed that in the course of differentiation processes, concepts, knowledge and practices between subsystems have been and are shifted and changed. In addition to the WDA approach, Giddens' concept of recursive structuring (Giddens [1984] 1997) and von Stuckrad's 'double-bind' (von Stuckrad 2015, p. 435), a mutual constitution of objects in the subsystems can be assumed. This means that scientific definitions of religion, secularization and modernity narratives circulate in the empirical field and in the subsystems and that the discourse actors use them accordingly in their patterns of interpretation and argumentative strategies.

This refers in particular to the premise applied in contemporary discourses of the distinctiveness of a religious and secular sphere, the narrative of overcoming religion and the opposition of religious vs. secular. This is based on the sociological theory concepts of

a secularization paradigm as a historical process since the beginning of the 19th century. Modernity is created as a social topos and, as a diagnosis of the times, is provided with temporal, sociological and normative settings. Oppositions such as religion vs. modernity or religion vs. rationality were created, based on the Enlightenment critique of religion, which emphasized reason and rationality as the highest principles. The overcoming of religion was set as a marker of modernity (Baumann and Neubert 2010, pp. 9–12; Seiwert 1995, p. 93). Through this narrative of overcoming religion as a precondition, modernity and secularization are linked as mutually dependent. This forms the argumentative starting conditions and sources of reference for the discourse actors in contemporary fields of discourse. In addition to the modernity narrative, Habermas' post-secular model of society and Rawls' political liberalism are two further theories on the idea of secularism that shape the general understanding of religion in the public sphere. Based on the principle of vertical transfer (Gladigow 1995), it will also be shown how the discourse actors implicitly and explicitly draw on these theories in their discursive argumentation strategies. For Habermas, secularization does not represent the disappearance of religion, but the possibility of its participation through the translation by and into secular reason. He links the place of religion in the public sphere to the following condition: religious convictions can only appear with a general claim to validity if they are expressed in arguments in such a way that all citizens can understand them based on reason. Habermas sees religion as a potential resource that could be translated into the language of public reason by secular reason. According to Habermas' principle, secular reason forms and creates the conditions in which religion can appear in the political public sphere, among other things. If religion accepts these conditions, it can, according to Habermas, form a coalition with secularity and oppose scientific rationality and an over-rationalized modernity (Habermas 2016; Schmidt 2014, pp. 30–32). Rawls, a representative of political liberalism, also ties this in with the principle of justice. Unlike Habermas, Rawls distinguishes between reason in public use and private truth. However, no translation process is required to agree to the principles of justice; instead, this should be based simply on political and universally reasonable considerations. The justifications, in turn, might be based on ethical and religious convictions and could vary considerably. The key here is the representation of a liberal stance in public (Rawls 1993).

Another aspect concerns the connection between religion and homosexuality. In the historically based narrative, the Christian churches or the Christian religion is mainly described as an opponent of homosexuality and, accordingly, of same-sex relationships. At the same time, secular voices are linked to its support. Joan W. Scott attributes this dichotomy of religious vs. homosexual to the introduction of liberal secularism. Here, the distinction was made between a public and private area of the political order and its gender and sexual coding. Religion and sexuality were attributed to the private sphere, and these in turn were classified as problematic by both religious and secular sides and regulated as distinct from one another (Scott 2009, pp. 3–5; Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2004). Accordingly, the first question can be clarified: how the opposition of religious vs. homosexual/religious vs. secular, which is derived from an understanding of modernity, has a structuring effect and is implicitly or explicitly used by the discourse authors as a starting point for interpretation, argumentation and positioning as support or rejection.

The questions are answered in three steps. Firstly, the field of discourse examined for this case study is presented with the corresponding discourse actors and the data material used. Secondly, a historical look is taken at how the contemporary field of discourse has been shaped and structured by the two discourse strands of marriage and homosexuality. It was only with the decriminalization and depathologization of homosexuality from the 1960s onwards that a process began in which the linking of these two strands of discourse was made possible within the framework of legislation. Thirdly, it is shown how the discourse actors of the discourse formations of politics (Union, SPD, The Left Party, Alliance 90/The Greens), religion (German Bishop Conference/DBK, Protestant Church Germany/EKD) and social movements (LSVD+ Federation Queer Diversity/LSVD

and Homosexuals and Church/HuK) in the negotiation of same-sex marriage in the 18th legislative period (2013–2017) use the decision of conscience as a discursive argumentation strategy to support or reject the introduction of same-sex marriage. In the end, it will be discussed how the oppositions of religious vs. secular and religious vs. homosexual, which are derived from an understanding of modernity, have a structuring effect and are implicitly or explicitly used by the discourse authors for their discursive strategies.

3. Discourse Actors and Data

Based on the WDA approach, actors do not act in a vacuum. As discourse actors, they assume a certain spokesperson position in which they represent, for example, an organization, a position or a social movement and can form explicit or implicit discourse coalitions or oppositions. They have various resources at their disposal and are bound by (institutional) rules in their particular fields. They (re-)produce a discourse through and with their statements as well as with and through so called dispositives. Dispositives are practices, i.e., non-linguistic instructions for action (so-called non-discursive practices), material objects and textual elements, such as, e.g., legal decisions, press releases, and official statements. As instruments of intervention, they have a power effect and thus produce a real discourse in society (Keller 2011, pp. 61–66, 73).

Actors and dispositives can be divided into so-called discourse formations. These are structured by certain rules and resources, contain certain knowledge and in turn shape these aspects. Discourse-analytically speaking, categories such as religion, politics and society can form such a definable context (ibid., p. 68). This means that categories such as religion, religious, politics, political, society or social are understood as discursively made attributions, categorizations or classifications of organizations, actors or actions. Accordingly, religious, political or social institutions and actors are analyzed as discourse carriers and producers at the meso and micro level, as collective and individual actors. The following discourse actors from the three discourse formations of politics, religion and social movements are used for the research period of the 18th legislative period of the German Bundestag in the years 2013–2017:

Politics: The political system of a parliamentary party democracy, the Basic Law and the parties as public bodies structure the discourse formation of politics. Therefore, the parties and their individual actors were used as collective actors for the political discourse formation. As elected members of parliament for a legislative period, they have the right to speak in the plenary sessions of the Bundestag and assume a spokesperson position for their party or parliamentary group for certain topics. In the 18th legislative period, the federal government was formed by the Union parties/Union (Christian Democratic Union of Germany, CDU and the Christian Social Union in Bavaria, CSU) and the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). The Left Party formed the opposition with Alliance 90/The Greens.

Religion: The cooperative relationship between state and churches, the organizational forms DBK and EKD as well as the distribution of dominance of the religious communities within society are the structuring principles in the discourse formation of religion. For example, only representatives from the Catholic Church, and here in particular from the Catholic Church, and in particular from the German Bishops' Conference (DBK) and the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) were chosen. They were invited by political representatives to take part in negotiation processes in the Legal Affairs Committee as experts or wrote public statements in the form of press releases. This means that the discourse itself shows a focus on the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Church in terms of spokesperson positions. Accordingly, the Catholic Church and the Protestant Church in Germany in their institutionalized organizational form as DBK and EKD are examined as collective discourse actors.

Society/social movements: The LSVD Federation Queer Diversity in Germany (LSVD) and the Homosexuals and Church Association (HuK) were identified as further collective actors. As socio-political associations, they represent the interests of cross-sectional areas

of society. They were therefore classified as social movements in the discourse formation of society.

As already mentioned, the discourse actors (re-)produce a discourse through and with their statements as well as with and through so called dispositives. Thus, statement practices were used as data material in form of press releases, position papers, statements as well as parliamentary speeches of the actors involved.

After developing the discourse actors and data used, the next section takes a historical look at the structuring and shaping of the contemporary negotiation process surrounding same-sex marriage.

4. The Discourse Field: The Historical Discursive Structure and Conditions of the Contemporary Discourse about Same-Sex Marriage in Germany

The field of discourse in which political, civil society and church actors operate is structured by the historical strands on marriage and homosexuality. The two historical strands form the basis and structure of the contemporary debate on same-sex marriage. The history of marriage and homosexuality should be understood as a process of negotiation in which the Catholic and Protestant Churches, the state and society in particular fought over the interpretation of the content of marriage and the sovereignty of interpretation. This always included attempts to regulate sexuality between men and women and to draw the boundaries between permitted and forbidden sexuality, which included both certain sexual practices and, later, certain sexual orientations. Furthermore, these struggles over interpretation also involved power struggles over the position and relationship between churches and the state. The patterns of interpretation used were then enshrined in state or church laws and ordinances, such as marriage law or the prohibition of homosexuality as a sin or criminal offense. These discourse-analytically spoken dispositives in turn established certain sexual moral and social narratives and were thus elevated to the law and norm of society. These could then in turn be used by the actors as the starting point for new negotiation processes and possibly reinterpreted in order to justify new positioning around the power of interpretation and content (Exner-Krikorian 2022). For the history of the legal institution of marriage in Germany, four discursive events that have shaped and structured today's discourse can be mentioned in the context of this essay: the introduction of mandatory civil marriage and the associated separation between the clerical and state sectors, the introduction of marriage as an institution and its protection under constitutional law, as well as the patterns of interpretation of marriage as a community of responsibility and procreation. The fourth discursive event to be mentioned is the drastic change in the patterns of interpretation, legal regulation of homosexuality and the resulting political demands since the 1960s.

(a) Civil marriage as legal institution and the fundamental transformation process in the so-called long 1960s

The legal institution of compulsory civil marriage was introduced in 1875 and marriage was finally removed from the regulatory monopoly of the churches. In contrast to the form of facultative marriage, obligatory civil marriage means that only civil marriage has legal validity. A clerical marriage is only valid within the respective church community and can only be legally performed on the condition of a preceded civil marriage. The state thus drew a clear distinction between the clerical and state sectors as part of the so-called 'Culture War' (Fuhrmann 1998). With the introduction of the German Civil Code on 1 January 1900, marriage law was codified together with family law for the entire German Empire. In 1919, a corresponding paragraph on marriage, family and filiation was included in the Weimar Constitution. The majority of the National Assembly rejected the idea of accepting and guaranteeing marriage and family as a given. Instead, the parties agreed on the compromise of placing marriage and the family under the special protection of the constitution, while at the same time retaining the openness to add further structural principles. This arrangement was confirmed in the 1998 marriage law reform (Schwab 2013, pp. 297–99).

The so-called long 1960s represent a significant discursive event in this historical process, as fundamental transformation processes took place during this period (Großbölting 2013; Bräunlein 2015). The post-war government under CDU Chancellor Konrad Adenauer adopted a conservative and restorative style of leadership. This was accompanied by an attempt to distance itself from the Nazi government and seek new roots. However, as Herzog was able to show, this attempt by the Christian Democratic parties and the churches to distance themselves from the Nazi regime was ambivalent. On the one hand, they marked their own sexual policy as a demarcation of the Nazi past and at the same time appropriated the same sexual policy of the previous government through the strict regulation of sexuality (Herzog 2018, pp. 9–17). The churches were also appointed by the Allied Control Council at the time to guarantee the return of morality and to advise politicians. The churches themselves referred to this process as re-Christianization (Lepp 2016, 288f.). This mixed situation changed slowly and over time led to fundamental changes in the legal structure of marriage and divorce, the perception of sexuality(ies), the roles of men and women as well as the influence and role of the church and state. (Maschwitz 2014, pp. 82–84; Schwab 1999, p. 811f.) From a discursive perspective, these processes of change can be described as waves and counter-movements of alternating and mutually dependent conservative and liberal positions. At the same time, stereotypes from the 19th century were reactivated; accordingly, the Catholic Church was portrayed as backward-looking, politically conservative and hostile to modernization, in contrast to the Protestant Church, which was described as open to dialogue and adaptable (Bräunlein 2015, pp. 46–49). Another reactivated narrative of this period is that of the crisis of family and marriage. The starting point here is the ideal of a Christian middle-class nuclear family, which is threatened by the social upheavals (Neumaier 2019, pp. 84–88; Gerhard 2005, p. 449). Due to the social changes and despite internal reformatory approaches, both churches continued to advocate marriage as a monogamous and permanent union between a man and a woman and as the ideal and center of Christian sexual ethics. While the Protestant Church primarily problematized premarital sex, the Catholic Church re-evaluated the relationship between marriage and sexuality. In the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes* (1965) of the Second Vatican Council, personal love was recognized for the first time as the legitimate purpose of marriage and sexual intercourse as an expression of this love. In the follow-up document *Humanae vitae*, the Catholic Church reaffirmed its understanding of sexuality as being directed solely towards procreation. In its orientation guide *Questions of Sexual Ethics* (1971), the Protestant Church emphasized the individual's freedom of choice, but continued to advocate marriage as a partnership between a man and a woman as the ideal relationship. However, the generative function of sexuality, i.e., the procreation of offspring, was no longer to be the starting point for its assessment, which is why the Protestant Church, in contrast to the Catholic Church, also permitted contraceptives in family planning (Lepp 2016, pp. 293–97).

(b) Decriminalization and depathologization of homosexuality as the central changes in the discourse on homosexuality in the 1960s

In addition to the historical discourse on marriage, the discourse on homosexuality also shaped and structured the contemporary debate on same-sex marriage. From a historical perspective, the so-called long 1960s were also a decisive discursive event here. With regard to homosexuality, the women's and emancipation movement of lesbians and gays in Germany changed the legal and social conditions, evaluations and legitimate reference systems. Until the second criminal law reform at the end of the 1960s, the history of homosexuality was characterized by a narrative of homosexuality as a sin, crime or illness that had grown over centuries and was based on theology, medicine and psychology, anchored in church and criminal law and realized in society (Brinkschröder 2006; Eder 2014, pp. 17–40). A visible process of decriminalization and depathologization of homosexuality only began in the context of the above-mentioned criminal law reform. This also changed the sources of argumentation used by those involved in the discourse as convincing and plausible. While the criminalization of homosexuality had previously been justified with

the biblical Sodom story, the protection of marriage, family and youth as well as the violation of general morality and social order, all these justifications were invalidated and instead justified with medical and psychological findings as well as jurisprudential expert opinions and statements. For the first time, the reform permitted homosexual acts between adult men with restrictions. However, homosexual events, occupational bans and discrimination in employment law as well as legal disadvantages for same-sex couples persisted (Kramer 2017, pp. 140–44; Ebner 2018, pp. 95–142). Both the Protestant and Catholic Churches can be categorized as negative voices during this period. In their social roles as ethical and moral authorities, they were attempting to preserve the moral order. They ignored or explicitly rejected new findings on homosexuality from the sexual sciences from the mid-19th century onwards. In both churches, the attitude pre of labeling homosexuality as an illness and disorder and thus assigning it to pastoral care and spiritual guidance prevailed. Homosexuality continued to be classified as a sexual aberration, but was no longer to be morally condemned (Ebner 2018, pp. 111–13). The same can be said of the Catholic Church in its declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Persona humana* (1975). The moral–theological classification of homosexuality as sodomy, which had been held for centuries, was replaced by a dogmatic tradition. This is based on a behavioral–psychological pattern of interpretation that distinguishes between illness (homosexual tendency as an innate drive) and behavior (homosexual tendency through influence) and is accordingly located in the responsibility of pastoral care (Goertz 2015, p. 206; Brinkschröder 2006, p. 28f.).

(c) Gay Marriage as demand for participation and inclusion of gays and lesbians in society

From a historical-discursive perspective, the demand for a legal institution for same-sex couples in Germany is closely linked to the institutionalization and professionalization of the so-called homoemancipation movement as a social movement and advocacy group in the 1980s and 1990s. While the focus in the 1980s was on criticizing hetero-patriarchal gender relations and formulating political demands based on this, the project of so-called gay marriage became the focus of the movement in the 1990s with the aim of promoting the participation and inclusion of lesbians and gays in society (Raab 2011). At the same time, the first associations of gay and lesbian Christians also emerged within the church as support and self-help groups, worship communities and for church political engagement. Since the 1980s at the latest, there have been isolated blessings for same-sex couples. They not only caused a stir in the media, but also led to internal discussions and personal consequences for those involved (Exner-Krikorian 2021, p. 133). Due to the increasing visibility and activity of homosexual employees and believers as well as gay–lesbian–Christian organizations like the organization Homosexuals and Church (HuK e.V.) or Lesbians and Church (LuK e.V.), a discussion about the positioning of homosexuality as a moral and pastoral issue began within the EKD church, i.e., since the 1970s at the latest. However, the blessing of same-sex couples was not approved. In its orientation guide *Living with Tensions (Mit Spannungen leben)* (1996), the EKD only agreed to prayer in the context of pastoral care for homosexual persons outside of a church service, but not to a public or church act of blessing. In its self-image of its social role as an ethical authority and political advisor, the EKD represented the narrative of an ethical and pathologizing rejection of the inclination towards homosexuality and the necessity of pastoral care for homosexuals derived from this (Ebner 2018, pp. 95–123, 185–205, 252–84). On the part of the Catholic Church, there was no internal exchange on the possibility of blessing same-sex couples, but homosexuality continued to be treated as a problem of natural law and morality. In its 1986 letter of recommendation, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith called on the bishops and members of the Catholic Church to take a clear stand against political or social developments that would normalize or positively condone homosexuality or same-sex relationships. It warned against this kind of propaganda, which would represent a danger to the general social understanding of the nature and rights of family and marriage (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 1986, No. 1, 2, 8, 9.). Both churches thus contributed, both within the church and in their role in society, to the fact

that homosexuality could continue to be morally, ethically or pathologically rejected and in need of pastoral or psychological care (Ebner 2018, pp. 95–123, 185–205, 252–84).

These negative interpretation patterns on the part of the churches were countered by the depathologization of homosexuality in the field of human science, medicine and psychology by the World Health Organization. The pattern of interpretation of homosexuality as a sexual orientation, which also included heterosexuality, also emerged in the field of sexual science (Mieszkowski 2014, pp. 41–72) Legal and political developments in Germany, Europe and worldwide at the end of the 1980s can therefore be read as the results of negotiation processes, which in turn were used by the actors to make social change plausible for further changes and demands. These included the introduction of civil partnerships in Denmark in 1989, the removal of homosexuality from the World Health Organization's (WHO) register of mental illnesses in 1990, the final decriminalization of homosexuality in German criminal law and the European Parliament's resolution on equal rights for gays and lesbians in the EU in 1994. The latter also called on the European Commission, among others, to issue a recommendation to remove national bans on marriage and adoption for homosexual couples. These developments, as well as the campaigns *Registry office campaign* (*Aktion Standesamt*), Get married campaign (it's a wordplay with the double meaning of "trauen" in German, which can mean dear you and get married; *Aktion Traut Euch*; LSVD 2019) and finally the so-called *Hamburg Marriage* (LSVD 1997) by gay and lesbian organizations, prompted the members of the Alliance 90/The Greens party to submit the first bill to introduce the right to marriage for same-sex couples in 1995. After the debate in the Bundestag and the Legal Affairs Committee, a majority spoke out in favor of establishing an equivalent substitute institution in the form of so-called registered civil partnership. In 1998, concrete demands from a position of political influence and decision-making reached the Bundestag for the first time in the form of a draft bill by the then governing parties SPD and Alliance 90/The Greens. Furthermore, it made a positive connection between the discourse on marriage and homosexuality and called for civil partnerships as a protective measure, as an instrument for equal treatment and for reducing discrimination against homosexual people (Exner-Krikorian 2022, p. 80).

The historical embedding shows the structuring, shaping and conditions of the field of discourse. It becomes clear how the two discourse strands of marriage and homosexuality, in their historical genesis of certain patterns of interpretation and their historicity, form theses of the negotiation process surrounding same-sex marriage. Furthermore, the historically conditioned structure of the field of discourse is revealed. This affects both the authorized speakers and participating discourse actors in the discourse formations of religion, politics and society as well as the content-related structuring of the discourse. Building on the opening quotation, the next section will show how the discourse actors in the negotiation of same-sex marriage in the 18th legislative period (2013–2017) use the decision of conscience as a discursive argumentation strategy to support or reject the introduction of same-sex marriage.

4.1. The Decision of Conscience among Political Actors: Government Parties (CDU/CSU and SPD) and Opposition Parties (Alliance 90/The Greens and The Left Party)

In the context of this study, the focus is on the 18th legislative period from 2013 to 2017 with the discursive event of the vote on the draft law as a decision of conscience in 2017. The formation of the new government in September 2013 united two parties, the Union and the SPD, which took opposing positions on the issue of opening up marriage in terms of their understanding and implementation. The Union maintained its course of gradually examining the alignment of civil partnerships with marriage and rejected the so-called opening of marriage. It also vehemently rejected these demands on constitutional grounds and adhered to its gender-binary interpretation of marriage as a community of witnesses and of opposite-sex marriage as a structural feature and as a cultural and legal–historical fact. The SPD, on the other hand, strongly supported the opening of marriage as an instrument for reducing discrimination. In the coalition negotiations, the SPD and

Union agreed to end existing discrimination against same-sex civil partnerships in all areas of society and to remove legal regulations that put same-sex civil partnerships at a disadvantage. On June 30, 2017, the vote on the draft law was a conscience decision and therefore not subject to parliamentary group constraints.

(a) The ambivalent position of the Union in the argumentation on same-sex marriage between constitution, tradition and reinterpretation of a Christian shaped tradition

The Union took an ambivalent position in this parliamentary session. On the one hand, it presented itself as a supporter of the equal value of the ethical–emotional and socially functional interpretation of marriage and civil partnership, and showed understanding for the needs and wishes of those affected for an equal designation: 'According to our view of humanity, who or how a person loves should not play a role in their judgment, recognition and dignity. Connections between two people that are built to last and characterized by responsibility for each other give this society stability and support.' (Ullrich 2016, pp. 15.278D–15.280C, author's translation). On the other hand, the CDU/CSU cited the reasons for its rejection that were familiar from the debate: It sees the opening of marriage as a constitutional problem and continues to insist on the constitutionally based distinction between civil partnerships and marriage. It argues with the constitutionally prescribed protection of marriage and family and the corresponding rulings of the Federal Constitutional Court that marriage is defined as a union between a man and a woman. Precisely because marriage is not clearly defined in the constitution and the Federal Constitutional Court understands marriage as a union between a man and a woman, the Federal Government is faced with a decision on values that can only be implemented through a constitutional amendment. In the last parliamentary session for the vote, the CDU/CSU expanded its grounds for rejection: in addition to the constitutional grounds and the decision on values, the Christian faith and cultural–historical tradition of the concept of marriage were included. This addition is linked to the positioning of the vote on marriage as a decision of conscience and a problem of terminology. In this way, the Christian faith conviction and a Christian cultural understanding of tradition are once again supplemented as the basis of the Union position and thus made plausible and legitimized as reasons for rejection:

> 'We see equality as a process. We are gradually making changes to the law—always where there is a need. (. . .) I believe that it is still appropriate to call different things different things. (. . .) The thesis is being put forward that only with the implementation of marriage for all can any discrimination be ruled out. (. . .) I have also repeatedly pointed out in recent times that this thesis can be rejected relatively quickly. (. . .) At the end of my speech, it is important for me to outline once again what the Federal Constitutional Court has said about this, because the impression is repeatedly created: The Federal Constitutional Court demands marriage for all.—The Federal Constitutional Court said quite literally on 7 May 2013: <Marriage is the institution reserved solely for the union between a man and a woman.>—If you read the decision, you will see that the Federal Constitutional Court differentiates very nicely by stating that civil partnerships can indeed form families and are therefore protected by Article 6 of the Basic Law, but that they do not fall under the concept of marriage. (. . .) Marriage is protected by constitutional law, and there is also a reason for this, namely the biological difference that marriage can in principle and purely potentially produce children. (. . .) Finally, I would like to support my parliamentary group, the CDU/CSU, once again. We are a people's party. It is part of the character of a people's party that it is a very broad-based representative of the population. It is quite natural that there are people who would like to liberalize marriage for everyone and others who, like me, have counter-arguments and see things differently. But I don't want to be accused of this.' (Hofmann 2017, pp. 23.555C–23.556C, author's translation)

Furthermore, the CDU/CSU expands its definition of discrimination in order to protect its position against the background of freedom of opinion and to protect it from insults and generalizations, especially on the part of Alliance 90/The Greens: 'Not everyone who has a different opinion than you on this topic is homophobic (...). Someone may have legal concerns, or someone may just have a differing opinion. You might have to tolerate this view, even if you think it is' (Grosse-Brömer 2017, p. 23561B). The Union used two different concepts of discrimination and used them strategically to position itself and other parties or as a basis for argumentation. On the one hand, there is the understanding of discrimination used by supporters of same-sex marriage, which refers to the legal discrimination of same-sex couples. The Union counters this understanding by arguing that this is merely a justified distinction between unequal persons: the non-equal treatment of unequal institutions does not constitute discrimination. On the other hand, the Union uses the concept of discrimination as a strategic concept of protection; this is intended to protect one's own position from other positions in terms of freedom of opinion and conscience and at the same time to ensure recognition, respect and tolerance.

At the last meeting, the Union presented another position. On the one hand, this was intended to make the negative stance more plausible and, at the same time, to develop the possibility of approving same-sex marriage. Plausibility was established with a focus on marriage as a system of values and symbols. The Union also emphasized its self-image as a Christian party, as a representative of people influenced by the church and as a representative of a traditional Christian German culture. Furthermore, this position attempted to establish a more dynamic, historical–critical approach to the concept of marriage in the constitution and the rulings of the Federal Constitutional Court. The difficulties that the Union cited with the liberalization of marriage were justified on the one hand by the ecclesiastical and Christian character of the concept of marriage. On the other hand, the Union cited a social majority as a reason that would represent this understanding of marriage and, conversely, its obligation as a people's party to include all people in this process appropriately. With regard to the speaker position, the introduction of personal experience, concern and expansion of the ethical–emotional interpretation pattern of marriage as a symbol of love and value as a Christian image of humanity took place as early as 2016: 'It's about love, it's about lived responsibility and it's about values: so it's not just about a legal institution. That's why we shouldn't make the debate smaller than it is. No, it is about a symbol. It's about marriage as a symbol of a stable bond that documents to the outside world that two people who love each other belong together and take responsibility for each other—for a lifetime—and are there for each other in good times and bad. This is commonly known as marriage' (Kaufmann 2016, p. 15.275A, author's translation). With this self-positioning as a Christian-based party, the Union attempts to promote understanding, but at the same time links this to an external positioning of the other parties. In this way, it attributes an easier handling of the redefinition of the concept of marriage to the other parties due to their atheistic habitus and thus their non-Christian and non-church affiliation. At the same time, the Union accuses the other parties of forgetting that no complete secularization has taken place in German society and that the Christian faith is still important in everyday life: 'Redefining the concept of marriage is more difficult for a party that has a C in its name, as we do, than for a party that is emphatically atheist. [...] And it's not as if our state is already completely secularized. The Christian faith still plays an important role for many people, at least in everyday life, [...] and therefore the guidelines of the Christian churches also play an important role (...). The representatives of a popular party cannot ignore this per se.' (Kaufmann 2017, p. 23.553B, author's translation).

This means, conversely, that the Union party is solely associated with Christian belonging and an awareness of people's religious, Christian and church-related issues. At the same time, all other parties are denied this knowledge and concern, as is the Christian affiliation of party members and their voters. Instead, there is a general classification as atheists. In other words, the Union uses a strategic generalization here that leads to

a polarization between the Christian Union as a people's party and its knowledge and concern for all people on the one hand and atheist parties without a sense for, knowledge of and concern for people's needs on the other. A religious belonging or the Christian orientation of the Union is used strategically in the form of value principles and combined with its own understanding of politics. In this case, Christian means that certain traditional values are represented, including love and responsibility. With these very unspecific, basic and comprehensive fundamental values, the Union solves both the dilemma of its Christian commitment and its commitment to a Christian-oriented voter base.

In the last session on the vote to liberalize marriage, this pattern of argumentation is used as the basis for the Union's approval. The opening of marriage is seen as the implementation of a modern, tolerant, civic and at the same time value-conservative policy. In addition, it is integrated into the Union's self-image as a binding force between traditional values and new developments. The central interpretation of marriage as an expression of love and responsibility is correlated with the Christian Democratic self-image and as a conservative value. The Union cites a Christian representative, namely the Protestant Church in Germany, to calm existing fears of loss and concerns about opening up: 'If, on the other hand, it is argued that same-sex marriages are an attack on families, I would like to reply: not a single child will be born less and not a single marriage between heterosexuals will be concluded less simply because gays and lesbians will also be allowed to marry in future. Nothing will be taken away from someone just because something is made possible for others. [. . .] This is exactly how the Protestant Church in Germany views it. They have just emphasized once again that the importance of marriage between a man and a woman is in no way reduced. On the contrary—it is once again emphasized. I think that's right. It would be absurd to want to protect marriage by preventing people from getting married. That doesn't fit together.' (Luczak 2017, p. 25.112B, author's translation)

(b) SPD, Alliance 90/The Greens and The Left Party and its legal–ethical–emotional interpretation of same-sex marriage

The SPD and the opposition parties Alliance 90/The Greens and The Left Party called for the vote on same-sex marriage to be opened up in parliamentary sessions from 2016 onwards in order to finally give people their rights and 'finally [end] the political poker for which they are being held hostage. This should finally mark the end of discrimination' (Brunner 2016, p. 19.894D). In contrast to its government partner, the SPD positioned the liberalization of marriage as a question of justice and human rights. Like the opposition party Alliance 90/The Greens, the SPD used an ethical and emotional interpretation of marriage. According to this, the opening of marriage is a legal recognition of the love and mutual responsibility of two people and the realization of human rights and needs. The decision to open marriage is categorized as a question of the legal–ethical principles of justice and human dignity, as a principle of solidarity and as a rational principle of reason. In contrast, tastes and gut feelings are rejected as irrational opinion sources: 'Now it is up to us, the legislators, to take the final step, and this is not a question of taste or gut feeling, ladies and gentlemen, but a question of justice and human dignity. That is why we are saying yes to marriage for everyone today! (Högl 2017, p. 25.100A) Love and reason are finally asserting their rights today. This is a success, a joy for the lesbians and gays in this country, but also for our democracy, for our tolerant, for our colorful Germany and not least for this House.' (Brunner 2017, p. 25.115B).

As with the Alliance 90/The Greens and The Left Party, the constitution is used as a legal corpus and representation of an ethical canon of national values and principles for the self-assurance of values. In other words, it is not used via a reference to a religious tradition or, as in the case of the CDU/CSU, to a German culture and tradition shaped by Christianity. The SPD stands for a legal–ethical–emotional interpretation of marriage. The opposition parties also campaigned for the liberalization of marriage as a human right. The Left Party was the only party to use the vote to critically point out further unequal treatment of same-sex marriages. It emphasized that the marriage reform had not yet led to normalization and complete equality. Alliance 90/The Greens see the opening up of

marriage as a historic sign and victory for human dignity. Like The Left Party and the SPD, it draws on the ethical–emotional, legal and legal–ethical–emotional aspects of the marriage interpretation pattern for its positioning and argumentation. By emphasizing the ethical–emotional interpretation pattern, the Alliance 90/The Greens party is primarily appealing to the feelings of the Union parties or to their conservative understanding of the value of marriage in order to gain their support:

> 'Today we have a social majority that has gone so far that 68% of all Germans say: Yes, I support marriage equality. Even almost as many members of the Catholic Church say this. 67% of members of Protestant churches (. . .) That's why I would like to call on the entire CDU/CSU and also the SPD: Take heart! (. . .) not only be proud of the old partnership law, but also take note of the fact that in the end you will have to say: Now I have the courage to raise my voice and vote accordingly. I have the courage to finally put an end to the unequal treatment of things that are the same.—Because love is equal to love. Responsibility is equal to responsibility. There is no second-class love.' (Künast 2016, p. 15.276C)

Finally, Alliance 90/The Greens emphasize the legal–ethical–emotional interpretation of marriage in that the party sees the legal recognition of love between two people on the basis of human rights in the opening up of marriage. In addition, a national dimension is added to this pattern of interpretation. In the last Bundestag session on the opening of marriage, Alliance 90/The Greens described the vote and the opening of marriage itself as a historic event and a sign of civil society, which advocates human dignity, the free development of personality and the principle of equality for all people before the law and recognizes the values of marriage as conservative values of responsibility, commitment and trust. The rights of a minority would be recognized and thus contribute to Germany's self-confession of unity, justice and freedom. Alliance 90/The Greens consider the legal aspect as well as the ethical–emotional aspect of marriage to be realized here. Unlike the Union, the party does not interpret this result as the protection of a traditional Christian concept of marriage, but rather as the implementation of the constitutionally based, cultural, civic and national values of human dignity, personal development and equality before the law. At the same time, it locates this event as a historical epochal event marking the beginning of the acceptance of gays and lesbians in Germany. This makes the history of gays and lesbians in Germany an integral part of German history and consequently also of German self-identification and the realization of their constitutionally based values of human dignity, personal development and equality under the law:

> '(This Day) is first of all historic for us, for our society and for its values, which we continue to strengthen today: for human dignity, for the free development of the personality, and especially for the equality of all people under the law. (. . .) It is historic for civil society and its political struggle for equal rights. After more than 25 years, countless CSDs, initiatives and campaigns, I am delighted that it will hopefully reach its well-deserved climax today, ladies and gentlemen. It's about something very simple: it's about marriage. But it is also about the way we live together in our country. Marriage is said to be conservative. That's why I don't quite understand why conservatives are so strongly opposed to it. No, nothing is being taken away from anyone. Trust, commitment, reliability: that's what it's all about, for everyone. Take your conscience in your hands and be happy.' (Göring-Eckhardt 2017, pp. 25.108B–25.109B, author's translation)

4.2. The Decision of Conscience by the Social Actors: LSVD and HuK

For the LSVD, human rights and the Basic Law form both a regulatory system and, with the principles of equal treatment and anti-discrimination, an ethical framework and value system for all actors in Germany. This stance of the LSVD became clear during the debates on the Civil Partnership Act and in the debates on adoption law in 2013. Legally guaranteed respect and equal rights form the basis for the LSVD's understanding of conscience: '[. . .] You have spoken out against discrimination, now it is up to you: Don't

let the Dobrindts and other shrill minorities hold you hostage any longer. Follow your convictions and your conscience. Break down the blockades. [. . .] Say NO to the disregard of the broad social majority, which has long stood up for equality. Simply say YES to equal rights and equal respect.' (LSVD 2013).

Based on these sources of legitimacy and authority of the law, the LSVD has adopted a strategy of dichotomizing reason vs. irrationality; the demand to introduce same-sex marriage after the intermediate stages of the Civil Partnership Act, thus guaranteeing equality and reducing discrimination against homosexuals, is derived from the sources of legitimacy and authority of the Basic Law and human rights and marked as reasonable. Conversely, positions that reject demands such as adoption, tax equality and ultimately the opening of marriage are marked as absurd, unreasonable and irrational attitudes on the part of conservative actors (Dworek 2011, pp. 7–11). The LSVD describes the situation as a cultural struggle between reactionary-conservative opponents of same-sex marriage, including conservative parties such as the CDU/CSU and FDP as well as the Catholic Church and large parts of the Protestant Church, and proactive supporters, including the then opposition parties SPD, Alliance 90/The Greens and The Left Party. The LSVD presented its own demand as a human rights and constitutional issue and strategically used a constitutional and legal–ethical interpretation of marriage. The LSVD has thus established an argumentative position that not only exposes the unreasonableness, prejudice and illogicality of any opposing position, but above all demonstrates its legal groundlessness and contempt for humanity. According to the LSVD, the situation has changed: it is no longer the homosexual person who is crazy, but those who refuse to recognize the rights of lesbians and gays as human rights can thus be classified as irrational:

> 'Let me remind you once again of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, our pioneer from the 19th century. At the time, some doctors reviewed his writings and then and declared him insane via remote diagnosis. A Prussian textbook of forensic medicine wrote at the time: this Mr. Ulrichs could not be 'in full possession of his mind'. His 'utter madness' was demonstrated by the fact that he had 'already gone so far as to demand the marriage of two men'. [. . .] Today, on the other hand, it is a litmus test of how civilized a society is that it recognizes that the <justification> of male and female love is based on elementary fundamental rights: human dignity, the free development of personality and equality.' (Dworek 2011, p. 12)

At the same time, the LSVD assumed a hierarchical relationship between state and church, meaning that religious communities and churches, as social actors, had to adapt to this legal and ethical framework. The LSVD considered the special role of the churches as political advisors on moral and ethical issues to be justified and correct only as long as the churches behaved and positioned themselves in accordance with the state's canon of law and values. The LSVD also uses the religious marking as Christian in the reason/unreason dichotomy: Christian attitudes that reject the demand for marriage are overcome by the reasonable recognition of the validity of the Basic Law. This strategy is already visible in the debate on the Civil Partnership Act:

> 'Declaring the registry office a no-go area for lesbians and gays was really bad, petty harassment. It was a classic example of political shabbiness—the exact opposite of civic decency. But it was also a losing battle. [. . .] Baden-Württemberg alone continued to proclaim this policy of disregard as the raison d'être of the state until March of this year [2011]. These Christian knights in sad shape apparently believed in all seriousness that this time they had to defend the West not in the Hindu Kush but in the Swabian Alb. Now they have been deselected. That is only right! The government in Stuttgart has already initiated the reopening of the registry offices' (Dworek 2011, author's translation). The LSVD likewise categorized the introduction of same-sex marriage in Ireland: 'The LSVD congratulates Ireland on this great success for equal rights, diversity and respect. Even in a country that is as Catholic as Ireland, the majority of the population

says: yes to equal rights, no to homophobia and discrimination against same-sex love.' (LSVD 2015, author's translation)

The LSVD had already posed the question of a decision of conscience in 2016, not as a decision of conscience associated with a Christian culture, as is the case with Union members of parliament, for example, but as a clear legal obligation of conscience, namely a decision of conscience committed to fundamental and human rights, as well as a decision of conscience with a rationalized emotionalization: 'The opening of marriage must no longer become a victim of the Chancellor's gut feeling and the political calculations of the CDU/CSU. The Federal Government must finally ensure that something that has long been in the hearts and minds of the population is finally translated into law by its representatives. A government that is waiting for Karlsruhe to finally end discrimination is not governing, but rather sitting out. The upcoming vote on respect, diversity and equal rights is not a question of party politics, but a question of conscience and a question of fundamental rights. Members of parliament should also be able to vote with this in mind.' (LSVD 2016, author's translation)

The argument for the opening of marriage is also based on a rationalizing emotionalization of marriage. The implementation of the liberalization of marriage is seen as a struggle between heart and head: marriage is understood as a knowledge of the heart and head. Love as the knowledge of the heart and mind is understood as rational knowledge and differentiated from the irrational knowledge of the gut feeling. Heart and mind knowledge and gut feeling knowledge are thus dichotomously juxtaposed and at the same time the love of two people is contrasted as an emotion to be understood rationally with the rejection of such relationships as an emotion to be understood non-rationally.

The Federal Chancellor's decision to declare the vote on same-sex marriage as a conscience decision and to make it independent of political parties is classified by the LSVD as a political move by the Chancellor and the CDU/CSU to save face. In addition, the parties had built up such political pressure by making the introduction of same-sex marriage a coalition condition (LSVD 2017c, author's translation). The CDU and CSU have finally agreed to put the opening of marriage to a parliamentary vote. The LSVD emphasizes the approval by a majority in the Bundestag, the self-evidence, legality and permanence of the demands for the liberalization of marriage as well as the end of an exchange of arguments: 'Equal rights for all people are a principle of our Basic Law. They will not tolerate any further delays and do not require any further discussion. All arguments have been exchanged numerous times over the last 30 years.' (Ibid.) The LSVD described the vote and ultimately the decision to open up marriage as rationalized and legalized emotion with its national-European-based, ethical interpretation of marriage: 'In the end, reason and the consistent fight for the opening of marriage will win' (LSVD 2017a) and 'Germany has voted for love [. . .]' This is a historic day! Not only for lesbians and gays, but also for a more equal and democratic society. In future, it will no longer be gender that decides whether or not you can get married in Germany, but love, solidarity and the promise to be there for each other in good times and bad. (LSVD 2017b, author's translation). The LSVD thus declares marriage for same-sex couples to be a symbol of an open, free society without discrimination and a victory for love, justice and equality between homosexual and heterosexual partnerships.

Alongside the LSVD, the HuK was the second collective discourse actor involved in the negotiation process. They criticized any instrumentalization of the needs of lesbians and gays for an election, church or religious campaign: 'However, we consider a vote catching campaign at the expense of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and trans* people to be intolerable. [. . .] The commitment to reduce discrimination is neither suitable for a church campaign nor for an election campaign'. [. . .] We expect Christian politicians not to declare any ideas of a <Christian image of man> which they use to protect heterosexual marriage in particular. [. . .] No one has a special monopoly on a 'Christian' view. For many people, it is precisely the Christian faith that forms the basis for advocating equality for homosexuals' (Gutfleisch 2013, author's translation).

Instead, since the beginning of the debates on civil partnerships, stepchild adoption and same-sex marriage, the HuK has argued in favor of the so-called opening of marriage. They justify their support by placing the debate on same-sex marriage as a theological question of Christianity. The so-called alternative narrative of Christianity of the HuK served as a justification, which attempted to dissolve the equation of Christian and discriminatory and instead established non-discrimination as a Christian value and Christianity as an LGBT-friendly religion: 'We have long been advocating marriage for everyone because we believe it is deeply Christian. It is Christian because it defines cohabitation in lesbian and gay partnerships as equal and renders complicated, discriminatory regulations obsolete.' (HuK 2017b, author's translation) 'We as the working group Homosexuals and the Church are firmly convinced that marriage for everyone is Christian, that lesbian and gay couples are a blessing for each other and for society. The Chairman of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany, Bedford-Strohm, and 75 CDU/CSU MPs who voted in favor of opening up marriage today share a similar view. Even CDU/CSU parliamentary group leader Kauder, who continues to oppose marriage for everyone, acknowledges that it is possible to vote for the liberalization of marriage as a Christian.' (HuK 2017a, author's translation).

