

Peter KNECHT

Ise sankei mandara and the Image of the Pure Land

The *Ise sankei mandara* appears to have been used as a guide to the Ise shrines. While a superficial analysis of its main features shows that the mandala is a fairly accurate visual representation of the sacred precincts, its meaning is much more extensive. The natural features of the Ise sanctuaries emerge as the physical representation of a non-physical world, for at certain points the spiritual can be intensely experienced in the environment. The mandala guides the prospective pilgrims through the physical world while reminding them that the pilgrimage is actually an image of the pilgrims' own life, and also offers a glimpse at their life's goal: the Pure Land. Furthermore, the mandala picture when taken by itself can be used as a means by those who cannot actually visit Ise to still enjoy the benefits of the pilgrimage.

KEYWORDS: Shrine mandala — mountains — otherworld — confraternities (*kō*) — *etoki* — Mount Fuji

Peter Knecht is former Director of the Nanzan Anthropological Institute and recently retired as editor of *Asian Folklore Studies*.

A FEW YEARS ago I had a chance to interview a priest of the Ise Shrines. The interview was part of a study into the organization and interpretation of that space which centers on the sanctuaries of Ise and forms the stage for the pilgrimage to Ise. I intended to learn from the priest how the members of the modern institution of the Ise Shrines view the sacredness of the space that leads up to and is occupied by the sanctuaries. My questions were somewhat “biased,” given my previous knowledge that the Ise pilgrimage more often than not included in its circuit a visit to a large Buddhist temple located on a mountain to the east of the Inner Shrine, on the border with Toba. But when I asked the priest whether his concept of the sanctuaries today also included this mountain, Mount Asama, and the large temple Kongō Shōji, he denied this quite emphatically, saying that the temple was a Buddhist institution and had nothing at all to do with the Ise Shrines. In fact, many of the groups or individuals making a pilgrimage to Ise today do not seem to include a visit to the mountain temple as part of their pilgrimage. Yet, historically speaking, such a clear distinction between the Shinto sanctuaries of Ise and at least some of the Buddhist temples in the area was not always made. Although we must accept that in earlier periods the view of the Ise priests did not necessarily coincide with the view of pilgrims visiting the shrines, the saying of the Edo period, “If you make a pilgrimage to Ise, you should also visit Asama; if you do not visit Asama, it is only half a pilgrimage” (OSAKA SHIRITSU HAKUBUTSUKAN 1987, 182), suggests that for the common pilgrim of former times a visit to Mount Asama and its temple was a significant part of the pilgrimage that could not be neglected. If that was the case, the question arises to why this Buddhist temple should be of such importance for a pilgrimage whose stated goal was the two Shinto sanctuaries at Ise? I believe that part of the answer to this question is offered by the *Ise sankei mandara* 伊勢參詣曼荼羅.

The Ise sankei mandara

The *Ise sankei mandara* belongs to a genre of Japanese mandala that does not aim to graphically express abstract Buddhist teachings. Rather, it simply displays before the viewer the main buildings and other famous features of a temple or shrine, as in a map. A *miya mandara* 宮曼荼羅, for example, shows the arrangement of the salient buildings and other noteworthy features of a sanctuary. Sometimes a main illustrative purpose may also be narrative. An *engi mandara* 縁起曼荼羅, for example, illustrates the story of a sanctuary’s foundation.

The *shaji sankei mandara* 社寺參詣曼荼羅 is similar to the *miya mandara*.

While the *miya mandara* is most often a static representation of a sanctuary's layout, however, the *sankei mandara* presents a dynamic aspect in that it does not only graphically represent religious space, but also describes the activities undertaken by the visitors to the sanctuary. For that reason a *sankei mandara* is usually filled with figures of people moving through the sacred space (HIRANO 1987, 282).

Today, four examples of the *Ise sankei mandara* are known to have survived.¹ Most of the main features they represent and their basic structure are very similar, yet there are some differences that I will mention later. In this paper I consider mainly the version of the *Ise sankei mandara*, which is kept at the Jingū Chōkoku 神宮徴古館, the museum of the Ise Shrines.² This copy was purchased by the museum sometime in the early twentieth century from a person of Uji-Yamada 宇治山田, but it is believed to be a work of the Keichō 慶長 period (FIGURE 1). If that is indeed the case the mandala depicts life at the Ise shrines in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries (JINGŪ SHICHŌ 1937, explanation of frontispiece).³

On all of the extant *Ise sankei mandara*, the itinerary which the visitor is invited to follow starts at the lower right corner with the crossing of the Miya River 宮川, and ends at the upper left corner with a view of Mount Fuji in the

1. The four extant examples of the *Ise sankei mandara* are kept at the following locations: 1) the Jingū Chōkoku in Ise; 2) the Takatsu Kobunka Kaikan in Kyoto; 3) the Mitsui Bunko in Tokyo; and, 4) the private collection of Mr. J. Powers in America.

The Osaka Municipal Museum organized a special exhibit *Shaji sankei mandara* in the spring of 1987. The book published in relation to that exhibit contains fine reproductions not only of the mandala actually exhibited, but also of those that could not be shown to the public. In case of the *Ise sankei mandara* it contains all four versions (OSAKA SHIRITSU HAKUBUTSUKAN 1987).

2. I wish to thank Reverend Yoshikawa Tatsumi, a priest at the Ise Shrines. When I first met him he was a curator at the Jingū Chōkoku. Although unfortunately I was unable to view the mandala, shortly thereafter Reverend Yoshikawa informed me that if I could come within a few days I could see it. When I arrived at the Museum he had arranged for the mandala to be hung in a private room so that I could view it at leisure and even take photographs, some of which are included in this article. On the day I visited the Museum, Mr. Murase Masayuki of the Jingū Forest Administration took me to see the stone structure on Mount Takakura. The information they offered helped me better understand the Ise Shrines, and I wish to thank them for their wonderful hospitality. Meeting them was an unforgettable experience.

