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Review

Heather Blair. *Real and Imagined: The Peak of Gold in Heian Japan*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015.

BOOK REVIEW BY BRYAN D. LOWE

If twenty-first-century scholars of Japanese religions were to adopt a catchy slogan, it would surely be "going places." No topic has enticed more recent scholarship than place and pilgrimage; more than a dozen recent monographs and dissertations have employed a site-specific approach since 2000, typically focusing on mountain practice and pilgrimage.[1] Heather Blair's *Real and Imagined*, a study of the Heian-period (794–1185) pilgrimage site Mt. Kinpusen 金峯山, joins these works that try to "go places," but it also manages to take the field somewhere new. It achieves what all books should but few do: it is historically and philologically rigorous, determinedly interdisciplinary, theoretically sophisticated, and lucidly written. This brilliant book should go down as a classic, serving as a model for how place and pilgrimage should be studied both in Japanese religions and beyond.

1 For twenty-first-century site- or region-based monographs on mountain practice and/or pilgrimage, including those that focus on modern and contemporary Japan, see Ellen Schattschneider, *Immortal Wishes: Labor and Transcendence on a Japanese Sacred Mountain* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Sherry D. Fowler, *Murōji: Rearranging Art and History at a Japanese Buddhist Temple* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005); D. Max Moerman, *Localizing Paradise: Kumano Pilgrimage and the Religious Landscape of Premodern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005); Ian Reader, *Making Pilgrimages: Meaning and Practice in Shikoku* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005); Sarah Thal, *Rearranging the Landscape of the Gods: The Politics of a Pilgrimage Site in Japan 1573–1912* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Barbara Ambros, *Emplacing a Pilgrimage: The* Ōyama *Cult and Regional Religion in Early Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008); and Allan G. Grapard, *Mountain Mandalas: Shugendō in Kyushu* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016). For recent dissertations, see Gaynor Sekimori, "Haguro Shugendō and the Separation of Buddha and Kami Worship (Shinbutsu Bunri), 1868–1890" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2000); Ethan C. Lindsay, "Pilgrimage to the Sacred Traces of Kōyasan: Place and Devotion in Late Heian Japan" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2012); Caleb S. Carter, "Producing Place, Tradition and the Gods: Mt. Togakushi, Thirteenth through Mid-Nineteenth Centuries" (PhD diss., UCLA, 2014); Lindsey E. DeWitt, "A Mountain Set Apart: Female Exclusion, Buddhism, and Tradition at Modern Ōminesan, Japan" (PhD diss., UCLA, 2015); Andrea Castiglioni, "Ascesis and Devotion: The Mount Yudono Cult in Early Modern Japan" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2015); and Frank W. Clements "Worldly Ascetics: Managing Family, Status, and Territory in Early Modern Shugendō" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2016). Embargoes prevented me from reading these final two promising dissertations. As will be noted below, the site-specific study of Japanese religions owes a great deal to arguments advanced in Allan G. Grapard, *The Protocol of the Gods: A Study of the Kasuga Cult in Japanese History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 4–7.

The title of the book draws from Edward Soja's notion of three types of space: real, imagined, and real-and-imagined, a model that also builds upon the work of Henri Lefebvre.[2] Real space refers to the physical and material world. Imagined points to conceptions of space that do not necessarily derive from the "real." The third form, real-and-imagined space, captures the dynamic interrelation between the first two; in other words, it recognizes the fact that the material world shapes and is shaped by our ideations. While these categories are useful, any effort to separate the real and imagined invites a host of ontological, hermeneutic, and epistemological problems. Perhaps with such dangers in mind, Blair argues that the real and imagined are "interdependent" and "in practice … interfused"; as such, "it is the historical, human reception and construction of Kinpusen as a real-and-imagined place that is the focus of this book" (p. 4).