Using ideas borrowed from gay theology and queer theology, the starting point and basic principles of their alternative Christianity (HuK 1994) were the principle of charity, a grassroots democratic understanding of community and the equal value of all people regardless of their gender or sexual orientation, as well as the state-guaranteed law of anti-discrimination. The HuK thus opened up the possibility of incorporating these principles as Christian values into religious self-understanding, political actions and argumentation and thus using them as sources of legitimacy and authority that can be coded in Christian terms. This discursive argumentation strategy was based precisely on the cooperation between the religious and secular spheres, values and laws, and enabled a conscientious decision to approve the introduction of same-sex marriage.

4.3. The Decision of Conscience for Religious Actors: DBK and EKD

With regard to the question of introducing same-sex marriage, the DBK maintains its position of protecting marriage and the family from questionable social developments. The DBK presents itself as a social actor loyal to the constitution, which, in contrast to politics, is obligated to comply with the law and the associated duties and limits of interpretation. Furthermore, based on the critical debate about the relationship between religion and the state, the DBK calls for the proven cooperative relationship between church and state not to be abandoned and accordingly calls on politicians to vote against the law of same-sex marriage if a decision is made.

With the vote in June 2017, the Commissariat of the German Bishops of the DBK addressed a broad public in the form of a press release and a letter to the members of the Bundestag asking them not to approve the draft law. In the letter, it asks the MPs to reject the draft law. Accordingly, the DBK also expresses its regrets about the Bundestag's decision to introduce same-sex marriage. In the associated press release, the position of the DBK is clearly expressed once again. The DBK supports the differentiation of different forms of partnership and emphasizes that this differentiation should not be understood as discrimination. It classifies marriage liberalization as a 'significant change in the content and dilution of the classic concept of marriage' (DBK 2017b). The DBK addresses the demand for the opening of marriage as an appreciation of same-sex partnerships, but in this context refers to the 'appreciation of same-sex cohabitation' (ibid.) and rejects the opening of marriage. This is because, for the DBK, the essential aspect of the constitutionally established protection of marriage in its significance as a reproductive community is missing. In other words, the DBK once again clarifies its rejection of the prioritization of an ethical–emotional interpretation pattern of marriage in favor of the acceptance of same-sex partnerships, which are understood as purely ethical partnerships. Instead, it emphasizes that the generative and constitutionally rooted aspect of the interpretation of marriage should be retained as a continuing and significant distinction:

> 'A fundamental characteristic of marriage, which is protected by Article 6 (1) of the Basic Law as an institutional guarantee, is that it is the union of a woman and a man. This was confirmed by the Federal Constitutional Court in its decision on the introduction of the Civil Partnership Act in 2002, in which it considered the registered civil partnership to be an *aliud* to marriage and stated that the same-sex nature of the partners differentiated the institution of the registered civil partnership from marriage and constituted it at the same time. (. . .) Irrespective of the specific legislative proposal, I would like to advocate retaining the existing concept of marriage and thus the distinction between a registered civil partnership and marriage. Church, state and society share the experience that marriage combines the aspects of a reliable couple relationship and the transmission of the life of the biological parents to their children in a special way. As a union in which the partners take on mutual responsibility and which is open for joint offspring, it is of great importance both for the individual and for the community. For this reason, Article 6 (1) of the Basic Law is not only understood as an institutional guarantee, but also as a value decision for a special form of cohabitation. In this special form, it differs from other cohabiting relationships that lack certain characteristics that characterize marriage.' (DBK 2017a, Nr. 17/author's translation)

Both churches advocate acceptance, with the DBK calling for acceptance on a personal level, i.e., for homosexual persons, while the EKD emphasizes the acceptance of same-sex partnerships by placing special emphasis on the ethical interpretation of marriage. After the vote of the Bundestag, the DBK stated its regrets that marriage had lost its essential meaning as a procreative community and had thus been deprived of its foundation. As ethically viewed communities, the DBK expresses its respect for same-sex partnerships, but emphasizes its view that civil partnerships and marriage are clearly distinguishable and assignable. At the same time, the DBK reserves the right to formulate its own definition of marriage in line with the principle of separation of church and state and religious freedom, and to apply this definition in its own clerical sphere:

> '(. . .) I regret that the legislator has abandoned key aspects of the concept of marriage in order to make it suitable for same-sex partnerships. At the same time, I regret that today's decision has abandoned a differentiated view of various forms of partnership in order to emphasize the value of same-sex partnerships. However, differentiation is not discrimination. An appreciation of same-sex cohabitation can also be expressed through a different institutional structure. It does not have to be expressed by making the legal institution of marriage open to same-sex partnerships. (. . .) It is worth considering that many of those who for a long time fought against the institution of marriage as hostile to life and an outdated model have now become fervent advocates of 'marriage for all'. It is thought-provoking to see how fundamental convictions in the understanding of marriage are being abandoned with reference to necessary flexibility, changing times and popular moods. It is sad that the legal institution of marriage has become caught up in the wheels of political tactics. Marriage does not deserve this. (. . .) At the same time, I would like to remind you that the sacramental character of our understanding of marriage remains unaffected by today's decision in the German Bundestag. Especially in the current debate, it is important for me to emphasize that the German Bishops' Conference has stressed in its statements on civil partnership law that it would be a misunderstanding to understand the emphasized legal status of marriage and its continued special protection as discrimination against homosexual men and women. As a church, we have respect for those same-sex partnerships in which mutual responsibility and care is assumed for many years.' (DBK 2017b, author's translation)

The EKD refrained from commenting on the matter until the declaration of approval. However, it then emphasized the intended opening of marriage as a sign of marriage's

future viability and expressed its support: 'For the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), trust, reliability and the assumption of responsibility in shaping human relationships are of central importance. In the view of the EKD, marriage offers the best conditions for this and is therefore a model for the future. It forms the legal framework for two people living together on the basis of lifelong fidelity. The EKD welcomes the fact that the legal space in which trust, reliability and responsibility are protected and supported by legal regulations is also fully accessible to same-sex couples who wish to enter into a lifelong partnership. The importance of marriage between a man and a woman is in no way diminished by this. On the contrary—it is emphasized once again.' (EKD 2017, author's translation).

The EKD did not comment on the result of the vote in a press release. However, the Protestant press service *epd* has collected various voices, including EKD Council Chairman Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, who took a positive and cautious view of the result. He writes that 'neither feelings of triumph on the one hand nor bitterness on the other should now set the tone' (epd 2017). He reiterates the opportunity to be able to perceive marriage as an awareness of lifelong fidelity and commitment (ibid.) For the EKD, this means that in order to be able to accept the opening of marriage from the Protestant side, it once again emphasizes the ethical aspect of the pattern of interpretation of marriage: marriage itself has become a model for the future, has not lost its significance and is instead a reinforcement of marriage as a long-term partnership and the mutual assumption of responsibility.

5. Summary: The Aspects of Law, Emotion and Religion as Discursive Strategies in the Discourse Coalition between Supporters and Opponents of Same-Sex Marriage

Marriage is a powerful human invention that constitutes family and kinship and culturalizes and regulates and charges the biological aspect of procreation with meaning. Marriage is used as a divisive marker between illegitimate and legitimate sexuality, or to draw boundaries between religious and secular spheres. Due to its ritualization as a life cycle ceremony (van Gennep 2019) and the values and conceptions of life associated with it, the debate on the introduction of marriage for same-sex couples challenged fundamental debates on precisely these concepts of the world, values and life. Furthermore, it also involved a renewed debate about the demarcation between the religious and secular spheres and the positioning of religious arguments and positions in a society that sees itself as modern.

The negotiation process shown in this article can be described as a reinterpretation process whereby the advocates sought to normalize same-sex love and marriage after its decriminalization and depathologization through a law and the associated practice of marriage. Central to this discourse are two structuring principles that allow certain discourse coalitions to be derived: The first structuring factor in the formation of the discursive strategy of the decision of conscience is the binarity of the principle of constitutional fidelity and constitutional protection with a tendency towards the sacralization and immutability of the Basic Law. On the other hand, there is the principle of equality and the universal validity of human rights with the tendency to legalize an emotion (love) and emotionalize a right, namely the right to same-sex marriage as a right to love. The second structuring factor in the formation of the discursive strategy of the decision of conscience is the premise of the relationship between church and state: cooperation or separation of churches or religious beliefs and the state or secular attitudes. Based on this oppositional structuring, the discourse actors can be located in a positioning field that sees support and rejection as opposing poles, between which the positions oscillate depending on the recognized sources of legitimacy and authority for the decision of conscience.

On the one hand, the actors in the discourse assumed a strict understanding of constitutional law, a Christian-influenced culture and thus also the concept of marriage. These provided the sources of legitimacy and authority for the decision of conscience to reject the introduction of marriage law for same-sex couples (DBK, Rejection within UNION). In its self-image as a consultant, the DBK did not use any theological or religious sources of legitimacy or authority. But the DBK referred to a constitutionally based pattern

of interpretation of marriage, a problematization of same-sex marriage as a legal problem and the use of the Basic Law and the rulings of the Federal Constitutional Court as sources of legitimacy and authority. With Habermas, the formation of conscience in the DBK is based on the discursive strategy of translating religious content and arguments into secular and secularly recognized or marked content and arguments. In this way, the DBK linked its understanding of an order of things given by the theology of creation with the constitutionally given order of things. In addition, it attributed to the constitution and the laws an almost natural law sovereignty of interpretation and order of society. The immutability and interpretative sovereignty of the constitution were thus assigned as the core of the constitution itself and legitimized under constitutional law. This translation of a religiously marked connection between marriage and family into a constitutional guarantee marked as secular and a constitutional mandate marked as secular created two further possibilities for action for the DBK: by using this pattern of interpretation of marriage and constitutional law, religious discourse actors such as the DBK, but also other discourse actors such as the Union or EKD, who saw themselves as secular-cooperating, were able to introduce a previously religiously based opposition between natural vs. unnatural sexual action and sexual desire as a secular stance and argue for it as a reason to treat homosexual and heterosexual partnerships differently. This in turn led to a shift in the underlying opposition formation from religious vs. homosexual to secular vs. homosexual.

Furthermore, the opposite position (supporters Union, EKD, SPD, Alliance 90/The Greens) can be found. Based on the structural principle of cooperation between the religious and secular spheres, it derives an endorsement of same-sex marriage. While the legal principles had been used by the discourse actors as irreconcilable opposition in the formation of conscience, the ethicization and simultaneous desexualization of homosexual partnerships emerged as a strategy to overcome the contradictions and achieve consent. The focus on the ethicization of marriage also led to an emotionalization of marriage law, in which it was understood as a combination of mutual acceptance of responsibility and love. Only two contributors to the discourse, namely HuK and The Left Party, took positions that were decidedly in favor of overcoming the homo/hetero dichotomy. However, these did not prevail against the dominant normalization and homo-normativization strategy of Alliance 90/The Greens, the SPD, pro-gay actors from the CDU/CSU and the LSVD.

In contrast to the DBK and EKD, the HuK emphasized the religious (Christian) basis for a decision of conscience by positioning the debate as a theological question of Christianity. With the alternative narrative of Christianity, it attempted to argue from a faith tradition defined as Christian and to derive from this a certain practice of action with which same-sex partnerships and the treatment of homosexual Christians should be represented coherently both internally and externally. The alternative narrative of Christianity promoted the principle of charity, a grassroots democratic understanding of community and the equality of all people regardless of their gender or sexual orientation as well as the basic principles and starting point for a state-guaranteed law of anti-discrimination. Christianity defined in this way became the benchmark for classifying and evaluating the actions, arguments and positions of the parliamentary debates between the DBK and EKD. The HuK thus offered a solution in the reversal of Habermas' approach: the Basic Law, human rights and anti-discrimination laws were incorporated as Christian values into one's own religious understanding and thus used as sources of legitimacy and authority that could be coded as Christian and thus legitimately introduced into the discourse. This solution also supported the cooperative model of churches and state, which sought to establish cooperation between churches and state on the basis of human rights and anti-discrimination instead of a competitive relationship.

And finally, in the opposition logic of the discourse, the discourse actors in favor of the opening of marriage are on the opposite side. The highest legal and value principle for a decision of conscience is formed solely by human rights and the Basic Law, to which all other ethical and religious justifications would have to be subordinated (LSVD). This is an application of the Habermasian principle in the sense of the premise of reason as an

ethical principle of decision-making and legitimization. Only statements and positions made in accordance with the principle of equality of the Basic Law and human rights are accepted as reasonable and therefore legitimate for the debate. Opposing positions are disqualified as unreasonable or irrational as implausible for the debate. However, this does not per se exclude emotions from the decision of conscience—love as an ethical dimension of marriage in turn forms the rationally deducible basis of argumentation for demanding equal rights for homosexual couples through the emotionalization of marriage and the legalization of their love relationship.

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Article

Six Rites of Allied Harmony: Changes in Ancient Chinese Wedding Ceremonies under the Influence of Confucianism

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Abstract: Ancient Chinese wedding ceremonies served as the solemn rituals for witnessing and establishing marriage, primarily aimed at forging kinship ties between two families and fulfilling the obligations of ancestral worship and lineage continuation. Within the Confucian tradition, the family and the state have always been interconnected, and ancient Chinese weddings, dating back to the Zhou dynasty, have maintained the fundamental order of both the family and society. This article primarily explores the influence of Confucianism on ancient Chinese wedding rituals and customs, as well as the historical evolution of wedding ceremonies throughout different dynasties. According to Confucian principles, the main procedures of the wedding ceremony included six rituals: "Nacai" (proposal ceremony), "Wenming" (name inquiry), "Naji" (betrothal gift ceremony), "Nazheng" (gifts for the selection of the auspicious day), "Qingqi" (asking for a wedding date), and "Qinying" (wedding procession). These six rituals were collectively known as the "Six Rites". This study found that, during the Qin and Han dynasties and the Tang and Song dynasties, there were two important stages of reform of wedding ceremonies under the influence of Confucianism. The "Six Rites" were streamlined and merged into the "Three Rites", gradually becoming more secular. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the interaction between Confucianism and the wedding ceremony weakened until the Republic of China period, when traditional constraints were broken. It is evident that the "Six Rites" have continued to serve as the template of traditional Chinese weddings and have been the important basis for subsequent wedding customs.

Keywords: traditional Chinese weddings; Confucianism; marriage customs culture; ritual evolution; etiquette design; wedding phenomena

1. Introduction

The wedding ceremony is a socially recognized ritual that marks the establishment of a marital bond between a man and a woman. It encompasses the entire process from proposal to engagement to the actual wedding ceremony itself (Ma 2014). Etiquette and ceremonial rites are integral aspects of Chinese life (Peng et al. 2022). In ancient China, the wedding ceremony was also referred to as the "hun li (昏禮)" and was one of the "jia (嘉)" ceremonies (Hu 2019). It served as a means of assisting a newlywed couple in transitioning into their new roles and identities, representing the beginning of a new family. Particularly for women, marriage is the means for obtaining a permanent place to belong and become a part of the husband's family. Ancient Chinese wedding ceremonies, rooted in Confucianism, held strong ethical and social significance under the guidance of Confucian ideology. These rituals played a crucial role in educating society and regulating behavior. Confucianism emphasized the responsibilities and obligations of parents, asserting that couples should strive together to procreate and pass down their values, thereby perpetuating their lineage and family ideals. Therefore, despite variations across different historical periods, ancient Chinese wedding ceremonies consistently emphasized the stability of marriage and the importance of the family, advocating for mutual respect, care, and support between spouses.

Many religions have specific wedding rituals that are established based on religious beliefs and doctrines, and China is no exception. Some scholars consider Confucianism to be a religion, while others argue that it is better classified as a philosophy, moral system, or cultural tradition (Cahill 2001). However, it is evident that Confucianism emphasizes personal cultivation, ethical morality, family values, and social order, and its teachings and values hold significant religious and spiritual significance for many Chinese individuals. Confucianism plays a central role in shaping the ideological framework. It emphasizes that human actions should align with "virtue" and establishes a set of norms based on moral requirements known as "rituals". The formulation, regulation, and value concepts of ancient Chinese weddings, in particular, stemmed from Confucianism, and their development occurred within the core framework of Confucianism while being influenced by societal, cultural, artistic, and economic changes of the time. The earliest records of Chinese weddings can be found in the Confucian classic, *Yi Li · Shi Hun Li* 儀禮·士昏禮, from the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods (770–221 BCE), which outlines the main procedures of the wedding ceremony as the "Six Rites". Therefore, the purpose of this study is to primarily explore the developmental trends of the Six Rites in later periods, aiming to investigate the interaction between Confucian ideology and ancient Chinese wedding ceremonies and their influence.

Currently, research on ancient Chinese traditional wedding ceremonies can be classified into three main categories. The first category focuses on exploring wedding customs and rituals from the standpoint of pre-Qin ceremonial systems and Confucian classical texts. Yang Zhigang conducted a comprehensive study on the various forms of wedding ceremonies within the overall framework of Chinese ritual systems (Yang 2001). Chang Jincang systematically categorized ancient Chinese discussions on rituals, thereby elucidating the distinct boundaries of wedding ceremonies and customs within the scholarly domain (Chang 2005). Chen Shuguo and Lan Jiayun provide a detailed examination of wedding rituals from ancient times to the pre-Qin period (771–221 BCE) based on the *Zhou Yi* 周易, with particular reference to polygamous marriages with concubines following the marriage (Chen and Lan 2007). Xu Wei and Xu Huimin focused their research on the wedding ceremonies depicted in the Book of Rites, providing insights into the metaphysical foundations, value, significance, and potential limitations of ancient Chinese wedding rituals (Xu and Xu 2016). Meng Qingnan summarized the early Confucian perspectives on the significance of wedding ceremonies, highlighting the themes of harmonious bonding and mutual respect (Meng 2017).

The second category involves a systematic study of wedding ceremonies as part of marriage from the perspective of ancient Chinese marital history. Some comprehensive works in this category include Chen Guyuan's extensive discussion on the historical development of Chinese marriage, specifically addressing the characteristics of wedding ceremonies in the section on marriage methods (Chen 1987). Wang Binling analyzed various wedding rituals and marital customs of different ethnic groups in China from the perspective of marital history (Wang 2013). Chen Peng focused on the process of marriage formation, emphasizing different forms of marriage that existed in Chinese history and organizing historical materials related to wedding rituals and customs (Chen 2005). Furthermore, there are specialized studies on wedding ceremonies and customs during specific dynasties. For instance, Peng Liyun explored the wedding system and distinctive features of the Song Dynasty (960–1279) (Peng 1988), while Xie Baofu conducted a detailed investigation into wedding rituals and phenomena during the Northern Dynasties (386–589) (Xie 1998). Qu Ming'an used the study of wedding ceremonies in a particular dynasty to explore the main characteristics of royal weddings throughout history. By focusing on the discourse and ritual elements in the process of courtship and marriage in the scholar–bureaucrat's wedding during the Zhou Dynasty (1046–256 BCE), Qu Ming'an proposed the significant viewpoint that ancient Chinese royal weddings formed a symbol system with a binary structure (Qu 2020).

The third category involves interdisciplinary research on wedding ceremonies from a socio-cultural perspective. Chen Xiaofang used the *Annals of Spring and Autumn* 春秋左傳 as a blueprint and proposed the theory of "Three Rituals for Spring and Autumn Weddings" (Chen 2000). Lu Shiqiu, from a comparative religious studies perspective, vividly presented the prevalent folk wedding and funeral customs in China through a combination of text and illustrations (Lu 2009). Zheng Huisheng attempted to discuss the relationship between the status of women in pre-Qin society and marriage from a female perspective and explored research in the field of cultural linguistics, revealing the implicit relationship between ancient Chinese kinship terms and wedding systems (Zheng 1988). Ji Guoxiu linked wedding ceremonies with social structures and the evolution of the ceremony with social change, analyzing the changes in Chinese village weddings within the context of social networks (Ji 2005). Additionally, numerous scholars have compared and summarized the cultural customs of wedding ceremonies in different regions or among different ethnic groups in China. For example, Xu Yuan and others discovered wedding custom activities in the Hanzhong region (Xu et al. 2014), and Wan Delengzhi and Zheng Dui explored the changes in traditional wedding customs of the Tibetan ethnic group (Wan and Zheng 2020). These studies reflect the influence and development of traditional wedding ceremonies and concepts in various regions, broadening the research perspective on ancient Chinese wedding ceremonies.

As an interdisciplinary research topic, ancient Chinese weddings have been widely studied in terms of their constituent factors and influences. Currently, there are abundant research results on ancient weddings influenced by Confucianism, which provide important insights into the inheritance and transformation of wedding rituals. However, most of them focus on macro-level discussions of the history of marriage or specific studies of a single dynasty or region. There is a lack of research on how the Six Rites in the Zhou Dynasty (1046–256 BCE) impacted and permeated later wedding ceremonies, as well as the evolution of wedding rituals throughout different dynasties under the influence of Confucianism.

Therefore, this study primarily centers on the Confucian wedding rituals of the Chinese elite, exploring the successive wedding rituals formulated by rulers and the phenomenon of wedding activities dominated by the scholarly class as the entry point. The focus is on the examination of the ritual processes and customs of ancient weddings, as well as the contextual design and underlying conceptual ideas. This leads to the following research questions: How did the Six Rites, established based on Confucian ideology, change, adapt, and transform over time? How did the designers of wedding ceremonies and political-economic factors influence the dimensions of the ritual performances? Is there any interaction and influence between the practices of wedding ceremonies and Confucian norms and values? In the scope of research on ancient Chinese weddings, the state rituals and folk customs are inseparable. Under the guidance of ritual systems as ideological guidelines, the differences between eras also contribute to the distinctive folk performances of wedding ceremonies. In response to the research question, we analyzed the wedding rituals and customs of major dynasties. Two main historical lines were summarized. Firstly, the ancient Chinese wedding rituals were developed and evolved from the foundational Six Rites proposed by Confucianism, represented by Confucius during the pre-Qin period. Secondly, the wedding customs in ancient China experienced a transition from Confucianism-dominated Han culture to a fusion of diverse cultures and ideologies. Ultimately, it critically advocated the pre-Qin Confucian ideology represented by Confucius to guide and explore the past and future of Chinese Confucian weddings.

2. Methodology

This study employs historical research and literature analysis methods. A comprehensive review and analysis of existing literature shows that the formulation, norms, and value systems of ancient Chinese weddings are rooted in Confucian wedding rituals. However, previous research has predominantly focused on specific dynasties or regional wedding

customs, lacking an exploration from the perspective of historical evolution and succession regarding the development of ancient Chinese wedding ceremonies under the influence of Confucian thought. Furthermore, there is a notable absence of holistic comparative analyses across different centuries. Historical research is a methodology that employs historical records to study past events in chronological order. In China, these transitions are marked by dynastic changes, defining distinct periods of social life. Consequently, this study explores the evolution of ancient Chinese wedding ceremonies across various historical periods, focusing on key dynasties that underwent significant transformations and developments for in-depth investigation.

This study collected primary source materials and used a systematic literature research method to analysis and explore the ancient Chinese wedding ceremony. The study used the Confucian classic text "*Yi Li·Shi Hun Li* 儀禮·士昏禮" as a model to investigate the six rites in ancient China. This text provides a comprehensive record of the wedding ceremonies during the Zhou Dynasty and is one of the earliest and most complete classical works documenting these rituals. It has also served as an authoritative reference for subsequent studies of wedding rituals. Therefore, the third section of this study thoroughly examined the core rituals, processes, and concepts of Confucian wedding ceremonies during the Zhou Dynasty.

Based on this foundation, the study delved into two specific aspects of ancient Chinese wedding ceremonies: the official and the folk traditions. On the official level, historical accounts and records of royal and aristocratic weddings were mainly derived from official ritual classics. In the Song Dynasty, private literary works such as "*Jia Li* 家禮" provided further insights into ceremonial customs. This study collected relevant literary materials spanning from the Han Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty and, in combination with ancient court paintings, explored significant changes in wedding rituals during different dynasties. A comparative analysis was conducted, comparing them with the 'Six Rites' documented in the Confucian classic "*Yi Li·Shi Hun Li* 儀禮·士昏禮", examining their characteristics, evolution, and connection with Confucian cultural thought. On the folk level, customs and traditions of ancient Chinese weddings gradually formed in local communities, often without official historical records. The data in this research area were mainly sourced from historical records, local gazetteers, novels, poetry, and Dunhuang manuscripts, as well as visual evidence from murals and artifacts. Descriptions of wedding scenes were commonly found in everyday life records, oral histories, folk songs, and documents describing geographical landscapes. These materials effectively depicted wedding scenes from various dynasties. Therefore, representative texts related to Confucian cultural thought and enduring wedding customs were selected as focal points. They were systematically summarized and organized, effectively reconstructing the visual representations of wedding customs and activities from different dynasties. In summary, the comprehensive application of these two methods enables a thorough and holistic study of the historical, cultural, and religious background of ancient Chinese weddings under the influence of Confucian thought. This approach also sheds light on the status and impact of weddings in traditional Chinese society.

Nevertheless, there are certain limitations in this study. Firstly, Confucianism itself is not inherently religious, yet it holds significant religious and cultural value in ancient Chinese society. There is an interrelation between ancient Chinese weddings and religious studies, potentially influenced by various religious wedding rituals. While this paper discusses the introduction of Christian weddings during the Republican era, leading to the emergence of modern civil weddings, it lacks a more detailed examination of these connections. Our study aims to reveal the historical evolution of wedding ceremonies, but further exploration is needed to unravel the intricate relationship between Confucianism, religion, and ancient Chinese wedding rituals.

Secondly, the study of Confucian wedding rituals demands more refined methodologies when considering the complexity and changes spanning different historical periods. By employing phenomenological analysis, more intricate and subtle questions can

be posed. Given the profound and extensive nature of ancient Chinese wedding customs, it is challenging to provide a comprehensive and objective assessment with only a few centuries of research. This paper represents an initial exploration, opening the door for further research into Confucian wedding rituals, which still provides ample opportunities for scholarly exploration.

3. The Foundation of Human Relationships: The Origin of the Ancient Chinese Wedding and the Six Rites System Established by Confucianism

3.1. Tracing the Origins of Ancient Chinese Wedding Ceremonies

Weddings are based on marriage, which emerged earlier than weddings. The earliest historical form of marriage was primitive clan-mixed marriage, followed by forms of marriage based on blood groups and extramarital relationships, resulting in a clan marriage system where two clans intermarried in a state of cohabitation without forming a household. During the mid to late Neolithic period, the clan group marriage system was gradually replaced by paired marriage[1] (Wang 1962). In *The Book of Rites·Li Yun* 禮記·禮運, it is recorded that "the desire of men and women for food and sex is one of the great desires of humanity" (Zheng 2021). This indicates that gender relations and diet are equally important human physiological needs. At this time, marriage was increasingly valued, and people tended to stay with their spouses. With the transition from matrilineal to patrilineal society, the concept of marriage changed from the natural cohabitation of men and women to a means of ensuring the continuation of family heirs (Chang 2005). Wedding ceremonies emerged during the late stage of the paired marriage system, as marital parties sought divine blessings through specific rituals to establish the marital relationship and form a family. Particularly in ancient China, despite the practice of polygamy, a family could have only one legal wife who was married through proper marriage rituals. Simultaneously, social constructivism argues that rituals are socially constructed and maintained (Liu 2015). As a ritual, weddings shape the symbols, norms, and expectations of marriage, contributing to the construction and maintenance of the institution of marriage and family values in society.

Religions typically have a set of norms and values that encompass perceptions and regulations regarding gender roles, gender identity, and gender behavior. As a religious ceremony, weddings often reflect and emphasize the expectations and norms associated with gender roles within a specific religion. Moreover, the status of Confucianism in social ideology became increasingly prominent, and it propagated moral principles by compiling the three Confucian classics[2]. These works, in turn, emphasize the dual significance of marriage: on the one hand, it carries the meaning of human relationships, as the wedding ceremony is closely related to the emergence of the concept of yin and yang. It was not until the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) that the Confucian system of ritual studies centered on the *Book of Zhou Rites* 周禮 officially proposed that men and women represent the yin and yang levels of society. In *The Book of Rites* 禮记, marriage is referred to as the "beginning of all ages" and the "foundation of ritual" (Sun 2004), emphasizing that couples are the foundation of human relationships and that other relationships such as those between a ruler and subject and between father and son are also established through the wedding ceremony. On the other hand, the wedding ceremony also carries significant implications for stabilizing the family, the state, and the world. Confucius advocated the poem "*Guan Ju*" (關雎), drawing a parallel between the osprey seizing a fish and human marriage conducted through rituals and music (Liu 2013). The virtuous gentleman uses qin and se to approach the lady, employing bells to create joyful music, symbolizing a love marked by emotional restraint, prudence, and the pursuit of marital harmony. This poem exemplifies Confucian aesthetics and moral standards, serving as a model for a harmonious and stable marriage. *The Book of Rites* 禮記 states that the marriage of the emperor and empress can serve as a model for the entire world and that the harmony between the external governance by men and the internal management by women is a sign of an era of great virtue and governance (Peng 2004). The *Shiji* 史記 also notes the belief that the

success or failure of an ancient emperor's rule was often related to the virtuousness of his spouse (Sima 1982). In summary, in a feudal society, under the system of ritual propriety, individuals appeared in social life as members of a family with a collective personality. The development and evolution of the wedding ceremony were influenced by the progress of marriage and the ideology of ritual propriety, with its essence lying in continuous iteration and renewal to ensure family harmony and clan advancement.

The *Yi Li·Shi Hun Li*儀禮·士昏禮is the earliest complete record of weddings in China, in which one can gain a clear understanding of the six ceremonial procedures and key information of the wedding ceremony. It provides detailed regulations on the timing, location, and participants of wedding ceremonies during the Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BCE). Specifically, the term "hun" (昏) in the wedding ceremony refers to dusk, signifying the gradual transition between Yin and Yang. As a result, the wedding ceremony is held during twilight, symbolizing the harmonious convergence of the cosmos. While some scholars support that dusk was considered an auspicious time in ancient times (Anonymous 1996). In religious wedding ceremonies, there often exists a division of labor and roles based on gender. For example, men may be assigned specific ritual responsibilities, while women may be expected to assume other roles. Confucian weddings are no exception. In the Six Rites, besides the bride, groom, and their respective families, there are other significant individuals involved, including the master of ceremonies (主人), the ushers (擯者) responsible for receiving guests, the liturgist (贊者) who performs the ritual, the female teacher (女師) in charge of educating noblewomen, the matchmaker or messenger, and various attendants, relatives, and those accompanying the bride. Apart from the female teacher and matchmaker, all others are male, indicating the dominance of men in these roles. According to Ernst Cassirer (2006), humans live within a symbolic universe and a network of symbols. Marriage symbols reflect the degree of regulation and behavioral patterns of romantic relationships between men and women in social and cultural structures. They express experiential knowledge, social customs, rational logic, and the contrast with the natural world. Hence, one of the most significant symbolic representations within the Six Rites is the wild goose, as live geese are presented during various stages of the ceremony. The ancients believed that the migration of geese between the north and south represents the harmonization of yin and yang. Therefore, the use of geese in marriage rituals symbolizes the harmony between men and women, as well as their unwavering loyalty to the institution of marriage.

3.2. The Core of Wedding Ceremonies: The "Six Rites"

The specific process of the Six Rites includes six ceremonial procedures, which, together with post-marital rites, constitute the basic structure of the wedding ceremony (Figure 1).

- Nacai (納采)[3]: In ancient times, betrothal negotiations had to be handed over through matchmakers and envoys. The process began with the man's family inviting a matchmaker to the woman's house to propose marriage. If the proposal were accepted, the man's family would send a messenger with a gift of geese to the woman's family to express their intentions. If the woman's family accepted the gifts, it indicated their agreement to the marriage proposal.
- Wenming (問名): In ancient times, following the requirements of ritual propriety, after Nacai (納采), in order to facilitate the man's divination of wedding matters, it was necessary to inquire about the woman's name and birth date. The entire process involved the male side inviting guests to ask for the woman's personal information, with an increase in the amount of food and drink compared to the proposal ceremony.
- Naji (納吉): The entire process involves the man's family divining auspicious and inauspicious signs at their ancestral temple and then sending a matchmaker or messenger to inform the woman's family of the results of the divination, accompanied by a gift of geese. After exchanging pleasantries, the matchmaker or messenger departs from the woman's home.

- Nazheng (納徵): The main purpose of the entire process is to dispatch matchmakers or envoys to deliver betrothal gifts, namely, five pieces of silk fabric in black and red colors that have been processed and can be directly used to make clothes, along with two pieces of deerskin. Once the ceremony is completed, the wedding enters the formal preparation stage.
- Qingqi (請期): The main process involves the selection of an auspicious wedding date by the groom's family. The matchmaker, envoy, or groom himself then visits the bride's family with a goose to discuss and confirm the auspicious day for the marriage. After receiving a written reply from the bride's family, the groom's family sends ceremonial letters, candles, cannons, and other gifts to the bride's family. In response, the bride's family reciprocates with gifts and informs their relatives and friends of the wedding date.
- Qinying (親迎): This is the most important part of the Six Rites, and the specific process is divided into three time periods: before the welcome, at dusk on the day of the wedding, and during the formal wedding procession.

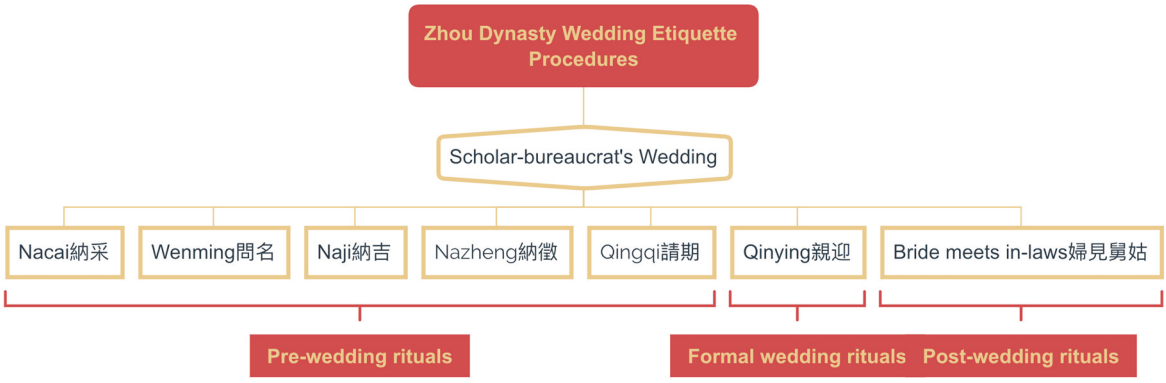

Figure 1. A diagram of the Six Rituals Ceremony during the Zhou Dynasty (1046–256 BCE). Reference from the book of *Yi Li·Shi Hun Li*儀禮·士昏禮 (Yang 2004). Created by the authors.

Before the formal betrothal ceremony, the groom's father instructs the groom in front of the ancestral temple and hosts a banquet to drink wine, a process also known as the "jiaozi (醮子)" ceremony. The bride's parents also give the bride instructions before she leaves home in a ceremony called the "jiaonü (醮女)" ceremony. Specifically, the father admonishes his daughter to be prudent and not to disobey the teachings of her in-laws, while the mother helps her daughter fix her clothing and remind her of her duties.

On the wedding day at dusk, it is customary to prepare a tonglao (同牢)[4] banquet. The first step is to place three tripods outside the bedroom door, each containing four types of cooked food: a small pig with its hooves removed; one pair of lungs and one pair of spines; fourteen fish; and a pair of dried rabbits with their tails removed. Inside the room, there are two dou (豆) (an ancient unit of capacity, equivalent to four liters) of hai Jiang (醢醬) (seasoning for mixing soy sauce and vinegar) of soy sauce and four dou of meat sauce. Shu (黍) and Ji (稷) (two types of grains grown in ancient times) are stewed with meat broth in four covered duns (敦) (an ancient tableware). Finally, on the east side of the hall's entrance, there is a bottle of wine containing four wine jugs and a Hejin (合巹)[5].

On the day of the formal wedding, the groom, dressed in a jubilee costume, rides in an ink carriage to the bride's home, accompanied by two other carriages. All the attendants wear Xuanduan costumes[6] and carry lanterns to illuminate the path in front of the carriage. The caravan stops outside the gates of the bride's house, and the host sets up a banquet. The bride, wearing a silk dress adorned with light pink hemlines, has her hair styled, and the female teacher stands on the bride's right. The bride's nieces and nephews wear black formal clothing and follow the bride. The host, dressed in Xuanduan costumes, greets the groom outside the gate and escorts him inside. The groom carries a goose and arrives at

the doorstep. The host and guests go inside the hall and place the goose on the ground, performing two bows. Then, the groom personally drives the bride's carriage, handing over the reins to the bride. The female teacher helps the bride put on a cloak. The bride then rides in the carriage while the groom follows in his own carriage, waiting outside the gate.

After the bride arrives at the groom's house, both the groom and bride enter the ceremonial hall. Before performing the ritual, the female servants of the groom's family exchange water for the couple to cleanse themselves. After cleansing, the couple participate in their first meal together, symbolizing their union as one. The celebrant uncovers the wine vessel and places the tripod to the south of the altar. The attendants place the utensils, including the knife and meat dish, beside the tripod and the sacrificial meat on the dish. The celebrant sets out the condiments, and the attendants place the sacrificial dishes to the east of the meat dish, followed by the fish and rabbit and the condiments of Millet dun, meat sauce, and broth for the bride (Figure 2). The groom's attendants arrange the seats and the food and invite the bride to sit with the groom to offer their sacrifice to Shu and Ji and the lungs of the sacrificial animal. After the offering, they eat the sacrificial meat and then rinse their mouths. They offer the wine again, and the bearer presents the liver to the couple, who offer it to the gods and then toast each other. They rinse their mouths and drink again, followed by a third round of rinsing and drinking. The celebrant then toasts the gods with a cup on the ground. The groom then leaves the room, and the attendants restore the room to its original state. The groom and bride change out of their ceremonial clothing, and the female teacher hands the veil to the bride. The groom enters to untie the bride's hairpin and extinguish the candles, and the attendants wait outside the door for the couple to call for them. This marks the end of the six rituals, but the wedding celebration continues with the post-wedding ceremony.

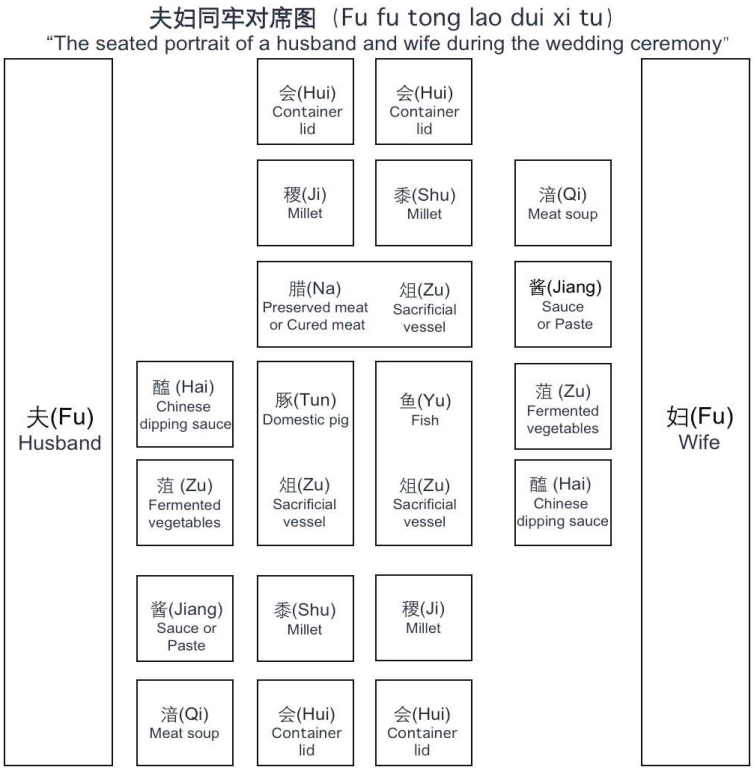

Figure 2. A diagram of the seating arrangement for the Tonglao banquet. Reference source: (Zhang 2020).

The day after the wedding, the bride is bathed in the morning, her hair is tied with a hairpin and a turban, and she is dressed in a silk gown and waits for the bride's brides-

maids to meet her in-laws. The bride and her bridesmaids are then greeted by the bride and the bridal party with a "one-offering ceremony" (一獻之禮)[7], in which the host takes a bottle of wine and offers it to the guests. The ceremonial escort then presents the sacrificial offering to the bride's family before the wedding rituals come to a close. The "bride meeting her in-laws" ceremony affirms the new bride's identity and emphasizes her respect and obedience to her parents-in-law, in accordance with Confucian values of filial piety. However, certain literary works illustrate the negative impact of excessive filial piety. For example, "*Kong Que Dong Nan Fei* 孔雀東南飛" portrays the tragic love story of Liu Lanzhi and Jiao Zhongqing, reflecting the challenges faced by married women in their in-laws' households. Similarly, in "*Dream of the Red Chamber* 紅樓夢", the fate of Daiyu demonstrates the significant authority of the mother-in-law in selecting a daughter-in-law. Behind these rituals, the evolving roles and rights of the new bride within the family reflect another facet of China's traditional ethical culture of filial piety.