3. Generally the *sankei mandara* had been used by wandering religious figures such as *hijiri* 聖 or the representatives of a Shinto sanctuary, *oshi* 御師, in order to promote support of, or pilgrimage to, a sanctuary. Nishiyama suggests that the early sixteenth century might have been the peak season for their production, while Fukuhara says that they were produced not earlier than the end of the Muromachi period, and production ceased after the end of the eighteenth century (NISHIYAMA 1998, 148; FUKUHARA 1987, 224–25). In the case of the *Ise sankei mandara*, however, little is known about when the four versions were produced. There seem to be no indications for the versions kept by J. Powers and the Takatsu Kobunka Kaikan. For the version of the Jingū Chōkoku there is the vague reference to the Keichō period just mentioned. The only version provided with a date is the one kept by the Mitsui Bunko. According to the inscription on its box it was donated in Man'en 2 (1861), but it is attributed to Tosa Mitsunobu, who is believed to have died at the beginning of the sixteenth century (OSAKA SHIRITSU HAKUBUTSUKAN 1987, 174–75).



FIGURE 1: The *Ise sankei mandara* of the Jingū Chōkokan at Ise. All photographs by author.

distance. Between these two points the visitor is first led to the Outer Shrine and the mountain behind it, Mount Takakura, and then goes back to the village of Okada where the street is lined with stalls selling the combs for which the village was famous. Then the pilgrim proceeds to the mountain, Ai no yama 間の山, between the two shrines then goes back into the valley, where he crosses the famous Uji bridge 宇治橋 over the Isuzu River and advances forward to visit the Inner Shrine. From there, finally, he proceeds to another mountain, Mount Asama 朝熊山 where he visits the temple Kongō Shōji 金剛証寺 and views Mount Fuji from that temple's small *oku no in* 奥の院.

Similar to a designed map of some tourist spot, the *Ise sankei mandara* is not an exact representation of reality, yet it does not disregard the disposition and natural circumstances of the real world either. It differs, however, from an ordinary map because it arranges features in such a way that they highlight meanings that are not readily perceived in the real world. In the case of the *Ise sankei mandara*, space is arranged into two sections with striking parallels: not only are the centers of the sections, the Outer and the Inner Shrine respectively, depicted

in an almost identical manner, but in both sections the pilgrims are depicted passing through them in an upwards direction. In contrast, in the single middle section, representing Okada village and the mountain between the two shrines, the visitors are shown passing in a downwards direction.

Although the sections depicting the two shrines (Outer and Inner) resemble one another in many ways, they clearly contrast in terms of one special feature. In the top part of each we notice a different image: in one case an image of the sun, and in the other case an image of the moon floating on clouds. The clouds seem to separate the sun and the moon (and the realm in which these appear) from the mandala's lower section in which the world of the shrines is more realistically depicted. In fact, the clouds appear to separate the heavenly world from the earthly one. This can be seen as a suggestion for the viewer that the mandala may be more than just a travel-guide-type representation of the shrines so that the pilgrims can find their way in the large space of the sanctuaries. The images of sun and moon are indications of a mystic interpretation superimposed on the physical shrine space. They hint that the two shrines and their physical world are also being interpreted as representations of two spiritual worlds that contrast with one another and yet are complementary. Furthermore, they indicate that the two shrines and their precincts are representations of the two mandala worlds of Ryōbu 两部 Shinto, the Womb World, *taizōkai* 胎藏界, and the Diamond World, *kongōkai* 金剛界. There are other mandala where sun and moon are used in the same way, yet some of the *Ise sankei mandara* exhibit a certain difference. Contrary to the usual arrangement that places the sun to the right and the moon to the left, two copies of the four extant *Ise sankei mandara* place the sun on the left, the side of the Inner Shrine (the sanctuary of Amaterasu, the sun deity), and the moon on the right, the side of the Outer Shrine dedicated to Toyouke. The monk Tsūkai 通海, who visited the shrines in 1286, writes in his diary, the *Daijingū sankeiki* 太神宮參詣記, of the two contrasting worlds saying that “the Outer Shrine is approached from east to west and the Inner Shrine from west to east. The two constitute the two [*ryōbu* 两部] mandala of east and west. The sun is venerated in the east and the moon is venerated in the west” (JINGŪ SHICHŌ 1937, 71). A text from the middle of the seventeenth century, *Seshū kokon meishoshū* 勢州古今名所集, says that according to the secrets of Shinto, the two shrines are attributed to heaven and earth: “Heaven and earth are yin and yang, yin and yang are sun and moon, the sun is in the east the moon in the west, yin is the inner and yang the outer. That the sun is venerated in the east and the moon in the west seems to indicate the rank of the two shrines. . . . In any case the location of the two shrines in Ise is an expression of the location of sun and moon” (JINGŪ SHICHŌ 1942, 70–71).

Tsūkai, in the text mentioned above, says further that “for Dainichi Nyorai the Diamond World means the Heaven mandala and the Womb World means the Earth mandala” (JINGŪ SHICHŌ 1937, 71). This would then mean that both worlds

are avatars of Dainichi Nyorai. The *Ise sankei mandara* is not only a graphic representation of this esoteric teaching, it further represents the two mystic worlds as being actually present in the real world the pilgrim can experience. Here, the world that is visible to the pilgrim's eye is shown as representing another world, one that is not visible to the eye but is present in the faith that guides the pilgrim's wandering. The visible world brings together shrines, temples, and various sacred places as the world that is physically encountered by the living pilgrim. The invisible world is that of faith and esoteric interpretations where the two shrines are considered to represent different yet not separate aspects of the one Dainichi. Sun and moon hint, therefore, at the presence of a world that transcends present time and space (FUKUHARA 1987, 215).