Blair divides her study into three parts. The first, "The Mountain Imagined," looks at representations of Kinpusen. Chapter one stresses the generative tensions between the perceived civilization of the city and the divinely dangerous but simultaneously powerful lure of the mountains. The imagined otherness of Kinpusen stimulated a desire to travel there, but it also, according to Blair, midwifed the famous ban on women, a discourse that emerged to sustain the alterity of the mountain at a time when it became increasingly accessible. Since pilgrimage gained much of its meaning as a journey to a different world, the proscription against women served to preserve the fantasy of spiritual sojourn for male travelers. By linking the necessary conceptual binaries of capital and mountain with *nyonin kekkai* 女人結界 (women's boundaries) discourse, Blair contributes to a highly debated topic with an original interpretation that moves beyond classic explanations tied to pure misogyny or adherence to *vinaya* rules governing Buddhist monks and nuns.

Chapter two focuses on Zaō 蔵王, the resident deity of the peak who "dwelt in the interstices between the categories of '*kami*' and 'bodhisattva'" (p. 64). It also pays some attention to a few other members of the local pantheon such as Mikumari 水分/Komori 子守. Blair examines what she calls "narrative theology," the vernacular stories propagated mostly by laypeople that address the identity of a deity. The flexible and multifaceted nature of these narratives challenge the supposedly fixed and systematic theologies found in the monastic treatises that form the basis of much scholarship on the "*honji-suijaku* 本地垂跡 paradigm," a model commonly used to understand the relationship between Buddhist deities as a source and Japanese *kami* as a trace. In this chapter, Blair also asserts that Zaō functioned as a "localizing deity," one that constructed Kinpusen as a powerful place with a unique religious landscape.

In the third chapter, Blair develops the notion of "ritual regimes," a tripartite structure of sites, rites, and texts. These resembled a signature; different individuals inaugurated particular combinations that they could in turn pass on to their descendants. To give but one example, Fujiwara no Michinaga 藤原道長 (966–1027), a central protagonist of this chapter, initiated a signature ritual regime composed of the following elements: Hōjōji 法成寺 and Kinpusen as sites, the *Lotus Sutra* and the complete canon as texts, and *Lotus* lectures in the capital and sutra burial on the mountain as rites. Much of the structure of this regime was consistent within the regent's house in subsequent generations with some minor modifications. As the power of the regents was challenged, however, new regimes emerged; perhaps most prominently, Retired Emperor Shirakawa 白川 (1053–1159) shifted pilgrimage to Kumano 熊野, a move that Blair interprets as an effort to establish a unique repertoire free from any traces of the Fujiwara. Shirakawa's success in creating this new signature is evidenced by the remarkably numerous pilgrimages to Kumano by subsequent retired emperors in place of Kinpusen.

Part two transitions from the mountain as imagined to the "real peak," though the imagined continues to populate this part of the book much as the real mountain never fully vanishes from the opening chapters. Chapter four outlines the preparations and journey of Michinaga and Fujiwara no Moromichi 藤原師通 (1062–99). Blair, never satisfied with mere description, usefully analyzes the "spatial soteriology" of the journey. While most scholarship on the Ōmine range focuses on the mandalization of the landscape, Blair contends that eleventh-century sources do not render the mountain through this esoteric framework. Instead, pilgrims conceived of their journey as enacting the bodhisattva path, their spiritual progress mapped neatly onto the landscape itself. Intriguingly, this conceptualization of Buddhist practice as spatial rather

2 Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996).

than temporal enabled aristocrats to rapidly advance in their religious pursuits without necessarily having to dedicate their entire lives to arduous training. It would be useful for future scholars to compare this soteriology with other efforts to "shorten the path" in the Buddhist tradition, including the non-linearity of original enlightenment discourse characteristic of the medieval age, as articulated by Jacqueline Stone.[3]

Chapter five turns to the practices performed by Michinaga and Moromochi upon reaching the mountain. These include preliminary rites, a large public dedication of sutras and other objects, and a smaller, private sutra burial. While the previous chapter demonstrated how pilgrims traversed space, this one adds a temporal dimension. According to Blair, sutra burial, in particular, followed the logic of "trace-ism" that linked past, present, and future. Deposited manuscripts functioned as "physical doubles" of their sponsors; as such, sutra burial meant that the patrons too could remain eternally at this sacred site intimately bound with the buddhas and deities of the mountain. This interpretation reveals the inadequacies of standard *mappō* 末法 explanations that claim patrons' anxieties over a perceived age of decline motivated them to bury texts to await Maitreya's descent.