Additionally, the bride is required to complete the "temple visit ceremony" to formally become a member of the husband's family. Three months after the wedding, the husband's family selects an auspicious day and leads the bride to the ancestral temple to offer sacrifices, symbolizing the bride's official status as a member of the husband's family. This concludes all the wedding ceremonies.

4. The Evolution of Ancient Chinese Wedding Rituals: Transition from Ritualization to Secularization Based on the Six Rites

The order of ancient Chinese wedding ceremonies went through a development process from the establishment during the Zhou Dynasty (1046–256 BCE) to the reform during the Qin and Han Dynasties (221 BCE–220 CE), the gradual integration of folk customs during the Tang and Song Dynasties (618–1279), and the ultimate introduction of ethnic culture during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912). In the Zhou Dynasty, noble families practiced polygamous marriages, and marriage was a significant matter for maintaining the lineage. According to the description in *Zuo Zhuan·Wen Gong Er Nian* 左傳·文公二年, "When a monarch ascends the throne, he should establish good relations with neighboring countries and secure marriage alliances. He should marry a primary wife to preside over sacrifices, which is in line with filial piety. Filial piety is the beginning of propriet" (Zhu 2008). It can be seen that marriage was also a way for the state to strengthen alliances through marriage alliances during the pre-Qin period (Cao 2000). The relationship between weddings and religion can be observed on various levels, with some connections being more apparent than others (Höpflinger and Mäder 2018). Religious beliefs influence the specific content of wedding ceremonies, prompting us to explore the mutual impact between religious beliefs and wedding rituals at the level of the ceremony.

Confucian wedding rituals embody the concept of harmony between heaven and humanity, playing a significant role in upholding and perpetuating traditional values such as marriage, family stability, and filial piety. The motives and values underlying wedding ceremonies throughout different historical periods are largely consistent with those of the Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BCE), primarily aimed at establishing alliances between two families, solidifying family influence, ancestral worship, and procreation. Scholars such as Zhai Ming'an believe that the basic paradigm of royal weddings in ancient China, especially of the Han ethnic group, comes from the wedding ceremonies of the aristocrats in the Zhou Dynasty. The royal weddings established by other ethnic groups that formed their own regimes each have their own regional and ethnic characteristics (Qu 2020). Subsequently, during the Tang and Song Dynasties (618–1279), the "Six Rites" were simplified and merged, while during the Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368–1912), some ritual procedures were abolished. This demonstrates that the content and procedures of wedding ceremonies throughout history have slightly increased or decreased due to changes in the times and differences in the social hierarchy while preserving certain traditional elements.

4.1. From "Not Celebrating" to "Celebrating Weddings"

During the Qin and Han Dynasties (221 BCE–220 CE), most weddings strictly adhered to the Six Rites system of the Zhou Dynasty (1046–256 BCE). However, significant reforms occurred in the ancient Chinese marriage system during this time. The Han Dynasty's wedding ceremony replaced the Zhou Dynasty's ceremony, which did not include a congratulatory procedure. At the same time, the trend of extravagant weddings began. During this period, political factors played a dominant role in wedding ceremonies, particularly during the flourishing of Confucianism in the Han Dynasty. The prevailing wedding customs led by the Han rulers vividly demonstrated how political power could influence and regulate marriage.

During the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), the collection and organization of Confucian classics were basically completed, and they were canonized through the dominance of Confucianism. As a result, the life etiquette of the Han Dynasty followed the ancient system, as recorded in the *Book of Han* 漢書: "due to the agreement on wedding and funeral ceremonies, it was slightly in accordance with the ancient etiquette and not allowed to deviate from the law" (Ban 1962). In addition, the wedding congratulatory tradition first appeared in the Han Dynasty and has continued in later generations. During the Western Han period (206 BCE–9CE), Emperor Xuan of Han (73–49 BCE) issued an edict stating, "The rites of marriage are the most important in human relationships. Banquets and feasts are held to practice ritual and music. Now, some officials in the counties and states, in their arbitrary enforcement of harsh laws, prohibit the people from holding wedding banquets and feasts. This abolishes the customs of the clans and deprives the people of their joy, which does not lead them" (Ban 1962). This was the first time in Chinese history that wedding celebrations were affirmed through legislation, which changed the Zhou Dynasty's etiquette of not using music or celebrations in weddings and emphasized the importance of banquets and feasts in conducting rituals and music (Du 1988).

During the Qin and Han dynasties (221 BCE–220 CE), the types and quantities of betrothal gifts increased significantly compared to the Zhou Dynasty (1046–256 BCE). According to the *Tong Dian* 通典, there was a total of 30 items, each with its auspicious symbolism, including cases of ink, Lu cloth, sheep, geese, clear wine, white wine, deer, and flint (Du 1988). Finally, the Confucianists advocated establishing a state religion that mirrored the laws of heaven and earth in terms of time, clothing, and ceremony. Therefore, during the Zhou Dynasty, wedding attire primarily featured the colors "xuan (玄)" and "xun (纁)," which symbolized the colors of heaven and earth. In the pre-Qin period (771–221 BCE), wedding attire tended to be simple, but with the appearance of wedding congratulatory decrees, Han Dynasty wedding attire began to evolve in the direction of luxury and splendor. The *Hou Han Shu·Yu Fu Zhi* 後漢書·輿服誌 records that "princesses, noblewomen, and concubines above the rank of consort may wear twelve-colored heavy-edged robes made of brocade, silk, gauze, grain silk, and silk gauze on their wedding day" (Sima 1965). From the changes in wedding attire, we can see that weddings during this period began to exhibit hierarchical characteristics among the imperial family and aristocracy. Therefore, political and economic factors in the Han Dynasty exerted a significant influence on the performance dimensions of wedding ceremonies, such as banquet arrangements, ceremonial music, and attire. These factors impacted the design, scale, extravagance, social expectations, and hierarchical distinctions associated with the wedding rituals.

4.2. From "Six Rites" to "Three Rites"

During the Tang and Song dynasties (618–1279), influenced by the "Revival Movement of Ancient Rites," Confucianism was highly respected during that time period (Wu and Wang 2022). Therefore, the rulers of the Tang Dynasty (618–907) continued to use the "Six Rites" in the weddings of the royal nobility but changed the system and "abolished the system of 'rituals not for the common people' (禮不下庶人)[8]". In the Song dynasty (960–1279), the same rituals were adopted by both the scholar–officials and the commoners (Yang 1993). The gentry mainly used simplified "Three Rites of Nacai (納采), Nabi

(納幣), and Qinying (親迎)", which signaled a significant departure from the six rituals of the Zhou Dynasty (1046–256 BCE). As a result, wedding ceremonies began to shift towards secularization.

During the Tang dynasty (618–907), strict regulations were imposed on wedding ceremonies, emphasizing the significance of rituals and music and the addition of ceremonies such as the coronation ceremony and the Shao Lao ceremony (少牢禮). Records of wedding rituals during the Tang dynasty mainly focus on imperial weddings found in works such as *Kaiyuan Li* 開元禮, *Tongdian* 通典, *Xinshu* 新書, and *Tang Huiyao* 唐會要. In the imperial wedding ceremonies, the first five rituals were consistent with the customs. However, there were three notable differences compared to the Six Rites. First, the status of the male family's representative was elevated, with the Grand Commandant serving as the envoy. Second, synchronized music performances were included, highlighting the importance of ritual and music. Third, during the stage of the bride's welcoming, the emperor did not personally greet the bride but delegated an envoy to receive her. Additionally, the first recorded princess wedding ceremony in the Tang Dynasty included the addition of the coronation ceremony and the Shaolao ceremony, which were noble ceremonial activities with sheep as sacrifices, and the omission of the ceremony of "taking the breast meat and giving it to mother-in-law."

The emergence of Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism[9] during the Song dynasty (960–1279) propelled Confucian thought to new heights, leading to significant changes in wedding ceremonies during this period. Song dynasty weddings became more secularized, and for the first time, specific wedding rites were formulated for the gentry, simplifying the rituals from the traditional Six Rites to the Three Rites commonly observed among the scholar–official class (Yang 1993).

At the aristocratic level, the wedding ceremonies of the Song dynasty's imperial family closely resembled the general outline described in ancient ritual texts. However, several additions were made to the existing Six Rites. These included the presentation of the Six Rites book before the formal betrothal, the reception of the bride with the attendance of court officials, and the ceremonial ringing of bells and drums. Princess weddings also involved additional processes, such as providing the emperor's son-in-law with clothing, wealth, and a noble residence, highlighting the elaborate and costly nature of Song dynasty imperial weddings. Subsequently, at the commoner level, the Song dynasty introduced the compilation of wedding rituals for the scholar–official class in the official ceremonial book, *Zhenghe Wuli Xin Yi* 政和五禮新儀. The rituals combined the processes of betrothal inquiries and formal engagement, simplifying the gift requirements. For instance, the San She Sheng (三舍生)[10] ceremony allowed the use of sheep in-stead of live geese, as traditionally required in the Six Rites. Commoners were permitted to substitute wild or domestic chickens as gifts.

In addition to the aforementioned developments, the literati of the Northern and Southern Song dynasties (960–1279) (Yang 2010), in their efforts to counterbalance Buddhism and Daoism, created a system of rituals that harmonized state ceremonial laws with popular customs, leading to the Confucianization of wedding practices in society. Sima Guang, during the Northern Song period (960–1127), provided a detailed account of folk wedding procedures in his work. The specific sequence of the "Qinying Ceremony" comprised six steps: paying respect to the ancestral tablet, ritual purification, reciprocal salutations, sharing sacrificial food, pouring and drinking wine, and exchanging cups. Zhu Xi, in his work from the Southern Song period (1127–1279), simplified the six rituals into three: "Nacai (納采)" (betrothal inquiries), "Nabi (納幣)" (presenting betrothal gifts), and "Qinying (親迎)" (receiving the bride). According to the regulations, the host was required to present the marriage contract in the ancestral hall during the Nacai ceremony, while the Nabi ceremony involved the presentation and reception of documents and ceremonial etiquette. The Qinying ceremony emphasized the supplementary ritual of the host making an announcement in the ancestral hall. The first procedure of the Qinying ceremony took place in the early morning when both families set up ancestral tablets and

ancestral plaques, performing the ritual of offering sacrifices to inform the ancestors of the marriage, signifying respect for the ancestral lineage. Furthermore, the "sharing sacrificial food (同牢之禮)" ritual was replaced with the groom's offering of wine and the bride's offering of a cup, followed by pouring a cup without offering food, and then three cups were used for the ceremonial toast. In Confucian thought, ancestor worship and witchcraft coexisted. Therefore, the introduction of these rituals during the Song dynasty further reinforced Confucian values and emphasized the consolidation of gender roles and social responsibilities.

Since the establishment of the "Three Rites" wedding format, the influence of "*Jia Li* 家禮" on the marriage rituals of the scholar–official class during the Song and Yuan dynasties (960–1368), as well as the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368–1912), has been profound, leading to increased attention to the wedding ceremonies of the scholar–official class. The transition from the "Six Rites" to the "Three Rites" can be seen as a reflection of how wedding ceremonies symbolize changes in social structure, cultural norms, and perspectives on life. The evolution of state-sanctioned wedding rituals also gradually adapted to the needs and realities of the general populace.

4.3. From "Han System" to "Manchu-Han Syncretism"

During the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368–1912), wedding rituals and ceremonies were organized in a hierarchical manner. In the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), weddings at various levels, particularly imperial weddings, were primarily based on the established Six Rites that had been passed down through generations. During the "Qinying" stage, the "sharing sacrificial food" ritual was merged with the pouring and drinking of wine, as well as the exchange of cups. In the Qing dynasty (1644–1912), while incorporating Ming dynasty systems, the customs and regulations of Manchu culture were also introduced, resulting in a diverse and inclusive characteristic.

During the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), the system of Six Rites was reinstated, and there was a strict hierarchy in wedding rituals at different levels. According to the *Ming Shi·Li Zhi Jiu* 禮志九·明史, wedding ceremonies could be classified into six categories: the emperor's marriage ceremony, the wedding of the Crown Prince, weddings of imperial princes, weddings of princesses, weddings of high-ranking officials, and weddings of commoners. Even when the Ming emperors took consorts, they still adhered to the Six Rites system. Similar to the Tang dynasty (618–907), during the "Qinying" stage, the emperor would be represented by appointed officials to receive the bride. The wedding ceremonies of crown princes and imperial princes followed a similar pattern, with the Six Rites as the main framework, emphasizing that the groom personally welcomed the bride during the "Qinying" stage. In the wedding ceremonies of princesses, the rituals per-formed by the bridegroom's family were similar to those of the imperial family. The difference lay in the "Qinying" stage, where, before the ceremonial toast, the bridegroom would perform four ceremonial bows to show respect to the princess (Yi 2017). The wedding ceremonies of high-ranking officials, known as "Pin Guan"[11], placed a greater emphasis on post-marriage etiquette. It was required that on the second day, the groom, along with his father, and the bride, along with her mother, would offer incense and make offerings of wine at the ancestral temple. Afterward, the bride would pay respects to her parents-in-law and perform the ritual of washing their hands and presenting food, with the bride serving the parents-in-law. Additionally, according to the *Ming Hui Dian* 明會典, during the "Qinying" stage of the wedding ceremonies of Ming emperors and high-ranking officials, the "sharing sacrificial food" ritual was combined with the subsequent "Zhen Ji (振祭)" ritual, which held an equivalent status to the ancient rituals. There was no separate "sharing sacrificial food" ritual. The "Zhen Ji" ritual involved inserting the sacrificial offerings into soy sauce or salt, shaking them to remove excess grains, and then proceeding with the ceremony. After the ritual was complete, the offerings would be tasted (Shen 1989). The records in the *Ming Shi* 明史 regarding the wedding ceremonies of commoners are relatively simple. The overall ceremonial procedures are similar to those of high-

ranking officials, especially in terms of modifying and restoring the three rites prescribed in Zhu Xi's *Jia Li* 家禮 from the Song dynasty (960–1279) to the Six Rites. Additionally, in the Ming dynasty commoners' wedding ceremonies, there was flexibility to accommodate secular needs. On the wedding day, the attire and accessories could exceed their own social class. The groom would wear the official robe of the ninth rank. This practice also demonstrated the significance attached to this ritual, aligning with the concept of "Dressing beyond the usual class for a wedding, extraordinary" (Zheng 2021) in Zhou dynasty wedding ceremonies.

Despite the frequent changes in political power in China, the country's cultural form has remained largely intact (Peng et al. 2022). During the establishment of the Qing dynasty (1644–1912), there was a continuation of the Six Rites system inherited from previous dynasties, along with the integration of distinct Manchu influences. The most notable change in Qing dynasty wedding rituals was the incorporation of Ming dynasty practices, combined with the addition of Manchu cultural customs. The fusion of these elements resulted in a diverse and inclusive wedding system that incorporated various aspects, including the ceremony process. The *Qing Shi Gao* 清史稿 provides detailed accounts of the wedding rituals and protocols for different social classes, including the emperor, crown princes, princesses, and high-ranking officials (Tong 1991). For instance, the illustration in Figure 3 of the "Complete Pictorial of Wedding Ceremonies" during the reign of Emperor Guangxu (1875–1908) depicts a grand procession for the bride's welcoming, with imperial envoys sent on behalf of the emperor. Additionally, it was required that one day before the wedding, officials be sent to perform sacrificial rituals at the suburban altar and ancestral temple. In addition to the traditional and standardized Six Rites, there are additional steps specific to the imperial princes' weddings. The prince and his bride must observe a nine-day post-wedding period known as "Gui Ning (歸寧)" before returning to their residence. In the case of princesses' marriages, the Qing dynasty incorporated its own customs. After the marriage is arranged, the groom must go through a ritual similar to betrothal inquiries at the Meridian Gate. On the wedding day, it is strictly required for the groom's family to pay respects at the Meridian Gate and present specific gifts known as the "Yi Jiu (一九)" ceremony, which includes a precise number of items such as 18 saddled horses, 18 sets of armor, 21 horses, 6 mules, 81 sheep, 45 bottles of milk wine and yellow wine, and 90 banquet tables. Finally, the princess must return to the palace and express gratitude after a nine-day post-wedding period. Therefore, in Qing Dynasty weddings, there was a significant association with political values. These ceremonies and regulations, which accommodated both Manchu and Han traditions, may have symbolized the endorsement and support of the Qing government.

During the Qing dynasty (1644–1912), it was stipulated that the marriage rituals for the scholar–official class should follow the Nine Ranks of the Official Ceremonial System. There were significant changes in wedding ceremonies for both the scholar and com-moner classes compared to the traditional Six Rites. One notable change was the inclusion of the "Ji (笄)" ceremony[12] in the "Qinying" stage, which took place on the wedding day after the bride's family made ancestral offerings. Additionally, according to the *Pingyang Fu Zhi* 平阳府志, "wedding ceremonies varied in different regions, but generally only four of the Six Rites remained: 'Wenming', 'Nacai', 'Qingqi', and 'Qinying', although in some cases the bride's arrival may not occur" (Linfen Cultural Bureau 2018). This indicates the possibility of simplifying the ceremonies to include only the four rituals of asking for the name, betrothal inquiries, setting the wedding date, and the bride's arrival. Therefore, the Qing government-imposed restrictions and regulations on the requirements and procedures of marriage ceremonies through the establishment of laws and regulations. In addition to following the Six Rites, weddings across different social classes in the Qing Dynasty were also influenced by Manchu wedding customs, such as the "Yi Jiu (一九)ceremony," "Jiu Ri Gui Ning (九日歸寧)," "Hun ri Ji Li (婚日笄禮)," and "San Gui Jiu Kow (三跪九叩禮)". This also reflects how political power can influence the performance dimension of rituals

through the promotion and shaping of the marriage system in order to achieve specific political objectives or propagate the values of Manchu culture in the Qing Dynasty.

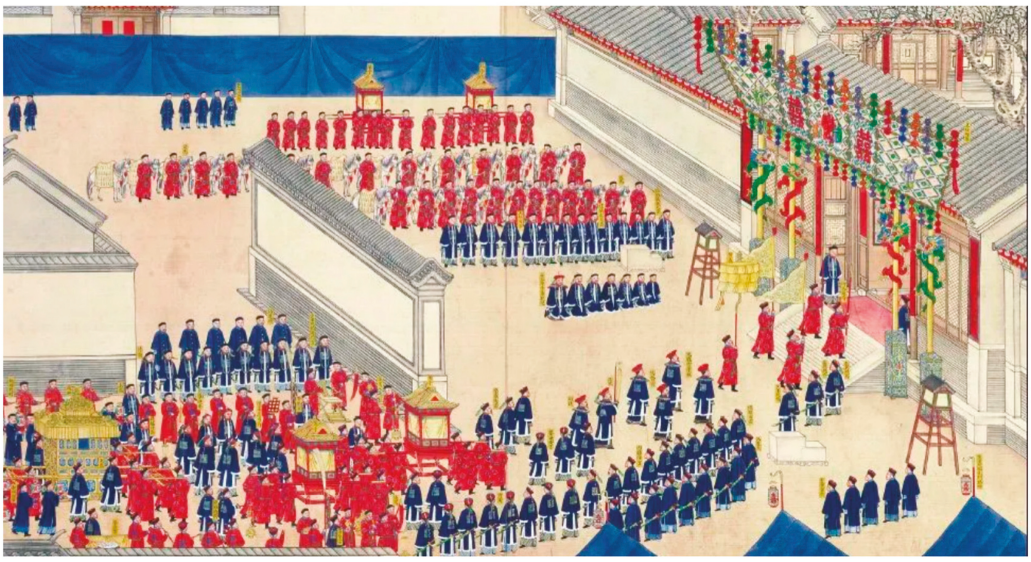

Figure 3. An excerpt from the painting "Ceremony of Enthronement and Welcoming". It is displayed at the Palace Museum. Photo sourced from website[13].

5. From Han Culture to Multicultural Integration: The Evolution of Ancient Chinese Wedding Customs

There exists a significant correlation between ritual behaviors and specific secular social relationships (Geertz 1993). Since ancient times, weddings have been inseparable from both "rituals" and "customs". Rituals serve as social norms, while customs are the default rules that emerge from habitual practices (Hu 2019). Wedding customs refer to the actual forms of wedding ceremonies that people have historically practiced. They represent the accumulated conventions and habits that have developed over long periods of societal life, which official orthodoxy cannot overlook (Sun 2020). Some scholars argue that wedding customs serve as a supplement to formal wedding ceremonies, and thus, the study of weddings should not disregard these customs (Hu 2019). The customs and practices of ancient Chinese wedding ceremonies gradually developed within the context of folk social life. In this subsection, we focus on selecting relevant and representative texts related to Confucian cultural thought and enduring wedding customs, summarizing and organizing them, and conducting in-depth research. It can be observed that throughout different dynasties, rulers have played a significant role in shaping the design, scale, and extravagance of rituals, which in turn influenced the formulation of wedding ceremonies by the general public. However, on the other hand, folk customs often deviate from ritual propriety, thereby challenging the ethical norms and hierarchical order imposed by the rulers. Therefore, there exists a conflicting and harmonizing relationship between wedding customs and the formalized wedding ceremony system.

Although the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) continued the tradition of the Six Rites, the concept of social status became prominent with the improvement of material wealth. The practice of "marriage based on wealth" emerged during the Han Dynasty (Huo 2018). This change reflects the evolving cultural norms of social etiquette. Since the Western Han Dynasty (206 BCE–9 CE), as a result of reforms in the marriage system, tranquil and simple wedding ceremonies were replaced by lively and extravagant ones. Especially during the Eastern Han period (25–220), Cai Yong's *Xie He Hun Fu* 協和婚賦 and the *Book of Han·Geographical Records* 漢書·地理誌 depicted numerous festive scenes of wedding celebrations featuring customs such as veiling the bride's face with a scarf (jinsha zhe mian)[14] and throwing a canopy (sa zhang)[15]. These customs were introduced to enhance the festive atmosphere of the wedding procession. It can be said that there is a corresponding rela-

tionship between wedding customs and rituals, and these customs have continued into later generations. In summary, the Confucian-advocated wedding rituals were primarily intended for the upper class, especially the "Li bu xia shu ren (禮不下庶人)" concept, which emphasized the distinction between the elite and the common people. Consequently, ordinary citizens were not eligible to follow strict ceremonial practices, leading to a lack of adherence to Confucian wedding customs in folk traditions. Folk wedding practices typically embody rich cultural traditions and values. These practices reflect the specific cultural context's understanding and importance of marriage and family. Therefore, we will examine, from the perspective of folk wedding activities characterized by significant temporal changes, the social, political, cultural, and economic norms and values expressed in religious wedding practices.

5.1. Wedding Customs Blending Northern Ethnic Minority Traditions

With ethnic integration during the Tang Dynasty (618–907), a large number of northern ethnic minorities migrated to the Central Plains region, cohabiting with the Han Chinese and gradually assimilating into the local culture. Interethnic marriages became common, and as a result, the wedding customs of the northern ethnic minorities directly influenced the wedding customs of the Central Plains ethnic groups (Shen 2012). In the Tang Dynasty, a trend emerged of blending folk wedding customs with those of the northern ethnic minorities. Scenes depicting wedding ceremonies among the common people during the Tang Dynasty can be found in Dunhuang literature, mural depictions, and other sources. The *Hun Shi Cheng Shi* 婚事程式 documented the inclusion of customs such as Cui zhuang (applying the bride's makeup), Zhang che (blocking the carriage), and Cui hua Que shan (presenting flowers and fan-waving) in the wedding rituals of ordinary people during the Tang Dynasty. Additionally, the "*Youyang Zazu* 酉陽雜俎" also recorded changes in the wedding procession, shifting from dusk to early morning, and the wedding chamber venue transformed into a "Qing lu," also known as the "Hundred Sons Canopy (百子帳)," a tent-like structure made of green cloth (see Figure 4), resembling the domed dwellings of northern ethnic minorities, and incorporating customs such as Nong xu, Hejin (合巹), and Heji (合髻) (Duan 1987).



Figure 4. Depicts the "Qinglu" painting on the northern slope of Cave 186 in the Mogao Grottoes during the middle Tang Dynasty. Photo sourced from (Dunhuang Research Academy and Tan 2001).

It is evident that ethnic integration profoundly influenced the evolution of Tang Dynasty weddings, with folk customs being particularly prominent and prevalent. One of

these customs is known as cui zhuang, which refers to the moment when the bride is received, and the groom's family leads a group of a hundred or several dozen people who collectively call out, "The bride emerges," until the bride reaches the carriage. The practice of applying makeup originated between the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420–589). In the *Dongjing Menghua Lu* 東京夢華錄 (a description of the works of Bianliang, the capital of the Northern Song Dynasty), it is recorded that the purpose of applying makeup is similar to an invitation (Meng 2019). Another custom is called zhang che, which refers to the practice of neighbors and relatives intercepting the wedding carriage during the marriage procession. The groom's side must offer gifts, food, and beverages to be allowed to pass. Originally, this custom was intended to bid farewell to the bride but later transformed into a desire for food, money, and entertainment. The custom of cui hua que shan occurs after the ceremonial greetings. The bride's floral headdress and ceremonial attire- are removed, and through poetic verses, the bride is encouraged to remove the fan that conceals her face. The bride traditionally uses a fan to cover her face during the wedding, not only to preserve modesty but also to ward off evil spirits. During the groom's procession to fetch the bride, a playful tradition called Nong xu takes place, where the groom is subjected to various pranks and teasing for amusement. The ritual of Hejin (合巹) involves the couple drinking from the same cup during the formal meeting. After drinking together, the cups would be placed in a certain arrangement to symbolize good fortune. Lastly, Heji (合髻) refers to the use of the couple's hair as a symbol of their marital union on the wedding day. Before toasting with the exchange of cups, they would each cut a strand of their hair, which would be intertwined to signify their unity of purpose.

In conclusion, the emerging wedding customs in the Tang Dynasty deviated from the requirements of traditional ancient rituals, resulting in instances of "breaching etiquette". This starkly exemplified the contradictory relationship between wedding customs and ceremonial expectations during the Tang Dynasty.

5.2. The Wedding Customs of Seeking Wealth and Expressing Respect

During the Song Dynasty (960–1279), wedding customs and practices also reflected the expression of economic norms and values. This encompassed aspects such as dowry, wedding expenses, property inheritance, and economic support. With the flourishing of Confucianism during the Song Dynasty, scholar–officials from both the Northern and Southern Song periods actively sought to establish a system of etiquette that harmonized national rituals with folk customs (Yang 2010). Scholar–officials produced works on ritual studies such as *Shuyi* 書儀, *Hunli* 婚禮, and *Jiali* 家禮 to describe the wedding ceremonies of both the elite and commoners. Additionally, numerous literary works, including *Dongjing Menghua Lu* 東京夢華錄, *Taiping Guangji* 太平廣記, *Mengliang Lu* 夢梁錄, and *Shilin Guangji* 事林廣記, summarized the folk wedding customs of the Song Dynasty (960–1279).

Represented by *Dongjing Menghua Lu* 東京夢華錄, these works detailed twelve folk customs previously unseen in earlier periods, including "qitiezi" (posting the wed-ding notice), "xukoujiu" (exchanging ceremonial drinks), "guodalizhi" (performing formal ceremony), "qiyanzi" (raising the canopy), "lanmen" (blocking the door), "jiabutadi" (not touching the ground with feet), "kuaan" (crossing the saddle), "zuoxuzhang" (sitting under a virtual canopy), "huasheng cumian" (flower-wearing and face-concealing), "lishijiaomenhong" (guests compete for pieces of colored cloth), "xufujiaobai" (bride and groom's mutual bow), and "qianjin" (holding the handkerchief together). Economic factors played a significant role in Song Dynasty weddings, reflecting both the social and economic structure and the economic capacity and status of individuals and families. Simultaneously, the development of the commodity economy in the Song Dynasty (960–1279) also caused marriage customs to be more inclined towards wealth based on the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). However, Confucian scholars, such as Sima Guang, criticized this materialistic tendency, arguing that such behavior was unworthy of scholar–official marriages (Sima 1985). Confucius himself advocated marriage on the basis of virtue rather than lintel

and on the basis of character rather than nobility (Zhang 2006). He also promoted frugality in rituals and ceremonies, emphasizing simplicity over extravagance.

Specifically, notable wedding customs that reflect these types of activities include "guodalizhi" (performing formal ceremonies), "qiyanzi" (raising the canopy), "lanmen" (blocking the door), and "lishijiaomenhong" (guests competing for pieces of colored cloth). "Guodalizhi" involves the exchange of clothing and utensils between the two families of the newlyweds. During the "qiyanzi" stage, when the bride is about to enter the sedan chair, the bride's family must offer colored silk, lucky money, items, or food for her to board the sedan chair and proceed. "Lanmen" occurs when the bride arrives at the groom's house, and guests and family members block the entrance to seek money, gifts, and red envelopes. "Lishijiaomenhong" refers to the act of hanging a torn piece of floral cloth on the door of the newlyweds' room on the wedding day. After the groom enters the room, people eagerly grab the torn edges of the cloth, symbolizing their desire for good luck and fortune.

In fact, from the above-mentioned wedding customs, it is evident that wealth and material possessions also serve as symbolic representations to a certain extent. Confucianism emphasizes "respect (敬)" (Wu et al. 2022). The exchange of wealth during the wedding ceremony is also used as a gesture of "respect" between the families of the bride and groom, as well as within the associated communities. The custom of "xufujiaobai" (bride and groom's mutual bow) further expresses this sense of respect between the couple. This activity involves the bride and groom bowing to each other on the wedding day, as recorded in the *Sima Shi Shu Yi* 司馬氏書儀 (Book of Rites by Sima Guang): "In ancient times, there was no custom of the bride and groom bowing to each other. It is only in the contemporary society that this practice began (Sima 1985)". This indicates that this custom officially started during the Song Dynasty (960–1279). In the Southern Song period (1127–1279), according to the *Mengliang Lu* 夢梁錄 (Records of Dreams in Liangzhou), the ritual of mutual bowing became more elaborate, including the use of scales or machines to lift the bride's veil. For example, female figurines found in the tomb of Hong Zicheng in Moyang County, Jiangxi Province, from the Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279) were adorned with a narrow strip of cloth on their heads (Gao 2001), confirming the tradition of lifting the bride's veil during the Southern Song period (see Figure 5).

In conclusion, it is evident that economic factors can also influence the performance dimensions of wedding ceremonies. It can be seen that despite the Song dynasty's emphasis on rituals and wealth in marriage, influenced by the style of the times and running counter to Confucianism, there were some wedding customs that still conformed to Confucian notions of respectful culture.

5.3. Wedding Customs That Embody the Compatibility of Manchu and Han Ethnic Cultures

According to historical records in the book *Ke Zuo Zhui Yu* 客座贅語, it is evident that certain wedding customs popular during the Tang and Song Dynasties (618–1279), such as "nongxu," "zhangche," "qinglu," and "queshan," were abolished during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). However, practices such as "cui zhuang" and "kuaan" were retained (Gu 2009). Consequently, the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912) simplified numerous wedding customs from the Tang and Song Dynasties (618–1279) while simultaneously incorporating many Manchu cultural elements, inheriting Han ethnic wedding customs. Drawing on the *Manzhou Hunli Yijie* 滿洲婚禮儀節 (Manchu Wedding Rituals and Etiquette) as a reference and various novels and notes such as *Hong Lou Meng* 紅樓夢 (Dream of the Red Chamber), *Xiang Yan Jie Yi* 鄉言解頤, these included "nijin tiezi" (golden clay wedding invitations), "baoping kuaan" (carrying a bottle while crossing the saddle), "he jin yong bei" (uniting the couple with shared cups), "he jin song ci" (reciting vows during the union), "zuo chuang" (sitting on the marriage bed), "xinlang shejian" (groom's archery), "huimen huijiu" (returning to the bride's family nine days after the wedding). Moreover, in the *Manzhou Hunli Yijie* 滿洲婚禮儀節, the "six rituals" of "nacai" (betrothal gifts), "nazheng" (groom's formal proposal), and "qingqi" (wedding date confirmation) were renamed as

"xiading" (engagement), "xiacha" (tea presentation), and "tongshu" (letter of agreement), respectively. Additionally, new participants in the wedding ceremony emerged, such as the "xiniang" (bride's attendant) responsible for caring for the bride and the "binxiang" (groom's companion) accompanying the couple (Suo 2002).

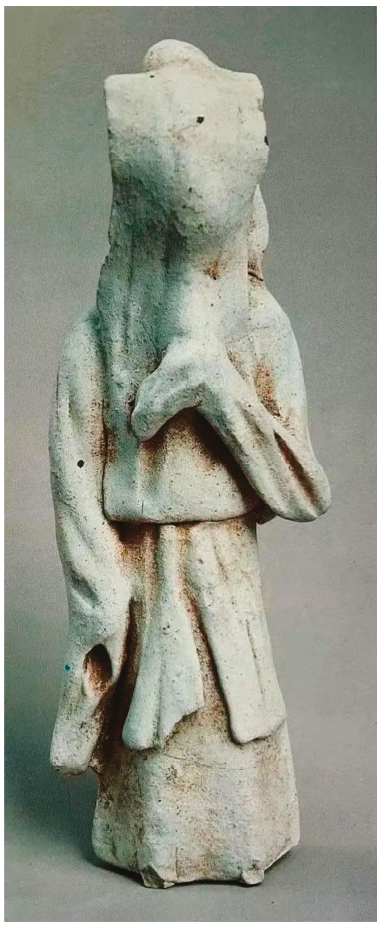

Figure 5. Portrays an image of a woman from the Song Dynasty wearing a "daigaitou" head covering. It is derived from the wooden figurines unearthed from the Song tomb at Sensen Village, Taizhou, Jiangsu Province, providing evidence of the custom of wearing "gaitou" during the Southern Song Dynasty. It is displayed at the Jiangxi Provincial Museum. Photo source: (Gao 2001).

By incorporating various Manchu customs into the wedding culture, the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912) not only preserved Han ethnic traditions but also introduced new wedding customs. These customs include the following: "Nijin Tiezi" refers to a practice where, after the engagement between the two families, the bride's family writes a response letter on a marriage certificate using clay paint made from gold flakes and glue. "Baoping Kuaan" involves placing a saddle in front of the sedan chair when the bride descends from it. Carrying a porcelain vase, the bride steps over the saddle, symbolizing the wish for safety and well-being (Pan 2013). "He Jin Yong Bei" and "He Jin Song Ci" refer to the Qing Dynasty practice where Manchu people recite specific vows during the Hejin ceremony. Specifically, it can be translated from classical Chinese as follows: "On this joyous day, the newlyweds enter into a harmonious union. Here, we bless this couple, hoping that they will live together in mutual respect and harmony". In modern traditional Chinese weddings, this ritual continues to be preserved as an important element. Unlike the Ming Dynasty's custom of combining the Tong Lao ceremony with toasting, which included three meals in the bridal chamber, the Qing Dynasty broke away from this tradition. Instead, elders would throw food on the roof of the chamber after each recitation, and the couple would use a pair of mandarin duck cups to symbolize their union (see Figure 6).

"Zuochuang" involves the bride entering a tent in the courtyard after the mutual bowing ceremony while the groom stands guard outside. The duration of the bride's stay in the tent is flexible, depending on the weather. "Xinlang Shejian" refers to the groom shooting arrows towards the gate of the sedan chair after the bride arrives at the groom's house. The bride can only descend from the sedan chair after three arrows have been shot. This custom also originates from Manchu traditions. "Huimen Huijiu" signifies the bride's return to her family's home after the wedding. "Huimen" refers to the three days after the wedding, while "Huijiu" refers to the nine days after the return.



Figure 6. Depicts a rhinoceros horn carving of a combined cup with the motif of an eagle and a bear. It measures 13.2 cm in height, with a diameter ranging from 15 to 6.7 cm at the mouth and a foot diameter ranging from 10.4 to 3.4 cm. The cup is designed in a double-linked style, with an octagonal shape, slanted straight walls, and a high foot. Photo source: the official website of the Palace Museum[16].

In summary, Confucianism was not clearly evident in the folk wedding customs of the Qing Dynasty, while the trend of ethnic minority integration was increasingly strengthened. Furthermore, the inclusion of new rituals and activities contributed to the representation of the Manchu-Han ethnic symbol culture, serving as manifestations of encoding and rules within the cultural system of folk weddings in the Qing Dynasty.

5.4. Wedding Customs as a Result of the Collision of Chinese and Western Cultures

During the Republican era (1912–1949), Confucianism was no longer the mainstream ideology, and with the influx of Western culture, wedding customs became a blend of Chinese and Western elements, giving rise to a two-stage wedding ceremony. Traditional rituals and modern civilized weddings[17] coexisted and maintained their separate identities. Descriptions of wedding rituals and customs mostly came from local gazetteers and novels, with the Nanjing wedding depicted in the Jinling Magazine 金陵雜誌 as a typical example. It was found that traditional wedding ceremonies, which included the six rituals, preserved customs such as bed installation from the Tang Dynasty (618–907) and the ceremony of joining cups from the Song Dynasty (960–1279), albeit with different names. Additionally, new customs emerged, including the presentation of birth characters, the exchange of red invitations, the unveiling of the bride's face, and the meeting of families,

which changed the names of "requesting a date" and "proposing a marriage" to "sending the wedding date" and "seeking consent", respectively (Xu 2013). On the other hand, civilized weddings took place in venues such as assembly halls or large hotels and leaned more towards Western wedding customs overall.

The form and content of wedding ceremonies reflect social and cultural changes. Specifically, regarding traditional weddings, "sending birth characters" referred to the groom's family sending a matchmaker to the bride's family for the formal proposal. The bride's family would write the birth characters on rough paper, commonly known as "grass invitations," and send them to the groom's family, exchanging birth character documents. If the compatibility were not suitable, they would be returned. This demonstrates that the Confucian doctrine of the Mean (中庸) has a significant influence on wedding customs, emphasizing harmony. Analyzing the compatibility through the Five Elements, Yin and Yang, and other factors is an essential aspect. "Exchanging red invitations" meant that after the engagement was confirmed through the eight-character match, the bride's family would use golden clay paint to write the entire invitation card in red and send it to the groom's family, who would reciprocate with various gifts. "Unveiling the bride's face" took place on the morning of the day after the wedding, where the bridesmaid would serve lotus seed soup to the newlyweds and then help the bride with her makeup, symbolizing a change in hairstyle and facial decoration before the bride's departure. "Meeting of families" refers to a banquet held by the groom's family for the relatives of the bride's family, aiming to strengthen the bond between the families. Therefore, even in traditional weddings, traces of the six rituals could still be observed, reflecting the importance of the Confucian principles of "respect" and "filial piety" in wedding morality during the pre-Qin period (771–221 BCE). In civilized weddings, the six ritual ceremonies were omitted. After obtaining the consent of both parents, the couple would exchange tokens and publish an engagement notice in the newspaper, solidifying the engagement. On the eve of the wedding date, a formal wedding notice would be published announcing the wedding date. On the wedding day, the ceremony would begin with the emcee, followed by the entrance of male and female guests, the main wedding couple and their families, the marriage witnesses, and the introducers, accompanied by music. The couple would then be led to their seats by the wedding attendant, and the marriage certificate would be read by the marriage witness. The witnesses, introducers, and the couple would then affix their seals accordingly. The couple would exchange rings, perform the bowing ceremony, express gratitude, and deliver speeches after receiving speeches or flowers from the guests. Finally, the newlyweds paid their respects to the officiants and relatives after the reception (Yi 2017). This simplified wedding, modeled on the Western style, broke the framework of traditional wedding conditions and laid the foundation for the formation of the "modern new wedding". The final stage of implementing marriage rituals among believers in Jiangnan is related to the 1911 Revolution, the "New Culture" movement, and the promotion of "Transforming outmoded customs and habits (yi feng yisu 移風易俗)" by the government of the Republic of China (Zhang 2023). Within society as a whole, the concept of marriage began to change.

The evidence suggests that during the Republican era (1912–1949), there was a departure from traditional Confucian wedding practices in China, leading to the emergence of modern weddings. This shift was driven by the influence of Western religious wedding ceremonies and concepts of marriage. As a result, modern Chinese weddings began incorporating elements such as ring exchanges and ceremonial rituals. This cultural exchange and adaptation sparked an innovative transformation in Chinese marital perspectives and wedding customs.

6. Conclusions

Ritual theory emphasizes the social functions and effects of rituals, specifically as meaningful roles, relationships, and systems that facilitate communication and foster social awareness (Ames and Rosemont 1999). For instance, Emile Durkheim focuses on the

relationship between rituals and social structure, emphasizing how rituals exert power in reality to integrate social resources, control social hierarchies, and reinforce social order (Durkheim 2011). Meanwhile, Bell proposes a model of ritual consisting of three elements: ritual as an activity, the fusion of thought and activity, and the dichotomy between actor and thinker. She points out that in a constantly changing society, rituals serve as a bridge between tradition and ongoing social transformations (Bell 1992). Rituals can also be employed to express judgments on the current society and aspirations for an ideal world (Smith 1987). As a type of ritual, weddings can, therefore, strengthen the connections between individuals and society, establish the legitimacy and stability of marriages, and also provide social recognition and support. Under the influence of Confucianism, the wedding ceremony served as a sacred and solemn testament and union of marriage. At the national level, weddings were governed by the ritual system, and the Six Rites became the central benchmark for the wedding system of later generations. Throughout the dynasties, wedding rituals were developed based on the maintenance of the traditional Six Rites, gradually incorporating folk customs and becoming more secularized. The departure from the solemn and austere wedding practices during the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), with the introduction of the celebratory wedding system, established a joyous and celebratory atmosphere for weddings. In the Tang and Song periods (618–1279), this festive spirit extended beyond the aristocracy and permeated the lives of commoners. However, for the average household, marriage remained a financially demanding endeavor. The simplified "Three Rites" better suited the economic capabilities and practical needs of the common people, leaving a profound impact on the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368–1912). During the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912), various folk customs were incorporated, creating a distinct landscape that balanced the preservation of tradition with the accommodation of local practices.