A close look at the mandala reveals still another interesting feature. The visible world, that is, the physical world of the towns of Uji and Yamada with their sanctuaries, is shown as having two aspects. The first is, of course, the world of Shinto, the world of the numerous shrine buildings and their functionaries that characterize Ise. These buildings and the communities of Uji and Yamada that house them constitute the "divine capital city," the *shinto* 神都. This "capital city" is at the same time a place in this world and a place in another, a sacred world, where one needs to follow certain ritual procedures in order to properly enter it. In order to enter this world one has to be duly prepared. The Miya River is the border that must be crossed by everybody who wants to enter this world. The river is also a spiritual border where the pilgrims can shed both their spiritual and physical uncleanness by undergoing an ablution, *misogi* 禊, in the river. In a text dated 1861, *Sakaki no kaori* さかきのかをり, for example, it is mentioned that upon alighting on the Yamada side, pilgrims also get their hair dressed in order to be completely prepared to enter the sacred world of the shrines (JINGŪ SHICHŌ 1937, 346). At the border to this world, the bank of the river, they are met by a delegate dispatched from the quarters of their *onshi* 御師 to welcome them.⁴ This person or some other member of the *onshi*'s household will take care of them during their stay and guide them to the sanctuaries and other sacred places in their premises. While they stay at their *onshi*'s quarters they are treated to lavish meals and also attend the solemn ritual of *daikagura* 太神楽.

In the second aspect, however, the *Ise sankei mandara* presents this world also as a Buddhist world. Among the pilgrims who populate the premises of the shrines on the mandala a surprising number of *yamabushi* 山伏 can be detected, recognizable by their small characteristic cap, the *tokin* 鬘, and their checkered

4. The term *oshi* (or *onshi* as it is used in Ise) is said to be an abbreviation of *okitōshi* 御祈禱師, which designates a specialist of incantations. Often, however, an *oshi* is a low ranking shrine official in charge of creating and maintaining a sanctuary's relations with its supporters, the *danna* 檀那, by collecting contributions and distributing the shrine's amulets, such as Ise's *taima* 大麻. They also were in charge of a sanctuary's relationships with the confraternities, *kō* 講 (INOUE 2002, 132; SUZUKI 2002, 82–84).

coat. At numerous spots even within the shrine precincts, Buddhist monks and nuns can also be noticed either among the pilgrims or as attending to some activity in behalf of the shrines. Finally there are a number of buildings that can easily be identified as Buddhist temples or halls. Possibly they might represent such famous institutions as Hōrakusha 法樂社 or Keikōin 慶光院, although it is difficult to identify these buildings definitely.

In the physical world the sanctuaries of Ise were at the center of two concentrically organized areas. The larger area was formed by the *kami sangun* 神三郡, the three districts of the kami, namely Watarai 度会, Take 多気, and Iino 飯野 (ŌNISHI 1956, 55; KNECHT 2006). These districts, their land as well as their people, were entrusted to the shrines so that the shrines had the authority to exercise complete sovereignty over them. The three districts were, therefore, not taxable by the feudal government. In fact, the story goes that when Toyotomi Hideyoshi 豊臣秀吉 ordered the whole country to be surveyed for tax purposes, he was prevented by divine intervention to have the order executed in the *kami sangun*. When Hideyoshi dozed off one day he had a dream. A man in white garb and *eboshi* 烏帽子 headgear declaring to be the messenger of the Great Deity of Ise appeared in his dream, scolded him for not fearing the gods, and even threatened to kill him if he should dare to survey this land. Startled and bathed in cold sweat, Hideyoshi woke up and immediately recalled his surveyors (JINGŪ SHICHŌ 1942, 365). The exemption from the tax survey was in fact granted by Hideyoshi's decree in 1594 (JINGŪ SHICHŌ 1940, 141; ŌNISHI 1956, 55).

Buddhist Clergy at Ise

Within the larger sacred area of Ise, the part occupied by Yamada and Uji was absolutely sacrosanct, so that any kind of pollution had to be excluded from it (ŌNISHI 1956, 55). The *Jingū nenpyō* 神宮年表, a collection of injunctions often repeated up to the early Meiji period, makes it clear that especially in the innermost area of the shrine precincts no sword was to be worn, no Buddhist word was to be uttered, and no Buddhist monk or nun was to intrude (JINGŪ SHICHŌ 1929). Yet, the latter rule was not entirely without exceptions. Because the shrines owed much to the activities of Buddhist clergy it had become impossible, especially during the Edo period, to prohibit their visiting the shrines. If we are to trust the *Ise sankei mandara* as a source for what was going on at the shrines at that time, it is evident that Buddhist pilgrims, especially *yamabushi*, were very much part of the picture. Furthermore, monks and nuns are depicted on the mandala as offering special services, such as dances like the *nenbutsu odori* 念仏踊り, or collecting a fee for the upkeep of a shrine or a bridge. In fact, a variety of Buddhist figures can be encountered on all the roads within the sacred precincts as they mingle with the other pilgrims.

However, the Buddhist pilgrims did pose a serious problem of contradiction

to the authorities of the shrines because of their habitual relationship to the world of death and funerals and, therefore, to some of the most dreaded sources of pollution (SONODA 1932, 104). Tsūkai writes of a dispute with a layman at the shrine who says that although it is not a written law, Buddha's Law has always been avoided at the shrines since the time of the gods, *shindai* 神代 (JINGŪ SHICHŌ 1937, 52). But, as it happens so often, even if the official ideology of the shrines could not tolerate any source of possible pollution within the most sacred area of the sanctuaries, they could not ignore the often enthusiastic expression of religious feelings towards the deities of Ise by these Buddhist pilgrims. Furthermore, they could not ignore the services these pilgrims did the shrines by writing or telling of their experiences and their emotions at the shrines. Certainly, Buddhist monks or nuns or anyone, for that matter, who had shaved their head and entered Buddhist religious life could not worship with the other pilgrims within the border set by the third *torii* 鳥居. But a way was found to allow them to worship at Ise from places facing the sanctuaries, although they were separated by a river or creek and hidden from the sight of the other pilgrims (JINGŪ SHICHŌ 1937, 600, 609; 1940, 208–209). In these special areas they could worship from afar yet without coming into direct contact with the shrines.