The sixth chapter is perhaps the most archivally impressive, because it deals with a relatively unknown manuscript that Blair uncovered in two copies: one owned by the Imperial Household Agency and the other by the University of Tokyo's Historiographical Institute.[4] She uses this text, a fragment of Ōe no Masafusa's 大江匡房 (1041–1111) diary, to explore Shirakawa's 1092 pilgrimage to Kinpusen. Here, Blair illuminates the retired sovereign's delicate negotiations between competing interests of monks in the mountain and those in the capital. Kinpusen clergy petitioned Shirakawa for independence from Kōfukuji, a temple that had been asserting administrative rights over the mountain in the 1090s. While other scholars have highlighted the ways pilgrimage provided theatrical and ideological rewards to retired rulers, this chapter gives a new perspective by also illuminating how monks themselves benefited from an audience with a powerful figure who could respond to their demands.

Shirakawa's trip, however, marked the end of an era and the start of a new order at the mountain, the subject of part three. Chapter seven narrates this transition. Outright warfare began soon after Shirakawa's pilgrimage; Kōfukuji attacked the mountain and burned down the Zaō hall. Contestations continued for subsequent decades resulting in an integration of Kinpusen into Kōfukuji's power bloc. This naturally changed the institutional landscape on the mountain. For Blair, it represents the start of a medieval age defined by the rise of the *kenmon taisei* 権門体制 (power bloc system). As such, this chapter offers another case study generally supportive of the thesis that the medieval era began with the *insei* 院政 (defined by Blair as 1086–1221) not the Kamakura period (1185–1333), an argument advanced by Kuroda Toshio in the mid-1960s as a central part of his *kenmon taisei* model, and one that has received significant attention in Anglophone scholarship.[5]

Chapter eight contends that it was precisely this context of integration into power blocs that birthed the genre known as *engi* 縁起 (origin narratives) in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. While *engi* are typically understood as tied to the places they describe, Blair emphasizes the role lowland monks played in producing and disseminating texts related to the southern mountains. As such, *engi* helped serve not only the sites of mountain practice, but also the powerful monasteries in Nara and the capital that administered them. These exchanges produced some of Japan's most famous mountain traditions such as many beloved leg-

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3 For shortening the path, see Paul Groner, "Shortening the Path: Early Tendai Interpretations of the Realization of Buddhahood with This Very Body (*Sokushin Jōbutsu*)," in *Paths of Liberation: The Mārga and its Transformations in Buddhist Thought*, eds. Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Robert M. Gimello (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1992), 439–74. For original enlightenment, see Jacqueline I. Stone, *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999).

4 Blair goes into the history of this manuscript in greater depth in Heather Blair, "Mountain and Plain: Kinpusen and Kōfukuji in the Middle Ages," in *Nara, Nanto bukkyō no dentō to kakushin*, eds. Nemoto Seiji and Samuel C. Morse (Tokyo: Bensei Shuppan, 2010), 4–11 One scholar, Miyake Toshiyuki 三宅敏之, had written briefly about the Imperial Household Agency's copy after it was displayed at an exhibition in 1962, which led Blair to seek out the manuscript.

5 For an introduction of Kuroda's work in English, see James C. Dobbins, ed., "The Legacy of Kuroda Toshio," special issue, *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 23, no. 3-4 (1996). For an assessment of the *kenmon taisei* thesis, see Mikael S. Adolphson, *Gates of Power: Monks, Courtiers, and Warriors in Premodern Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000).

ends of En no Gyōja 役行者 and the well-known mandalization of the mountains. *Engi* were so successful in inventing these traditions that they have come to be seen as timeless, despite being the products of a very particular historical moment.

The epilogue sustains the book's attack on ahistorical approaches. It questions dominant ways of defining Shugendō 修験道, views that have often used folklore or structuralist models to assert an unchanging essence to mountain religious practice rooted in Japanese religiosity. In contrast, Blair defines Shugendō as a combination of organizational hierarchies, institutions, rites (especially "peak entry"), and texts that would have been recognizable as a distinct mode of practice by both insiders and outsiders. She argues that this recognizable religious movement coalesced in the thirteenth century in response to the changing political and religious configurations brought on by the medieval period. She also provides a brief overview of the growth and flourishing of Shugendō in the Edo period (defined by Blair as 1603–1867) and its proscription and perseverance in Meiji (1868–1912) and beyond. Blair's succinct but compelling treatment will hopefully force future researchers and teachers to abandon the popular definitions of Shugendō advanced by still-influential scholars such as Miyake Hitoshi 宮家準 (1933–) and Gorai Shigeru 五来重 (1908–93).