The ritual system is the outcome of a gradual evolution from simplicity to complexity and from fragmented to systematic, rooted in the religious and daily lives of humans. Therefore, "ritual" and "custom" are inseparable and mutually influential. The phenomenon of wedding customs reflects, to a certain extent, the production and living conditions of the people during a certain period. Throughout different historical periods, the overall landscape of wedding customs has undergone a transition from Han Chinese cultural dominance towards the amalgamation of diverse cultures. Social context and ethnic heritage have consistently been the driving factors. Starting from the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), wedding ceremonies particularly emphasized the symbolic nature of wedding dowries. During the Tang Dynasty (618–907), wedding customs were influenced by the practices of ethnic minority groups in the northern regions, incorporating some distinctive elements. However, the emphasis on formality and material wealth that characterized the Song Dynasty (960–1279) did not persist into the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). Instead, various procedures were simplified, and a phenomenon of cultural integration between the Manchu and Han ethnic groups gradually emerged during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912). In the Republican era (1912–1949), influenced by the trend of Westernization, traditional Chinese wedding customs collided with Western-style civilized weddings, eventually evolving into modern wedding ceremonies that combine elements of both cultures.

The progression of society and various cultural, political, and economic changes significantly impact the representation and practice of religious weddings. Contemporary Chinese wedding practices exhibit a complex landscape: rural weddings still maintain a considerable continuity with traditional ceremonies, while urban weddings often bear traces of "civilized weddings" (He 2018). On the other hand, wedding rituals tend to simplify, with traditional weddings being a clan affair, while modern weddings are often just a banquet. The shift from traditional to modern weddings in China primarily stems from the prevalence of individualism, which challenges the Confucian construct of a kinship-based ethical society, where family is the foundation of the nation and disrupts the formation of the family entity. Moreover, evolving marriage concepts, systems, and cultural diver-

sity have eroded the solemnity and traditional characteristics of wedding rituals (Hu 2019). The disorderly nature of modern weddings reflects the gradual obscuring of the original "righteousness" and diminishing significance of the ritual aspect. Wedding ceremonies mark the beginning of Confucian ideals of constructing family ethical relationships, establishing familial ties, and stabilizing the nation. Hence, the critical and inclusive inheritance of ancient "Six Rites" under the guidance of pre-Qin Confucian thought may, to some extent, call for a resurgence of ethical consciousness and aim to revitalize the sense of ceremony and spirituality in weddings. Although the "Six Rites" no longer exist, they have transformed into prototypes for modern-day proposals, engagements, and marriages in wedding ceremonies. Simultaneously, many wedding customs, such as bridal chamber pranks, lifting the bridal veil, and the post-wedding banquet, have been preserved as important components of ancient wedding traditions. Traditional Chinese weddings have transformed into a new cultural form and re-entered the public consciousness in modern times. In future research, it is imperative to contemplate the evolution and societal impact of traditional Chinese wedding ceremonies within the context of modern society. This consideration will better equip us to provide guidance for the preservation and innovation of contemporary Chinese wedding practices.

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Notes

1 Paired marriage is a relatively stable cohabitation of paired men and women for longer or shorter periods in primitive societies.

2 "*The Book of Rites*", "*The Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial*", and "*The Record of Rites*" collectively constitute the "Three Rites", which are three classic works of Confucianism.

3 "Nacai" (納采) refers to the first rite among the Six Rites, where the groom presents betrothal gifts to the bride's family as a marriage proposal. The term "cai" means "selection" or "choosing".

4 Tonglao refers to a ritual in ancient weddings where the newlyweds partake in a meal together, symbolizing the start of their shared life. "Lao" refers to sacrificial objects, with a combination of three types of animals (cattle, pigs, and sheep) called "Tai Lao" and a combination of only two types (pigs and sheep) called "Shao Lao."

5 The "Hejin" ceremony, also known as "Jiao Bei Jiu", originated from the Zhou Dynasty as a wedding custom. "Jin" refers to a dipper made by cutting a gourd in half. In ancient times, the bride and groom each held one to drink wine during the wedding ceremony.

6 Xuanduan, also known as Yuanduan, is an ancient Chinese formal attire in dark colors that served as the upper garment of court dress during the pre-Qin era in ancient China.

7 The "One Offering Ceremony", also known as the "Three Goblet Ceremony", originated from the ritual system in the Zhou dynasty and is a ceremonial protocol of traditional culture.

8 "Rituals not for the common people " refers to the fact that the common people are too busy with their labor to be able to do the rituals adequately, so they cannot be asked to do everything in their rituals.

9 The Cheng-Zhu School of Neo-Confucianism was one of the main schools of thought in the Song and Ming dynasties, and it remains one of the most influential schools of Neo-Confucianism.

10 During the Song Dynasty's Three Dormitory System, the Imperial Academy had 2000 external dormitory students, 300 internal dormitory students, and 100 top students, collectively known as the "Three Dormitory Students."

11 "Pin Guan" generally refers to officials with a rank in ancient China.

12 "Ji Li" ceremony refers to the coming-of-age ceremony for Han Chinese girls.

13 https://www.meipian.cn/2u2sqxz6?from=timeline (accessed on 16 April 2023).

[14] "Jinsha zhe mian" refers to the practice that originated in the Eastern Han Dynasty, where the bride covers her head with a special veil that the groom later unveils.

[15] "Sa zhang" refers to the act of throwing fruits, flower petals, and copper coins inside the wedding bed canopy after the couple's ceremonial greeting.

[16] https://www.dpm.org.cn/collection/bamboo/228487.html (accessed on 16 April 2023).

[17] Modern civilized weddings refer to modernized wedding ceremonies that gradually replaced feudalistic practices in Beijing after the Xinhai Revolution.

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Cultural Codes of Marriage Rituals in Anatolia: From Ritual to Word in the Context of Oral Culture

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Abstract: Marriage is a social contract that carries a number of qualities recognized as having fundamental values. These qualities include a spiritual bond between spouses, mutual love, affection, and responsibility, the continuation of the generation, and the existence of social order. The social definition of marriage implies that it is a phenomenon that occurs not only between two individuals in the context of cultural continuity but also in other social structures. It evolves into a structure that encompasses not only the initial two families but also the broader societal context. In Islamic marriage, a contract is formalized between a man and a woman who meet the religious requirements for marriage. The contract is executed with their consent and in the presence of witnesses. However, from a cultural perspective, marriage embodies a multifaceted structure, influenced by religion, ritual practices, symbols, and traditions. In this study, topics such as oral culture, wedding traditions, and rituals are discussed, and cultural practices are interpreted. This study sheds light on the manner in which marriage rites influence the discourse and actions within the social structure. Such studies are of paramount importance in demonstrating the continuity and vitality of culture, as well as the transformative nature of ritual meanings over time. They underscore the notion that culture is an ever-evolving process of interpretation, a characteristic that is intrinsic to its very essence. These actions, inextricably linked to societal structures, have the potential to give rise to novel symbolic meanings and values at any given juncture. However, it is imperative to recognize that the mere analysis of texts representing oral culture products is insufficient for comprehending their ritual functions, social messages, and emotional dimensions. Consequently, an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates the study of transitional rituals and oral culture is necessary to achieve a more comprehensive understanding. By examining cultural elements from diverse perspectives, we can develop a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of cultural diversity in Anatolia.

Keywords: oral culture; ritual; transition period; Turkey; marriage; folk song; mani

1. Introduction

Marriage is a profoundly entrenched institution with a history that is commensurate with the history of humanity itself. Marriage, regarded as both a religious and cultural institution with origins dating back to Adam and Eve, is accompanied by numerous practices from the past to the present. The marriage ceremonies of disparate societies vary significantly from one another, exhibiting a rich tapestry of religious and folkloric elements that are unique to each community. Even within the context of ethnic groups inhabiting the same geographical area, variations in traditions are evident. Anatolia, with its rich cultural and geographical diversity, serves as a prime example of this variation.

Beyond the ethnic diversity evident among the Turkish, Kurdish, Arab, and Assyrian populations, the region's religious landscape, encompassing Sunni, Alevi, Christian, and Jewish communities, further underscores its cultural and religious diversity. Historical evidence indicates that cultural exchange between peoples has occurred throughout history. However, the marriage traditions of each ethnic and religious group reflect their unique cultural and religious identity. Ziya Gökalp, a prominent figure in the development of modern Turkish thought during the Republican era, underscored the pivotal role of culture and civilization in societal transformation. According to Gökalp, culture embodies the local and organic, while civilization signifies the universal and technical elements. Gökalp placed significant emphasis on the preservation of culture and argued for the adoption of Western civilization as a means to achieve modernity within Turkish society (İnalcık 1965, p. 421).

The survival of oral culture is contingent upon its continued functionality within the socio-cultural landscape. According to Malinowski, function can only be defined as meeting a need through an activity in which people cooperate, use artisanal products, and consume goods (Çobanoğlu 2021, p. 254). A notable intersection emerges between Malinowski's context-centered functional culture theory and Bascom's understanding of functional folklore. Bascom's theory is predicated on four functional approach models for the fundamental needs of society (Bascom 1954). *Manis*[1] and folk songs sung at weddings serve a dual purpose, contributing to individual happiness while also facilitating integration with the matrimonial process. These songs are imbued with the function of providing enjoyment, fostering merriment, and entertaining participants. The proverbs, hymns, and prayers incorporated into wedding traditions underscore the profound sacredness attributed to marriage and family. These cultural expressions, embedded within oral traditions, serve a dual purpose: they facilitate the transmission of cultural values and social institutions to both the bride and groom and the wider wedding community while also fostering a sense of communal belonging and tradition. The transmission of cultural values to future generations through educational processes supports the bride and groom in acquiring their social roles and future status. Rituals such as bachelorette or henna nights can offer individuals a space of freedom without social pressure and restrictions. These practices function as a means of evasion from both social and personal pressure.

2. The Methodology of Conducted Research

The scope of this study is Turkish wedding and marriage traditions in Anatolia. The research focuses on oral culture elements such as rituals, folk songs, manis, folk beliefs, and proverbs in wedding traditions. This article's primary focus is on the role and function of oral culture products in the context of marriage and wedding rituals, with a particular emphasis on the transmission of tradition and the analysis of signs and symbols as a reflection of social memory.

This study utilizes qualitative research methods as a foundation for the analysis of oral culture products. The analysis draws upon evaluation models rooted in the theoretical frameworks of prominent scholars in the field of anthropology and folklore, including van Gennep, Turner, Geertz, Malinowski, Bascom, Ong, Dundes, and Honko. To enhance comprehension of the multifaceted and traditional cultural fabric of Anatolia, a synthesis of these theoretical and methodological approaches was undertaken.

This research involved the utilization of numerous texts from oral cultural products, including folk songs, manis, proverbs, and folk beliefs, with a particular emphasis on folk songs. However, due to the constrained nature of this article's format and given the substantial volume of the sample texts, a curated selection of examples was made, with a focus on those that offer strong representation in terms of meaning and inclusivity. These

examples are presented in a concise form, accompanied by a brief interpretation and a contextual analysis. The original full texts of the examples can be accessed through the page numbers in the references cited.

3. Marriage as a Transitional Ritual

Marriage is considered a significant transitional period in Turkish culture. Arnold van Gennep, in his seminal research "Les rites de passage", conceptualizes marriage as a rite of passage (van Gennep 2022). When evaluated in the context of van Gennep's theory of rites of passage, marriage has been shown to effect a change in an individual's social status and to bestow upon them a new identity. Individuals in the threshold process are not recognized by society as having a permanent status. During the matrimonial ceremony, individuals undergoing this transition adhere to the established norms of religion, tradition, and culture, irrespective of their pre- or post-marital status or roles. It is at this threshold, characterized by the presence of taboos, superstitions, rituals, ceremonies, and various oral narratives, that individuals are considered to be at a special transition stage. These evolving rituals, special rules, and prohibitions represent the symbolic isolation of individuals at this threshold by society. Adopting Arnold van Gennep's theory of "rites of passage", Turner (Turner [1969] 1991, pp. 94–96) identifies three stages in these rituals: separation, liminality, and aggregation; separation, threshold stage, and integration.

To further elucidate the concept of marriage as a rite of passage, it is advantageous to examine Anatolian weddings, which possess a profound and deeply entrenched tradition, in conjunction with the theories proposed by van Gennep and Turner. The initial stage commences with the conception of the notion of matrimony. In this stage, the individual (bride/groom) engages in a symbolic separation from their former status, marking the commencement of their transition to a new role or status. Turner ([1969] 1991) characterizes this phase as the ritual of separation. The behavior of individuals who elect to marry represents the initial phase of separation from their previous status (i.e., the selection of a spouse). The first formal step on the path to marriage, which also conveys a message to society, is the arranged marriage. During this transition, the woman departs from her family to become a bride, and her family receives a bride price[2]. In certain cultural contexts, the practice of repeating[3] the marriage ceremony more than once is associated with the ritual of asking for a girl, whereby the family requests the departure of individuals seeking to transition out of their former social status. The social structure, through the ritual of asking for a girl, acknowledges those whose intentions are aligned with this transition. The practice of "the ceremonial promise of marriage/ceremonial promise" symbolizes the transition from the old status to the new one. The rings worn during this ritual are a symbolic representation of the official status achieved during this significant transition.

A period of liminality ensues, during which the bride and groom undergo a transition from their former to their new status. This period, characterized by liminality, is considered a vulnerable phase in Turkish folk beliefs. This liminal phase, characterized by its ambiguity, exerts a dual influence on the bride and groom, simultaneously endangering and transforming them. This liminal phase is accompanied by a rich tapestry of ritual practices, folk beliefs, and taboos that have been meticulously woven over centuries of oral tradition, serving as a protective barrier against malevolent spirits. One such practice is the ritual of hair cutting[4] and ritual beating[5], which is believed to have originated in ancient times (Yolcu 2014, p. 274). Despite the evolution of these practices, their cultural significance has persisted throughout history. This period, characterized as liminality, encompasses the phase in which the transition to the new status is not yet complete. It is replete with other practices as well. The most common rituals, symbolic actions, and ceremonies at this stage are engagement[6], henna night[7], and the wedding ceremony.

The culmination of these rites and ceremonies marks the integration of the bride and groom into their new social status and roles as a married couple within their respective societies. According to Turner ([1969] 1991), individuals are integrated into their new social status and roles as a married couple at the conclusion of the aforementioned ritual processes, through the symbolic approval of their society in accordance with their new status. In Anatolian marriage ceremonies, there are many traditional practices indicating the stage of integration such as the nikah ceremony[8], bridal pick-up[9], wedding night[10], and conjugal ceremony. An examination of Anatolian marriage ceremonies reveals a multitude of traditional practices, including the wedding, bride taking, wedding night, and the price for seeing the bride's face, that collectively signify the culmination of the integration stage.

Clifford Geertz (2010) conceptualizes culture as a network of signification, intricately woven by human beings, and itself of these webs. According to Clifford Geertz (2010), cultural analysis should not be regarded as empirical knowledge in search of a law but rather as an interpretive science in search of meaning. Clifford Geertz (2010, p. 19) asserts that superficial incomprehensibilities are transformed into meaningful expressions through social actions. An analysis of Anatolian wedding rituals reveals that they are not merely physical actions but also a structural element that carries profound meanings encompassing social and cultural codes. A case in point is the bridal bath, which, in addition to its physical cleansing, symbolizes the cultural practice of rebirth and purification. The burning of henna on the bride's hand is imbued with profound symbolic significance, extending beyond mere aesthetic elements. This ritual, in its cultural context, symbolizes the bride's pledge to her husband, family, and God. The gold coin placed in the bride's palm by the mother-in-law during the henna ceremony symbolizes blessing and fertility (Ergun 2010, p. 279).

Marriage and wedding rituals, as cultural transition processes, exhibit significant diversity in terms of content and practice. Each society meticulously crafts the rituals that accompany this significant period, aligning them with their religious, historical, and cultural underpinnings. Through this process, societies give rise to their own unique values, indicators, symbols, and codes (Karataş 2014, p. 139). For instance, the mixing of salt and ash to symbolize the strengthening of kinship ties between two families, the hearth as a family symbol, and the bride being pressed against a sheepskin to instill her docility are manifestations of human creativity and the capacity to attribute meaning that is specific to a given society (Öğüt Eker 2000, p. 95).

4. Oral Culture and Marriage Rituals

Elements of oral culture, including folk beliefs, folk songs, manis, and proverbs, serve not only to convey personal sentiments and experiences but also to fulfill significant functions. These functions include reflecting social feelings and experiences, protecting social values, transmitting cultural values, and ensuring the continuity of rituals. As Ong (2013, p. 57) observes, the act of repeating information verbally contributes to its permanent storage in memory. In the context of primary oral culture, where knowledge is not documented, the acquisition of information, often requiring years of effort, is preserved through rituals and constant repetition, ensuring its retention rather than its loss to the passage of time.

The limited understanding of the younger generation regarding traditional wedding practices, coupled with their inherent curiosity about these subjects, results in a transfer of knowledge from the older generation to the younger generation. This phenomenon underscores their role as guardians and transmitters of traditional knowledge. As Ong asserts, knowledge is often acquired through prolonged effort and is of significant value. Society places significant respect on individuals who possess the ability to preserve knowledge and recount historical narratives (Ong 2013, p. 57). In the context of preserving the products of

oral culture, there have been some transformations throughout history. Initially, knowledge was preserved through written texts; however, subsequent technological advancements played a pivotal role in the preservation of information. However, it is inaccurate to assert the complete extinction of oral culture in the face of these transitions. In contemporary society, oral culture products persist in numerous ritual practices.

Roy A. Rappaport underscores that rituals encompass more than mere religious practices but rather embody cultural, social, and communicative dimensions. According to Rappaport, a ritual is defined as "the performance of unwritten, unchanging expressions and gestures of a certain form in precise sequences by actors" (Rappaport 2006, p. 299). Oral culture products, which include folk songs, manis, proverbs, folk beliefs, and more, are integral components of various rituals, such as the henna night, the bride's reception, and wedding festivities. Henna folk songs, bride and groom folk songs, and folk beliefs performed during rituals serve as conduits for social communication by expressing social values and emotions, both verbally and non-verbally.

5. Marriage Rituals in Folk Songs

Anonymous folk songs are a common form in this context. The expressions utilized by the ritual performers are not their own, and they are so archaic that the original singers have been forgotten (Rappaport 2006, p. 404). This phenomenon can be interpreted as an indication of the profound connection between oral cultural products and social values and belief systems.

These folk songs function as oral archives and as conduits for the transmission of musical entertainment culture and intangible cultural heritage. These folk songs embody the cultural codes and value systems inherent in the society that produced them. The thematic content of these folk songs encompasses the primary subjects of folklore research, including oral history, aesthetic perspective, social and social value judgments, proverbs, idioms, transition rituals, folk economics, traditions, customs, and folk beliefs (Karataş 2014, p. 145).

As Alan Dundes emphasizes, a holistic approach is essential for making healthier interpretations in folklore research. To this end, a comprehensive analysis model has been developed for the analysis of any folkloric element, including text, texture, and context (Dundes 2006, p. 61). This model has proven to be instrumental in the analysis of marriage-themed oral culture products, as well as genres such as mani and folk songs performed in the context of marriage ceremonies. When evaluating mani and folk songs in terms of rhythm, sound, and local words in folk dialects (texture), it becomes evident that both the content of the songs and the manner in which they are performed assume significance. The content and meaning of oral culture products are enriched by the presence of text. A notable example is the mani "If you have a hundred gold coins made/I will wait until summer" (Yolcu 2011, p. 132), which is sung by the girl to the man during the engagement phase. This song articulates both the economic expectation of the woman from the man and her desire for the timing of marriage. In the context of folklore products, the question of context, performer, recipient, purpose, and function is of particular relevance. Typically, during the henna night ritual, women perform their art in melodic and theatrical styles in the absence of men.

5.1. Henna Folk Songs

Henna night is a distinctive ceremony that is typically organized among women the day before the wedding. It symbolizes the bride-to-be's departure from her father's house, reflects Anatolian culture, reinforces the emotional bond between mother and daughter, and provides a pleasant experience for the participants. The lighting of henna for the

bride and groom constitutes a pivotal ritual, exerting its influence not solely on the couple but also on all the participating women. The henna ceremony is a communal event, with all women and girls in the neighborhood participating. The belief system among these women is such that the act of attending the henna ceremony is believed to have a positive influence on their future marital fortune. Mothers play an active role in this tradition, often imparting wisdom and guidance to their daughters during the ceremony. The henna tray is symbolically passed over the girls' heads, signifying the transition from childhood to adulthood and the hope for a harmonious marital life. The folk songs sung during the henna night serve to express the sadness experienced by the girls due to their separation from their families and mothers (Korkmaz 1999a, p. 95). Henna night, a significant cultural event in Turkish tradition, is characterized by a blend of festivity and emotion. During the ritual of henna burning, the bride and her mother shed tears, and the folk songs sung during this process are referred to as the folk songs to make the "bride cry". These songs articulate the emotional journey of the bride, encapsulating her sentiments of loyalty to her family of origin and her subsequent adaptation to her new familial unit. The emotional culmination of this tradition is the folk song "Don't cry, girl-bride; this is what fate has written for you" (Korkmaz 1999b, p. 77), which is sung to comfort the bride as she departs from her father's house for the final time.

Boratav's field research reveals significant variations in the henna ritual even within close geographical proximity, underscoring the cultural and regional diversity inherent in these practices. The observed variation in the duration of the ceremony, with one village opting for a single night and another dedicating two nights to the ritual, underscores the cultural heterogeneity within these communities. The girls' henna ceremony is held on Tuesday evening, while the women's ceremony is held on Wednesday evening. The girls' henna ceremony is characterized by an exuberant atmosphere, with young girls engaging in singing folk songs and playing games until late into the night, symbolizing a "farewell to bachelorhood." In contrast to the exuberant atmosphere of the girls' ceremony, the women's ceremony is characterized by a more subdued and emotional ambiance. On this occasion, the bride's intimate companions are present at the young girl's residence, engaging in the singing of folk songs and the "Sığırtmaç game" (Boratav 2003, p. 232). These two nights represent the culmination of the bride's rite of passage before marriage, marking a significant transition into her new role as a wife. The community's involvement in these rituals and emotional transformations plays a pivotal role in facilitating the passage.

One of the most prevalent folk songs performed during henna nights is "Don't build houses on high high hills" (Kaya 1999, p. 200; Göde 2010, p. 166). This folk song recounts the tragic tale of Zeynep's marriage to a young man named Ali, who resides in a distant village. This folk song, imbued with symbolism, embodies themes of separation, longing, and sadness. It is traditionally sung by women during henna nights, with the intention of evoking tears from the bride and her mother. According to the narrative conveyed within the oral tradition, the young woman is prevented from seeing her mother, father, and siblings for a period of six years, a circumstance stemming from the geographical distance of seven days, and ultimately succumbs to illness as a result of this profound longing. This folk song serves as a poignant symbol, representing the challenges faced by a bride who, due to geographical and emotional distance, experiences a sense of disconnection from her new identity and the community around her. The line "It has been six years since I left my village" exemplifies the bride's inability to assimilate into her new environment, resulting in a physical separation. The presence of "flying birds," "high hills," "horse," "thorn," and "rose" in the folk song's lyrics symbolizes emotions such as distance, obstacles to reunion, journey, and longing experienced by the bride. The folk song conveys a dual message: it does not merely advocate for the prevention of bride abduction to distant lands; it also

underscores the significance of emotional bonds with her mother and family. These bonds are essential for the bride to assimilate into her new familial environment. The folk song can be interpreted as a social critique of patriarchal families, emphasizing the emotional and physical distance that these families often impose on their daughters.

The sentiment of expatriation and the reluctance to relocate to a distant land is poignantly captured in the lyric "Don't give me to a distant land" (Kaya 1999, p. 187). The girl says that, rather than becoming a bride in a distant and unfamiliar place, she would even consent to marry one of her cousins. Within a patriarchal system, the autonomy and agency of women are often constrained, as they are unable to freely exercise their will and articulate their perspectives. The folk song "Don't give me away to the foreign hand" offers a poignant reflection on the pervasive influence of oppression, particularly as it affects girls. The song conveys the notion that individuals' negative thoughts and behaviors during the threshold process can hinder or prevent the subsequent stage of "aggregation/integration". The bride's apprehensions and trepidations concerning her future are poignantly articulated in the folk song. These expressions, evident in various stanzas such as "This girl needs a mother," "My hand is henna, my face is veil," "We shall apply henna to the bride-to-be," and "I lit the henna on the white hand" (Kaya 1999, pp. 187–88), underscore the bride's state of liminality (threshold) at this juncture. In the folk song entitled "Red plums along the banks of the Arda River", the subject's lack of agency is evident. This folk song chronicles Halime's defiance against her familial forces who compelled her marriage and her subsequent suicide in response to her rejection of the imposed norms (Mirzaoğlu 2015, p. 338).

While the establishment of a family is a significant accomplishment, the ability to sustain a family in a peaceful and harmonious manner is equally crucial. The folk song "There's honey at the bazaar my bride" (Göde 2010, p. 167) offers a poignant cautionary tale, underscoring the potential consequences of the bride's behavior post-marriage. The text conveys a series of admonitions addressed to the bride, including the necessity of exhibiting a disposition characterized by amiability, respect toward her husband, and a harmonious relationship with him, with these behaviors to be demonstrated in all circumstances and at all times. The term "honey" is used metaphorically to denote qualities such as respect, affection, eloquence, and a sweet disposition, while "lamb" is employed to represent docility and harmony.

In the folk song titled "Bring the Henna Aney! (Oh mother!)" (Göde 2010, p. 168), the bride conveys her perspective on the transition period through the metaphorical depiction of a physical and emotional departure, articulated by the phrase "I hit the road." The bride accentuates her status as a guest in her father's household, expressing a desire to repose with her mother. This expression serves to underscore two interrelated themes: first, the transience of the bride's former status, and, second, the absence of complete integration with her new status. The folk song also highlights the profound bond between the bride and her mother.

In the traditional folk song "Happy mother happy mother happy mother, may your household be happy" (Kaya 1999, p. 187), the bride's message to her mother, who is melancholic about her departure, is to "let your house be happy". The phrase "they made my mother cry; they took the bride" alludes to the departure of the bride in both physical and ritual contexts. Another folk song (Kaya 1999, p. 188) details specific ritual actions, including making the bride cry, applying henna, adorning her with a ring, stirring henna in a golden bowl, crossing the threshold, and finally, bidding farewell.

5.2. Bridal Pick-Up and Welcoming Folk Songs

In the context of Anatolian marriage traditions, the ritual of taking the bride is considered a pivotal stage in wedding customs. The bridal procession is the ritual in which the bride departs from her father's residence, proceeds to the groom's house, and her transition to a new status is formalized through a distinctive ceremony. This transition marks the establishment of a unique bond between the two families, signifying a significant cultural and social transformation for both the bride and groom. In the context of transition theories (van Gennep 2022), the bride's departure from her family, the social environment where she was born and raised, and her transition from her previous status (singlehood) to her new status (marriage) marks a significant phase in the transition to her new home and family. However, the integration of the bride into her new family unit has yet to be fully realized. In this transitional phase, an ambiance of bereavement pervades, particularly for the bride and her family who remain behind. The musical accompaniment, characterized by the somber melodies of instruments such as drums and zurna, along with the emotive folk songs, serves to underscore the prevailing sentiment of loss and transition. During the most significant wedding ritual, the intensity of emotion experienced by both families, particularly the bride and groom, is expressed through folk songs, which are an integral component of oral culture.

A notable example is the folk song called Cezayir (the folk song of Algiers), which is traditionally sung during the bride's departure from her father's house or during the henna night. The historical underpinnings of this folk song, which is sung during the bride's departure from her father's house, can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of the bride's association with soldiers who never return home. The thematic elements encompassing this sentiment include separation, bravery, heroism, captivity, and soldiers who embarked on their journeys at a young age, never to return to their families. Drawing from the experiences of soldiers who departed for the Algerian campaigns during the Ottoman period and never returned, this folk song maintains its historical context by being incorporated into wedding rituals (Mirzaoğlu 2015, p. 180). In the context of the marriage ritual, the bride's departure from her former status (celibacy), never to return, symbolizes the life she leaves behind and her transition to a new life.

The folk song "Horses saddled" (Yakıcı 2007, p. 217) is a folk song sung during the bride-taking ritual and depicts the girl's separation from her family. The line "I left my parents" and expressions such as "addling the horses" and "the girl collecting her dowry[11]" represent the process of separation in the context of transition rituals.

In bridal folk songs, the subject of separation is intensely covered. In both bridal and henna folk songs, the prevailing sentiment is one of farewell. While the thematic content of bridal folk songs is typically uniform, disparities in vocal delivery can be discerned with respect to melody structure. In instances where the melodies are characterized by cheerfulness during the singing of the bride in the boy's house, the melodies are of a more somber nature when the bride is singing in the girl's house, due to the symbolic departure of the bride. In Yakıcı's work (Yakıcı 2007, p. 218), "salt" is identified as a symbol of purity, fertility, and reproduction in folk beliefs. The arrival of the bride at the boy's house is accompanied by "welcome" folk songs in a festive atmosphere. In the context of the transition period ritual, the concept of "aggregation/integration" is reinforced through folk songs. The phrase "Don't be separated from your wife until you die" underscores the permanence of the bride's role in her new status as a wife. The phrase "red bride" in the folk song, specifically the term "red" (al), is a symbolic representation of the bride. The bride's veil and bridal sash are traditionally red. The color red is traditionally associated with virginity, purity, and rebirth. Within the context of the ritual, the "bride" assumes a central role. The performance of folk songs in various locations where the bride is present

underscores the preservation of Anatolian experiences in social memory and the manner in which they address the needs of the social structure.

6. Marriage Rituals in Manis

Manis, a type of anonymous folk poetry, is a prominent feature of Turkish oral culture, with a wide geographical distribution and a rich variety of forms and genres. Their memorability stems from their typical composition of four lines and seven syllables. These songs offer insight into a wide array of themes, including the human condition, emotions, and interpersonal relationships, reflecting the rich tapestry of the Anatolian ethos. A seminal study by Elçin (1990) systematically categorized these themes, highlighting the prevalence of certain motifs, including the yearning for a spouse abroad, the anguish stemming from this longing, broken promises, disloyalty, defiance against fate, the quest for parental affection, the dichotomy of beauty and ugliness, the inevitability of death, the concept of marriage, and the conflict between the bride and the mother-in-law, which can be attributed to generational differences and evolving life perspectives. In accordance with the research scope, the subject of manis, which has an extensive discourse network, has been constrained within the context of marriage and wedding rituals, including marriage ceremonies, henna nights, bridal baths, the planting of the wedding flag at the bride's head, and çömçe bride ceremonies. The environments in which manis are performed during marriage ceremonies are as follows: these include the sighting of a prospective bride, the proposal of marriage, the henna ceremony for the mother and daughter, the male henna ceremony, the bridal bath, the wedding ceremony, the bridal praise, the bridal farewell, the bridal reception, the nuptials, bridal pick-up, and the bride's procession, among others (Artun 2006, p. 24).

As Honko (2006) points out, "The true repository of oral literature is not found in folklore archives, but rather in the collective memory of the human race." In alignment with Honko's (2006, p. 139) perspective on laments, the tradition of singing mani is predicated on oral tradition rather than on written records. This finding indicates that manis are transmitted through live performance and are preserved by memory. Manis exhibit a direct interaction with the environment in which they are produced. These performances typically occur within the context of ritual or social gatherings, such as during courtship rituals, henna nights, and wedding celebrations. The individual who performs a mani functions as an interpreter of social thoughts and sentiments, offering insights into the cultural and emotional nuances inherent in these practices. The preponderance of women in this practice suggests a medium for the articulation of sentiments that might otherwise be repressed. Consequently, both the lyrics and the context, including the setting, the occasion, the intended audience, and the purpose, assume significance. Manis, as oral cultural products, can be replicated through the preservation of their original form.

In the field research conducted by Yolcu (2011), the reconstruction of the improvised melodies sung by the women performers each time aligns with the theory that the archive of folklore is human memory (Honko 2006). The performances of the female performers metamorphose into a visual and auditory spectacle, accompanied by instruments such as tambourines, bowls, and coppers, in addition to theatrical movements.

During the period when the tradition of singing mani was prevalent, courtship/flirtation between young individuals was met with societal disapproval. Indeed, it was a social taboo for young people to openly express their feelings of sexuality, love, and infatuation for each other. The medium of manis served as a conduit for the articulation of sentiments related to marriage and love, which were regarded as intimate by societal norms. As Artun (2006, p. 29) observes, in a particular instance, a young woman expresses her desire to marry a young man by saying "Carnations in bunches/Go ask for me from my mother". This

statement conveys a dual intention: first, to express a desire for marriage, and second, to acknowledge the traditional expectation that the girl's wish to marry must be approved by her family. Another mani verse articulates the concept of cohabitation: "If I don't hug and sleep together/My heartache will not pass" (Artun 2006, p. 29). The manis, as articulated by young girls in communal settings, serve multifaceted functions, including entertainment, education, and social unification.

Historically, in Anatolia, it was considered shameful for young people to express their desire to get married directly. To circumvent this social norm, young individuals have devised a plethora of methods and behaviors to articulate their matrimonial aspirations, albeit indirectly, thereby circumventing the potential social censure that might otherwise be imposed upon them (Boratav 2003, p. 209). One method employed is the singing of a mani, which conveys the desire to wed, as illustrated by the following verse: "Get me married father/Is a house really a house without a bride" (Çelik 2005, p. 510). This phenomenon can be understood as a manifestation of the desire to obtain familial approval, which is a fundamental aspect of social structure and family values. This phenomenon can be interpreted as an illustration of courtesy, a component of social interaction and family values, within the context of family communication. In another mani verse, the mother is addressed as follows: "Mother, get me married/Enough of being single" (Elçin 1990, p. 59). Because girls are ashamed to express their desire to get married, they indirectly express their feelings and position in society to their mothers by singing mani (Atnur 2015, p. 15). This reveals that the mother is accepted as an authority figure or that young people convey their desire to marry to her because they find her closer to them.

In the context of oral cultural traditions, mani can be regarded as a form of aesthetic communication. In instances of romantic relationships between girls and boys, their families are approached for consent to formalize the union. However, should the families not accept the relationship, the young people may indirectly express a willingness to elope. This phenomenon aligns with social values, underscoring the importance of respect for family and open attitudes towards marriage. This is exemplified by the lyrics of a mani, "If my father doesn't give me permission/Feed your horse well" (Büyükokutan 2006, p. 63), where "father" symbolizes authority and "horse" represents escape and autonomy in decision making.

The manis sung in the ritual of asking for a girl function as a means of communication and showcase the musical and rhythmic aspects of the language. The female side of the family extends a warm welcome to guests with manis, commencing with the phrase "Welcome, Welcome" (Artun 2006, p. 25). The responses exhibited by the girl's side, whether positive or negative, serve to reinforce the established social etiquette through the medium of aesthetic expression, as evidenced by the performance of a mani. The tradition of singing mani, which involves a mini-performance in the presence of family members, reflects layers of meaning beyond the poetic text of manis. The manis sung in the ritual of requesting a girl's hand in marriage are not merely a component of a literary text; they also serve as an indicator of social ritual and communication between families. In accordance with Dundes's approach, these songs are seen to reveal a more profound layer of meaning within the context of text, texture, and context (Dundes 2006).

The environment in which they are sung contributes to the interpretation of certain manis, as evidenced by the existence of a game and mani called "Delilo" (Aksu 1997, p. 73). The elders of the young man's house and the young people who go to request a girl's hand in marriage play "Delilo" in front of the girl's house. The door, functioning as a physical threshold, serves as a symbolic indicator in the process leading to a change in status on the way to marriage. The "Delilo" game and the songs performed during this ritual serve a dual purpose: they are both sources of entertainment and convey explicit messages

regarding the physical attractiveness of the girl, the level of interest she has piqued in the boy, and the intentions of the male counterpart.

A significant ritual in Turkish wedding tradition involves the practice of binding a red belt around the bride's waist. This belt, imbued with symbolism since ancient times, has represented notions of abundance, fertility, good luck, and diligence. In recent times, the significance of virginity has been added to the comprehensive meaning of the belt. This belt, which is imbued with significant connotations, is traditionally tied by the bride's brother prior to her departure from her father's residence (Yeşil 2014). In the absence of a brother, the belt can be tied by the girl's father or uncle. As articulated in the mani text, "The bride's belt will be tied by her brother/The drum and zurna will be at the door/Three hours of crying" (Çelik 2005, p. 399). The belt, a symbol of purity and cleanliness, represents the girl's transition from her father's house. The drum and zurna, instruments of entertainment, underscore the festive nature of the occasion. This multifaceted atmosphere, characterized by the juxtaposition of emotions such as sorrow and mirth, serves as a symbolic representation of a family's profound sense of pride in bestowing their daughter with the role of a bride and thereby marking the establishment of a new and harmonious domestic environment. The presence of participants in the ceremony, accompanied by drums and zurna at the bride's departure from her father's house, also symbolizes social integration and approval.

Wedding ceremonies in Anatolia are distinguished by their rich entertainment culture. Notably, the practices involved in the procession of the bride to the groom's residence are integral components of a social ritual. The arrival of the bride at her new home is met with jubilation by the groom's family, relatives, and guests, who engage in festivities and express their elation. A notable element of this cultural expression is the halay, a traditional game that involves the bride and groom dancing in tandem, often accompanied by melodious tunes. These melodies, which serve as a crucial component of the halay, are collectively referred to as halay melodies. The game is played by lining up side by side, with players holding each other by the pinky. This collective activity symbolizes entertainment, social harmony, and integration through movement. The mani "My lover danced the halay at the wedding; he happens to be my brother-in-law's brother" (Demir 2013, p. 374), which is sung during wedding ceremonies and especially during the halay, is particularly noteworthy in terms of demonstrating the bride's integration into both the new family and the established family ties.

In the tradition of the bride's arrival, the bride, who is escorted from her father's house to her new home, symbolically marks her transition into her new familial unit. Upon her arrival, the bride is greeted by the elders of the family, typically her father-in-law or mother-in-law. A series of rituals are performed until the bride enters the house. One such ritual involves the opening of closed doors, often accompanied by the exchange of gifts or tokens of appreciation. The mother-in-law heralds the arrival of the bride with the words "Open the door, mother-in-law/The bride is coming for you" (Çelik 2005, p. 500). An examination of the context reveals that the lines "My beloved doesn't want me; it's the bride's seating ritual" (Wouldn't my mate, my love, want to see me as a bride?) (Çelik 2005, p. 151) in another mani constitute a component of the tradition of bride seating. Upon first entering her new home, the bride is not seated in her designated place without receiving monetary compensation or a gift. This ritual is believed to facilitate the establishment of a genuine bond between the bride and her new family, as well as to promote her integration into her new home environment.

An additional mani illuminates the practice of the bride's arrival and dismount ceremony, offering further insights into this tradition. Historically, brides were escorted from their father's residence to the groom's residence on horseback. The mani "If your mother-

in-law doesn't give you sheep/Don't get off the horse" (Elçin 1990, p. 86) underscores the significance of this practice. Historically, it was customary to bestow gifts upon the bride when she dismounted from the horse, and, in contemporary times, this practice persists when she alights from the car. This practice of welcoming the bride by the mother-in-law and bestowing gifts symbolizes the integration of the bride and mother-in-law within the marital and familial structures. However, the stipulation of sheep as a gift in the mani, as well as the possibility that the mother-in-law may not offer a sheep, can be interpreted as a potential indicator of conflict between the bride and mother-in-law.

Bride—Mother-in-Law Manis

A mother-in-law who lauds her daughter-in-law and portrays an ideal mother-in-law profile prior to the marital union of her son may subsequently evolve into a mother-in-law who grapples with her daughter-in-law. Conversely, girls who express their intention to be an ideal bride before marriage may transition into a bride who experiences difficulties in her relationship with her mother-in-law post-marriage. This phenomenon is exemplified by numerous manis. A mother-in-law who says to a girl before marriage, "As long as you are my daughter-in-law, I will tie a belt around your waist, I will give you sherbet, I will apply henna in your hair" turns into someone who can say to her daughter-in-law after the girl becomes her daughter-in-law, "You are walking on the street/You are upsetting my son/What beauty you have . . ./You look like a monkey". A similar shift in perception can be observed in the case of a daughter-in-law's attitude towards her mother-in-law. Prior to marriage, she may express admiration for her mother-in-law, using phrases such as "Mother-in-laws are pilgrims/They are the crown of our heads." However, following the union, her perspective can undergo a transformation, leading her to perceive her mother-in-law in a more negative light, using expressions like "Mother-in-laws are snakes/All their words are lies" (Kaya 2000, p. 342).