More serious than the threat of pollution on the part of those who had a professional contact with death or funerals was the threat caused by death as it occurred within the sacred city itself. In this case, too, however, a way was found to circumvent the problem to some extent by pretending that the recently deceased individual was actually still alive. Death was, therefore, announced by saying that someone was gravely ill, and the funeral was held without delay on the same day as an "early disposal" (*hayagake* 早懸). The survivors then began the mourning period upon returning from the grave so that everything up to the burial happened as if the person were still alive. Therefore, this manner of dealing with death ensured that it did not constitute a threat of pollution to the community (JINGŪ SHICHŌ 1942, 565–67; ŌNISHI 1956, 56–57).

Ise's Normative Life-Oriented Religion

The fear of death, and the pollution caused by it, was very intense at the Ise sanctuaries because of their orientation towards the absolute opposite, namely towards the source and protection of life. Fukuhara Toshio suggests that one of the reasons why sun and moon are represented on the *Ise sankei mandara* is that they are symbols for the good that the deities at Ise guarantee, namely the uninterrupted continuance of life (sun) and life-sustaining food (moon, the rice deity of the Outer Shrine) (FUKUHARA 1987, 215). If his interpretation is correct, it is understandable why everything which threatens life itself, especially death or contact with death, has to be prevented from entering the immediate premises of the shrines.



FIGURE 2: The stone structure, *Ame no iwado*, on Mount Takakura.

One of the concrete positive features of Ise was that the shrine precincts offered the pilgrims an opportunity to encounter the source of their life in a very real manner, when they would receive improved seed grain as “Ise miyage” 伊勢みやげ at the Outer Shrine. This seed would help them to better the results of their own crops (KANEMORI 2001, 179). However, the *Ise sankei mandara* depicts an occasion where the pilgrim could not only pick up seed rice, but meet directly with the ultimate source of life, namely the Sun Goddess herself. The mandala promises that this meeting is not merely symbolic, but real, because it brings the pilgrim in direct contact with the world of the myths and the figure of the Sun Goddess in an event performed in the vicinity of the Outer Shrine.

I have already mentioned that the top section of the *Ise sankei mandara* differs from the lower sections in that it offers a glimpse into another world, a spiritual world. This world, however, is not represented by abstract symbols but by concrete images of persons and things as they exist in the physical world. One of the locations where the pilgrims could come in quasi-physical contact with this other world was a stone structure erected on Mount Takakura 高倉山, a hill of low elevation (117m) behind the Outer Shrine. This structure is known by various names, but in popular tradition it was widely known as *Ame no iwado* 天の岩戸 and is believed to be the cave where Amaterasu hid herself after she had been put to shame by her brother Susanoō (FIGURE 2). Today the cave is said to be a *kofun* 古墳, but the *Shinkyō kidan* 神境紀談, a text compiled in 1700, quotes many traditions of the Edo period which say that the cave had once been the abode of evil or unruly deities who were eventually overcome and driven out by the power of Toyouke, the deity of the Outer Shrine located at the foot of the mountain. In the vicinity of the cave was also some flat open space which was known as *Takama no hara* 高天原, the “High Heavenly Plain” of mythology

(JINGŪ SHICHŌ 1942, 268-69). This mythological interpretation of the site was the reason why crowds of pilgrims visited it throughout the Edo period as an important part of their Ise pilgrimage. According to the *Miyagawa nikki* 宮川日記 of 1746, the attraction of the place was so great that its income through offerings even rivaled that of the Outer Shrine (JINGŪ SHICHŌ 1937, 259). A further attraction it offered was that *miko* would perform a *kagura* dance on the flat area before the cave, on the *Takama no hara*, and so reenact for the pilgrims the myth of the hiding and reappearance of the Sun Goddess. This is depicted in FIGURE 3, where a crowned *miko* holding an instrument like a hand drum dances in front of a large cave accompanied by musicians playing instruments such as flutes, drums of various sizes, and cymbals. In the background one notices a woman peeking out of a narrow opening in the rock that closes the cave. There can be no doubt that this scene is intended as a reenactment of the dance Uzume performed before the Heavenly Cave, which succeeded to lure the Sun Goddess Amaterasu out of her hiding. And this is exactly how the author of the *Ise sangū annaiki* 伊勢參宮按内記 interprets the *kagura* dance performed at this location (JINGŪ SHICHŌ 1937, 721).

From a number of pilgrimage reports we learn of the activities at the cave and of the impression a visit to the site made on the pilgrims. Kanemori Atsuko quotes a report where a woman pilgrim from Akita describes how she was asked by a *negi* 禰宜 at the site to make a donation to buy oil, which he then poured into the tray of an oil lamp used in the cave (KANEMORI 2001, 179).⁵ The writer of the *Nan'kōki* 南行記, Morikawa Kyoriku 森川許六, describes his feelings on entering the lighted cave saying that “one is remembered of the events of the distant past, an unfathomable blessing” *arigataki koto kagiri nashi* 有難き事かぎりなし (JINGŪ SHICHŌ 1937, 243). In these reports the cave appears to have been not only a sacred place as were so many others, but to have been conceived as the earthly representation of the heavenly cave of the myths.

Officially Marginalized but Popularly-Supported Shamanic Events

But these were not the only mystic events accounting for the attraction of this place. In the *Sankeiki sanchū* it is mentioned that a *fujō* 巫女 or female shaman has a *miko* perform a dance so that the *miko* becomes possessed by a *kami* and utters “strange words” *yōgen* 妖言. If a *kami* possessed a *miko* at this particular place then this must have been an additional factor supporting people’s belief that this indeed was a place where deities assembled, as the *Ise sangū annaiki* mentioned above states (JINGŪ SHICHŌ 1937, 721). Yet, possession by a *kami*

5. The term the woman uses for this light is *tōmyō* 灯明, a term ordinarily used for the lights before a religious statue or on an altar. Although the woman does not elaborate further on her feelings in the cave, I believe it to be possible to think that by her using this term she indicates her awareness of the sacred character of the place.