Blair's book successfully rewrites the history of medieval Japanese religions. It contributes new interpretations and data on some of the most central and hotly debated topics in the field including *nyonin kekkai*, *honji-suijaku*, mandalization of mountains, sutra burial, pilgrimage, *kenmon taisei*, *engi*, and Shugendō. Moreover, its seemingly obvious but often ignored methodology of using Heian-period sources to tell a Heian story should be a model for scholarship going forward. Finally, it offers a number of theoretically useful, if at times underdeveloped, frameworks for understanding Japanese religion. While some readers may be turned off by the number of terms Blair coins (e.g. affective landscape, narrative theology, cardinal ideology, trace-ism, and spatial soteriology to name a few), I found their usage, including some of the new "ologies," to be both provocative and applicable for scholars working in religious studies more broadly.

Take one of these neologisms: "trace-ism" This concept of "trace" (*ato*, *seki*, *jaku* 跡) appears frequently in Heian sources, where it can refer to precedent in terms of law and ritual, the manifestations of buddhas and bodhisattvas as *kami*, and to handwriting in manuscripts. This notion is powerful, because it shows that Heian individuals viewed their sacred spaces and texts as saturated with resonances of humans and deities, who were always to some degree present in the manuscripts and landscapes of Japan. As Blair notes, the term trace "designated physical entities that provided access to the past and the divine … not so much a representation as a condensation or replication of the person or god who produced it" (p. 8). This notion of trace-ism, in which people and gods are present in the materials and landscapes of Japan, helpfully collapses temporal, spatial, and ontological divisions between human and divine spheres. As such, it undermines linear narratives and sacred and secular distinctions. It reminds readers that deities are, to borrow a phrase from Robert Orsi, "really present" in the religious landscapes of Japan.[6] Here, Blair accomplishes the best of theorizing; rather than applying a theory, typically one derived from continental philosophy, to her data, she works outward from concrete examples in the sources to construct a generalizable model, one usable by scholars working in other traditions.

This question of generalizability brings me to my final point. As indicated above, in recent years site-specific studies have come to dominate the field of medieval Japanese religions. Much of this has been inspired by Allan Grapard, who suggested that we ground our study in specific sites, much as the sources themselves commonly do. Yet, as Grapard himself argued, there is also much shared across sites:

> We find in these sites—from the most complex cultic center to the most simple place of worship—common elements in their organization of sacred space, in ritual and sacerdotal lineages, in combinations, and in their social and economic aspects. Local differences, though important, do not hide the patterns along which the tradition was fundamentally organized. Thus, even though there were remarkable distinctions between, for example, the universe of meaning of the Dewa Mountains and that of the Kunisaki Mountains, those cultic centers were identical at the structural level.[7]

Now that the field of Japanese religions, largely thanks to those inspired by Grapard's groundbreaking

6 Robert A. Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), esp. 2–5.

7 Grapard, *Protocol of the Gods*, 7.

scholarship, has a large number of site-based studies, including those related to Mts. Iwaki, Haguro, Hiko, Kinpu, Kōya, Murō, Ōmine, Ōyama, Togakushi, Yudono, and Zozū (Kotohira), as well as the "Kumano Sanzan," it is time to ask how stable the patterns and structures across sites may be, and how we can explain such stability, if it indeed exists. Other methodological questions arise as well. Put most bluntly: do commonalities undermine site-based studies? Perhaps more charitably: what other ways can scholars frame their projects from the outset beyond a site-based approach? How would our perspective on Japanese religions and mountains change if, rather than starting with a site, we chose a particular trope or practice, and explored it across sites? At the very least, this reviewer feels that the field has reached a saturation point with site-based studies. Greater synthesis across sites is required. It is a testament to the merits of a book when it raises questions of whether the whole field needs to adopt a new approach, because the present site-based one has been so masterfully executed. But such is the success of Blair's important new study, a must-read for all students of Japanese religions, sacred space, and pilgrimage.

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