In Turkey, the bride does not occupy a central position within the family structure. This is due to the fact that the bride is assigned the role of adapting to the patriarchal structure. The decline in arranged marriages and the decreasing trend of cohabitation between brides and mothers-in-law, along with related behaviors such as the bride's adaptation to the family, deference to the mother-in-law, the mother-in-law's supervision of the bride, and power struggles between them, have been gradually diminishing with modernization. This transformation can be attributed to the modernization process. The struggle of women for power lies at the heart of the bride-daughter-in-law struggle. The bride, having relinquished her former familial and social context, finds herself in a state of unfamiliarity within her current environment and family. The prevailing figure within the family structure is the mother-in-law, who often exhibits a reluctance to share power with her daughter-in-law. In-laws may perceive brides as women who undermine their authority and create a divide between them and their sons. According to Altunsu Sönmez, the primary cause of the conflict between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law is the struggle for dominance over the patriarchal social structure's powerful male figure. Consequently, the conflict cannot be adequately explained as mere jealousy (Altunsu Sönmez 2019, p. 1160).

7. Marriage Rituals in Folk Beliefs and Proverbs

Proverbs, a type of oral culture, function as concise, anonymous expressions that reflect the knowledge, experience, beliefs, and values of a society. The meaning of proverbs is shaped by the social environment within a specific context, allowing them to adapt to the evolving nature of oral culture. This section will offer an examination of proverbs pertaining to family and marriage during the transition period.

The functional potency of proverbs is contingent not solely on their textual import but also on the context in which they are articulated. The message of a proverb articulated within the context of an experienced situation transcends mere textual transmission, metamorphosing into a social event. The act of "choosing a spouse" during marriage rituals is a significant step in many societies, as it is a means of establishing long-lasting and healthy families. In Turkish culture, women shoulder significant responsibilities and assume pivotal roles within the family unit. The proverb "The female bird builds the nest" underscores the significance of women in establishing the foundations of the family unit. In the ritual of choosing a spouse, proverbs such as "Some women build a house, some women demolish a house" and analogous expressions are employed by family elders. These proverbs underscore the significance of selecting a suitable spouse for the family unit, thereby imparting a societal message that transcends the mere words of the proverb. When articulated within the context of a transition period ritual, these proverbs contribute to the realization of the ritual in a socially healthy manner.

An illustrative example of this phenomenon is the proverb, "The bride rode a horse and said, 'What if it happens?'" This proverb underscores the element of uncertainty surrounding the eventuality of the marriage. It is noteworthy that the bride's placement on a horse is a culminating element of the wedding ceremony. The existence of documented cases of brides and grooms separating even at the final moment suggests that Anatolian people may be influenced by magic, the evil eye, and evil spirits. This belief is rooted in the notion that individuals are particularly susceptible during periods of transition. While the phrase "May you sit in the corner of your son" might initially appear to be a curse, it is in fact an expression of prayer in Gaziantep, signifying "May you see your son get married" (Korkmaz 1999b, p. 79).

The practice of sprinkling sugar, peanuts, coins, and other items on the bride's head is believed to symbolize the hope for prosperity and abundance. As the bride exits the vehicle, whether it be a car or, in the past, a horse, and enters the house, specific objects are ceremoniously sprinkled on the bride's head in a ritual known as *saçı*: wheat, a symbol of abundance and fertility, is a central element in this ritual. The scattering of wheat is believed to symbolize the hope for a fruitful and productive marriage, as well as progeny that will contribute to the well-being of the family. The breaking of the empty bottle by the mother-in-law is a gesture that symbolically dispels the notion of the evil eye and malevolent spirits. As the bride traverses the threshold, she is escorted by her mother-in-law, thereby acknowledging her authority within the familial structure. The act of hurling pomegranates as the bride enters her new home symbolizes fertility and the cycle of life. Each ritual in this process symbolizes a transition from one status to a new one, representing acceptance or approval.

The practice of taking the groom to the mosque for the purpose of singing hymns and reciting prayers is rooted in the belief that this sacred space serves as the catalyst for a new beginning. Historically, female visitors to the girl's house would request a broom from the girl's family and take a seat on the broom provided by the host. These visitors would then vocalize the reasons for their visit through folk songs (Artun 2006, p. 25). The act of the women sent to assess a potential bride, who claim to have come to request the girl of the house, taking a seat on the broom, can be interpreted as an indication of their pure intentions and the establishment of a sacred and unsoiled domestic environment.

8. Conclusions

Traditional marriage rituals encompass oral cultural elements that reflect both individual sentiments and actions and social memory, fostering identity and belonging, and transmitting these elements across generations. However, the increasing prevalence of

written culture in modern societies, the effective use of media, and numerous other factors have led to a gradual erosion of the ritual power of oral culture. Nevertheless, it is evident that rituals such as marriages continue to play a crucial role in preserving cultural memory. Furthermore, elements of oral culture in Anatolia demonstrate a capacity to respond to both individual and social needs.

An examination of marriage and related rites reveals notable manifestations of oral culture, including folk songs, manis, hymns, prayers, and proverbs, each reflecting the distinctive characteristics of oral tradition. Anatolian weddings, therefore, are not merely an ordinary marriage ceremony. It is a transitional ritual that is deeply rooted and rich in tradition. By examining how folk beliefs and cultural codes influence marital rituals, the role of social memory in shaping these rituals, the manner in which social bonds are formed, and the transmission of common values and cultural knowledge, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural shaping of marriage.

Manis, with their short, rhymed, and rhythmic structures, are a notable component of oral culture. As a living cultural archive, they play a pivotal role in both their symbolic values and their individual and social functions. These cultural artifacts are integral to significant rites of passage, particularly those associated with marital transitions, such as "asking for a girl," "engagement," and "bridal pick-up". These performances are characterized by their poetic structures, which represent processes of separation, transition (liminality), and integration (aggregation). They carry folk beliefs and cultural codes, both entertaining and educating, and facilitating communication between individuals and between individuals and society.

Anatolia, with its rich historical tapestry shaped by the interaction of diverse cultures and civilizations, stands as a testament to the profound impact of cultural exchange on the evolution of society. This study may serve as a useful basis for future comparative and interdisciplinary research. For instance, it can direct studies that compare oral culture elements in the marriage rituals of diverse ethnic and religious communities in Anatolia. It can also guide research that examines the impact of urbanization on oral culture in traditional marriage rituals. Furthermore, it can inform studies that explore how technology and social media transform oral culture elements in marriage traditions. Finally, it can assist in the study of cultural diffusion areas and the interaction of oral culture in the wedding traditions of Anatolia and regions outside Anatolia.

At the culmination of the matrimonial process, the bride and groom undergo a transition in their social status. The integration of the bride and groom with their new roles, as well as the subsequent announcement of their new social roles to society, is realized through the performance of wedding rituals. Marriage, therefore, can be conceptualized as a transitional period between birth and death, during which individuals undergo a change in status through three distinct stages: separation, transition, and incorporation. The employment of appellations such as "bride" and "groom" at the culmination of singleness and during the transitional phase preceding matrimony exemplifies this progression. The elements of oral culture manifest in marriage traditions in Anatolia align with the theories advanced by cultural theorists. For instance, the oral culture elements observed during henna nights and wedding celebrations serve the functions of recreation, the transmission of social values to younger generations, and the expression of resistance against oppression through the articulation of repressed sentiments.

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Notes

1 Poems that generally consist of four seven-syllable lines and have a unique rhyming structure are called manis. Mani is one of the basic verse forms of anonymous folk poetry. It is one of the most commonly used verse forms in folk poetry due to its volume, structure, and ease of expression (İçel 2007, p. 76).

2 Until recently in Anatolia, a bride price was a sum of money or gifts in exchange for money given by a man to the family of the woman he wanted to marry (Öztürk 2009, p. 179).

3 A Turkish proverb says, "A girl's house is a house of cajolery".

4 As a sign of coming of age, some of the bride's hair, especially the bangs, is cut. With hymns and prayers, the bride's bangs are cut off, and, thus, the bride becomes mature and leaves her former status. This practice is thought to symbolize submission to God and symbolic slavery (Yolcu 2014, p. 273). Cutting the hair, especially the bangs, is a symbolic sign of coming of age, of transitioning from girlhood to womanhood, in other words, to a new social status.

5 In Anatolian weddings, the groom is subjected to some torture for entertainment purposes. There are many practices such as making the groom wear women's clothes, dousing the groom with water, and beating the groom by the groom's friends. The basis of these practices is not only entertainment but also the testing of both the physical and mental endurance of the groom, who will assume a new status as he prepares for this role (Yolcu 2014, p. 275).

6 The engagement ceremony takes place after the promise and before the wedding ceremony. The engagement ceremony, which is held with the participation of a large crowd, both traditionally and legally announces the beginning of the marriage process. The provision in Article 118 of the Turkish Civil Code, "Engagement is based on the promise of marriage", is the legal equivalent of the parties' desire to transform their promise of marriage into a family law and to unite as a family in the future. The engagement is an official step towards marriage, but the couple is not yet married. The engagement ring worn by the couple at the engagement ceremony is a symbol of the man and woman's promise to marry. Even though engagement ceremonies are celebrated in different ways today with a modern element, traditional elements and rituals are still practiced by a large community.

7 The henna night is one of Anatolia's most common wedding entertainment traditions. It is usually organized by the bride's side and performed one day or, depending on the time, one week before the wedding day/night of marriage.

8 The word "nikâh" (Atar 2007, p. 112), which means "joining, bringing together; marriage, marriage; sexual intercourse" in the dictionary, is an agreement established by the free will declarations of a man and a woman who meet the conditions for marriage in accordance with both religious, legal and social values. With the Nikah ceremony, the new status of the bride and groom is officially declared as legally and religiously approved, and, with this, social acceptance and integration are realized.

9 One of the richest and longest-lasting stages of traditional Anatolian wedding ceremonies is the bride's reception. During the process of bringing the bride to the groom's house, the bride is accepted and integrated with her new family through various ritual practices. The rituals at the stages of the bride's departure from her father's house, the bride's journey, and the bride's arrival at the groom's house are not limited to the integration/acceptance stage. See (Kartal et al. 2024) for a broader focus on the bride-taking ritual.

10 It is the coming together of the bride and groom after civil or religious marriage (Örnek 2014, p. 272). It is the first time that the bride and groom are alone together on the wedding night, and it is one of the most important symbols of the integration process.

11 In Anatolian culture, all kinds of items are prepared for the girl who will be the bride. In a proverb, it is said that "The girl is in the cradle and the dowry is in the chest", emphasizing that dowry preparations begin in the cradle for girls.

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Article

Wedding, Marriage, and Matrimony—Glimpses into Concepts and Images from a Church Historical Perspective since the Reformation

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Abstract: This contribution provides three church-historical glimpses into concepts and images that deal in different ways with the idea of the union of two parties and communicate it through media. The material under discussion is analysed from a gender perspective. Firstly, the Reformation period is discussed as a process of the valorisation of sexuality, the defence of priestly marriage by Philipp Melanchthon is examined, and attention is drawn to the so-called Oeconomialiteratur, which regulated the cohabitation of spouses. The article then turns to bridal mysticism in order to analyse the gender construction of Jesus and the male members of the Moravians on the basis of the "Kleines Brüdergesangbuch". It is emphasised that various options can be discussed, but that the concept of a leading masculinity of Jesus is the most appropriate for the description of the multiple masculinity constructions of the specific episode of the so-called "Sichtungszeit" of this community. In a last step, the reception of images and ideas about Katharina von Bora and Martin Luther since the Reformation period will be used to discuss how their marriage and matrimony became denominational identifiers—both for Protestantism and for Catholicism. For this, the double portrait of Katharina von Bora and Martin Luther by Cranach as well as a polemical pamphlet from the time of the Thirty Years' War and the invention of Katharina von Bora as a pastor's wife in the 19th century will be examined. By means of historical hermeneutics and a gender perspective, the article thus determines how media have both enabled the freedom to explore and establish new concepts and ideas as well as been used as a vehicle of regulation. In addition, the church-historical examples analysed also illustrate that wedding, marriage, and matrimony themselves became a medium to structure lives, to communicate religious and social issues, and to reject, construct, consolidate, and pass on denominational identities.

Keywords: gender; church history; reformation

1. The Agony of Choice—A Church-Historical Disclaimer

Because every approach to science is subjective and every selection of sources for articles requires explanation, I will begin with an explanatory prologue, offering clarification of the positionality and contextuality of what follows. Being invited to a conference and writing an article in a Special Issue as a church historian means speaking for "the" church history and having to represent it as a discipline. However, I do not intend to do this, insofar as I will present cursory readings through the centuries with a focused thematic emphasis.

From a church-historical and theological perspective, marriage is a complex and wide-ranging topic. It must be addressed by means of marriage theologies. And to do that—so I was told once—properly and profoundly would even be an "art in itself", whatever that might mean. Thus it is not surprising that more than enough other scholars have dealt with marriage theologies themselves, analysed and researched them deeply (see, for example, Witt 2013; Breul and Salvadori 2014) or with a broader focus (Holzem 2008). Here, in line with the thematic focus of this Special Issue, I concentrate on sources that I consider to be

of interest for the concept of mediatisation. Moreover, I have chosen to present glimpses into concepts and images from a church-historical perspective: They are glimpses because they only illuminate very specific areas from a gender perspective. Of these glimpses, I will discuss three that in different ways concern the idea of the union of two parties and communicate it through media—be it wedding, marriage, and matrimony. These three terms define the field that I will approach. In my view, the terms are difficult to separate in the context of church history. They all describe the conditions and consequences of the union of two parties, which are then medially conceptualised, produced, and regulated. Thus, this article raises the question of the interrelation between media, religion, and gender in regard to this topic from a church-related historical perspective.

The (church) historian has the agony of choice due to the abundance of sources. Every selection of sources not only produces knowledge but also leaves blind spots and gaps that cannot be taken into account. Here, the choice of sources reflects both my own research field and certain lines of tradition that exist in Christianity. These lines were redefined, conceptualised, and remembered over the centuries following the emergence of a new denomination during the Reformation. In my gender-focussed historical hermeneutic analysis, I use the chosen sources to investigate three different aspects of the field: wedding, marriage, and matrimony. They show the wide and incompatible variety of views on marriage among Lutherans and the fact that marriage has always posed and still poses problems for Christians because the soul of every individual has historically been gendered female. The three chapters will provide inside into the following:

- Firstly, the new valorisation of sexuality within the framework of (priestly) marriage and the cohabitation of spouses within the marital framework.
- Secondly, the bridal mystical idea of union with Christ and its poetic expression as an ideal of piety within the Pietist movement of the Moravians.
- Thirdly, and finally, the medialised culture of remembrance of the marriage of Katharina von Bora and Martin Luther in its confessional significance.

2. The Cohabitation of Spouses—Religious–Political Practice, Exegesis, and *Oeconomia*

As Ute Gause (2013) pointed out, the Reformation was not only a religious event but also had a significant impact on the perception of sexuality. In establishing priestly marriage, which was articulated both from considerations of the ritual purity of parish personnel unaffected by contact with women and the rejection of Catholic tradition, a valorisation of sexuality was implemented. Gause has even considered talking about "marriage as a reformation". Her proposition is that

> "the staging of marriage is a phenomenon of Reformation change that sought to make explicit something elemental to the Reformation: the worldliness and demonstrative sensuality of the new faith, moreover, a recognition of masculinity in terms of virility" (Gause 2013, p. 327)[1]

Even though I do agree with Gause, I would go even further: Not only is male sexuality being acknowledged but also sexuality in general. However, contrary to Gause, I have to agree with Karant-Nunn's assessment of the taming and domesticating of "the wild beast of sexuality" (Karant-Nunn 1997, p. 7). This means that a very specific form of sexuality was emphasised: a heterosexual and heteronormative sexuality within the framework of marriage. This emphasis reinforced the heterosexual matrix and tamed "the wild beast of sexuality" very effectively—and with a lasting effect on contemporary history.

In fact, by abolishing the ascetic ideal that valued sexual abstinence as the highest form of Christian life, monogamous marriage was installed as a counter-model. By permitting priestly marriage, priests were—among other theological aspects—no longer imagined as a class distinct from the laity. A change also occurred for women: "In contrast to traditional notions about the moral superiority of celibate life, humanists as well as Protestant and Catholic reformers more generally revaluated marriage and, in the process, attributed a more a more important role to women. Women were praised as their husbands' true

companions and as an important source of emotional support." (Stolberg 2003, p. 295). The emphasis on the normativity of marriage, however, derives not only from exegetical insights that understand marriage as a creation order from Genesis. It also comes from the rejection of the Anabaptist movements, in which ideas of polygamy and libertinistic sexuality existed (see Gause 2020, p. 9). Considering this emphasis on monogamy, the confessional advice of Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560) and Martin Luther (1483–1546), allowing the bigamy of Philip of Hesse (1504–1567)—Landgrave of Hesse from 1518 to 1567 and one of the two leading protagonists of the Schmalkaldic League, who thus played an essential role in the realisation of reformatory endeavours, has a certain irony. After all, as key figures of the Wittenberg Reformation, both Melanchthon and Luther were at the theological centre of the constitution of a new religious denomination (for Melanchthon, see Greschat 2010, pp. 129–30; Greschat 2017, p. 50; Bauer 2020b, pp. 58–59).

Although bigamy was punishable by death, Luther and Melanchthon had decided that it would be morally more acceptable if Philip married his mistress in order to avoid continuing living in concubinage. Melanchthon, however, seriously reproached himself on account of this decision since it was not in line with his general theological and social convictions. It can therefore be argued that this decision was also made in favour of Margarete von der Saale (1522–1566), the second wife of Philip of Hesse, and thus not out of mere power calculation but in favour of a woman. The same reasoning for matrimony not only as a legitimate framework for sexuality but also in opposition to misogynistic tendencies can be found in Melanchthon's defence of priestly marriage, too. In connection with the repeatedly cited ritual impurity through contact with women, an argument against priestly marriage he stated was as follows:

> "According to the Holy Scriptures, women are highly praised for their holiness and religion. For since the histories of the Church testify that God has abundantly communicated grace to them, that they have confessed the Gospel and Christ in manly fashion, as the histories of the holy martyrs and witnesses of Christ indicate. [...] To despise women, or to abuse God's creature for any vice or fornication, is a foolish raging and superbia by the devil. For no one can deny that half of the human race are females. Ask any man whether his mother was a stone or a human being?" (Bauer and Gause 2020, pp. 73–74)[2]

This does not mean that the Reformers implied any emancipatory or even feminist agenda. Nevertheless, it is clear that the priesthood of all believers, supported by the evaluation of humans as simul iustus et peccator, were able to bring about an appreciation of femininity on an anthropological–theological level—all humans thus became essentially equal in front of God. This egalitarian moment can also be observed in the *Oeconomia* literature. It was reintroduced into early modern discourse in 1529 by Justus Menius (1499–1558) (on Menius and the *Oeconomia*, see Gause and Scholz 2012). When I speak of egalitarianism here, however, it does not refer to our modern concept. It rather means that man and woman, according to their complementarity based on creation, stood before God as husband and wife in unison and as a reciprocally entrusted community of work and life.

Accordingly, Menius assigned the husband and wife their respective tasks. At first, this does not sound very innovative or women-friendly, because the wife had to take care of domestic affairs and the children, especially childbearing qua the order of creation—even the supervision of potential wet nurses could be subsumed here. In the temporal context, however, this can be understood as a big step. The woman's work, i.e., childbearing, did not make her unclean, but, like working by the sweat of one's brow for the man (Genesis 3:19), it was one of the tasks foreseen by God, which the Fall entailed. In their toil and suffering, husband and wife fulfilled the order of creation foreseen by God. This also acknowledged and enhanced the value of women's care work—and possibly even more, as Menius wrote:

> "She should not doubt that God will grant her fortune and salvation and help her in all her hardships in a mighty way. As arduous and dangerous as it is for a woman to conceive, bear children, nurture and bring them up, it is all the more comforting for her to know that, firstly, such affliction is God's will and work,

> it comes from no one else but Him and cannot be or become more difficult than God wants it to be". (Bauer and Gause 2020, p. 42)[3]

In the state of childbearing, "the woman" is thus close to and in the care of God. Her suffering is not a punishment, it indicates that she is fulfilling her God-given task. However, childbearing is not a work for salvation—Menius repeatedly stated that faith alone promises justification, especially with regard to those who cannot have children. It is this (Protestant) faith that guided the bond of marriage, matrimony, childbearing, and household management for the couple and that structured their lives.

3. Marry Me, Jesus—Bridal Mysticism and Gender

The union of two parties in the marital nexus is not just a structural element in religious and social contexts but can also be central to theological conceptions that influence piety. At a first glance, bridal mysticism evokes associations with a kind of "female" piety practiced in monasteries in the Middle Ages. One might think of Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), Mechthild of Magdeburg (c. 1207–c. 1282/1294), Teresa of Avila (1515–1582), or other female mystics (on the so-called female mysticism; see, for example, Schäufele 2017, pp. 126–50). However, in fact, the motifs of the bridegroom and bride were also used by "male" authors like Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), John of the Cross (1542–1591), Johann Arndt (1555–1621), and many more. It is not a secret that Martin Luther too uses the mystical heritage of the Middle Ages (see Leppin 2016) and the motifs of bridal mysticism—although on a more abstract level—when writing *The Freedom of a Christian*:

> "Faith . . . unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. By this mystery, as the Apostle teaches, Christ and the soul become one flesh [Eph 5:31–2]. And if they are one flesh and there is between them a true marriage . . . it follows that everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil". (Howells 2012, p. 125)

Bridal mysticism coincides directly with the gender constructions of the practitioners and that of Jesus Christ. The level of abstraction of the imaginations plays an important role here. As I have already explained elsewhere, if women imagine Jesus as the bridegroom, the heterosexual matrix (see Butler 1999) is not disturbed, whatever degree of abstraction is in use. In fact, one could argue that the heterosexual matrix is even reinforced when celibate women implement and affirm a heterosexual norm within piety (see Bauer 2020a, p. 142). This becomes problematic when the heterosexual matrix is disturbed, as in the case of Benedetta Carlini analysed by Patricia Simons, which she describes as "erotic mysticism", in which "pious and sexual performances are intertwined" (Simons 2019, p. 102). Even if men imagine Jesus as a bridegroom with a high level of abstraction, there is no alteration to or disturbance of Jesus' gender by measurement of heteronormativity. For when Jesus stays within the frame of "normal" heterosexuality, by applying those metaphors to the femininity of the church (ecclesia) or the individual soul (anima) as his bride, the heterosexual matrix is not disturbed. However, this is different as soon as men are imagining Jesus as their bridegroom without a high level of abstraction, such as in the specific period of "sifting" in the community of the Moravians. In this period, the favoured expression of piety of the Moravians was a combination of bridal mysticism and mysticism of the Passion of Christ, which manifested in Moravian hymnbooks and daily life (see Vogt 2009; Bauer 2018, 2020a, 2020c). As Jon Petter Heesch argues, the metaphors and motifs being used became "unchained, and [were] not only given new meaning, but also altered liturgical praxis" (Heesch 2023, p. 122). The "Kleines Brüdergesangbuch" offers a large variety of motifs concerning bridal mysticism, such as the following:

> "Have You already loved me, as I was highly grieved? Didn't You send your courting, bridegroom! to me?" (Beyreuther et al. 1978, Hirten-Lieder, p. 84)[4]

> "Which one amongst all. . . that long for their beloved, which one equals my man? . . . Which one will immolate his life willingly for the life of his bride? Where will such a couple be married"? (Beyreuther et al. 1978, Hirten-Lieder, p. 108)[5]

Jesus was depicted as the bridegroom of each and every member of the community—regardless of their gender—whilst focusing on the mystical union with him. The focus of the imagination lays on his wounds, especially his side wound and its penetration, which alludes to ideas of sexual intercourse:

> "You lacerated wounds! how sweet are thou to me, in thou I have found a little spot [plätzgen, diminutive of place] for me: how gladly am I only dust, if nevertheless I am the spoils of the lamb! . . . My heart seethes out of love to you, my dearest lamb, and all my urges are to live [for] the bridegroom, the one who conciliated me and was given to the cross out of love". (Beyreuther et al. 1978, Hirten-Lieder, p. 89)[6]

> "What does a creutz=luft=täubelein [cross-air-dove, B.B.] do if it wants to get out of its little hut? the limbs are a little sick: sooner or later the soul wants to see the bridegroom; thus she soon sees him stand there, she sees the side, hand, and foot, the little lamb plants a kiss on the faint heart. The kiss of peace pulls out the soul and takes it home in his mouth: the kiss is seen right in the hut. . . and if it's finished, the soul gets it to join it in the cave of the wound." (Beyreuther et al. 1978, Von der Ablegung unsrer Hütte, p. 8)[7]

Therefore, three options for the constitution of Jesus' gender are given, which directly correlate with the constructions of male Moravians' gender (see on that Bauer 2020a):

(1) Jesus can be read as a heterosexual male, and therefore the Moravian brothers would be—in the line of thoughts of heteronormativity—female. In fact, Christian Renatus (1727–1752), the son of the "founder" Zinzendorf, exclaimed that all brothers would be sisters from now on at one point in Herrnhaag, which was "the center of the Sichtungszeit, [that] was also the most vital community in the Brüdergemeine at mid-century" (Atwood 2005, p. 185). He did so because all souls are female (anima) (see Miller 2013, p. 57); therefore, the possession of a male body and being a male are only temporal (see Peucker 2002, p. 71; Bauer 2018, pp. 76–77). This idea was not limited to Herrnhaag, but can also be seen in Marienborn (see Miller 2013, p. 62) and in Zinzendorfs' theology at large (see Vogt 2015, pp. 118–22). Thus, this option is to think of Jesus' gender as resembling that for women imagining Jesus as their bridegroom, except that the believers were initially men—one might ask, if the "brothers" were spiritually "trans-gender" (see Bauer 2020a, p. 142).

(2a) Jesus is depicted as feminine on account of the imagined penetration of the side wound (see Faull 2011, pp. 72–74). Some scholars have even suggested that the side hole was imagined as a vagina (see Fogleman 2007, p. 3.82.257). According to Elke Pahud de Mortange, who draws on Christina Braun's analyses, this would not be particularly unusual, at least in iconographic terms (see Pahud de Mortanges 2018, p. 362). The imagination would go as far as a ritual (re)enactment of the penetration, as happened in 1748 at the feast of the single brothers, where a wounding of a Christ figurine was staged: "After Christian Renatus washed his hands in the stream of blood the Christ figure disappeared, only to leave behind a huge image of the side hole, large enough for a person to bend down and enter the choir house through it. And this is exactly what Christian Renatus, Rubusch, and all the others in attendance did; thus they physically penetrated the sidehole" (Peucker 2006, p. 48). Heesch reflects on other ritual practices in Herrnhaag, which he wants to see established on the basis of metaphors of bridal mysticism, death, and wounds that become "completely unchained":

> "Many of our activities are metaphorical in nature. The metaphorical concepts that characterize those activities structure our present reality. New metaphors have the power to create a new reality. In this context, bearing the ritual in Herrnhaag in mind, it is interesting to see what happens when a new metaphor enters the conceptual system which we base our actions on. It will then alter that conceptual system and the perceptions and actions that the system gives rise to". (Heesch 2023, p. 121)

Should it be the case that the side hole was actually imagined as a vagina, the (re)enactment of the penetration would be a sexual act categorising Jesus as being female in a heteronormative framing and also in the traditional gender connotation of the mystical bridal metaphor (see on the gendered connotation Kutzer 2023, p. 377). Following Fogleman, however, Peter Vogt rightly asks: Was Jesus really female for the Moravians? ("War Jesus für die Herrnhuter wirklich weiblich?" Vogt 2021, p. 286). Hence, combining this ritualised penetration and the idea of Jesus as a bridegroom—which means "masculine"—one might come to terms with thinking of Jesus as somewhat intersexual in this line of thought (see Bauer 2020a, p. 143).

(2b) Jesus' side wound has been interpreted as the male anus as well—bringing into agreement Jesus' supposed masculinity and the act of penetration, as well as the supposed homosexuality in the Moravian community (see on that Miller 2013). As Peucker puts it,

> "The adoration of the sidehole, the numerous songs about going into the sidehole, and even reenactments of penetrating the sidehole all seem to suggest that penetrative sex would fit the metaphor. [. . .] Penetrative homosexual intercourse as part of religious ritual makes the most sense if the anus were considered to be an image of the sidehole". (Peucker 2006, p. 61)

According to Atwood, the Moravians were aside from this speaking "openly about Jesus' penis" (Atwood 1997, p. 26) at the feast of the circumcision. Whereas Fogleman insists on a "metaphorical, spiritual homosexuality" (Fogleman 2003, p. 309), Faull proposes to describe the relationship between the male Moravians and Jesus as a "mode of performative bi-sexuality" (Faull 2011, p. 56). All in all, this would leave us with a cis-gender male Jesus, which would be the passive and receiving end of penetrative "homosexual" intercourse (see Bauer 2020a, p. 143)—although there was also the reverse "recurring image of Christ penetrating single brothers (usually synecdochically by his side wound)" (Miller 2013, p. 63).

(3) However, as I have argued elsewhere, I would like to conceptualise Jesus' gender in this context as a "strictly transcendental masculinity" and as a "leading masculinity" (Bauer 2020a, p. 143). This is also key to the construction of the brothers' masculinities. Being transcendent as well as symbolising the ideal and archetypical masculinity, I already have and still would suggest framing Jesus' masculinity as a "transcendental hypermasculinity" (Bauer 2020a, p. 143). That means he is the transcendental counterpart for the brothers' immanent masculinity—I would like to understand "hyper" here subject to the Greek preposition as somewhat "above" the immanent masculinities (see Bauer 2018, 2020a). This leaves us with two corresponding masculinities that are related by virtual marriage medialised by song, which are both key elements in that specific time of Herrnhut. This perspective challenges a conventional scientific notion of heteronormative conceptualisations of marriage, since "Moravian familiarities were unique relationships, unique constellations of self and community—identities without precedent, a singular vocabulary of desire, sui generis eroticisms, and fraternal conjugalities" (Miller 2013, p. 58).

However, it does not mean that same-sex relationships were an accepted norm among the Moravians. Rather, the so-called "Streiterehe" ("marriage militant") was regarded as an ideal of marriage to be emphasised at an immanent level, which placed the partnership of the spouses in the service of Christ (see Faull and Norfleet 2011). This makes the bridal mystical motifs all the more interesting. After all, despite the Moravians' subsequent condemnation of the behaviour during the sifting period and the heteronormative reactions from outside, a few questions remain: How could such motives become virulent in the first place? Were they possible because of the positive attitude towards (marital) sexuality that distinguished the Moravians from the surrounding theological opinions (see Peucker 2011)? Was the "concept of sex as a sacramental act [, which] was a liberating experience for many Moravians" (Peucker 2011, p. 35) at the same time a liberation towards queer spaces of thought? And why did a deviation from the typical hegemonic ideas of masculinity and binarities that are prevalent throughout society appear attractive?

4. The (un)holy Couple (of Protestantism)? Marriage and Matrimony as a Denominational Identifier

Let us return to Reformation times for a very brief moment: I have already mentioned the religious–political importance of priestly marriage. In fact, we can see that marrying became a practice of Reformers or at least their pupils from early on: In May 1521, the priest from Kemberg, Bartholomäus Bernhardi (1487–1551), a former student in Wittenberg, married accompanied by the "Apology" of Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt (1486–1541). Karlstadt himself married in 1522, and by the end of 1523, about a hundred priests, monks, and nuns had entered into matrimony, showing their approval of the socio-religious changes of the Reformation (see Plummer 2012, p. 52). The wedding of the key figure of the Reformation, Martin Luther, to his wife Katharina von Bora (1499–1552), on the other hand, did not take place until 1525—a conceivably bad time in the midst of the Peasants' Wars and, moreover, under the exclusion of a larger public. Even Melanchthon was initially irritated since, on the one hand, it took place unexpectedly and without his presence, and, on the other hand, he considered the timing at the height of the Peasants' Wars to be very inappropriate. However, Melanchthon did not attribute the inappropriate decision to Luther, but thought "that 'the nuns', i.e., the liberated women from the convent [to whom Katharina von Bora also belonged, B. B.], had seduced him 'into this untimely change in his state of life'" (Greschat 2017, p. 49)[8]. However, Melanchthon did not believe in rumours of premarital sexual intercourse between Luther and Katharina von Bora, although they were already circulating at the time. In the 16th century, the polemics against the Reformation couple use a negative matrix to show what the ideal woman and the supposedly correct gender order should be. In polemical writings, which my brilliant colleague Anna-Katharina Höpflinger has analysed, Katharina von Bora is mentioned above all in relation to her leaving the monastery and her marriage to Martin Luther (see Höpflinger 2021). The marriage of the two was a scandal in Roman Catholic circles—it was even rumoured that the Antichrist would be born from this union. Meanwhile, in Lutheran circles, Katharina von Bora and Martin Luther were stylised as the Protestant couple par excellence right from the 16th century.

It can be observed, for example, that the double portraits of Katharina von Bora and Martin Luther made by Cranach (see Figure 1) serve to address the rumours: Katharina von Bora is portrayed here as a well-off bourgeois, and the portraits show that her marriage to the reformer has not led to a socially precarious situation, but the couple live a good Christian and respectable life—Katharina is "under the bonnet" ("unter der Haube") as her hairnet indicates, showing her honourable status as a wife.

The couple and their marriage and matrimony thus became a point of identification for the Lutheran denomination as early as the 16th century. This identification continued through the centuries: The wedding and also the marriage of the two were repeatedly the subjects of writings and images—both from the Lutheran and the Roman Catholic sides. In the period of the Thirty Years' War, for example, the pamphlet "Nun muss es ja gewandert seyn" ("Now it must have wandered") (see Figure 2) was published (see Grochowina 2021). The "Battle of White Mountain" (1620) had just been lost, the Bohemian Winter King Frederick V of the Palatinate (1596–1632) had to give up his kingship, Protestant nobilities were executed, Protestants in general were expelled from Bohemia—and yet the Thirty Years' War was to continue. The fact that the pamphlet focuses on Martin Luther and Katharina von Bora is remarkable: the couple seem to stand as a cipher for Lutheranism in the 17th century as well. The etching illustrates the theme of emigration: Martin Luther, so corpulent that his belly—symbolising greed and avarice—has to rest on a wheelbarrow, walks ahead with a large cup in his hand and a pannier with heads presumably intended to show the Bohemian nobles. We can see books and the heads of Zwingli, Calvin, and Melanchthon on the wheelbarrow—Protestantism in general is fleeing Bohemia. Katharina von Bora on the other hand appears very gaunt, carrying a child in her arms, a wooden barrel and the Bible on her back, and leading a dog on a leash. In this picture, it is Katharina

von Bora who is carrying the Word of God after Martin Luther, his focus apparently laying more on his belly.



Figure 1. Double portrait of Martin Luther and Katharina von Bora, Lucas Cranach the Elder, ca. 1529, oil on wood, 57 × 41 cm, Museum in the Melanchthonhaus Bretten.

In the accompanying text, the words make it clear—and I quote Nicole Grochowina's insightful analysis:

> "sola fide' is therefore a fine principle, but it would not result in the child having enough to eat. In addition, the idea that faith alone makes one blessed now has a special connotation, because apart from faith—as is put into the mouth of Katharina von Bora—they have nothing left. After all, they were on flight. All in all, it should be noted that the people no longer want to believe 'our words' either. So what kind of faith is this that cannot feed the people? In this respect, her statement ends almost logically with the request to have a sip of the wine, because her mouth is dry and her feet are weak". (Grochowina 2021, p. 102)[9]

The polemic makes it obvious: the marriage of the two is deprived of any foundation, except for faith alone. They have neither a permanent home nor enough food for themselves, let alone their child. The couple's physical relations figuratively demonstrate that the denomination initiated by Luther is a selfish one that aims more at its own bodily well-being than the Word of God.

Lastly, let us take a look at the 19th century. If we think of Katharina von Bora, the image of the pastor's wife has become imprinted in cultural memory. However, this is a 19th-century construction. For, if we want to be historically accurate, "the pastor's wife in Wittenberg [...] was Walburga Bugenhagen (1500–1669)" (Jancke 2021, p. 204), the wife of Johannes Bugenhagen (1485–1558). Nevertheless, Katharina von Bora has entered the

cultural imaginary of Protestantism as such a wife. In fact, the Luther household was a professorial household. However, under the ideals and premises of the 19th century that stylised Protestant marriage and the bourgeois nuclear family, Katharina von Bora became a pastor's wife—the contemporary ideals were projected back into the 16th century. In religious–political terms, then, the following can be observed: "Marriage became proof that the Protestant churches were better than the Catholic Church"(Jancke 2021, p. 211). Gabriela Jancke demonstrated the invention of the legend and the establishment of the tradition of Katharina von Bora as a pastor's wife using the painting "Luther's Wedding" ("Luthers Trauung") by Paul Thumann (1834–1908) (see Figure 3).



Figure 2. Nun muss es ja gewandert sein, 1625, broadsheet, etching, below four-column poem (type print, 35 lines), Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (digital copy: VD17 1:739706E).



Figure 3. Luthers Trauung, after an oil painting on wood by Paul Thumann, in Die Gartenlaube 13 (1872), pp. 205–7.

It is the only painting depicting Katharina von Bora at all in Thumann's five-part Luther cycle for the Wartburg, which undertakes a national Luther heroisation. Thus, Katharina von Bora has only a place via her wedding in 19th-century representations of the Reformation. Moreover, she is not recognisable as a person of the 16th century, but she is depicted in recent visual patterns. This rejection of the woman—remember the 17th century—thinking theologically or at least biblically and depicting her in the pure function of the wife corresponds to the contemporary context of the picture: the women's movement took action and was fought against, and "the woman" was relegated to the private sphere of the domestic. However, there is nothing to be seen of Katharina von Bora as a pastor's wife in the painting. With a change in media ("Medienwechsel") or the combination of media (see Emich 2008) in various receptions, this image is used to illustrate the "invented tradition" of the pastor's wife Katharina von Bora—it serves to assign women their heteronormatively determined place using religious legitimation.

Even in the 20th century, this tradition continued to have an effect in different ways: the Nazi regime colported the pastor's wife Bora as a German mother and gave its ideology a religious basis; Jochen Klepper's counter-draft in the form of a novel, which had only been passed down as a fragment, depicted Luther as an anti-Aryan seeker and was partly merged with biographical elements of his wife; and feminist movements emphasised the emancipated businesswoman Katharina von Bora, who had her husband's back and also thought along theological lines. It becomes clear that the person Katharina von Bora is essentially remembered on the basis of her marriage to Martin Luther. The lack of sources about and by her provided recipients with the opportunity to fill her life story with their own ideas or to rewrite it.

The cross-denominational references to the Luther couple through the centuries also support the conclusion that marriage and matrimony are important socio-religious themes that have been negotiated again and again. In this context, Katharina von Bora and Martin Luther serve as a projection medium not only for theological but also for social ideas,

concepts, and movements. The references of Protestant and Roman Catholic authors to the couple are remarkable and show that not only historical persons but also the unions of people in a binding framework become both theological and political issues. Katharina and Martin thus become the (un)holy couple of Protestantism. Their marriage and marital status are denominational identifiers for both Protestantism and Catholicism.

5. Conclusions—Medial Regulation and Medial Freedom

It is clear that weddings, marriage, and matrimony are important topics in church history. However, the discourse in my selected sources was more concerned with sexuality, marriage, and matrimony as such, whereas weddings rather served as a medium for communicating other content (e.g., a religious–political statement or a pious ideal). Nevertheless, these topics have church historical relevance on various levels: as a concept of piety and virtual union between believers and Jesus, as a statement of belief in an emerging denomination and a new concept of being and being together, or as part of a culture of remembrance that uses a historical tradition—invented or not—to legitimise its own point of view. In addition, the involvement of media in these negotiation processes has been demonstrated:

Media became a realm of freedom to develop, try out, or discard individual and collective ideas, to reinterpret and rewrite history and stories, as well as to interpret, comment on, and influence contemporary events. However, media have also continually been used for the sake of regulation: To regulate the new affirmation of sexuality, which would be transferred into the clearly defined framework of marriage, to define oneself and others through confessional polemics, or to fend off an emerging women's movement, which was put in its place from a patriarchal point of view.

Finally—and I will make use here of the openness of the media concept applied in this Special Issue—wedding, marriage, and matrimony themselves became a medium. They have since been used as a medium to structure lives, to communicate religious and social issues, and to reject, construct, consolidate, and pass on denominational identities.

It could, therefore, be discussed whether the concept of media should be defined as restricted as we understand it, where only text, images, etc., are considered to be media. Rather, my observations from sources demonstrate that concepts themselves also become media, that is, carriers of knowledge and meaning. This results in a reciprocal process of exchange and transformation between the physically present material and the ideational–theological media, which, from the perspective of my church-historical gender research, could be summarised under the term "mediatisation" used in this Special Issue.

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Notes

1 "die Inszenierung von Ehe ein Phänomen des reformatorischen Umbruchs ist, die etwas für die Reformation Elementares deutlich machen wollte: die Weltzuwendung und demonstrative Sinnlichkeit des neuen Glaubens, zudem eine Anerkennung von Männlichkeit im Sinne von Virilität".

2 "Und so man Heiligkeit und die Religion ansehen will, so haben die Weibsbilder ein sehr großes Lob in der Heiligen Schrift. Da nämlich die Kirchenhistorien bezeugen, dass ihnen Gott reichlich Gnade mitgeteilt hat, dass sie gar männlich das Evangelium und Christus bekannt haben, wie das die Historien der heiligen Märtyrer und Zeugen Christi anzeigen. [. . .] Denn Weiber zu verachten oder Gottes Geschöpf zu allem Laster und Unzucht zu missbrauchen ist ein unsinniges Wüten und Hochmut vom Teufel. Denn niemand kann leugnen, dass die Hälfte des menschlichen Geschlechts Weibsbilder sind. Frage ein jeglicher sich selbst, ob seine Mutter ein Stein oder Mensch gewesen sei?"