FIGURE 3: *Kagura* dance of a *miko* in front of the “Heavenly Cave” (Jingū Chōkokan).

was not necessarily a prerequisite for such a belief. A story in the *Seshū kokon meishoshū* says that a villager went to the mountain where he heard some strange sounds. On following them he came upon a place where deities and immortals were enjoying themselves, playing music and eating and drinking. When he told the villagers what he had witnessed, they too wanted to see the place. However, when they arrived there the next day they could not notice anything. Nevertheless, the text concludes that “there was no end to such mysterious happenings” (JINGŪ SHICHŌ 1942, 134), hinting that the reported incident was not an isolated event. This seems to suggest that the mountain Takakura and the cave *Ame no iwado* in particular were haunted places where everything could happen because here was the point of contact between this world and the other world, a “locality where the kami hide,” *kami kakushi no sato* 神かくしの里 (JINGŪ SHICHŌ 1942, 134).⁶

It appears, however, that the shrine authorities generally were not pleased with the shamanic events on Mount Takakura. Yet these practices were apparently difficult to stop, as an entry of 1655 in the *Jingū nenpyō* suggests, where it says: “*Kagura* performances at the *Ame no iwado* are *again* [my emphasis] forbidden” (JINGŪ SHICHŌ 1929, 80) Another kind of injunction, one concerned with the activities of a *negi* at this site, is of interest in this context. As already

6. *Kami kakushi* is often used when somebody, especially a child, suddenly and mysteriously disappears for a while or for good. However, considering the context in which the term is used here, that interpretation does not make sense. It is rather the kami who abscond at this place, usually unseen by human beings.

mentioned, a pilgrim's report from the end of the Edo period says that a *negi* was taking contributions for oil to be used at the cave. It can, therefore, be assumed that a *negi* performed certain services for the pilgrims visiting the site. However, the author of the *Miyagawa nikki*, Tada Yoshitoshi 多田義俊, writes of his visit in 1746: "everybody visits this place. If a regular *negi* is among them he becomes unclean and for that reason cannot serve at the food offerings for three days. He can resume the food offerings only after a ritual cleansing" (JINGŪ SHICHŌ 1937, 259).⁷ This would mean that at least for the shrine personnel there was another cause for contracting ritual pollution besides that caused by contact with death. This was, namely, a certain kind of contact with otherworldly forces that were not officially acknowledged, that is, forces that were "out of place," that were associated with beliefs which were held to be superstitious according to the regular shrine authorities. That such an interpretation is not without grounds is suggested by the case of the *kagura* mentioned above, where a female *miko* is made to become possessed by a *kami*. Although there is no mention of exactly what kind of *kami* possessed the woman, it may not be entirely wrong to assume, considering that the *kami*'s words were "strange," that it was not a *kami* from among those venerated at one of the many shrines of Ise. If that is the case, then it would appear that this sort of intrusion from the part of the other world, uncontrolled as it is by the shrine authorities, could be understood as being something longed for by the common pilgrim. At the same time it is something defiling for a member of the shrine establishment because it threatens to disturb the ordered and controlled world as it is conceived by that establishment. The point I wish to make here, though, is that both sides, pilgrims and the shrine authorities alike, acknowledge at least the possibility of some kind of divine intrusion occurring at this place. However, what is regarded as a legitimate means in the eyes of the pilgrims to establish contact with the *kami* world is seen as illegitimate in the eyes of the shrine authorities because it challenges their very authority to control access to the shrines' deities.⁸

The fact that this location and even the dance of the *miko* are represented with much detail on the *Ise sankei mandara*—with one exception: on the copy held by the Takatsu Kobunka Kaikan in Kyoto neither cave nor *kagura* dances are found (OSAKA SHIRITSU HAKUBUTSUKAN 1987, color plate no. 43)—indicates

7. The *shōin negi* 正具禰宜 mentioned here in the *Miyagawa nikki* is probably one of the *negi* who performed the official rites at the Ise sanctuaries. There were ten at each shrine. They had to observe strict observances such as not leaving the immediate surroundings of the sanctuaries by crossing the Miya River and not wearing a sword or any metal object (JINGŪ SHICHŌ 1937, 256). If this interpretation is correct, it is understandable that such a *negi* was not to visit a place which was not officially approved. On the other hand, the *negi* active at the cave, as mentioned by the woman pilgrim from Akita, may have merely been a low-ranking official.

8. Spirit possession may not always be controlled, but in folk religion it is a legitimate means to establish contact with the *kami* world. At Ise, however, as far as I am aware, there is no acknowledged role for spirit possession, perhaps with the exception of Yamato Hime.

that the mandala were made with the intention to cater carefully to the beliefs of the common people who were to visit the shrines, and to guide them to those places that promised them an immediate kind of contact with otherworldly forces. What the pilgrims could experience when they in fact visited these places was a particularly powerful confirmation of their beliefs because it also provoked a strong emotional response. This response was the reason for a kind of satisfaction they could not expect at the official and formal rites as they were performed at the shrines, and as such it explains why *Ame no iwado* was as attractive as the main shrines.

What has been said so far can be summarized in three points. First, the *Ise sankei mandara* is a guide to the Ise sanctuaries prepared for the common pilgrim. It represents, therefore, the sanctuaries principally from the point of view of the people. Yet, at the same time it also expresses, of course, the standpoint of the Ise priesthood by representing the main features of the shrines and the religious activities taking place there. Second, as an expression of the common pilgrim's expectations it represents not only the acknowledged route to be taken within the sacred precincts, it also highlights certain spots within the precincts as being mystically powerful, where the pilgrim might encounter certain mystic experiences that may occur outside the formal visits to the main shrines, yet are related to the visits. In this sense the mandala raises expectations that the pilgrims will find their beliefs corroborated. And third, it accepts the fact that the world of the Ise Shrines, next to its overt Shinto character, also includes Buddhist elements. In the following I hope to show that the Buddhist elements must have had a special attraction for the pilgrims, not the least because they, too, offer their own specific form of contact with the other world.

Ise's Buddhist Cosmology

As mentioned earlier, the sacred premises of the Ise Shrines also included a number of Buddhist institutions and were the stage for a variety of activities performed by Buddhist monks and nuns. This overt aspect must, of course, have been noticed by everyone visiting the shrines. Bearing in mind the Ise Shrines as they present themselves today, it is difficult, if not impossible, for us to imagine a time when Buddhist elements could be noticed almost anywhere within the shrine precincts. But the mandala hints at the presence of yet another kind of Buddhist presence within the world of the Ise Shrines. Only some parts of this world are visible but they promote a mystic experience not entirely dissimilar to the one just mentioned. In this respect the mandala's presentation of the Buddhist world to be experienced in Ise parallels its presentation of the Shinto world discussed above. While Shinto mystic experiences seem to have been focused mainly on the visit to the Heavenly Cave and on the activities related to it, hints of similar experiences in the Buddhist mode can be found at several other places



FIGURE 4: The *datsue ba* at the gate to Yamada town (Jingū Chōkokan).

along the pilgrims' trail. And more important, while the experience at the Heavenly Cave brings the pilgrim into contact with Amaterasu or with other deities and, therefore, with the source of life itself, the Buddhist experience is one of the world after death. This is the more remarkable, I believe, because overtly the religious world of Ise made every effort to keep any contact with death or pollution induced by contact with death outside its precincts, especially outside the space immediately around the sanctuaries. But on the *Ise sankei mandala* there are hints at the presence of a postmortem Buddhist other world that can be discovered at various places along the pilgrim's itinerary through the sacred realm. As a matter of fact, these hints even follow the order of events that were believed to happen after death.

For the pilgrim to Ise to cross the Miya River meant a passage from the polluted everyday world to the pure world of the kami, and the river's waters providing the appropriate means to be cleansed from any kind of defilement. From there the pilgrim sets out on a trail leading to the sources of life. When, in the following discussion, we focus on the Buddhist aspect of the pilgrim's passage through the sacred realm of the Ise shrines, we also have to begin at the river. One of the first items on the mandala of the Jingū Chōkokan that catches the eye of the viewer is a rather large building, open towards the town gate of Yamada, and with a somewhat oversized old woman with an ugly face sitting in it. She is sloppily dressed and holds a bundle of white clothes in her left hand (FIGURE 4). On the other copies of the mandala we notice instead a building at about the same location in the vicinity of the gate in which a seated man also faces the road like the old woman. On the Mitsui Bunko mandala, the man has a red face, wears an elaborate crown and is holding something in his right hand

(OSAKA SHIRITSU HAKUBUTSUKAN 1987, color plate no. 44 and p. 175). The man is apparently King Enma (Yama) 閻魔王, the first of the ten kings of the other world whom the dead have to face first on their way to the other world, and from whom they must receive the sentence which determines to what hell the dead must go. If it is King Enma we can be sure that the old woman with the ugly face is the *datsue ba* 脱衣婆, the woman who snatches the dead person's clothes after the dead have crossed the Sanzu River 三途の川, the river which is the border between this and the other world in Buddhist folk religion.⁹

The positioning of these figures in parallel with the others who emphasize entry into the pure Shinto realm reminds the pilgrim that at this place there is also an alternate entrance to another world. Under this respect they are similar to the Shinto figures who offer ritual cleansing at the gate to make the pilgrim prepared to enter the sacred city. But the world into which they introduce the pilgrim is neither that of Shinto nor that of life, but is a Buddhist world and one of death, worlds utterly shunned by Shinto religious thought in general and the Ise Shrines in particular. Again, the Miya River represents the border to another world, but in the view these figures suggest the river is reinterpreted as being an image of the Sanzu River, the entrance to a world after death. With this another aspect of the pilgrims' trail is advocated. I have argued earlier that the Shinto pilgrim can have mystic experiences and encounter the other world on Mount Takakura. Under the Buddhist aspect of the mandala, however, the pilgrim, upon entering the sacred realm, is immediately made to experience that this entrance means entering into a mystic world different in character from that of the overt world of the Ise Shrines. Although it is the world after death and the encounter with King Enma or the *datsue ba* is a fearsome beginning of the pilgrim's trail through it, it also adumbrates already the bliss which awaits the pilgrim at the end of the journey through this world of death.

Among the four extant examples of the *Ise sankei mandara* all, except that of the Takatsu Kobunka Kaikan of Kyoto, show either the old woman or King Enma. The Kyoto example lacks many details found on the other mandala; among other things, it lacks a representation of the *Ai no yama*. As a whole it gives the impression of being a technically amateurish work. It is, therefore, not surprising that it is judged as being somewhat childish, *chiki ga aru* 稚気がある, in its conception (OSAKA SHIRITSU HAKUBUTSUKAN 1987, 182). On the other hand, it shows two remarkable features that are not found in the other three examples but are significant when considering the Buddhist aspect of these mandala. Both these features appear in the top section of the mandala, which means that they belong to the esoteric, the non- (immediately) visible aspect of the Ise pilgrimage. While these images are not well preserved, they are

9. The origin of the idea is in an apocryphal sutra written in China (possibly even Japan), the *Jizō jūōkyō* 地藏十王經, probably in the eleventh or twelfth century, linking Jizō (Kṣitagarbha) with the dead (OSAKA SHIRITSU HAKUBUTSUKAN 1987, 176–77).

sufficiently recognizable. On the right panel two figures who certainly belong to the group of Amida (Amitābha) and his companions arriving over the mountains, floating on a cloud, can be recognized although the image shows traces of having been tampered with. On the left panel, in the mountain over the Inner Shrine, a *tengu* 天狗 appears out of a cloud trying to snatch a woman pilgrim (OSAKA SHIRITSU HAKUBUTSUKAN 1987, 182 and color plate no. 43).¹⁰