3 "Sie soll auch gar nicht daran zweifeln, dass Gott ihr dazu Glück und Heil bescheren und ihr in all ihren Nöten auf mächtige Weise helfen werde. So beschwerlich und gefährlich es auch ist, wenn ein Weib schwanger werden, Kinder gebären, nähren und aufziehen soll, umso tröstlicher ist es für sie auch, dass sie sich erstens gewiss ist, dass solche Kümmernis Gottes Wille und Werk ist, von niemand anderem herkommt als von ihm und nicht schwerer sein oder werden kann, als Gott es haben will."

[4] The quotations from the Kleines Brüdergesangbuch are translated from the German version of the text in Beyreuther et al. (1978) by me and are quoted according to the names of the hymnbook's syllabus. Due to the fact that a continuous pagination is missing in the edition, I use the page numbers of each chapter of the hymnbook's syllabus in addition to the regular citation. Because of the loss of literary quality in the translation, the original version of the lyrics is provided in the footnotes. "Hast Du mich doch schon geliebt, da ich Doch gleich hoch betrübt? hast Du deine werbung nicht, Bräutigam! auf mich gericht?" (Beyreuther et al. 1978, Hirten-Lieder, p. 84).

[5] "Welcher unter allen denen. . . die sich nach geliebten sehnen, welcher gleichet meinem Mann? . . . Welcher wird sein eigen leben für das leben seiner braut williglich zum opfer geben? wo wird solch ein paar getraut?" (Beyreuther et al. 1978, Hirten-Lieder, p. 108).

[6] "Ihr aufgerissnen Wunden! wie lieblich seyd ihr mir, ich hab in euch gefunden ein plätzgen für und für: wie gerne bin ich nur ein staub, wenn ich nichts desto wenger auch bin des Lammes raub! . . . Mein herze wallt vor liebe nach dir, mein liebstes Lamm, und alle meine triebe sind, um dem Bräutigam zu leben, Dem, der mich versöhnt und ward für mich aus liebe ans creutz hinan gedehnt" (Beyreuther et al. 1978, Hirten-Lieder, p. 89).

[7] "Wie machts ein creutz=luft=täubelein, wenns 'raus will aus dem hüttelein? die glieder sind ein wenig krank: der seele wirds kurz oder lang, den Bräutigam zu sehn; so sieht sie Ihn bald stehn, sie sieht die Seite, Hand und Fuss, das Lämmlein gibt ihr einen kuss, aufs matte herze. Der frieds=kuss zieht die seele 'raus, und in dem munde mit nach hause: der hütte sieht man den kuss an. . . wenns gar ist, hohlt die seele sie nach zur Wun-den=höhle!" (Beyreuther et al. 1978, Von der Ablegung unsrer Hütte, p. 8).

[8] "dass 'die Nonnen', also die befreiten Frauen aus dem Kloster [zu denen auch Katharina von Bora gehörte, B.B.], ihn verführt hätten, ‚in dese unzeitgemäße Veränderung seines Lebensstandes hineingeraten zu sein'".

[9] "'sola fide' sei demnach ein schöner Grundsatz, würde aber nicht dazu führen, dass das Kind genügend zu essen hätte. Zudem bekomme der Gedanke, dass der Glaube allein selig mache, nun noch eine besondere Konnotierung, denn abgesehen vom Glauben—so wird es Katharina von Bora in den Mund gelegt—hätten sie ja nun auch nichts mehr übrig. Immerhin seien sie auf der Flucht. Insgesamt sei festzuhalten, dass auch das Volk ‚unsern Worten' nicht mehr glauben wolle. Was also sei das für ein Glaube, der die Menschen nicht ernähren könne? Insofern endet ihre Einlassung fast schon konsequent mit der Bitte, auch einen Schluck von dem Wein zu bekommen, denn ihr Mund sei trocken und ihre Füße seien schwach."

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Visual Representations of Weddings in the Middle Ages: Reflections of Legal, Religious, and Cultural Aspects

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Abstract: Wedding rituals and ceremonies have been depicted in various forms of literature, art, and illuminated manuscripts in medieval times. These representations offer valuable insights into the cultural, religious, and social aspects of weddings during that period. This article considers the state of research on visual representations of the wedding ceremony in the Middle Ages and how these pictures reflect legal, religious, and cultural/social aspects of medieval life in Europe. Using examples from various religious, literary, and legal texts, several questions will be addressed: In which contexts were the pictures of wedding ceremonies created? What is depicted and what is not? Which legal, religious, and cultural aspects are reflected in the medieval visualizations of the wedding ritual and how do the visualizations correspond to the religious, legal, and cultural setting of the wedding ritual in the Middle Ages? Illuminated legal manuscripts, particularly the *Liber Extra*, the *Decretals of Pope Gregory IX*, reveal much about the rituals that signified the essence of the medieval wedding ceremony: the exchange of consent, the joining of the right hands (dextrarum iunctio), and the blessing of the union by a priest. Since the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, marriage was considered a sacrament by the Church, making the ritual a fulcrum of religious life. However, only the consummation of a marriage was able to bring the property-related effects of marriage into effect, and some pictures from a secular context refer to this part of the wedding ceremony. The primary function of these visual representations of marriage was the illustration of the text, in both canon law manuscripts and medieval literature. Therefore, they are, besides the textual transmission, valuable sources and crucial interpretive keys for understanding the legal and socio-cultural dimensions that shaped the institution of marriage in medieval Europe.

Keywords: medieval wedding ceremony; marriage by consent; legal history; manuscript illuminations; *Liber Extra*; dextrarum iunctio; iconography; consummation

1. Introduction

The Middle Ages were marked by significant developments in the realms of religion, law, and culture. Marriage, being one of the vital social institutions, was governed by these domains. Visual representations of wedding ceremonies from this era, found in manuscripts, frescoes, and altarpieces, provide us with a nuanced understanding of medieval life. These images are not just artistic endeavors but are imbued with the legal, religious, and cultural connotations of the time. This paper seeks to provide an overview on the current state of research on visual representation of wedding ceremonies in illuminated manuscripts and to understand how exactly visual representations of wedding ceremonies in the Middle Ages reflect these aspects. At the same time, it aims to contribute to the history of marriage customs and ceremonies of the later Middle Ages by exploiting this hitherto neglected source material. Although there have been several contributions to the topic in recent years, the interdisciplinary approach to this topic, incorporating both the history of art and cultural/legal history, is still a desideratum, and no systematic approach to fill this gap has been proposed so far.

The latest publication on the iconography of visual representations of weddings from the early to the late Middle Ages is the excellent overview by Harriet Sonne de Torrens (Sonne de Torrens 2021), a Canadian historian of art. Her chapter, concluding a volume on the cultural history of marriage in the medieval period, overviews the development of marital iconography in Christian art, along the classical periods of the history of art: the early medieval, the Romanesque–Gothic, and the later Middle Ages. The author examines key iconographic elements and their evolution over time, emphasizing the portrayal of different types of weddings and their associated iconography. However, this overview does not take into account the doctoral thesis and publications of Kathleen Nieuwehuisen on the topic of manuscript illuminations.

For the early medieval period (4th to 11th century), Sonne de Torrens describes the integration of Greco–Roman and Judaic legacy in early Christian art. One central element is the adoption of Roman marriage customs, such as mutual consent and the idea of indissoluble marriage. In iconography, this included handclasp gestures, marital embraces, and the dextrarum iunctio, the joining of the right hands (on dextrarum iunctio see Iacobini 1991; Kötting 1957; Reekmans 1958; Walter 1979; Yang 2016). During the Romanesque and Gothic periods (12th to 13th centuries), she observes a greater ecclesiastical influence on the subject of marriage. This went hand in hand with a greater emphasis on the sacramental nature of marriage, with iconography reflecting both spiritual and consummated unions. One can observe the development of various symbolic gestures in medieval iconography to represent different types of marital relationships. In the late medieval period (14th to 15th century), more definitive statements about the church's role in marriage and the marital ceremony are articulated. The portrayal of the legitimacy of marriages through iconographic elements such as the dextrarum iunctio is predominant in that period. At the same time, exchanging rings in wedding ceremonies or veiling can be observed in other regional contexts.

According to her findings, throughout the Middle Ages, the representation of wedding in art was influenced by theological, legal, and social contexts. The study reveals a shared iconographic language that evolved to represent wedding rituals across different periods. This language included gestures, stances, and attributes that carried specific meanings in the context of marriage, influenced by Roman, Judeo–Christian, and later ecclesiastical traditions. The use of specific gestures, such as the dextrarum iunctio and the left-handed clasp, evolved to represent different types of marriages—from spiritual and symbolic to consummated and legal unions. Over time, the presence of the church and religious figures in wedding scenes became more pronounced, reflecting the growing ecclesiastical authority over marital matters.

Equally useful in this context is the article by Jerome Baschet on matrimony in the *Enciclopedia dell'arte medieval*, giving a concise overview of the pictorial and iconographic programs related to wedding and marriage in medieval art (Baschet 1997). The best synthesis in the German language is the book on "Trauung und Jawort" by Clausdieter Schott, bringing together the history of law and the visual representation of wedding through the centuries (Schott 1992).

Probably the most exhaustive work on the iconography of wedding rituals on book illuminations so far is an unpublished doctoral thesis by Kathleen Nieuwenhuisen, presented in 2000 in Dutch at Amsterdam University (Nieuwenhuisen 2000). Her research concentrates on legal manuscripts and in particular on the various editions of the *Liber Extra*, the *Decretals of Pope Gregory IX* (Nieuwenhuisen 2001). Central findings of her thesis have been published in a collective volume on the *Liber Extra* in 2012 (Nieuwenhuisen 2012). One of these findings is that in the copies of *Liber Extra* produced in France, the illuminations related to marriage all show the joining of the right hands in the presence of a priest. In the Italian copies, the priest is often absent, and the dextrarum iunctio does not exist. Instead, the transfer of the ring is the central motif (Nieuwenhuisen 2012, p. 138). These findings on divergent pictorial traditions remind us that particular ceremonies in different regions took place, evolved eventually over time, and represented different perspectives on marriage,

although the context of exchanging consent at the wedding ceremony was always the same. Furthermore, it can be deduced that artists rather took inspiration for their illuminations from their immediate cultural background than from the illustrated text.

Another recent substantial contribution on medieval wedding representations in illuminated manuscripts is the article by Marta Pavón Ramírez, *Marriage Symbolism in Illuminated Manuscripts of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, published in a volume on marriage symbolism edited by Line Cecilie Engh (Pavón Ramírez 2019; see also Engh 2019). Pavón Ramírez explores the relationship between visual images and theological ideas, as well as the role of artists and patrons in the construction of new images of the theological concept of marriage in the 12th and 13th centuries. Her work is concentrating on illuminated manuscripts from legal and liturgical context and manuscripts of the *Song of Songs*, which depicts the mystical marriage between Christ and the Church in a very emotional way. She observes that the material becomes denser in the 13th century, when we topic of controlling marriage became central for the church. The study of matrimonial images in three manuscripts of the *Decretum Gratiani* by Guiseppa Zanichelli goes into the same direction, emphasizing the important changes in the social embedding of marriage in the 12th and 13th centuries and its representation in art (Zanichelli 2014).

Originally, the topic of the iconographic representation of marriage was investigated in a substantial article by Chiara Frugoni, delivered for the Spoleto congress on marriage in the Middle Ages in 1976. This work is very much devoted to the origins of spousal iconography in the Western Roman Empire (mostly transmitted through reliefs on sarcophagi) and the reception of this tradition in the early and high Middle Ages. Although the iconographic representation of marriage often used the exchange of consent as a central motif, with joining of right hands and coronation, the topic of spousal and matrimonial life is of course broader than this one iconic moment (Frugoni 1977). Older research, such as the article on marriage in the *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et Liturgie* (Leclercq 1931) or work on particular iconographic traditions such as *The Wedding of Peleus and Thetis* (Grootkerk 1975) or *Hall on the Arnolfini Bethrothal* (Hall 1994) are of minor importance in this context. However, there is a study on the dextrarum iunctio depicted on a proto-Byzantine gold medallion by Antonio Iacobini that is interesting for tracing back the origin and tradition of this central iconographic motif of the wedding ritual into early Christian times (Iacobini 1991).

As shown above, the research on visual representations of wedding and marriage in the Middle Ages has only started to gain substantial momentum in recent years, maybe also due to the better availability of the images online. Little to no research has been conducted on the Frankish and Ottonian periods, although the Roman tradition of late antiquity is well studied. The situation improves from the 12th century onwards, similar to the rising flow of material that has emerged.

2. Materials and Methods

There are several collections of manuscript illuminations online and in print relevant to our topic. The volume on "*Decretales pictae*", edited by Martin Bertram and Silvia di Paolo, provides an extensive catalog of miniatures from 34 manuscripts of the *Decretals of Pope Gregory IX*, the so-called *Liber Extra*. The most exhaustive of these printed collections is the three-volume compendium of illuminations in *Gratians Decretum* (Melnikas 1975). The third volume, including pages 863 to 1172, collects the illuminations from different manuscripts (12th–15th century) of the *Decretum Gratiani*, related to causae XXVII–XXXVI, which treat topics of sex and marriage. This thematic collection of pictorial variations connected to one base text is especially intriguing for investigation.

In recent years, the publication of digitized manuscripts has opened up new opportunities for research, particularly if the illuminations are described with appropriate metadata. The French database "plateforme ouverte du patrimoine" (POP) contains 205 illuminations that mention marriage in the description. Examples can be found from the legal and ecclesiastical domains, mostly decretals, books of hours, illuminated Bibles, but also some

literary texts. Within this database, there are 16 examples of the marriage at Cana (noces de Cana), mostly from the 14th and 15th centuries. However, some illuminations, primarily ornamented initials, date back to the end of the 12th century (Sermones de Tempore et de Sanctis, Avignon, Bibliothèque Municipale, 0593; Bible en Images, Amiens, Bibliothèque Municipale, 0108). These and the following numbers are all based on the content of the databases in April 2024.

Another French database is Mandragore (https://mandragore.bnf.fr/, accessed on 9 August 2024), the database of illuminated manuscripts at the French National Library. A simple search returns 362 results for marriage (marriage) and 49 for wedding (*noces*) for the Middle Ages. The majority of the manuscripts are, as usual, from the 14th and 15th centuries. Similar results are produced by "Initale", a digital catalogue of French illuminated manuscripts provided by the CNRS (https://initiale.irht.cnrs.fr/, accessed on 9 August 2024).

A rich source of medieval book illuminations is the Getty art collection catalog, providing several examples of the marriage/wedding at Cana, the Marriage of the Virgin, and the exchange of consent by couples, dating from the beginning of the 14th century to the beginning of the 16th century (https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/search?images=true&q=marriage&date_range=482:1500, accessed on 9 August 2024). The Digital Scriptorium Catalogue of medieval manuscripts in US libraries (https://search.digital-scriptorium.org/, accessed on 9 August 2024) lists 66 hits for marriage and 2 for wedding but has no feature to filter for illuminations. Marriage contracts are retrieved together with illuminated volumes. The Penn Open Library also provides access to a database of illuminated manuscripts (https://openn.library.upenn.edu/, accessed on 9 August 2024) and uses Google Custom Search for retrieval. The search terms <"historiated initial" marriage> or <"historiated initial" wedding> bring up 26 and 36 mostly relevant results, although not all records have pictures associated.

The services of the British Library were recently disrupted due to a cyber-attack in November 2023 and only limited access to the databases was possible. However, the service has been re-established, and access to images can be obtained at https://imagesonline.bl.uk/ (accessed on 9 August 2024). More results from manuscripts in British holdings can be accessed at Bodleian Digital Library at https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/ (accessed on 9 August 2024).

The *imreal* database of the Institut für Realienkunde of the University of Salzburg (Austria) has 23 hits for "Hochzeit", mostly related to the marriage at Cana and the marriage of the lamb (of Jesus and the Church). Additionally, relevant illuminations of Wolfram von Eschenbachs "Willehalm" are present with three examples. For "Ehe" (marriage), there are just two relevant hits, one depicting the sacramental character of marriage in the *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* of Guilelmus Durantis. The e-codices project (http://www.e-codices.ch, accessed on 9 August 2024) allows filtering for illuminated manuscripts, but no iconographic details can be specified. The same holds true for the "Handschriftencensus" (https://www.handschriftencensus.de/, accessed on 9 August 2024). The catalogue of German illuminated manuscripts (KdiH) returns valuable results and detailed descriptions but has no links to the actual images (https://kdih.badw.de/datenbank/start, accessed on 9 August 2024). The HeidICON database of Bibliotheca Palatina at Heidelberg (Germany) provides 35 hits for medieval book illustrations related to marriage, mostly to the prose romance of Pontus and Sidonia from the Henfflin–Werkstatt, originally from France but translated later into middle-high German in the middle of the 15th century.

Although this is only a small portion of the possible source-material for book illuminations related to the wedding and the broader context of marriage, we can already deduce from this brief survey that the majority of representations of the wedding ceremony in this type of source are related to biblical themes: the marriage at Cana and the marriage of Christ to the church. However, depictions of the wedding at Cana always show the wedding party sitting at a table, experiencing the miracle of the transformation of water into wine. This is a different iconography from those illuminations showing the exchange

of consent, the other important emblematic visualization of wedding and marriage in the Middle Ages.

The material in the printed collections and the databases concentrates on the high and later Middle Ages. We hardly find any pictures of exchanging consent and joining hands at weddings in manuscripts before the turn of the millennium. However, these low absolute numbers might also simply be the result of the relative scarcity of this type of sources for the early Middle Ages.

3. The Legal Background of the Wedding Ritual

The legitimate, inheritable marriage according to early medieval secular law was a complex, step-like process (*mariage par étapes*), involving various legal actions (formal acts), namely, the clan contract or betrothal, the formal handover of the bride, the ceremonial homecoming or bridal journey (Pastrnak 2023; Seidel 1994; Spiess 1997), the bedding, and finally the morning gift. In addition to these marriage acts, other customs with a customary legal character were added: the groom's procession to the bride's house, the wedding beer, and the drinking on the occasion of the bridal run (for the following paragraphs see Wettlaufer 1998, 1999, ch. 3, with references).

The ceremonial and ritualized transfer of the bride in exchange for the bridal treasure is often seen as the origin of the later developing marriage ceremony. The further elements of a "Muntehe" were betrothal, the solemn homecoming or bridal journey, the bedding, and finally, the morning gift. Especially the homecoming or the bridal journey appears in the early medieval sources as the designation for the marriage itself. These moments of the marriage had an important symbolic value in the sequence of the legal actions. The homecoming and bedding had to be attestable, as for a long time only the family and relatives or the village could take on the guarantee for the property law consequences of the marriage. In old Swedish law, the woman was entitled to a third of her husband's estate as an inheritance if he died after the bedding. Some researchers therefore argue that the "public initiation of domestic and sexual cohabitation through the homecoming of the bride and bedding" (Schulze 1986, p. 495) were the actual and, in the people's view, constitutive legal actions for marriage. This was accompanied by the payment of a morning gift, which, together with the consummation of the marriage, became the formal sign of marriage in the early Middle Ages.

Significant financial transactions were tied to a legitimate marriage, which was aligned with the church's conception of marriage. The bride price, originally widespread among Indo-European populations, a payment from the groom to the bride's clan, soon transformed into a payment to the bride herself (dotal marriage). From the bride's family, another gift, the so-called dowry, was given to the bride in marriage. From this perspective, marriage was more about gift exchange and property transfer than anything else. Of course, the reason for these transactions was clearly the establishment of a new household of bride and bridegroom, enabling the couple to procreate offspring and raise children in a legal and customary way.

In the traditional perspective of legal history, the predominant form of marriage in Merovingian and Frankish times was the "Muntehe" (Mikat 1978). According to classical understanding, the defining moment of this form of marriage was the transfer of munt (in the sense of dominion) over the bride from the father to the groom at the marriage. For this, a bridal treasure or munt-money (mundium, wittimon, pretium puellae, mundr, meta) had to be paid by the man's side or the groom, with later sources suggesting an interpretation of a purchase price for the munt. Recent research has put a question mark behind this claim of a model character of the transfer of mundium (cf. Dunn 2006; Karras 2006, 2012; Livingston 2012; Southon 2017). In the high Middle Ages, some crucial changes occurred. The importance of the dowry as the central gift from the bride's family increased and often took on the meaning of an advance payment of an inheritance share. In any case, the dowry could take on considerable dimensions in the late Middle Ages, especially in higher social circles. The groom or his family made a corresponding counter-gift. However,

these transactions only became legally valid when the marriage was consummated through the bedding.

Research has long been concerned with the influence of the church on marriage law by Christian religion and the church. Only a few studies have taken up the question of the actual enforcement of church norms in marriage practice. One of the first was the Paderborn church historian Joseph Freisen, who concluded in his study of the Nordic Catholic ritual books that marriage law in the Scandinavian countries "remained a secular matter in Catholic times"(Freisen 1909, p. 138). The church's additions to marriage were initially only additive. This also applied to the joining of the spouses in front of the church and the subsequent bridal blessing in the church. The church wedding was originally an ecclesiastical approval of the will to marry corresponding to Christian doctrine. The benedictio in thalamo was, accordingly, the blessing of the bridal couple after the completion of the legal actions of the marriage. Interestingly, the situation was similar in medieval Italy, where marriage remained pretty much a private legal act during the Middle Ages. (Klapisch-Zuber 1995, 2020; cf. Nieuwenhuisen 2012).

The church eventually also tried to influence the property law component of marriage. By prejudicially determining the legitimacy of a marriage, it thought it had already decided on marital property law. An example of such an attempt at church interference is the dispute between King Henry II and Pope Alexander III, recorded in the *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, in which Alexander issued an instruction in an inheritance dispute that was changed upon Henry II's protest so that the bishops were only tasked with determining a legitimate marriage and left the actual inheritance decision in secular hands. However, unlike in the question of marital consent and impediments to marriage, the church did not succeed in gaining judicial supremacy here. The property law consequences of marriage remained tied to the consummation act of the bedding. From a secular perspective, it could be advantageous to maintain an independent legal action for the property law concerns of marriage.

Undoubtedly, however, the church gained ever-greater authority over marriage, especially in the areas of marriage impediments and legal actions. In the 12th century, a dispute arose among jurists about whether the copula carnalis or the nudus consensus must be given constitutive significance for marriage. The church eventually sided with the concept of consent, which was included in the collection of *Decretals of Gregory IX* in 1234 through the adoption of a decision by Alexander III from 1170 into the Corpus Iuris Canonici. This had long-term consequences for the question of parental co-determination in the marriage of their children and, of course, for the legal actions of the wedding ritual. The importance of the ritual bedding for marriage was thus pushed back and subordinated to the consent of the spouses (Reynolds 2016).

The requirement of individual consent of the bridal couple probably spread hand in hand with the new church doctrine through social and economic changes in the high Middle Ages. An increasing number of people were released from their clan associations and the clan-public marriage was not possible for them, especially if it was not about the transfer of goods, or had lost its function. However, the requirement of consent was by no means an invention of the church, but it is anchored in Roman traditions. Furthermore, it seems that the idea of consent between the bride and bridegroom regarding the union was not absent even in tribal law (McCarthy 2004, pp. 19–50). The long-term process of establishing a Christian marriage model in the Western hemisphere had profound underlying social and economic changes, which led, under the increasing influence of the church, to a different conception of marriage itself. From about the 13th century onwards, a "Christian marriage model" was established. Since the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), marriage had become a sacrament, and the Church played a central role in regulating and sanctifying unions. Marriage was seen as a way to fulfill God's command to procreate and establish a stable family structure. This ecumenical council, convened by Pope Innocent III, is often considered a pivotal moment in formally recognizing marriage as a sacrament. It established stricter rules for valid marriages and required the presence of a priest as a

witness for a marriage to be valid. An important component of this marriage model was the church's demand for publicity through a mandatory announcement of the banns before the marriage. This publicity of the marriage and its individual acts appeared in the late Middle Ages as the only means to control clandestine marriages, which the church had first made possible through its marriage doctrine with the absolute emphasis on the concept of consent.

Finally, in the late Middle Ages, the church exerted a strong moralizing and disciplining influence on the form of marriage. The wedding day was to be celebrated with a certain dignity and solemnity. The bridal couple was preached to about their special responsibility before God. The city councils in the late Middle Ages also took care of a proper and especially status-appropriate wedding.

4. Religious and Cultural Background of the Medieval Wedding Ritual

One of the earliest descriptions of the wedding ritual in the medieval West, and in particular of the customs in Rome in the ninth century, is the response of Pope Nicolaus I. to the questions of Tsar Boris-Michael of Bulgaria (866), the *Responsa ad Consulta Bulgarorum* (Heiser 1979; Laiou 1985; Sheehan 1991). In response 3 (see Appendix A below), we find a detailed description of the ceremonies and practice in the area of Rome at the time, at least how the pope whished them to be. We learn from the letter that the Romans exchanged rings rather than being crowned at the vows. The ceremony took place in the church and at the moment of the benediction by the priest, the couple was veiled as a sign of community with the church. After leaving the church, they carried crowns on their way home, but those crowns were stored in the church, and therefore they were only borrowed by the couple for that special day. The ritual of crowning the bride and bridegroom was a continued feature in the Byzantine marriage ceremony (Vikan 1990). The liturgical formulae used in the Roman church became predominant in all of Western Europe later on (Ritzer 1981, p. 329).

This text already mentions most of the relevant and constituent ceremonies for a legal Christian marriage and puts emphasis on the will of the bridal couple, therefore promoting consensus between the bride and groom as the most decisive part of the ceremony. The Judeo–Christian model for dextrarum iunctio was the marriage of Tobias and Sarah (Tob. 7:15, Vulgate Bible): "*et adprehendens dexteram filiae suae dexterae Tobiae tradidit dicens Deus Abraham et Deus Isaac et Deus Iacob sit vobiscum et ipse coniungat vos impleatque benedictionem suam in vobis*". "And taking his daughter's right hand, he gave it into the right hand of Tobias, saying: 'May the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob be with you, and may He Himself join you together and fulfill His blessing in you.'" (Sonne de Torrens 2021, p. 149). This focus on the exchange of consent by vows is represented repeatedly in the depictions of the marriage ceremony in manuscript illuminations from the legal and religious context.

Detailed descriptions of the Christian wedding ceremony in the medieval West, varying from region to region in detail but always considering the exchange of consent as the decisive act for the church, can be found in the works of Korbinius Ritzer, Otto Opet, and Jean B. Molin and Protais Mutembe (Molin and Mutembe 1974; Opet 1910; Ritzer 1981). The benedictio in thalamo was common in early medieval France and Spain (Ritzer 1981, pp. 329–30), putting the emphasis on the legal and property-related consequences of a consummated marriage. From the 11th century onwards, the so-called Norman wedding ritual in front of the church had spread over many parts of Europe in the high Middle Ages and replaced the benediction of the couple in the wedding bed (Grass 1983). After the exchange of the consent in front of the church door, a mess was celebrated inside, and the benediction of the couple in front of family and other witnesses took place. This development might be one of the reasons why the majority of depictions of the benediction at the wedding are showing the dextrarum iunctio and not the benediction in thalamo, as the earliest pictures of Christian benediction stem from exactly that period of the high Middle Ages. No earlier visual representations of the benedictions have survived; only

textual witnesses describe these original forms (Ritzer 1981, pp. 52–7, 206–13). Instead, the marriage of Cana is the predominant motif of Christian marriage in the early Middle Ages, signifying the acceptance and appreciation of Christ for the concept of marriage. Not surprisingly, the only depictions of the benedictio in thalamo we have today are from the late 15th century and represent heroic couples of the early Middle Ages in the literature (see also Figure 6 below).

The literature from the medieval period not only echoes similar rituals but also adds new details. While religious art focused on the Virgin Mary and the sanctity of her marriage to Joseph, secular literature often depicted marriages intertwined with themes of heroism, loyalty, and familial alliances. The contractual elements in marriages were visually represented in manuscripts through negotiation scenes and gift exchange, reflecting the social and economic dimensions of these unions. Symbolism and allegory were omnipresent (Reynolds 2019). Allegorical representations often extended the concept of marriage to symbolize divine union, epitomizing the amalgamation of human love with divine love. Social and cultural contexts were visibly encoded in these depictions. Regional variations presented in the artwork hint at localized customs and attire, indicative of a diverse cultural tapestry. The legal facets of marriage were tightly interwoven with the religious aspects. The rising influence of the church on marriage concerned also property rights, inheritance, and spousal responsibilities, adding another layer of complexity to the institution. The presence of a priest at these ceremonies not only sanctified the union but also legally authenticated and consecrated it. Nevertheless, only the consummation of a marriage was able to bring the property-related effects of marriage into effect in the later Middle Ages. This is also visible through pictures of the public bedding ceremony and the benediction of the couple in the wedding bed.

In the following chapter, I will supplement the legal procedure of marriage with examples of the pictorial sources from the manuscript material, indicating the possible reasons why several parts of this ceremony can be found more often in illuminations compared to others. This method of blending legal, religious, and cultural aspects of weddings with visual sources addresses several central questions on the visual material under consideration: In which contexts were pictures of wedding ceremonies created in illuminated manuscripts and early prints? What is depicted and what is not? How do the visualizations of the wedding ritual in the later Middle Ages correspond with the religious, legal, and cultural settings of that period? Do they change and develop accordingly?

5. The Mediatization of Medieval Weddings through Visual Representations

Starting from the legal, religious, and cultural background of the marriage ceremony, I would like to provide some examples of the ritual development outlined above, addressing the various aspects and stages of marriage and relating them to the associated visual representations. This can only be done by example and will not be exhaustive, due to the temporal and geographical dimensions of the topic. The first example stresses the importance of marriage for the transmission of wealth and the continuity of the family and the clan of the bride and bridegroom. Therefore, it represents the early medieval type of legal marriage, emphasizing the transmission of goods.

In a twelfth-century cartulary, the *Liber Feudorum Maior* (Figure 1), a scene of the Marriage of Ermangardis and Gausfred is rendered next to a marital agreement that outlines the contractual terms of the bride's dowry. Sonne de Torrens describes the context and iconography as follows: "Beside the Ermengardis of Carcassonne and her spouse, Gausfred III de Rosellón, signed a marriage contract, dated to 11 May 1110, in which her father transferred her dowry to her bridegroom. The cartulary includes a representation of the bridal couple, Ermengardis and Gausfred, and the family members. Between the bridal couple stands the father of the bride, Bernat Ató de Bézier, in the traditional patriarchal role, authorizing the marriage. Prior to the full involvement of the church in marital unions the patriarchs of the two families were the ones who usually arranged the conditions and terms of the marriage contract. The father, not a priest, is shown officiating this marital

agreement; but, his arms are crossed as he takes the couple's right hands in a *dextrarum iunctio*. The mother of the bride, Cecilia, is seated to the left in the composition. Her right arm is raised and points toward the couple. Her right arm is supported by her left hand on her right elbow, again, an unusual gesture. The crossing of the arms was used by artisans in different compositions to reflect discord, negativity, changeability, and contradictions as well as malice and deception. For example, the arms of Adam and Eve are crossed in the Fall of Man rendered on the bronze doors of Hildesheim, c. 1015. The terms of the dowry in the marriage contract shed some light as to why the father crosses his arms. The contract stipulates the terms under which the groom can keep the dowry. Should his new bride die, in order to retain the property, he must marry one of her sisters. Other terms concerning children and property are carefully laid out in the contract as well as what happens when Bernat Ató de Bézier dies. The gesture of the father reflects the changing conditions of the dowry being given to the new groom: 'And if the above Ermengardis daughter is dead, we give you the said Geoffrey, son of Guirardo, all of the above-mentioned by the said conveniencias with another one of our daughters whom you shall have as wife.'" (Sonne de Torrens 2021, pp. 159–61).



Figure 1. Marriage of Ermangardis and Gausfred, Liber Feudorum Maior, fol. 78 v., early twelfth century, Archivo de la Corona de Aragon, Barcelona, Spain. Scene depicting a marriage commitment. Viscount Bernard Anton of Beziers, sitting, is about to give the hand of his daughter, Ermengarda, to the future Gaufred III of Roussillon, both of them standing, in the presence of his wife Cecilia, who is sitting. https://de.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Mariage_of_Ermengard_of_Carcassonne_and_Gausfred_III_of_Roussillon.JPG (accessed on 9 August 2024).

Our second example (Figure 2) is from Justinian's *Digest* and shows the practice of gift exchange for legal marriage. Here, a nuptial belt is depicted in an early-fourteenth-century miniature illustrating the title, *De Donationibus Inter Virum et Uxorem*, in Justinian's *Digest* (24. 1). Pledge and the counterpledge to marry (*sponsalia*) are sealed by the fiancé, who gives his fiancée a belt with a purse and in exchange receives a ring.



Figure 2. Dig. 24,1: "De donationibus inter virum et uxorem", Tübingen, Universitätsbibliothek, Mc 293, f. 345r. With kind permission. Cf. Kirshner (2015): 61, Figure 2.1 with wrong signature.

The dextrarum iunctio features most of the medieval visual representation of the wedding ceremony and is the most common type of wedding iconography in medieval manuscript illumination. The wedding ritual, and in particular the joining of the hands, took place according to the widespread Norman ritual, in front of the church or specifically at a church door. Some examples from literary manuscripts also show bride and bridegroom inside the church, kneeling or standing in front of the priest and receiving the blessing. In the following example (Figure 3) of a historiated letter from an exemplar of a Spanish law code called *Vidal Mayor* in the Getty collection from the end of the 13th century, we see a fine example of the joining of the right hands (dextrarum iunctio) by a priest in front of a church door.



Figure 3. *Vidal Mayor*, Initial L: A Marriage Ceremony, Getty Collection, Ms. Ludwig XIV 6 (83.MQ.165), fol. 197v. https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/105WDH (accessed on 9 August 2024).

Common iconographical elements associated with marriage are the dextrarum iunctio, the clasped hands, rings, crowns, veils, and the handfasting ritual (for an example of handfasting, see the *Marriage of Raymon and Melusine*, manuscript from the 15th century. Bibliothèque Nationale de France MS Français 12,575 fol. 26v.) After the exchange of consensus, couples received a blessing by the priest, often after a mess inside the church. The parents and public witnesses played a crucial role in legal marriage, especially in the later Middle Ages. In a volume on the life and works of Saint Hedwig, we see a picture of Hedwig's marriage, at age twelve, to Duke Henry of Silesia (Figure 4). With the blessing of the priest at the center, Hedwig joins hands with Henry. As was common in thirteenth-century Europe, Hedwig's father, standing behind her, played a major role in arranging the politically advantageous union. The numerous witnesses attest to the marriage's strategic importance.

According to Baschet (1997), some elements of the matrimonial ritual are rarely found in imagery. This is the case with the different variants of velatio nuptialis (Molin and Mutembe 1974, pp. 228–29; Melnikas 1975, pp. 997–1000) and nuptial coronation, which in Byzantine marriage constitute the climax of the ritual (Vikan 1990). Other important elements of the rite, such as the deductio ad domum, where the woman is led to the home of her husband, seem to almost never be represented, while the final phase of the marriage could be recalled by depictions of feasts and banquets that characterized nuptial celebrations. The same is true for the copula carnalis. Only symbolic gestures related to that final but decisive element of the ritual have been reported in the context of marriage by procuration among the higher nobility. From a 14th century manuscript of the *Decretum Gratiani*, we have a depiction of the marriage ritual under the pallium (Figure 5, for other examples, see Melnikas 1975, pp. 1013–15).



Figure 4. The family of Berthold VI; the marriage of Saint Hedwig and Heinrich, 1353, https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/103S9J (accessed on 9 August 2024).



Figure 5. *Decretum Gratiani*, 14th century. Ms. Arras, Médiathèque de l'Abbaye Saint-Vaast, CGM 921 (263), fol. 231r. (https://initiale.irht.cnrs.fr/decor/106616) (accessed on 9 August 2024).

As Christianity spread throughout Europe, it absorbed and adapted local customs and traditions into wedding practices. Pagan elements were sometimes incorporated into Christian weddings, resulting in a blend of religious and cultural influences. The consummation of the marriage and the ritual of "Beilager" in regions of Germanic law are good examples for these conflicting traditions. The benedictio in thalamo can therefore be understood as the incorporation of the pagan tradition of "Beilager" into the Christian ritual (Molin and Mutembe 1974, pp. 255–70; cf. Wettlaufer 1998).



Figure 6. "Wie Raymond und Melusina zusammen wurden gelegt und sy der Bischoff gesegnet in dem pette et cetera" (How Raymond and Melusina were put to bed together and received the blessing from the bishop). Melusine, Thüring. von Ringoltingen, 1468, GNM Hs4028, 41/17r, https://dlib.gnm.de/item/Hs4028/41 (accessed on 9 August 2024).

6. Conclusions

Legal marriage becomes Christian marriage (sacrament) with exchange of consent and benediction by a priest in a long-term process, starting in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Christian authority, represented by the church, is symbolized by the act of joining together the hands of the couple, suggesting divine consent to the marriage project. Visible normative cultural elements present in medieval weddings are the consent of the couple as a foundation of marriage (marriage becomes a sacrament) and witnesses, the public sphere and a ceremony in front of or in the church (common, but not mandatory).

The visual representations of weddings in the Middle Ages often depicted a combination of important legal, religious, and cultural aspects that reflected the values, beliefs, and social norms of the time. The legal aspects are at the core of written or pictorial descriptions of weddings. The exchange of consent between the bride and groom was a central legal and religious aspect of medieval weddings. Artwork very often depicted this moment, highlighting the verbal agreement and commitment made by the couple when referring to the topic. Other elements. such as the exchange of rings or the veiling of the bride and bridegroom in France also had legal aspects. Illustrations sometimes included witnesses, such as family members or community members, who were present to validate the marriage and provide legal testimony about the consent. Not visible on these pictures are (in general) emotions (kissing, affection) or any sexual activity.

On the other hand, secular texts, and in particular the literature, often depicted marriages intertwined with themes of emotions, heroism, loyalty, and familial alliances. The contractual elements in marriages were visually represented in manuscripts through negotiation scenes and gift exchange, reflecting the social and economic dimensions of these unions. Symbolism and allegory were omnipresent. Allegorical representations often extended the concept of marriage to symbolize divine union, epitomizing the amalgamation of human love with divine love. Social and cultural contexts were visibly encoded in these depictions. Regional variations presented in the artwork hint at localized customs and attire, indicative of a diverse European and regional cultural tapestry.

The rising influence of the church on marriage concerned also property rights, inheritance, and spousal responsibilities, adding another layer of complexity to the institution. The presence of a priest at these ceremonies not only sanctified the union but also legally authenticated and consecrated it. Nevertheless, only consummation of a marriage was able to bring the property-related effects of marriage into effect in the later Middle Ages. This is visible through pictures of the public bedding ceremony and the benediction of the couple in the wedding bed, a custom well documented from the 6th century onwards in liturgical texts.

Visual representations of the wedding ritual mirrored the norms and values of their time while also serving as mechanisms for social instruction and continuity. The primary function of visual representations of marriage in illuminated manuscripts was the visualization and illustration of the canon law and medieval literature. Therefore, the images have a strong connection to the surrounding text. Nevertheless, these visualizations introduce an individual and sometimes regional layer of information through the depiction of local customs in an exemplary context. Therefore, besides the textual transmission, they are crucial interpretive keys for understanding the legal and socio-cultural dimensions that shaped the institution of marriage in medieval Europe. Through the detailed study of manuscript illuminations, we can uncover layers of meaning and interconnectedness that may otherwise be lost in written documents alone. They remind us that the institution of marriage has always been a complex interplay of various societal factors, many of which continue to influence us today.

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Appendix A

MGH, Epistolarum tomus VI, pars I, Epistolae Karolini Aevi tomus IV (Berlin, 1902), Epistolae Nicolai I papae, ed. E.PERELS, no. 99, pp. 568ff.; see also Cf Laiou 1985, pp. 200–1. Medieval Sourcebook: The Responses of Pope Nicholas I to the Questions of the Bulgars A.D. 866 (Letter 99), W. L. North, trans., https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/866nicholas-bulgar.asp, accessed on 9 August 2024.

"We shall strive, while avoiding a wordy style, to show you that the custom, which you say the Greeks maintain in their marital unions, recalls in small ways the custom which the Roman Church received in antiquity and still maintains in unions of this sort. Now then, our men and women do not wear upon their heads a band of gold, silver, or some other metal when they contract a marriage pact. Instead, after the betrothal is celebrated—which is the promised pact of future marriage made with the consent of both those who contract the pact and those under whose power they are—the betrothed man joins the bride to himself with vows through the finger marked by him with the ring of

> faith and the betrothed man hands over to her a dowry (dos) pleasing to both people along with a document containing this agreement in the presence of those invited by both parties. Then, either soon after or at an appropriate time, namely in order that no such thing be presumed to be done before the time defined by law, both are brought to the wedding. First, they are stationed by the hand of the priest in the church of the Lord along with offerings which they should offer to God and so at last they receive the blessing and the celestial veil, on the model, namely, of the Lord who, after placing the first people in paradise, said to them: Increase and multiply, etc. [Gen.1:38] Tobias, before he had come together with his wife, is also described as having prayed to God with this same prayer. [cf.Tobit 8:4] The person who passes into a second marriage, however, does not receive this veil. When they leave the church after this, they wear crowns on their heads, which are always kept by custom in the church. And so, after the wedding is celebrated, they are directed to lead their own life with God disposing over the rest. These are the wedding vows, these are the solemn agreements of married people, as well as those which at present do not come to mind. But we do not claim that it is a sin if all of these things do not occur in a marriage agreement, as you say the Greeks told you, especially since so great a lack of wealth usually oppresses people that it offers them no help in preparing these things. And for this reason, according to the laws, the consent alone of those whose union is at issue, is enough [to make a marriage]. Yet if this con-sent alone is perchance lacking in the wedding, all the rest, even if it is consummated with intercourse itself, is in vain, as the great teacher John Chrysostom attests, who says: Not intercourse but will makes marriage [Homilies on Matthew 32] (. . .)".