A *tengu*, believed to be a mysterious creature of the mountains, is at times taken to be the impersonation of a mountain deity, *yama no kami* 山の神. Strictly speaking it may not be a typically Buddhist figure, but it may be said that it stands for the mystic or occult aspect of the world of the mountains, namely for the idea that the other world is located in the mountains, *sanchū takai* 山中他界. As it is well known, the world of the mountains is particularly sacred to the practitioners of Shugendō 修験道, for whom *tengu* are the personification of spiritual or non-worldly powers whose source are the mountains. This powerful world has to be kept off limits for women. In this sense the angry *tengu's* appearance from out of the mountain is probably not so much a specifically Buddhist idea, but it reminds the pilgrim of the sacredness of the mountain as an image of the other world. I need to return to the image of the mountain as the other world later, but before I do that I wish to draw attention to the other scene happening in the mountains in the same mandala—that of the *goraigō* ご来迎 of Amida and his companions, from behind the mountains. This scene is more directly related to the world of death because it illustrates the moment when the devout follower of Amida on the verge of death expects to be met by him in order to be guided safely into the other world. However, as opposed to what the scenes of the clothes-snatching woman or King Enma suggested by marking the entrance to the other world of judgment and hellish punishment, the arrival of Amida carries the promise for the believer that he/she will be led to Amida's Pure Land. Although the two scenes with the *tengu* and Amida appear only on the mandala of the Takatsu Kobunka Kaikan they strongly support an idea that can also be recognized in the other mandala, namely the idea of the sacredness of the mountains. This is because they are part of the other world and, therefore, the physical realm where human beings can come in contact with beings of the other world and with the other world itself. If this line of thought is correct, the *Ise sankei mandara* can be seen to suggest that the pilgrim following the sacred trail within the sacred realm actually experiences a mystical wandering through the other world. In its Buddhist aspect the wandering reminds the pilgrim on one side of the dangers of hell, but on the other side it also evokes in front of the

10. Nishiyama believes that the damaged image of the Amida group is most probably the result of someone trying to erase the image to free the mandala of Buddhist imagery in line with *shinbutsu bunri* 神仏分離 ideology. He further suggests that the woman-snatching *tengu* betrays the painter of this version as a person with bad feelings about Shugendō (NISHIYAMA 1998, 153–54).



FIGURE 5: Kongō Shōji on Mount Asama and Mount Fuji in the distance (Jingū Chōkokan).

pilgrim's eyes the image of the mountains as the other world where Amida is waiting to conduct the pilgrim to his/her final goal, the Pure Land.

The Roles of Mount Asama and Mount Fuji

Seen in this respect, the reason why a pilgrimage to Ise that omits Mount Asama is only half the pilgrimage is more easily understood. Mount Asama (555m) lies about halfway between Ise and Toba at the eastern border of the "divine capital city." Today Ise and Toba are connected by the modern Ise-Shima Skyline, a driveway which passes over the mountain. One of the scenic attractions of Mount Asama mentioned in many pilgrim accounts is the view of Mount Fuji beyond the Bay of Ise in fair weather (FIGURE 5). Yet, it seems that Mount Asama was not the only place within the environments of the Ise Shrines from where Mount Fuji could be seen. Some accounts mention that Mount Fuji could also be seen beyond the ranges of hills and mountains from Mount Takakura, that is, from the location of *Ame no iwado*. But why should so many accounts describe the breathtaking view of Mount Fuji from Mount Asama, and why should Mount Asama be part of the Ise pilgrimage?

Today, visitors to Mount Asama are mostly attracted by the view of Ise Bay and its islands, which can be seen from a platform close to the mountain top. But with the exception of a very few days during the year it is practically impossible

to see Mount Fuji today from this spot. A few minutes' walk below the platform lies the temple Kongō Shōji. Originally founded as a Shingon temple it is now affiliated with Rinzaï Zen. In a short distance from the main temple, crouched on the steep mountain side, is the temple's *oku no in*. From the platform of this small temple Mount Fuji could once be viewed.¹¹ This temple is visited today in order to pray to Jizō Bosatsu to help aborted fetuses or to have a commemorative pillar, *tōba* 塔婆, prepared for a dead relative. The narrow road approaching the temple from the side of Kongō Shōji is lined by walls of wooden square pillars of many sizes, some small and others several meters high. The pillars are inscribed with the posthumous names of the people in whose memory they are erected and with the names of the pillar's donors. Under the deep shadow of the mountain's old trees it is truly an eerie and awe-inspiring dark world. For the people in the area, however, this temple is significant for another important reason.

After somebody has died in Ise or another settlement at the foot of the mountain, a group of male members of the bereaved family visits the *oku no in* on the day after the funeral and has a pillar inscribed and dedicated to the dead person. On returning the men take a twig from a box tree (*tsuge* 黄楊) or Japanese star anise (*shikimi* 檜) on the mountain and plant it on the new tomb in the home village or town (MIYATA 1974, 320). All of this is the responsibility of male members of the deceased person's family, but while they visit the mountain the women who stayed behind may hold a *kuchiyose* 口寄せ in the house of the departed person. In this ritual the spirit of the dead person is called into a medium and made to speak once more to the members of the family through the medium's utterings. For the people of the region the mountain represented by Kongō Shōji and especially its *oku no in* is an image of the other world, the world after death, where the spirit of a dead person is put to rest or from where it can be called.