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The Wedding and Its Medialization from the Perspective of the Ljubljana Lacanian School

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Abstract: The ritual of marriage serves as a nexus for various dimensions of social and personal life, including sexuality, gender, religiosity, family, and parenthood. This pivotal event is laden with a multitude of expectations, hopes, and fears for all involved parties. The psychological energies converge not only within the spouses or participants but extend to encompass the entire cultural community. Simultaneously, it represents a ritualistic identification, where individuals, through the ritual, become what they are, establishing an identity. This article aims to provide a Lacanian interpretation of the marriage ritual, informed by the interpretation popularized by the Ljubljana school of psychoanalysis. Lacan's framework allows for the conceptualization of identification as a socially mediated process, revealing the psyche as extending beyond the individual into intersubjective structures. This approach might help to clarify the inner logic of the ritual, allowing for a better understanding of the role of medialization. It will be shown, that under these lenses wedding photography and other forms of medialization do not only preserve memories of the event afterward but are already playing an active and even constitutive role during the event.

Keywords: identification; psychoanalysis; Lacan; wedding; wedding photography

1. Introduction

This paper will attempt to describe the ritual of the wedding as practiced in contemporary American and European Christianity in terms of Lacanian psychoanalysis, using the interpretation put forward by members of the Ljubljana Lacanian School. The findings might or might not apply to rituals practiced in other cultural contexts, which would certainly be an interesting topic in itself. However, this paper will not investigate beyond the cultural context described above, as this type of analysis necessitates an empathetic grasp of the inner workings of certain cultural formations.

In describing the wedding ritual based on Lacanian theory, the three registers of psychical subjectivity will be the primary points of reference. As the wedding is loaded with enormous amounts of psychic energy (as Freud would have put it), for the spouses as well as for the entire cultural community, it should be possible to very clearly examine mechanisms aimed at processing these energies. Lacan's work seems suitable for this endeavor because his thought emphasizes intersubjective structures as constitutive for individual psychic life. In introducing Lacanian concepts, attention shall be placed on locating the respective ideas in their philosophical contexts. By building a bridge from abstract philosophical discussions to the concrete descriptions of weddings, it should be possible to do justice to the theoretical nature of Lacan's work by applying it to the context of relatively concrete cultural studies, while at the same time remaining understandable for readers not familiar with Lacan's work or that of his interpreters.

This article will look at the wedding primarily as a way of culturally codified identification. In Lacanian thought, identification takes place in symbolic and imaginary ways. The structure of this text will follow the three registers of psychic life, beginning with the symbolic. The symbolic is the most obvious dimension of identification taking place at the wedding. It could be regarded as the core of the ceremony (everything to do with the

formal process of getting married) to which other aspects are (it seems) added, which are relevant when thinking about the wedding's medialization.

1.1. The Wedding as Symbolic

In order to examine the wedding's symbolic aspects, it is crucial to briefly characterize the concept of the symbolic, which functions as one of the three registers (imaginary, symbolic, or real), "the three fundamental dimensions of psychical subjectivity" (Johnston 2023) within Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. One must be careful when defining a certain phenomenon to belong to one of those registers since they primarily are dimensions of the inner life of individual subjects. However, this paper contends that certain phenomena represent, illustrate, or are paradigmatic of a symbolic or another aspect—as will be argued towards the end of this chapter with regard to the priest.

Before characterizing the symbolic register in order to elucidate what is meant by symbolic identification, it should briefly be mentioned what is meant when talking about identification. In everyday language, "to identify" usually means to denote another person, an object, or oneself with a specific term to assign an identity to someone or something, i.e., "This is a tree". However, identity can also be understood in the sense of the relation of two identical things which in reality are one and the same, i.e., Frege's famous example: "The evening star is the morning star" (Frege 1948, p. 215) or more commonly, "I am [name]".[1] In Lacanian theory, identifying something or oneself always also carries the meaning of setting two things as identical. This should be kept in mind when going forward, as the necessary failure of any identification conceived this way is a central tenet in Lacanian theory.

The best way to introduce the symbolic is via the theory of language, as the symbolic is essentially the realm of language, simultaneously encompassing law and tradition, as those are phenomena tied up with language and meaning. Lacanian psychoanalysis is indebted to Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralist theory in this regard. Saussure analyzed language as a system of signifiers defining each other by differentiating each other in a semi-stable network. The rules of language are largely arbitrary and change over time, but the speaking subject is nevertheless bound by them (de Saussure 1959, pp. 65–74).

How, then, can any speaker ever know what word to use? How is it even possible to perceive language as stable while speaking (as one must necessarily do, lest one cannot speak at all)? The Lacanian formula is a reference to the Other. Signifiers are able to express a certain meaning insofar as the speaking subject is able to assume that a listener other than them will understand a certain meaning. This was essentially the point in Wittgenstein's well-known argument about the impossibility of private language (Wittgenstein 1984, §§ 243–61). The existence of a listener who knows the spoken language is a condition of the possibility of the use of language in general because otherwise, it would be impossible to know if one is using the words correctly.

Lacan however goes one step further. For him, language is not only in question when a subject is speaking but also when they are thinking, and even in unconscious processes. Lacan's aphorism that "the unconscious is structured like a language" (e.g., Lacan 1966, p. 800) implies that there has to be an Other present even on the level of the unconscious. Lacan develops this insight into one of his best-known terms: "the big Other" or just "the Other" [capitalized].

The big Other is the other of the social order, as mediated by language. It exists purely as a role necessarily implied through our use of language. It is witness to every use of language and functionally guarantees its meaning. One must be careful to not simply equate this role with any existing position or person within one's lived experience, as it is impossible to ever fully assume this position due to the (post-)structuralist conviction of the impossibility of ever fully grounding the social order. The position of the big Other is, therefore, one that cannot ever be truly occupied, or as Lacan puts it more poetically, "And when the Legislator (he who claims to lay down the Law) comes forward to make up for this, he does so as an impostor".

Nevertheless, it is clear that the impossible position of the big Other is temporarily assumed (as an impostor nevertheless) by the priest in the wedding ceremony. The priest functions as a representative of the church, which in turn functions as the representative of God, perhaps the ultimate model of the big Other. This is signaled by the importance of the priest's language. He needs to say certain words and (perhaps even more importantly) hear certain words in order for the ceremony to be successful. By speaking, a couple is able to change reality, not only what they are for each other but also in the eyes of God (which implies, in reality). But this transubstantiation through speech act (Searle 1968) in the form of a rite of passage (van Gennep 2019) by the couple is only possible if the priest is there to listen and witness the speech. As Catholic Cannon law, for example, clearly states in c. 1108 §1, "Only those marriages are valid which are contracted before the local ordinary, pastor, or a priest or deacon delegated by either of them, who assist [. . .]"[2]. We can understand this as a constitutive rule (Searle 1969, p. 33) of a speech act and, therefore, as a necessary condition of it. The representative functions here as a kind of medium, allowing speech to become causally real. In Lacanian terms, "He is supposed to guarantee the meaning of words and therefore to function as the big Other of the symbolic order".

The wedding, being an instance of symbolic identification in which a symbolic identity is granted through a speech act, is quite an obvious observation. More interestingly, we can now investigate its imaginary aspects in order to hopefully make sense of them and explain why they might appear.

1.2. The Imaginary and the Photographer

In order to approach the topic of imaginary identification, one can look to the mirror stage. The mirror stage is the phase of human development in which the infant recognizes itself in the mirror for the first time. For Lacan, this moment opens up a profound problem that a person will not be able to solve for the rest of their lives. What the infant learns at this moment is that it has a body that can be perceived. Lacan writes the following:

> *"For the total form of his body, by which the subject anticipates the maturation of his power in a mirage, is given to him only as a Gestalt, that is, in an exteriority in which, to be sure, this form is more constitutive than constituted, but in which, above all, it appears to him as the contour of his stature that freezes it and in a symmetry that reverses it, in opposition to the turbulent movements with which the subject feels he animates it".* (Lacan 1949, pp. 94–95)

The German term, Gestalt, indicates here that the mirror image (the only image the infant has of itself) has a fullness to it, which the infant cannot redeem due to a lack of control over its own motor functions. The contour of their stature makes the image in the mirror appear like an organized body, which the infant does not perceive internally. This is a misrecognition, an identification with something that the infant is not. It is not their mirror image, but they cannot but identify themself with it.

This misrecognition is the first and paradigmatic case of imaginary identification (Žižek 2008, p. 116). The subject identifies themself with an image that (because it is an image) has a greater fullness than themself. The implications of this dynamic become clear when one realizes that Lacan assumes that this insight into the relationships humans have to themselves positions psychoanalysis against Descartes' cogito (Lacan 1949, p. 93). Indeed, with Lacan, the kind of self-knowledge Descartes referred to in order to create a basis for all human knowledge is not actually attainable.

However, the immense philosophical and metapsychological implications of the idea of the mirror stage need not be of interest here in all their detail. What is important is that imaginary identification is a basic dynamic of subjectivity, which is repeated and has significance for the rest of one's life. It functions through seeing and being seen, hence the term "imaginary", which must be read here as image-like rather than in the colloquial sense of "made up".

When trying to connect the imaginary to photography, one might be tempted to look to film theory. Unsurprisingly, Lacan's concept of imaginary identification has found a

particular resonance there. In her description of what she calls narcissistic scopophilia—in a paper which also termed the now commonly used concept of the "male gaze"—Laura Mulvey (1975) famously interpreted the camera and the image it produces as a means of imaginary identification, following Jean-Lois Baudry (1986, 1974). In broader media studies, Friedrich Kittler also made a similar point calling the camera the "perfect mirror" (Kittler 1986, p. 225) and connecting it to the Lacanian imaginary. One should, however, be suspicious here. As Joan Copjec (1994, p. 16) has pointed out, these theorists tend to misunderstand Lacan's vocabulary, as their use of it is filtered through Althusser's writing and influenced by Foucault's work.

Lacan himself did not speak on photography directly. In Seminar Eleven, however, he used the word in a peculiar way, saying, "[. . .] the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which—if you will allow me to use a word, as I often do, in a fragmented form—I am photo-graphed"(Lacan 1998, p. 106). Even though this quote does not refer to photography but only uses the term for wordplay, Ruth E. Iskin builds on this and other fragments in order to situate photography in the context of imaginary identification. She argues that photography can be analyzed as a way in which subjects map themselves, similar to what happens in the mirror stage (Iskin 1997). Having established this, we can take a look at wedding photography.

Wedding photography appears to be self-evident. We might call it an essential part of the "wedding industrial complex", as described by Ingraham (1999). Michele Strano (2006) has conducted empirical research into this very phenomenon from the perspective of communication theory. She interrogates the specific role of wedding photography in the reinforcement and continuation of gender roles and social norms in general. What Lacanian psychoanalysis might be able to add to this description is the answer to the question of why photography seems needed at weddings. Of course, the intuitive answer has to do with conformity, but through this angle, it is possible to see behind this answer and locate the function of photography in the ritual. Conformity remains as an explanation untouched by this, as we are dealing with a completely different level of description here. One of Strano's interviewees describes the decision to have a photographer present at their wedding as "unconscious" (Strano 2006, p. 39), thus pointing unknowingly towards a psychoanalytic answer.

The function of photographs here is precisely the function of imaginary identification, i.e., the need for a coherent image of oneself with which to identify. The wedding presents an opportunity to be identified with the thousands of images of weddings individuals might have seen throughout their lives, which Ingraham fittingly calls the "heterosexual imaginary" (Ingraham 1994). One especially interesting historical case is the wedding of Queen Victoria in 1840, after which many middle-class individuals adopted the white wedding dress (Ingraham 1999, p. 34) precisely as an attempt at imaginary identification with an image of royalty and a life many of them desired.

In order to make the point that the medialization of weddings falls into the imaginary register, the difference between it and the symbolic can be highlighted. Žižek describes this difference as follows:

> *"[. . .] imaginary identification is identification with the image in which we appear likeable to ourselves, with the image representing 'what we would like to be', and symbolic identification, identification with the very place from where we are being observed, from where we look at ourselves so that we appear to ourselves likeable, worthy of love".* (Žižek 2008, p. 116)

This difference becomes clearer when we recall the priest and the photographer. Identification involving photography involves a person identifying with an image of what they would like to be ("This is what I have always dreamt of!"). The identification that takes place via the priest involves the extra step of being a certain way for the Other. In this specific case, the priest guarantees the marriers a certain status in the eyes of God and the community. This operation does decidedly not follow the logic of "now I truly am

where I always wanted to be", but rather that of "I am doing what they want me to do, and therefore I appear as good in their eyes".

We can, therefore, see that wedding photography, and by extension, the medialization of weddings in general, can be viewed as a means of imaginary identification. The question remains, however, what this mapping of elements of the wedding onto kinds of identification might explain about the inner logic of these cultural practices.

1.3. Why Mediatile the Wedding?—The Role of the Real

It has become clear that we could analyze the wedding ceremony as primarily a symbolic affair, with wedding photography and the like indicating a kind of imaginary appendage or supplement. There remains however the question of why this supplement seems to be necessary. In order to understand this, we must take into account the third register: the real.

The imaginary and the symbolic taken together constitute what Lacan calls reality. This reality is opposed to the third and most difficult register to grasp: the real. The best definition of the real is precisely the one mentioned above: that which resists integration into the symbolic and imaginary (see Johnston 2023). In a paradoxical way, which must nevertheless be perceived as true according to Lacan, the real is both a condition of the possibility of reality and is produced as a negative space, a lack in reality. As mentioned above, the social order can never be "closed" so to speak. As beings who articulate social relations through language, we remain conditioned by a structure which is never able to ground itself and is, therefore, in a perpetual crisis of legitimacy. The real emerges due to this failure as a traumatic force.

In earlier writing (e.g., his text on the mirror stage (1949)), Lacan suggests that imaginary identification might be a defense against a preexisting real (in the biological sense) lack in the subject. When, towards the middle of his work, the symbolic takes center stage, this becomes reformulated into imaginary identification covering up for the necessary failure of symbolic identification (e.g., in *Subversion of the Subject* (Lacan 1966, 809f); see also Van Haute 2002, p. 92). However, at this point, the real can also be seen as a product of this failure, indicating the continuity in Lacan's thought. (In his later Seminar Twenty, Lacan (1999, p. 90) also presents the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary as a triangular formation, highlighting how they engage in a sort of circular motion.) Imaginary identification then is necessitated by the failure of the symbolic to completely guarantee identity on its own.

The precarious nature of the symbolic order, threatening to bring forth the real, can be read as the incentive to substitute it with imaginary means. If one wanted to locate the paradigmatic figure of the real at the wedding ceremony, akin to how it was done earlier with regards to the photographer and the priest, it might most successfully be done in the figure of the spouse.

In a foundational text of the Ljubljana Lacanian School, Mladen Dolar (1993) analyzes the Althusserian notion of interpellation, taking a detour via the topic of love and falling in love. It is once again preferable to skip some of the theoretical parts of this text in order to concentrate on the point which concerns the topic at hand.

Using the Lacanian notion of forced choice, Dolar explains how love is always reliant on contingency. One meets another person at a certain point in time and falls in love, but from a rational perspective, this can never be more than good (or even bad) luck. If things had gone slightly differently, the two individuals concerned might never have met at all; they might have found someone else and fallen in love with that other person just as easily. This, however, is not at all the subjective experience of a person in love. For them, more often than not, it seems like fate. The commonplace phrases of "being made for each other" or being "soulmates" highlight this peculiar conviction.[3]

Dolar, using Lacan's theory, is able to show how radical contingency and the experience of fate or predestination do not contradict each other, but that the former rather necessitates the latter. Contingency here is the real (as a contingent event is meaningless and the absence of meaning [symbolic] is the real), which can only be given meaning by

wholeheartedly accepting and assuming it. The enthusiastic presumption of necessity exists as a psychic defense against the utter senselessness of falling in love (Dolar 1993, pp. 80–83). The senseless real at the core of the affair, however, cannot fully be worked through and reconciled in this way (and in fact, it never can). There remains a real traumatic kernel at the very core of every relationship, troubling and animating it.

Another way of approaching the spouse as real is via the notion of object petit in Lacan's thought. The points made here stem from Lacan's text, *The Subversion of the Subject* (Lacan 1966), especially the explanations regarding graph 3, even though those have to be simplified again here. Bruce Fink (2004) and Phillipe Van Haute (2002) offer useful resources to engage deeper with this text.

For Lacan, desire is not something that stems from external stimuli that animate it; rather, it results from the subject's own internal inability to reconcile oneself with oneself, brought about by language. Necessary failings of symbolic and imaginary identification—as seen in the mirror stage as a misrecognition and the fact that the big Other never actually grounds the social order—mean that something is left over (Fink 2004, p. 118). This leftover, which has not and cannot be expressed, is the subject's desire and has to be thought of as a lack within subjectivity itself. Therefore, it does not have any positive content of its own. However, through fantasy, the subject is able to project its lack into a given external object (Van Haute 2002, p. 137). Then, the formula of fantasy is expressed as "I am not whole, I lack something and this external thing is what I am lacking. If I can get it, I will truly be complete". We can already recognize some similarities to Dolar's explanation of love, in that negative space is filled up by getting committed fully to something contingent and external.

The object then becomes loaded with the subject's lack and therefore bound up with the real at the core of subjectivity. In this way, the real is present in the wedding as the object of desire, which is most often the spouse. We can therefore interpret the wedding ceremony as a defense mechanism against the real, which might manifest itself in the beginning of marriage. It involves coming close to what you believe is your desire. This reaching what one wants is always bound up with the risk of suddenly revealing its radical contingency. The ceremony then offers opportunities for identification in order to stabilize subjectivity through this very risky endeavor. The interesting twist, of course, is that the very real that the wedding can be read as a defense against also emerges as a consequence of such institutions (as it involves the breakdown of the symbolic). Such is the dialectic of the registers.

It should be stressed, however, that it is precisely because the real is an absence, or a lack, that anything can theoretically take on this role in the minds of individual subjects. Individual history must be of primary concern when approaching individual stories of weddings through a psychoanalytic lens. What has been done here is only identifying a structure of psychic functions, scattered into the world as concrete individuals in the basic setup of the wedding.

2. Explanatory Power and Limitations

The arguments laid out so far have tried to apply psychoanalytic thinking, which always affirms the importance of the history of individuals, to a cultural artifact, excluding precisely the individual histories and networks of meaning involved. This operation is legitimate, as it has been carried out many times in cultural studies (i.e., Kittler 1986 or Mulvey 1975). Still, it should be noted that Lacan's ideas were removed here from their psychological context and placed into an investigation allowing for a more liberal application of his theories.

In identifying a psychic structure of functions in the wedding, it was possible to offer an idea of how the wedding relates to its (imaginary) medialization. This text can therefore be read as relating to the same questions approached by researchers like Strano (2006) and others (i.e., Mäder 2023) in an empirical way. In this analysis of the wedding's medialization, we might see that it is not only a question of preserving memories, but that

this preservation already plays a role in the event itself. It is not a contingent copy of the wedding for later use, but, in its role as preserving, it is already constitutive of the thing it is supposed to preserve. Wedding photographers and priests are, then, not part of totally different operations but work together, so to speak, in upholding a nexus of meaning.

It might also be possible to build further on this framework by taking a closer look at the history of weddings and trying to explain their change over time in the terms proposed by this paper. For example, one might try to relate the changes to wedding ceremonies to the thoughts on secularization proposed by Eric Santner (2011). According to this, weddings would be driven to change (and perhaps intensify its imaginary side) by a general crisis of legitimacy that intensified in modernity.

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Notes

1 Lacan formulates his own version of this discussion in the difference between the subject of the statement and the subject of enunciation (Lacan 1966, p. 800).

2 cc. 144, 1112 §1, 1116, and 1127 §§1–2 outline exceptions to this rule. The exceptions do, in this case, prove the rule, as even in those cases witnesses are of prime importance.

3 Some might argue, that marriage out of love has not been the norm in history. This could potentially be countered by noting, that via his notion of forced choice, Lacan makes clear, that even in the case of love, you never really "choose" your partner. This would however necessitate a deeper engagement with this notion. For the purposes of this paper, as stated in the introduction, only contemporary practices are being investigated.

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religions

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Article

Inter-Religious Architecture for Wedding Spaces

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Abstract: Culture and media transform each other through mediatization. Mediatization interacts between culture and media through artifacts of material and visual culture to convey its messages to as many people as possible. Religion is an important component of culture, so it may be interesting to analyze the influence of mediatization on specific religious practices such as rites, particularly the rite of marriage. The processes of mediatization in marriage rites act performatively on physical and cultural space, and they are reshaping religious values and norms. Starting from the relationship between the ritual form of marriage and the physical shape of the architecture designed to host them, this article analyzes the relationship between mediatization and interfaith marriage rites. The objective is to show how the condition of inter-religiousness can demonstrate the presence of invariants in the structure of marriage rites and the architectural characterof the spaces where they take place. This article aims to demonstrate that the performative dimension of the space of marriage rites is based on these invariants, which are becoming one of the main tools through which mediatization is acting.

Keywords: marriage rites; ceremonial; mediatization; ceremonial invariants; architectural archetypes

1. Introduction—The Interfaith Point of View

Mediatization can be understood as the interaction between culture and media. It uses all the artifacts of material and visual culture, such as images, films, fashion, and architecture, in order to convey its messages to as many people as possible. If we regard religion as one of the most important components of culture (Geertz 1993), it may be interesting to analyze the influence of mediatization not only on the general concept of religion but also on some specific religious practices, like rites and particularly on one of the most important *rites de passage* (van Gennep 2019), marriage.

If we analyze the effects of mediation processes on marriage rites, we can observe how they act performatively on their physical and cultural space and, at the same time, how they reshape their values and norms. Starting from the relationship between the aggregative form of the participants in marriage rites and the physical form of the architectural space destined to host them, this article discusses how the effects of mediatization processes are transforming the values and norms of marriage rites, particularly interfaith rites, and the architectural character of their space. The objective is to show how the condition of inter-religiousness can be useful for demonstrating the presence of invariants in the structure of marriage rites and architectural characteristics of the spaces where they take place. This article aims to demonstrate that the performative dimension of the space of marriage rites is based on these invariants, which is becoming one of the main tools through which mediatization is acting.

The US statistical center Pew Research recently published a study on the religious geography of the world in 2050 (Pew Research Center. Religion & Public Life 2015). Today, 3 out of every 10 inhabitants of the world are Christians, and 2.5 are Muslims; in 2050, the number of Muslims will almost equal that of Christians. In 2010, Muslims were 8.4% of the European population; in 2050, they will be 11% of the population. Even if no more migrants were to arrive in Europe from now on, the number of Muslims would still increase as the

percentage is linked to the higher fertility of the Muslim community, which has an average age of less than 13 years compared to non-Muslim Europeans. In this context of mixed cultures and faiths, the future of European cities will depend on the social issues raised by the encounter between inhabitants and migrants. This *mixitè* of people is turning cities into transforming places, into threshold spaces. The threshold is a space of transition between two different spaces. The threshold has a temporal dimension. How long will it take to pass from one condition to another? The threshold has a cultural and existential dimension. Europe has its own threshold: beyond, there is not only the opportunity to make a new identity subject arise from the phenomenon of migration but also the opportunity to make a new post-national European identity (Giammetti 2018b).

The section "*Challenges from Urban Cultures*" in *Evangelii Gaudium* (Francesco 2013b) describes how Pope Francis immerses the spirituality in the transformative dynamics of contemporary cities and suggests processes of reconfiguring the ritual and religious space by resignifying physical space and community. Bergoglio proposes a program in a historical scenario where, on the one hand, there is the constant planning of new worship spaces open to the poor and disadvantaged and in dialogue with other religions and, on the other hand, the increasing abandonment of churches and monasteries, a dichotomy representative of the anthropology and topography of the sacred and its rites today (Giammetti 2018a).

Pope Francis writes of an ecclesial renewal that cannot be deferred «[. . .] a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open» (Francesco 2013a). This approach invites us to rethink the rites and the urban palimpsest of the spaces of spirituality no longer exclusively in relation to the topic of the sacredness of places but in a performative dimension of spirituality that passes through a practice of 'care' and is activated through the action of inhabiting (not occupying) the space.

Society is becoming much more pluralistic. There are many spaces that cannot be entrusted to only one religion. There are many spaces that cannot be defined by a specific name (church, mosque, synagogue, Buddhist temple, etc.), as they are open to different religious groups. These spaces are mainly located in airports, hospitals, universities, parks, government buildings, schools, and places open to the new multi- or intercultural communities. The construction of inter-religious spaces is rarely promoted by religious institutions. This kind of project usually has a different approach: projects such as the House of Religions of Bern, the Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi, or the House of One in Berlin gather different religions under one roof but not in one prayer space. Each religious community frequently has its own place of worship, and every prayer room is positioned around a common space (Somers Cocks 2019; House of One. Three Religions under One Roof 2024). These architectures are functional hybrids that compose buildings with different functions and keep their typological characteristics intact. The common space is often a covered or an uncovered square. It may be interesting to study if this connective space could become a new typology, but it is a large, indistinct space right now, much less important than the spaces of prayer placed around it. It is useful to underline the difference between multireligious and inter-religious spaces: the former are architectures that group separate prayer rooms belonging to different religions in the same place; the latter are made by only one space that can be used simultaneously or at different times by people belonging to different religions. We can classify inter-religious spaces into three categories: (a) silent rooms; (b) interfaith rooms for prayer and meditation; (c) interfaith celebratory rooms. Silent rooms are nonconfessional spaces that can be used by those looking for a quiet place. Everyone can enter and remain silent, or, simply, they may relax to acquire strength for daily life, to meditate, to pray. An example of a silent room is the Rothko Chapel in Huston. The inter-religious rooms for individual prayer and meditation are confessional spaces for

praying and meditating, dedicated to different religions. An example is the inter-religious chapel designed by Eero Saarinen at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Boston. The interfaith celebratory rooms are inter-religious spaces used for individual or common prayer and for celebrating rites. Different from the inter-religious rooms for prayer and meditation, here, it is possible to celebrate the rites of different faiths by setting up the space from time to time with the liturgical and iconic apparatuses of each religion. An example is the celebratory space in Ingelheim Cemetery (Figure 1).



(**a**) (**b**) (**c**)

Figure 1. A representative collage of the three classes of interfaith spaces: (**a**) silent rooms; (**b**) interfaith rooms for prayer and meditation; (**c**) interfaith celebration rooms. From left to right: Rothko Chapel in Huston; Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Chapel in Boston, designed by Eero Saarinen; celebratory space in Ingelheim Cemetery, designed by Bayer & Strobel Architects.

The interfaith celebratory rooms are a category of great interest: they highlight the relationship between the form of the inter-religious architectural space and the 'form of the rite', that is, how communities arrange themselves in the space during rites and how these arrangements influence the spatial architectural character. In an inter-religious space, the form of the rite and the architectural characteristics of the space change in accordance with the religious identity of the community of worshippers who inhabit the space from time to time. This phenomenon suggests performative dimensions of space and rite. The rites «[. . .] *can* be a strategic way to 'traditionalize', that is, to construct a type of tradition, but in doing so it can also challenge and renegotiate the very basis of tradition to the point of upending much of what had been seen as fixed previously or by other groups» (Bell 1992, p. 124). The performative dimensions of space and rite in interfaith rooms is not a new phenomenon. The history of architecture shows many architectural examples that were organized in this way. However, we have lived through a long historical period during which we have been accustomed to inhabiting predominantly monofaith spaces. For this reason, this article proposes an analysis focused on examples of Roman Catholic rites to demonstrate how the liturgical form of rites can influence the form of architectural space. Afterward, the analysis focuses on the form of the marriage rite in order to demonstrate how, for different religions and even in its inter-religious dimension, the marriage rite generally retains an invariant formal structure. In the final part, this article demonstrates how some ritual and spatial invariants of marriage, both in mono- and inter-religious rites, are becoming useful tools to support the processes of the mass mediatization and social mediatization of marriages.

2. Materials: Archetypes, Rites, and Uses: Three Categories for Constructing a Method of Cross-Reading Liturgical Space and Architectural Space

Western culture recognizes its ritual places in "aula" architectural typology. An aula is a symbolic form of public space: it is a place that responds to the human being's need to gather in a well-defined space as a physical expression of collective rites, be they religious, institutional, cultural, recreational, and so on (Giammetti 2018b). The aula monumentalizes the collective space and has a double meaning like other monuments: the symbolic one (monument: *moneo*—to admonish and *menini*—to remember, to make known) and the

material conformative one, linked to the character of each specific place and capable of influencing the quality and modalities of living in it.

The physical space of the aula interprets the interior–exterior relationship in terms of the otherness of interior space, understood as a condition of being or praying in relation to an infinite sacred. The aula is traditionally an architectural archetype representative of the irruption of the sacred. Nevertheless, the interior–exterior relationship, as an expression of the sacredness of the interior space, has been previously expressed by the enclosure archetype through the archetype of the enclosure. The enclosure was the archetypal translation of being inside, as expressed by the enclosing wall. In Greek, *temenos*, from the verb *temno*, to cut, is the architectural element that cuts off a portion of space, which takes on a special meaning (a sacred otherness) compared to the undifferentiated infinity of the exterior (Joseph Rykwert 1991). The aula declines the same idea of being inside, as it was covered by another archetypal element, the roof (Martí Arís 1993). These two archetypal principles relating to the spatiality of places for prayer and rites have been materialized in models of churches, mosques, synagogues, and other kinds of temples and have expressed through different spatial typologies according to the interpretations of each historical period.

Rites Ceremonial Uses of Archetypal Places Type–Morphological Models of Liturgical Aula and Uses

The aula as an architectural archetype of a prayer space suggests a close connection between its architectural form and the form of the rites that can be performed within it. The rites possess specific forms that correspond to the different shapes that the communities and the celebrants gathered during the rite can put in place according to the ceremonial dynamics specific to the rite to be developed. This section focuses on the Catholic rite forms and their relationship to the aula architectural typology. The category of liturgical praxes are shaped according to the type of rite, and the rites are set up according to the different seasons of human life to which the sacraments belong (Figure 2).

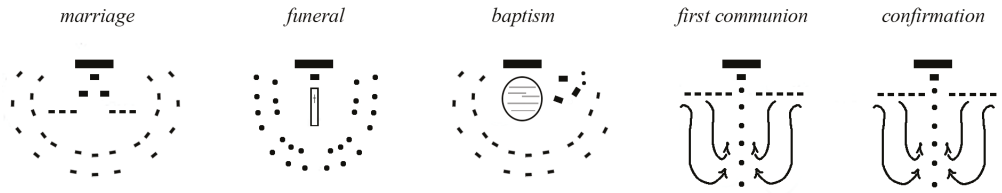

Figure 2. The models highlight the topological relationships between the community, the celebrant, and the faithful who perform the actions during the rite. In the diagrams, black rectangles of different sizes highlight the positions of the liturgical furnishings, the celebrant, and the people mainly involved in the rite. Around them, the different shapes of the gathered community are represented. In the last two diagrams, black lines highlight the movements of the people during the rite.

3. Religious and Inter-Religious Marriage in the Mediatization Prospective

The form of the rite influences the form of the architectural spaces. Figure 2 shows how the Catholic liturgy assigns a clear and well-known form to each type of rite. Figure 3 analyzes how the typology of the aula is capable of accommodating these different forms through its shaping in different models. What happens to the form of the space when we approach an inter-religious rite? How do the architectural space and the aula transform when the interfaith rite is a marriage? For the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, marriage is the union between two partners formalized by a minister of worship. Under specific legislative conditions, this religious marriage is recognized with civil effects. An Islamic marriage is not a religious rite, although it involves a ceremony, but a contract between two parties based on religious principles and separate legal roles for man and woman. There are religions where the marriage is articulated into several rites. For example, Indian marriage is divided into pre-marriage, marriage, and post-marriage rites, and they begin several weeks before the ceremony.

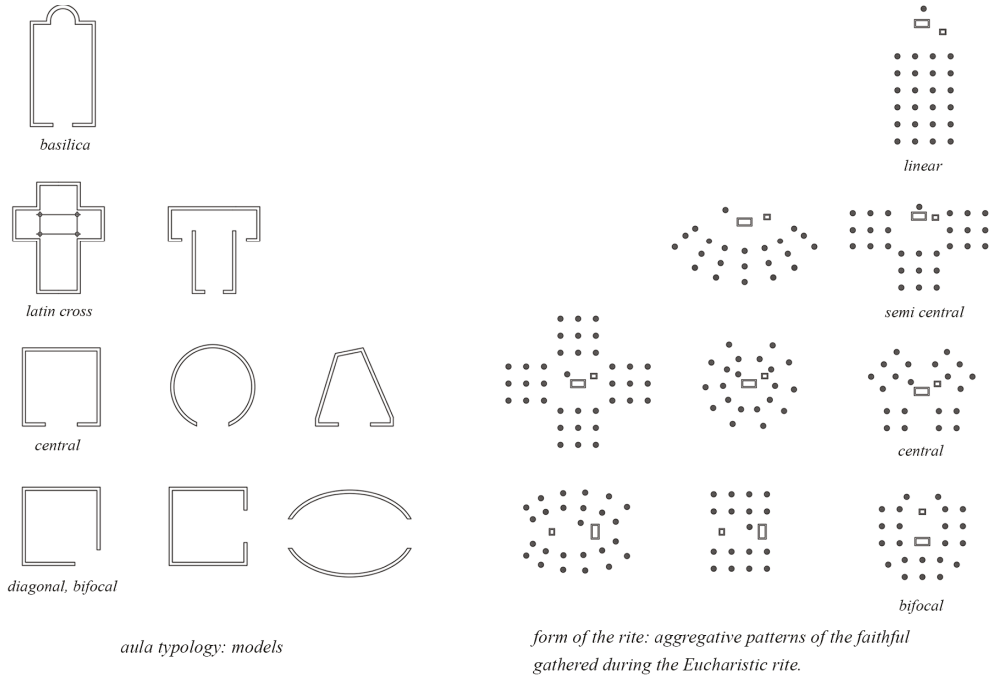

Figure 3. The image consists of a matrix where aula models are linked with aggregative patterns of the faithful gathered during the Eucharistic rite. The space and the architectural character of the models are adapted to accommodate these different patterns through their different formal declinations, although the typology remains the aula.

Assuming that we do not address the topic of interfaith marriage from the perspective of religious sciences but from the architectural viewpoint and that we do not ignore the profound differences that exist among the traditions of marriage rites, we nonetheless assume as a hypothesis of the analysis of marriage rites the existence of certain invariants in the organizational structure of marriage rites in order to analyze how these influence the architectural space. Looking at the spatialization of rites, we can see that there are a bride and groom in the presence of a celebrant; the wedding couple is often accompanied by witnesses who attest to their presence and to the freedom of the marriage (Figure 4). Surrounding this main group, there is a community of friends and relatives who attend the rite. Although specific ceremonial practices may vary according to the traditions and religions, this organizational structure is generally invariant in marriages between people of the same religion, and it also remains unchanged in inter-religious marriages. In the meantime, the topological relationship between the ritual space of the marriage and the architectural space dedicated to it presents characteristics that are common to inter-religious and monoreligious marriages.

Unlike other types of rites, such as funerals, the spatial arrangement of the main group involved in the rite generally remains unchanged from religion to religion, as well as the formal structure of the architectural space used to host the rite. The space must be configured to adequately accommodate the wedding couple, who are the center of the space's topological relationships; the witnesses; and the celebrant, so as to provide an atmosphere of sacredness and/or solemnity and to facilitate the participation and active listening of the conveners during the rite (Figures 6 and 7). The aula architectural typology, that is usually used to host mono-religious marriages is also suitable for hosting inter-religious rites: it can be adapted to a different arrangement of ceremonial elements. The architectural space can be set up for different positioning of the bride and groom, witnesses, and celebrant in relation to the community of friends and relatives who attend the rite (Figures 5–7).

Assuming the invariance of the topological relationships between the members of the main group involved in the rite and the group and the architectural space, the aula typology, set in a specific model, can be arranged with furniture and ornaments that

reflect the diversity and inclusiveness present in an interfaith marriage rite (Figure 8). The symbolic and ornamental apparatus participates in the performative dimension of the inter-religious rite and decides the architectural space in such a way that the participants recognize each other and recognize the space as a place designated to host the marriage rites at that specific moment. The aula, a typology structurally open to multiple semantic interpretations, is able to compose the formal invariants of the architectural structure and marriage rites; on the other hand, the symbolic and ornamental apparatuses can express the differences in inter-religious perspectives. However, it is helpful to emphasize that while decorative apparatuses are used to characterize the specific cultural identities of the bride and groom, they is also increasingly linked to the current fashion trends that are diffused by the mass media. They tend to flatten the local specificities and standardize the tastes according to the global economic market of the wedding sector, which uses the mass media as one of its most effective tools.

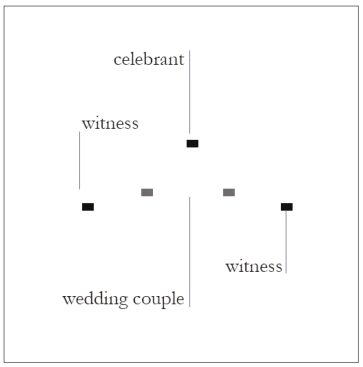

Figure 4. The image consists of a scheme that summarizes the organizational structure of the marriage rites. It shows how the bride and groom represent the center of the typological relationships that can be developed in the architectural space destined to host the marriage rite.

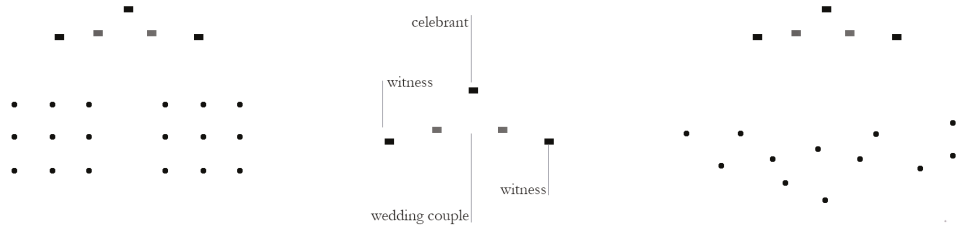

Figure 5. In the center is a scheme representing the main topological group in the marriage rite. On both sides, two arrangements represent different ways of relating the community of friends and relatives to the bride and groom.



Figure 6. On the left is an image of the Catholic marriage ceremony and attached patterns relating to the conformative structure of the rite. On the right is an image of the Muslim marriage ceremony and attached patterns. The relationship between patterns and images highlights how the aula typology can be set up for different positionings of the bride and groom, witnesses, and celebrant in relation to the community of friends and relatives.

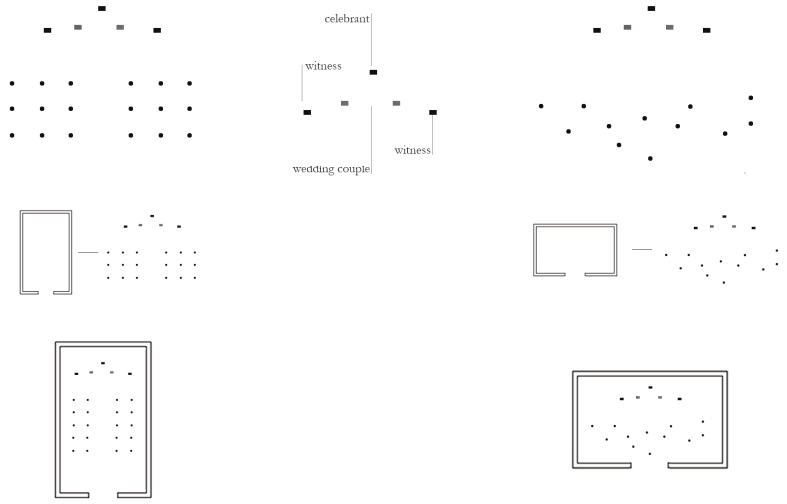

Figure 7. The aula architectural typology can be adapted to a different arrangement of ceremonial elements. The image shows how, from different ritual patterns, the aula typology can be adapted into different models, all capable of accommodating marriage rites.



Figure 8. Collage composed of pictures of the celebratory moments of inter-religious marriages. The symbolic and ornamental apparatus participates in the performative dimension of the interreligious rite and sets the architectural space in such a way that the participants recognize each other and recognize the space as a place designated to host the marriage rites at that specific moment.

4. Spatial Invariants, Changing Values, and Mediatization: Open Conclusions on a Process in Transition

Although a partial analysis was developed from the perspective of religious sciences, the discussion focused on the architectural issues highlighted the relationships between the topological relationships generated during marriage rites and the capacity of the architectural aula typology to be shaped according to these relationships. It was pointed out that there is a recurring invariance in the organization of the architectural space

dedicated to the rite of marriage, which transversally crosses not only marriages between believers of the same religion but also interfaith weddings. This architectural invariance is mainly attributable to the position of the bride and groom as the center of the topological relationships and to the aula architectural type capable of being inhabited by groups of people gathered in different aggregative forms. The architectural invariance resulting from the relationship between the aula typology and the rite's topological scheme is reinforced by the common elements of marriage rites that create a sense of familiarity and bonding between different cultures and traditions.

It was pointed out that the symbolic and ornamental apparatuses used to organize the space during a marriage can be tools that participate in the performative dimension of an inter-religious rite and are useful in declining the architectural space. Thus, the participants in the rite, although of different religions, recognize each other and recognize the space of the aula as the place designated to host the marriage at that specific moment.

Wedding rites often involve strong emotions such as love, happiness, hope, and commitment. These emotions are universal and easily understood by a wide audience, which encourages a dual role of the ornamental apparatus: on the one hand, the identitarian function and, on the other, the flattening of the tastes suggested by the global market of the wedding sector, which uses the mass media as one of its most effective tools. Through the development of a close link between weddings, media, and social networking tools, the architectural space, interculturally recognizable, becomes a tool for facilitating the dissemination of a narrative structure built around the wedding event through social media. The space is enriched with decorative elements inspired by romantic and sentimental art and, as such, is always at risk of bad taste. Kitsch taste (Valerio Mosco 2022) often overpowers the simplicity and strength of the architectural character belonging to the ritual space and sometimes even the religious symbols. The architectural rigor expressed by the aula typology, as a space dedicated to public collective rites, takes second place to the kitsch characteristics of the decorative apparatus, which include but are not limited to the elements typical of religious symbolism. According to the kitsch style, it is appropriate to build a set designed to take photos and videos in line with the current fashion trends suggested by the wedding business market. Regardless of their religion, married couples want to stage their wedding film and encourage the sharing of their experience and the celebratory aspects of their wedding on media and social networks. As the spatial structures are similar, sharing and mass mediatization are simplified. The current and tendency toward kitsch taste, easily exportable thanks to the presence of the common elements present in the architectural spaces dedicated to weddings all over the world, has contributed to making marriage a popular topic easily accessible by social media, both as a source of entertainment, an example of shared and universally recognized values, and economic business. One of the effects of this phenomenon is the possibility of spreading the process of the globalization of wedding events, which has proven to be a useful tool for supporting the mass mediatization of weddings (Williams 2010). Today, more than ever, it is necessary to deal with kitsch as, through this confrontation, we aim to test our esthetic temperament. At the same time, the intersection of weddings and social media suggests a possibility of an investigation into the relationship between media and architecture. Just as the inter-religious horizon offers new perspectives on the possible developments of the architectural typology of the aula in relation to a performative dimension of the rite, the mass media horizon invites reflection on the impact in architectural terms. There is a vast amount of literature on massmediology, which mainly concerns social networks, newspapers, television, the Internet, etc. On the other hand, the communicative systems inherited from history and which have been mass media tools, among which architecture must be counted, are still little-studied. Architecture, which has lost the original ethical–esthetic tension of the historical avant-gardes born between the wars, spreads without limits and without semantic content. It performs functions but does not evolve radically on an esthetic level in the most complete and general indifference. However, the affinity between mass media and architecture is to be found in the very nature of this art, which has both a

conformative and a representative component. The contents of the current mass media culture are only expressed by the representative component of architecture to the detriment of the conformative one. However, it is also possible to identify some positive factors in this phenomenon. The reference to mass media culture can be a check for architects' proposals and can provide guidance for the sociological component of architecture. From this point of view, it is worth investigating the possibility that, from the analysis of the needs, desires, and expectations of mass culture, we may arrive at the formulation of a code of architecture that makes it not only a tool for performing functions but also a way of communicating and revitalizing its conformative component (De Fusco 2005, p. 15). The study of inter-religious spaces and the stresses expressed by mass culture can be useful tools for the construction of new esthetic horizons of architectural language and its typologies. Working on case studies, such as the space dedicated to interfaith weddings, best expresses the characteristics of this approach of architectural research into the morphological and typological aspects of space in a period of cultural transition, such as the one we are currently experiencing.

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Article

For Ever and Ever the Perfect Wedding Picture: Converging Religious and Secular Norms and Values in Wedding Photography

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Abstract: The paper examines how stylistic norms of wedding photography express, affirm, adapt, and reshape religious and secular values by combining ethical considerations with qualitative ethnographic observations. The first part offers a critique of the distinction between civil secular and religious weddings in current scholarship. In the second part, the relation between norms and values in an ethics of wedding photos is elaborated. The discussion is illustrated with examples from a study with 27 married couples and their wedding photos. The study reveals two key aspects: In the production of wedding photos, the triangular relation between the couple, their guests, and the location, the so-called locationship, is staged through the lens of the camera. In this triangle, the blending of religious and secular norms and values could be observed. Another significant aspect is how norms and values originating from wedding photography of religious ceremonies continue to impact secular norms and values. It is particularly noteworthy that religion serves as an aesthetic matrix in wedding photography, contributing to a "visual enchantment", irrespective of whether the ceremony is religious or secular in nature.

Keywords: wedding photography; ethics; norms; values; religious and secular; locationship; visual enchantment

1. Photos of Religious and Secular Weddings

During my conversations with 27 couples in Italy, Germany, and Switzerland the couples showed me their wedding photos. Although there were differences between each of these weddings, the photos have similarities due to their common genre, not only with regard to stylistic conventions but also with regard to how the photos were made and how they are received.[1] Out of curiosity, I conducted a small experiment with my students in which I showed them photos of the couples during their wedding ceremonies. The question was whether the students were able to distinguish the traditional religious weddings from civil weddings in the registry office. Surprisingly, fewer portraits were matched correctly than I expected. Only a relatively small number were correctly assigned to the categories of religious or civil weddings. After a while the students gave up, saying that it is too difficult to know whether a wedding is religious or not.

The decision to marry in a religious rite is fundamental for the couples and for them the difference is obvious in the pictures. By contrast, from an outside perspective it is the similarities between the portraits which are conspicuous. It is not surprising that weddings resemble each other. Wedding rites take place in religious and in secular contexts (Schäffler 2012, pp. 37–40). As a rite of passage they follow a number of social, cultural, and religious norms as Gerard van Gennep expounded in his famous book (Van Gennep 2019). But wedding photos also follow norms that always make the ceremony identifiable as such. These representational norms make it even more challenging to distinguish between religious and non-religious civil weddings. Additionally, the ceremony location plays a central role in wedding photos. The couple and their guests are placed in the

photo in relation to the location. However, it is not only the rites but also the religious and civil ceremony locations that are difficult to distinguish. Registry offices are often historical landmarks, churches have become registry offices, town-halls look like religious buildings, and religious and civil ceremonies are conducted in the same settings outdoors. The categories of religious and secular no longer appear to be sufficient for analyzing the stylistic conventions and norms of wedding photography. This paper thus demonstrates the implications of adopting a more fluid understanding of the interplay between religion and non-religion in the context of weddings with the following question: How do the stylistic norms of wedding photography express, affirm, adapt, and reshape religious and secular values?

This contribution is structured in two parts. The first part offers a critique of the distinction between civil secular and religious weddings in current scholarship. Subsequently, it scrutinizes conventions and norms in the production and representation of wedding photos on the basis of the existing literature on wedding photography. In the second part, the relation between norms and values in an ethics of wedding photos is defined. The discussion includes examples from my study with the 27 married couples. The conversations with the couples, each 50–90 min in duration, were conducted between April 2022 and January 2023 in Italy, Germany, and Switzerland. This larger study combines the qualitative method of semi-structured interviews with the ethnographic method of photo-elicitation (Lapenta 2011). The couples reconstructed their wedding day while viewing and showing their wedding photos or videos. The photos are photographed to analyze them afterwards by applying an analytical image interpretation (Astheimer 2016). The conversations are video-recorded to combine the photos with the statements and to also include the non-verbal communication in the analysis (Misoch 2014, pp. 65–71).[2]

2. Religious and Secular Weddings

In the current academic discussion of weddings, the terms secular and religious are used as analytical categories that refer to the location and the rite. The secular wedding consists of the civil rite that is conducted by a civil servant, the registrar. The registrar's office is often, but not always as we will see later, located in the town hall where the civil wedding is conducted. A religious wedding mostly takes place in the context of a religious tradition or in an alternative rite that includes a transcendent dimension. Religious symbols play a crucial role in such weddings to refer to the transcendent realm. Such an understanding combines a substantial and functional approach to religion, as Gergely Rosta and Detlef Pollack further state: "The distinction between immanence and transcendence and the symbolisation of transcendence in immanence form the indispensable core of the definition [. . .]." (Pollack and Rosta 2015, p. 72). With regard to a religious wedding rite, this means that the social actors participating in the rite symbolically communicate with the transcendent realm during the wedding. But in some cases, the secular and religious dimensions of the wedding ritual are blended and blurred, as the following examples show.

In Italy, for example, the priest can act as official registrar. For two couples in this study, only one of the pairs—in each case the bride—married religiously and received the sacrament of marriage. The husbands decided to marry civilly because they do not define themselves as Roman Catholic. One might assume that the location in which the wedding takes place can be easily assigned to a religious or secular context for the rite.

This may indeed be the case during the actual wedding, as guests present in person can typically attribute the location to either the religious or secular sphere. But when looking at wedding photos the stylistic similarities still persist and blur the boundaries between the religious and the secular on a representational level, which is less the case during the rite itself. Additionally, as already mentioned, religious weddings take place not only in churches, synagogues, and mosques, but also in gardens, public parks, or even former wine cellars. Nevertheless, in this study most of the religious couples chose to marry in a religious building to which they often felt personally attached.

These cases show that the seemingly opposed categories of religious and secular are discursively formed during the wedding rite and its photographic representation rather than representing fixed analytic categories (Knott 2014, p. 81). The representational norms and conventions of wedding photography further blend the religious and secular spheres of wedding rites because " a wedding consists of a standard sequence of essential stages—and photo opportunities." (Ruchatz 2018, p. 196). The many predetermined motifs in wedding photography are followed in both secular and religious contexts, as the following examples illustrate.

The different motifs allow the receivers to allocate images to an event and its ritual structure, which in the current case is a wedding. These motifs are conspicuously stable (Fritz 2018, pp. 45–91) and can be structured into before, during, and after the ceremony (Bezner 2002). Before the ceremony, pictures of the bride and the groom show them often separated, serious, and nervous. For example, a couple who conducted their third wedding ceremony, after a Muslim wedding in Ghana and a civil wedding in Switzerland, a Roman Catholic wedding in Togo, arrived at the church in separate cars (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Roman Catholic wedding in Togo in 2022 (photo: M.-T. Mäder).

The bride and the groom "performed" according to the norms, they seemed serious and nervous. The photographer captured the separate arrival of the bridal couple. In the wedding album, the photos are placed on the same page, complementing each other (Figure 1). Often, these pre-wedding photos additionally include detail shots of the bride's hair, wedding dress, and flowers. During the ceremony, the exchange of rings or the signing of the marriage contract are photographed (Figures 2 and 3).

The photo mostly frames the couple, testimonies (Figure 2), and the institution's representative, as in the example in Figure 3, the Spyridon, the Greek Orthodox priest. After-the-ceremony moments are captured, such as exiting the place of the ceremony (Figure 4) or the first kiss of the newlyweds.

These wedding photo motifs can be observed in various cultural and religious contexts, as the current study shows. The following section will discuss the existing literature that examines how these photos are based on and influence the norms and conventions of the motifs.



Figure 2. Civil wedding at the registry office in Rome 2017.



Figure 3. Greek Orthodox wedding in Venetia in 1993 (photo: M.-T. Mäder).



Figure 4. Civil wedding in central Switzerland in 2022 (photo: M.-T. Mäder).

3. Norms and Conventions of Wedding Photography in Recent Literature

The literature on wedding photography can be divided in two categories: practical guides for successful wedding photography on one side and on the other side research publications about wedding photo- and videography. The following literature review focuses on how norms and values are discussed. To clarify from the outset, religious dimensions are mentioned only in passing, if at all. Therefore, this paper aims to address this gap.

The first category contains an endless number of guides about wedding photography, explaining to photographers how to take the perfect wedding photo. Titles such as "*Master's Guide to Wedding Photography: Capturing Unforgettable Moments and Lasting Impressions*" (Bell 2007), "*The Bride's Guide to Wedding Photography: How to Get the Wedding Photography of Your Dreams*" (Hawkins 2003), "*The New Art of Capturing Love. The Essential Guide to Lesbian and Gay Wedding Photography*" (Hamm 2014), and "*Stylish Weddings: Create Dramatic Wedding Photography in Any Setting*" (Jairaj 2016) suggest that wedding photography asks for a specific photographic technique that follows representational norms to express certain values. The guides set high expectations for non-professional as well as professional photographers and advise them how not to mess up their task because a wedding happens on a single day as a unique and unreproducible event. This is also one of the reasons why many couples decide to hire a professional photographer for the wedding that ensures the "best" pictures in the eyes of their customers. According to Jens Ruchatz "Wedding photographers are hence taught to expect the unexpected, to pay attention to particular events or certain kinds of mementos that appear in the course of the wedding." (Ruchatz 2018, p. 198). The representational norm of wedding photography manuals mainly emphasizes the singularity of the couple as well as that they and their guests look good on the images. Likewise, all the important moments, even the unexpected, are expected to be documented.

Research studies on wedding photography, the second category, critically reflect on these wedding photo practices and their normative impact. They ask, among other questions, how norms and values are communicated, transformed, and challenged in the context of wedding photography. The studies have mainly taken place in the United States and most of them focus on heterosexual weddings, with a few exceptions (Kimport 2012), because they date from the time before same-sex marriage was legalized in 2004 in Massachusetts/US and 2015 as a federal law of the United States. The literature highlights the communication spaces of wedding photography, namely, the production, the representation, distribution, and the reception in different ways (Fritz et al. 2022, p. 17). Additionally, the studies focus on the wedding as a ritual, on material aspects of the wedding as defined by capitalistic consumer culture, on the staging of gender, sex, and sexuality, and on questions of race, ethnic background, and class as well as technological premises of wedding photography. In the following, a selection of relevant approaches is considered to scrutinize and provide an overview of how norms and values are addressed in the context of wedding photography.

The premise of wedding photography and its development is the technological invention of photography and its potential to create wedding norms and develop conventions. In a historical account on wedding photography, Charles Lewis outlines how the development of photography from the studio in its early days to shots on location, the so-called "candids", formed and transformed wedding photography (Lewis 1998). As Lewis states: "For the twentieth-century American bride and groom, the story of the wedding has been one told largely through photographic images; and these images have been constructed according to conventions evolving mostly out of business and technical concerns." (Lewis 1998, p. 42). The photographer becomes the designer of the wedding. With the couple consenting, he or she (but mostly he) possesses a central authority over the rite of passage. "The norm is for couples to accept the photographer as an expert and to relish the photographic experience and its products because photography is another rite of the wedding spectacle." (Lewis 1997, p. 174). Lewis understands wedding photography, and specifically taking the wedding photos, as another rite of the wedding, with a shaping

power of the ritual itself. Photography and its producers, the photographers, influence the representational norms of the wedding photos. They master the technology efficiently to the satisfaction of their customers. The power of creative means is equally conspicuous in wedding videography. By including a soundtrack, emotions are steered in the reception (Walsh and Wade 2020; Corpuz 2019; Wade and Walsh 2019). "These videos thus serve as potent tools of socialisation through what is valorised for posterity and what is otherwise excluded." (Wade and Walsh 2019, p. 28). The editing of a wedding video in combination with the sound score mostly follows the conventions of a romantic atmosphere valorizing the institution of marriage.

The wedding album plays another important role in displaying norms and values in the reception space. With reference to Victor Turner and the three stages of the ritual, Bezner analyzes the wedding album: "While no wedding holds fast and hard to any strict categorization, most wedding albums may be delineated quite neatly into these three stages." (Bezner 2002, p. 5). Through the wedding album, in which the religious and cultural norms are visually expressed like a "shining language", the ritual is handed down. Viewing the album with relatives and friends reenacts the ritual and encourages cultural continuity. The photos often depict material aspects of the wedding like gift tables, expensive wedding rings, and decorations. These material aspects are combined with more idealized representations of the bride, for example, as fertile, holding a lush wedding bouquet, or as a symbolic object in a patriarchal system by staging the bride as an innocent virgin. According to Bezner, viewing the wedding album reaffirms such values of marriage and family (Bezner 2002, p. 6). Marc A. Ouellette also scrutinizes the material aspects of a wedding by staging his own wedding in an auto-ethnographic experiment in which he and his wife stage a wedding photo session with dresses and props from the thrift shop. Ouellette understands the wedding photos as indexical of the wedding, in turn promoting the wedding and its values (Ouellette 2018). Additionally, he critically reflects on the relation between the individualized features of a wedding that "paradoxically produces conventionalized and generic results through the ritualized performance of the day." (Ouellette 2018). According to Ouellette, the value of the props and dresses for a wedding lies more in how they appear in the photos than in their purchase price, as they quickly lose value after the wedding. Specifically, the bride is central to the performance for the photos as "the pictures produce and package the bride" (Ouellette 2018). Ouelette's emphasis on the role of the bride is part of further approaches to wedding photography that critically reflect on how wedding photos confirm existing norms of the bride in white (Glapka 2014; Ingraham 2008; Otnes and Pleck 2003).

In the context of the legalization of gay marriage in Massachusetts/US, Katrina Kimport shows that wedding photos of lesbian couples can dissolve the link between sex, gender, and sexuality, and challenge heteronormativity. But at the same time the photos reaffirmed the heteronormative narrative (Kimport 2012, pp. 894–95) as most of the lesbian couples were traditionally dressed: one woman as the bride in white and the other woman as the groom in a tuxedo. Lesbian couples, compared to gay couples, are more flexible in playing with gender roles in their clothing. However, as Kimport states, their challenge to the heteronormative wedding script is still moderate: "These performed identities remain constrained by normative expectations of what—and who—constitutes a wedding." (Kimport 2012, p. 894). This approach demonstrates that existing wedding norms form a strong model that is challenging, if not impossible, to transgress.

This balancing act of confirming existing, questioning, and transforming norms in wedding photography is also discussed in Nhi T. Lieu's study, which looks at the performances and bodily transformations of American/Asian brides and grooms in bridal photography. The conventions of wedding photos even de-emphasize ethnic markers to a US American life style: "[T]he visual productions made from cultural practices surrounding matrimony—through codes of class, discourses of respectability and multiculturalism, and performances of heteronormative romantic love are meant to normalize and position Asian immigrants as part of American society." (Lieu 2014, p. 155) But instead of becoming

part of the US American society, Lieu considers these photos of Asian American wedding couples as threatening. Lieu shows how representational norms are applied in processes of inclusion and exclusion. In this case, the bridal photos express the belonging to a group that shares certain social norms and values that at the same time, when over-adapted or even exaggerated as in the case of wedding photography, jeopardize the endeavor.

This interaction between adapting to norms and questioning them captures Michele M. Strano in "*Ritualized Transmission of Social Norms Through Wedding Photography*" (Strano 2006). Strano introduces the distinction between descriptive and injunctive norms in wedding photography. Descriptive norms refer to what is actually done based on certain values and observed by others compared to what should be done, which refers to injunctive norms that, if not respected, are followed by social sanctions. The author explores how the visual representations and rituals captured in wedding photographs serve as powerful mechanisms for reinforcing cultural values, norms, and expectations and at the same time questioning them. For example, the virgin bride dressed in white represents the injunctive norm of virginity (how it should be) in wedding photography (and in the historical world). Instead, the widespread descriptive norm in mass media says that most brides are not virgins. The white bridal dress and the innocent posing for the picture is rather symbolic. Again, the bride dressed in white has to oscillate and express herself between these two norms in the photos, they "perform according to injunctive norms about chaste behavior, although the descriptive norm may be closer to their everyday behavior." (Strano 2006, p. 39). The author shows that even though wedding photography and its ritualized communication performance follows many conventions it still contests social norms. The approach captures wedding photography as a communicative ritual practice; a similar focus is chosen by (Bezner 2002).

The discussed literature, primarily focused on weddings in the United States, highlights the pivotal role photographers play in not only reproducing and affirming the norms of wedding photography but also the conventions of the wedding rite itself. Photography and videography are communicative practices that shape these norms and conventions through their stylistic choices. Additionally, the photos serve as an index of the material aspects of the wedding, particularly the presentation of the bride, who is depicted according to these norms. Questioning and transgressing heteronormativity and the American lifestyle is challenging, as evidenced by photos of lesbian couples and Asian American couples. Overadaptation can be perceived as threatening. However, there is still some room to play with these norms, as shown by the contrast between the injunctive norm of virginity and the descriptive norm in mass media that most brides are not virgins. Ultimately, the norms and conventions that couples adhere to in a predefined part of the setting are perpetuated through the wedding album, which reproduces the rite of passage.

To summarize, wedding festivities offer a rich pool of actors, ritual practices, and locations, the latter only marginally dealt with in the existing literature, that become part of the setting of wedding photography. On both levels, norms play a central role. On one hand, there are norms and conventions regarding how wedding photos should look. On the other hand, the organization of the wedding ceremony and reception is also reflected in the photos and influenced by the photographer in the production process. Focusing on the relationship between the production and representation of wedding photos is crucial to understanding how representational norms and conventions are implemented and the values they are based on. Similarly, norms and conventions play an equally important role when viewing the wedding photos. This complex relationship between norms, values, and conventions will be further clarified through an applied ethics approach to wedding photography, incorporating the mostly missing religious dimension of weddings.

4. The Applied Ethics of Wedding Photography

In the ethics of wedding photography, human actions during production, reception, and distribution, but also in the representation—the photos themselves—are central to the discussion, as they can be judged as morally right or wrong. This discussion is situated

within the field of media ethics, a branch of applied ethics. Media ethics addresses questions that refer to the political, cultural, economic, and technical dimensions of the media (Filipović 2016, p. 207). In the current approach, the media ethical question of what constitutes a good and successful wedding photo is central. This question pertains to norms, conventions, and values that encompass both religious and secular contexts.

The art historian Hans Belting distinguishes between two visual actions in photography: capturing images is the first visual action, and visually assessing them is the second. The gaze is central in these practices. The making of the photos is an exchange of the photographer's gaze with the world. This gaze becomes the gaze of the past that is received in the present and thereby becomes permanent (Belting 2011, p. 154). Both dimensions, the photographer's gaze and the world of the wedding, ideally complement each and result in a successful wedding picture. This means that the photographer and the couple are pleased about the result in the present that becomes permanent (Tappe 2016, p. 306). For example, the exchange of rings must be performed in a way that the photographer is able to catch this moment, namely, not too quick but at the same time naturally. The photographer needs to know about the best angle and how to include the light conditions in the best possible way. A couple mentioned that the photographer even asked them to sign the wedding contract slowly so that the photographer would be able to take the picture.[3] A Jewish Orthodox couple chose a photographer who is familiar with their wedding ritual in order to know at which moment the picture needed to be taken.[4]

Posing for a wedding picture and taking the photos that are evaluated as good and well made in the reception follows specific norms that exceed mere conventions. In the current case, conventions are understood as rules to be followed, "individuals must generally act in accordance with them" (Southwood and Eriksson 2011, p. 202) because they depend on correct behavior. Nonetheless, conventions might also be accompanied by normative principles. "But the existence of a convention does not entail the existence of a generally accepted normative principle. Therefore, conventions are not, nor do they entail, corresponding norms." (Southwood and Eriksson 2011, p. 200). The photographer, the bridal couple, and their guests pose for the photos according to certain conventions, in the sense that this is how wedding photos are made and everybody agrees on that.

But wedding photos go beyond the mere convenience of the good mood of all participants. The posing is socially and morally anticipated and judged, and the photos express social and representational norms. Some wedding photos, for example, are compulsory, such as the photo when signing the contract, as shown above, or the group photo with the parents or siblings. The photographer is judged as to whether they manage to take all the "important" pictures. Maybe not all the guests are equally invested in achieving this goal but they at least comply with the convention. Yet most of the guests observe the norms, accept the normative principles of wedding photos, and follow as a matter of course the instructions of the photographer. They not only do it for the bridal couple but also because they think it is the socially and morally appropriate behavior in the moment. Likewise, these pictures will become permanent in the wedding album, which is another reason to respect the norms. In the study, only one couple did not take any group pictures with family and friends because the couple explicitly rejected posed photos. This demonstrates the widespread acceptance of posing for wedding photos.[5]

The representational norms of wedding photos express certain values of how a good and successful wedding picture should look. The relation between norms and values is mutual, they interact with each other. One can say that norms are expressed in actions that are justified with values (Kettner 2011, p. 223). Norms can be seen as former values that have become binding for actions (Staake 2018). The reverse is also true: values are operationalized in actions, in which case they become binding norms. Specifically, social norms have a bridging function for communities because they "are instruments to realize certain values"(Tranow 2018, p. 343; Baurmann et al. 2010, pp. 7–8). Values are the result of an individual's experiences and education on the one hand and on the other hand include a collective dimension. For individuals and for groups values play

an important part in identity processes (Beckers 2018, p. 508). In the context of wedding photography, representational norms, expressed in the photographer's gaze and the actions of the depicted social actors, operationalize certain values in the context of weddings (Mäder 2020, pp. 257–58).

The photographer visually stages the place of the ceremony, which the couple has carefully chosen. The depiction of the ceremony location follows certain norms that are based on values. How defining such photographic norms and values can be specifically in religious contexts shows-up in the sometimes tense relations between clergy and photographers. In some areas, the conflict of interest between the two parties resulted in banning photographers from churches and synagogues between 1950 and 1970 in the United States (Lewis 1998, pp. 33–34). The relationship between religious specialists and wedding photographers can be conflictual even today, as a BBC report shows (Wedding Photographer Caused Mayhem—I Told Him to Leave 2024).

It is not only the act of taking the expected photos on location during the ceremony that follows certain norms and influences the ritual. But the photos are also edited in post-production according to certain norms. For example, some photographers add a "transcendental style" (Schrader 1972) to the pictures of religious ceremony locations according to Bezner. With reference to Victor Turner's liminal stage of the ritual, she describes the visual interpretation of a religious experience expressed in photos. "These photographic simulacra of religiosity signify the visual language of the sacred in an aesthetic mere candids cannot achieve. Wedding photographers understand such visual metalanguage as presiders over the creation of an ideal." (Bezner 2002, p. 8). The religious dimension is attributed to the photo with creative representational means and is connected with "beauty and visual perfection". The place of the ceremony and the involved social actors, Beltings "world" (Belting 2011, p. 154), are not further discussed by Bezner, although they play a crucial part in the photographic reproduction of the ceremony. They are the material of the historical world (Nichols 2010, p. 45) that is formed and normed in the editing phase of the photos. The location, almost omitted from the existing literature, and the social actors constitute the base for the successful, correct, and valued wedding photo. Norms and values in the photographic representation of the ceremony location, religious and secular, take place on two levels: Norms and values of the ceremony location are expressed on the one hand in the photos and on the other hand attributed by the social actors when viewing the photos.

5. "Locationships" in Religious and Civil Ceremonies

The ceremony location is understood as a place that is "a marked space, a space that is qualitatively defined, that possesses an imprint, a character, a limit, and a history." (Danani 2014, p. 47). Wedding locations often have a history but not always. They are places in which something happens dynamically, as Kim Knott explains. She outlines "location as the outworking—but not the end-point of a process of considering things, people, and events in relation to each other, both geographically and socially." (Knott 2014, p. 33). This understanding aligns how wedding locations are grasped in the current approach, namely, in the tension between the bridal couple, the community, the ceremony, and its photographic representation.

The photographic representation highlights the relationship between the bridal couple and the location. A typical wedding photo motif shows the couple during the wedding ceremony in the vanishing point of the image (Figures 5–7). The photo suggests that the couple and the celebrating community are taking part in something bigger, which in some cases the couples themselves mentioned. Like the woman who describes her civil wedding as a "movie wedding" that included more than only her and her husband:

> The only thing I cared so much about—yeah, no but it wasn't even, I mean it was a fake movie wedding, it wasn't a real wedding, it wasn't you and me, it was a thing—the only thing I cared so much about was for them to play Pachelbel's

> Canon at the entrance of my arrival in the nave. That was one thing I had that I really cared about and it was very important to me [. . .].[6]



Figure 5. Roman Catholic wedding in central Italy in 1991 (photo: M.-T. Mäder).



Figure 6. Civil wedding near Rome in 2022 (photo: M.-T. Mäder).

The woman struggles to find the words to describe the wedding experience properly, which obviously transcends the marriage act. The music added an extra quality to the location that intensified the experience outside of the everyday. This representational norm is not only independent of the religious or civil secular context of the ceremony but also between different religious contexts no significant difference could be observed apart from explicit religious symbols that clearly belong to a religious tradition. Such a symbol, for example, is the Chuppa, meaning "a roof over their head", under which a Jewish wedding takes place. The Chuppa is located in the front part of a Synagogue, open to all sides, and symbolizes Abraham's house.



Figure 7. Free wedding, northern Italy, 2022 (photo: Andrea Gilberti).

Likewise, the participants of the current study expressed a close connection with the wedding location not only during the ritual but also when they selected the place for the ceremony, and when they remember it.

A couple who married in a Greek Orthodox church in Venetia introduced their guests to the traditional Greek Orthodox wedding ritual of which they are fond. The wife described the atmosphere of the church in detail and highlighted the advantage of such a wedding rite for the community:

> [. . .] also the atmosphere that is created is very strong, or at least that which was created at our wedding, because other Greek weddings, in short, the Greeks [don't] sit in the pews like this, we had all our friends around us, we were there. The Church of the Greeks also, I mean, it's an important church, it's a masterpiece of the 16th century. The Spiridion, who is also an authority, is an authority of the Orthodox Church internationally, just. Everything created, yes, I don't know, on the one hand I was tense, on the other hand I was—I felt I was participating in something, yes, important, but important from the point of view not of feeling, spiritually important. That was it.[7]

Having their friends around them during the wedding in the "masterpiece of the 16th century" created a special atmosphere for the community. The wife, who was raised Roman Catholic, additionally described the spiritual experience which was created by the church that gave her a feeling of belonging to something "spiritually important." With the reference to the aesthetics and the religious significance of the church the woman connects her wedding with a larger history and constructs a line of tradition in which her wedding participates. The significance and the age of the church should hopefully be transferred to the marriage, that is important and should last a lifetime.

Some couples chose a religious place because the bride or the groom had performed other rites of passage in the same location, such as baptism, first communion, confirmation, or all of these. These typical Roman Catholic rituals imbue the venue with a unique significance, fostering an additional emotional connection and memory. Some of the couples even knew the priest since their childhood because he conducted all the rites. But besides these personal religious experiences, the building, the church itself, is often connoted with positive values, as another wife mentions: ". . . [I]t is Romanesque, Romanesque because it was the style of the Cistercians, that is to say, these people here in [place] founded the Church in [place], so I am very fond of it."[8] In the current case the husband adds that his wife has been baptized by the same priest that married them. Both agree on the church's remarkable beauty that according to the husband also impressed the wedding party attending the service.[9]

Similarly, a personal connection to the location holds significant importance in civil ceremonies, where lines of tradition are constructed. Additionally, the civil ceremony may often carry more significance than the couple initially anticipated. A German couple, for example, married in the registrar's office of the husband's hometown in 2022. Initially, they planned a simple wedding and ended up with a surprise reception in front of the registrar's office before they celebrated in a garden restaurant. Commenting on the photo taken right after they exited the registrar's office: they felt like "king and queen"[10], with their heads and the bride's flower bouquet. The friends' and family's surprise to the newlyweds outside the town hall with a sparkling wine toast even turned this moment into something extraordinary.[11] The husband highlights his personal connection to the place and the wife mentions that the registrar's office is beautiful and symbolically meaningful:

> **Husband:** Yes, because I know that the registry office is also very nice.
>
> **Wife:** It's very nice!
>
> **mtm:** Yes.
>
> **Woman:** And also the fact that in the end it had this classic touch, that you say you were at the Freising registry office, I thought that was somehow really nice.[12]

The location becomes meaningful because it is connected to a tradition. The building is in the historical old town of Freising in Bavaria and one of the most important Rococo buildings in Upper Bavaria. To marry in this building was important for the couple, because it made their wedding more valuable. The office is located next to the city church in the same block and represents, together with the town hall, a landmark in Freising. The importance of the place is also reflected in the couple's portrait in front of the town hall (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Civil wedding in Bavaria in 2022 (photo: M.-T. Mäder).

The ritual and the location of civil weddings are often captured as transcending the everyday, as was the case with the lesbian couple who married in Rome in 2016. They registered their life partnership in the registrar's office in Campidoglio (capitol) in the "sala rossa". The "sala rossa" is where many couples in Rome conduct their civil weddings and it is only since 2016 that homosexual couples have been legally admitted to register their life partnership in a civil act. To be registered at such a symbolic place was crucial for them, as the wife commented:

> But I think for me perhaps the moment that has stayed with me the most is the embrace afterwards in the "sala rossa", after the exchange of the rings, because it was us, but around us we had everyone. So it was our world that somehow recognized our union. That was it for me, I would say.[13]

In this case, the community, "our world", who gathered in this traditional place to testify to the couple's union is important. To see their community in a locationship with the "sala rossa" testifying to their union became the most precious moment during the whole day.

From the perspective of the couple's comments about the rite, the difference between secular civil and religious weddings is often bigger. The couples who married in religious rites tended to be more self-confident that their wedding was meaningful and authentic. Nevertheless, the wedding location is a "special" place and the social actors often express a personal relationship with the place, highlighting extraordinary features or praising the unique atmosphere. This "locationship" is therefore understood as a feature of the ceremony location. It consists of the couple's relation to the place and how they experienced it during the ceremony and remember it afterwards. The representational norms and the values of civil and religious wedding locations conspicuously converge in the individual accounts combined with the photos of the ceremony location, as discussion showed.

6. Secular and Religious Norms and Values of Enchanted Locationships in Wedding Photography

This paper combined media ethical considerations with qualitative ethnographic data to consider stylistic norms of wedding photography. The aim was to understand how these norms express, affirm, adapt, and reshape religious and secular values. Two key aspects are revealed. The first aspect concerns the choice of location and the importance of participating in a shared tradition. The focus on the ceremony location proved to be productive when considering the merging and blurring of religious and secular norms and values in wedding photography. In the production of wedding photos, the triangular relation between the couple, their guests, and the location, the so-called locationship, is staged through the lens of the camera. In this triangle, the blending of religious and secular norms and values could be observed. (1) The spatial design of wedding photos sets the bridal couples in relation to the ceremony location in similar ways by applying comparable motifs independently of a religious or a secular wedding. (2) In the photographic reproduction of the locationship, traditions are formed or reconstructed. Some ceremonies are connected to a religious tradition and others use religious rites as a matrix for a civil secular wedding. This matrix is expressed in the photographic practice of taking pictures of before, during, and after motifs. The three-part structure depicted in the photos is once again associated with various locations and their thresholds, providing a religious dimension also for secular weddings.

The second key aspect pertains to how norms and values originating from wedding photography of religious ceremonies continue to influence secular norms and values. Thus, they become integral to the "visual enchantment" of the wedding photo genre, irrespective of whether the ceremonies are religious or secular. It is particularly striking that religion is used in wedding photos as an aesthetic norm independently of whether it concerns a religious or a secular wedding (Illouz 2008, p. 113). For example, when the couple is photographed at the vanishing point with the community at their backs. The representational norm stages the couple enchanted as part of something bigger. Another norm shows the couple related to each other as one unit fading out of their surroundings. Also, in this case the wedding couple seems visually enchanted, taking part in something bigger that transgresses the material world.

In this manner, photos of civil or secular weddings can convey similar values as those of religious weddings. This is achieved through the utilization of photographic conventions and norms originally derived from religious wedding rites but now applied to secular wedding ceremonies. Such motifs merge and blend the religious sphere with the secular and can result in the "visual enchantment" of the wedding photographs in their production and reception. The couples connect their wedding to something "bigger", transcending the everyday. When looking at the photos, they evaluate and remember these photographic representations of locationships meaningfully. They mention the beauty and singularity of the location regardless of whether they married in a civil or religious rite. This gives

the wedding event an "extraordinary" (or transcendent) charge. It is therefore the visual staging that strongly constructs this moment of something special. In this context, religion provides a matrix for the extraordinary.

In cases in which the couples married religiously, the civil rite was surprisingly unimportant in the photos. Often the couple did not even have photos of the civil wedding. In cases where there was simply a civil wedding, the rite adapted traditional elements. Therefore, it can be said that wedding photography favors tradition over innovation. It fosters the traditional normative principles of marriage and elevates them to an eternal norm of the best possible lifestyle. This aligns with Belting's conception of photography, which categorizes the world and its places while preserving the past within its frames.

> Photography geometricizes, ranks, and classifies the world. Places become photographic places and as such are captured in the square of the print with no way out; what was observed by the camera at that moment is locked within a past time, [. . .]. (Belting 2011, p. 147)

Photos represent and realize norms and values through the viewers' engagement with them. They evoke memories that are categorized within cultural thought patterns and contexts. However, these memories are idealized, creating an invented past. This invented past exists within a relational dynamic involving the couple, their guests, the location, and the wedding photographer, who preserves the traditional values of weddings. In this process, religious and civil elements of the wedding are merged and blended. Therefore, the norms and values originating from religious wedding ceremonies continue to influence all wedding photos, whether religious or secular, resulting in the "visual enchantment" of wedding photos as a genre.

The active and passive merging and blending of the secular with the religious sphere in wedding photography additionally shows how religion is transformed and adapted in mediatization processes. "Generally speaking, mediatization is a concept used to analyze critically the interrelation between changes in media and communications on the one hand, and changes in culture and society on the other." (Couldry and Hepp 2013, p. 197). How individuals and groups interact with media varies but in the case of weddings the adaptation of the historical world (Nichols 2016, p. 155) to stylistic norms of the media, the so-called mediation, is conspicuous as Mark Deuze accurately states (Deuze 2022, p. 33). He mentions the influence of existent wedding representation on the staging and photographing of the couples. With regard to religion, one could argue that the photographic stylistic conventions level out the cultural religious differences between the ceremonies. In the current study, it is conspicuous how the secular adapts to the religious and not the other way around. The values connected with marriage and expressed in the photos often surprisingly relate to religious values. In such cases, the photographic depiction of the secular sphere of civil weddings alludes to a religious dimension.

By reproducing wedding photo norms photographers, couples, guests, and locations are handing down traditional values about marriage. They become the bearer of the religious dimension of a rite of passage. Every wedding takes part in this process of handing down certain norms and values, as the case of homosexual couples show. They easily adapt to the norms and values of wedding photography. It can only be speculated that should wedding photography be radically transformed then wedding norms and values will also be radically transformed. Or maybe the couples actually enjoy the (additional) religious enchantment in their wedding photos because it reminds them of a time far back in the past, and connects them with such traditions.

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Informed Consent Statement: Written informed consent for publication of the participants' details was obtained from the participants.

Data Availability Statement: Due to protection of privacy and the sensitivity of interview footage, the data can only be shared based on the explicit consent of the participants. The data include wedding videos and photos in which religious affiliation, sexual orientation, and personal details are discussed. It is stated in the written consent form that the data will not be made open unless the participants agree. The transcriptions of the interviews can be accessed by submitting a request to the author via email, which should detail for what purposes the transcriptions would be used.

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Notes

1 For more information about hte research project see www.promising-images.eu (accessed on 5 June 2024).

2 The ethical statement of the study (https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8250222, accessed on 5 June 2024) and the questionnaires in English, German, and Italian (https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8249440, accessed on 5 June 2024) are stored on zenodo. The particpants' consent to publish their photos and to participate in the study ahs been obtained and is avalable to the publisher.

3 See Interview VIW_22_CH_010223 (20:2 ¶ 67 – 69 in VIW_22_CH_010223_III_ts.docx), https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8248443, accessed on 5 June 2024.

4 See interview VIW_04_CH_260522 (4:29 ¶ 312 in VIW_04_CH_260522_II_ts.docx), https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8181259, accessed on 5 June 2024.

5 The interview took place in Central Italy 27 Sepetmber 2022 (https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8190245, accessed on 5 June 2024).

6 Translation from Italian by the author (145:4 ¶ 107 in VIW_25_110223_VI_ts.docx), https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8248820, accessed on 5 June 2024. The wedding took place near Rome in 2022.

7 (98:1 ¶ 72 in VIW_24_IT_110223_IV_ts.docx), https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8248660, accessed on 5 June 2024.

8 Translation from Italian by the author. Interview 7 April 2022 in Central Italy (61:12 ¶ 526 in VIW_02_IT_070422_I.docx), https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8178945, accessed on 5 June 2024.

9 (61:4 ¶ 150 in VIW_02_IT_070422_I.docx), https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8178945, accessed on 5 June 2024.

10 (152:1 ¶ 34 – 64 in VIW_18_DE_111222_III _ts.docx), https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8247717, accessed on 5 June 2024.

11 (152:3 ¶ 18 – 20 in VIW_18_DE_111222_III _ts.), docx, https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8247717, accessed on 5 June 2024.

12 (151:1 ¶ 226 – 237 in VIW_18_DE_111222_II_ts.docx), https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8247717, accessed on 5 June 2024.

13 (140:8 ¶ 128 – 129 in VIW_26_IT_110223_V_ts.docx), https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8249246, accessed on 5 June 2024.

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