From behind the halls of Kongō Shōji a short and steep path leads up to a clearing close to the top of the mountain. At that spot *kyōtsuka* 経塚 have been discovered in 1884. A *kyōtsuka* is a place where sutras had been sealed in containers and buried. At the time several metal mirrors were unearthed which had the image of Amida and his companions arriving from over the mountains engraved on them. The mirrors date back to the late twelfth century. When the disastrous Isewan Typhoon of 1949 felled a number of trees on this exposed spot, the remains of several more *kyōtsuka* came to light. Many of these *tsuka* contained inscriptions by members of the priestly families serving the Ise Shrines, the Arakida 荒木田 and Watarai 度会.¹² This shows that the Buddhist

11. For an illustration of this scene taken from *Ise sangū meisho zue* of 1797 (Kansei 9) see KNECHT 2000, 27.

12. See note 12 in SAKURAI 1990, 234–35. Nishiyama warns that there is too much of a time difference between the production of these mirrors and the mandala for the mirror's image to be considered as proof that demonstrates the thinking of the people at the time when the mandala was made. However, the fact that this image appears on the mandala underlines the idea in folk religion of the mountains as the other world (NISHIYAMA 1998, 153–54).

world of Mount Asama was not completely alien, even to the Shinto families serving the shrines at the mountain's foot. It also suggests that these families had a certain concern with the world after death and believed that this concern could be answered by the Buddhist-inspired rite of burying a sutra text on Mount Asama. The question is, then, why should they want to do it there, on that particular spot on Mount Asama?

The statement of Ozu Hisatari 小津久足, a local historian of the first half of the nineteenth century, quoted by SAKURAI Tokutarō (1990, 213), might offer part of an explanation. Ozu was a thorough researcher and therefore not simply satisfied with earlier reports unless he could verify them himself. In order to see what it means to climb Mount Asama, he went there himself one day. On that occasion he also visited Kongō Shōji which, he wrote, housed Zen as well as Esoteric Buddhists. It is also known as Tosotuin 兜率院 and was No. 11 on the Ise pilgrimage circuit. Then he went on to say that approaching Mount Asama was like reaching *gokuraku* 極樂, that this was the real *jōdo* 浄土, the true Pure Land. And to illustrate his impression he quoted a song that is attributed to Amaterasu herself. In the song she says that she is always on the mountain, the Isuzu River sees the coming and going of people; this has to be thought of as the place of passage from this world for the ascetic wanderer, as a temple on the cloud of the Tosotsu (Tuṣita) world, that is, of Miroku's 弥勒 Pure Land. In other words, he wrote that the mountain is the other world because it is the abode of Amaterasu, who herself proclaims in the song to always be there. And because of this presence the mountain is the other world of Tosotsu, the Pure Land of Miroku.¹³

Ozu published his report, *Isekoku kenbun shū* 伊勢国見聞集, in 1844, at a time which is considerably later than the one when the *Ise sankei mandara* of the Jingū Chōkokan is assumed to have been made. Yet I believe that we are not grossly mistaken, if we assume that what Ozu says of the mountain's significance coincides very much with the idea the painter of the mandala wanted to express, namely that the mountain is an image of the Pure Land. The painter of the mandala, however, apparently did not think of Mount Asama itself as being the Pure Land although the buildings of Kongō Shōji loom large at the end of the pilgrim's path. If this temple were the ultimate goal for the pilgrims, then, I believe, there would have been no need to bring Mount Fuji into the picture, as the mandala's painter has done. Yet there are reasons to think that Mount Asama was conceived as an image of the other world while at the same time being a kind of stand-in for a different mountain which was the ideal place and

13. It is interesting to note that Ozu lines up several notions of the other world in this short text combining quite naturally Shinto ideas (Amaterasu) with Buddhist ones (Tosotsu, *gokuraku*, and *jōdo*). This supports my own fieldwork experience, where ordinary people when asked about how they think about the other world often used various terms for it without any concern about their precise doctrinal meaning.

symbol for the other world of the Pure Land. This other mountain could not be reached immediately by those who made the pilgrimage to Ise because of the distance that lies between this mountain and the sanctuaries of Ise. The mountain and the Pure Land it stands for is Mount Fuji, whose white cone shines for the pilgrim in the far distance, both for the viewer of the *Ise sankei mandara* as well as for the pilgrim lucky enough to have reached the top of Mount Asama on a clear day.

As mentioned before, today it is a custom in the villages at the foot of Mount Asama that a delegation of men visits the temple on the mountain on the day of the funeral for one of their family members in order to have a *tōba* inscribed and dedicated. It is no doubt quite hazardous to use a contemporary custom in order to explain an idea expressed several hundred years ago. Nevertheless, I believe that this custom provides a hint for a plausible explanation for the fact that the *Ise sankei mandara* shows Mount Fuji in the distance at the end of the pilgrim's route. The local custom to climb Mount Asama on the occasion just mentioned is called *take mairi* タケ参り, "visit to the mountain." *Take* (岳 or 嶽) is a general term for "mountain," but in the present context it is a term used locally for Mount Asama. In the villages further away from the mountain the custom of *take mairi* is not known. Instead, many of them have a *Fuji kō* 富士講, a religious confraternity whose purpose is to make pilgrimages to Mount Fuji, but because of that mountain's distance from the members' homes they replace the pilgrimage to Mount Fuji with one to Mount Asama in the years between the real pilgrimages to Mount Fuji. SAKURAI quotes a song the *kō* members use while climbing Mount Asama: "How fortunate, how fortunate and felicitous! Let's descend, but do the pilgrimage again! In order to stand on Mount Fuji one day, people take meanwhile a cleansing, pass the two shrines and make their pilgrimage to Mount Asama. How fortunate! Seeing Mount Fuji from Mount Asama, seeing the white snow on Mount Fuji..." (SAKURAI 1990, 235, note 13).

In this song the pilgrims see their climbing of Mount Asama as a part of their pilgrimage to the shrines and at the same time as a substitute for another pilgrimage, which in their eyes is the real one, the climbing of Mount Fuji. But why should this pilgrimage be related with the idea of Asama and Fuji as being symbols of the Pure Land? I think that beliefs related to Mount Fuji and their expression on the so-called *Fuji sankei mandara* 富士参詣曼荼羅 can offer a key to answer this question.

Similar to the *Ise sankei mandara*, the *Fuji sankei mandara*¹⁴ depicts the

14. Five such mandala are known today (OSAKA SHIRITSU HAKUBUTSUKAN 1987, 184). Three had been exhibited at the exhibition of the Osaka Municipal Museum, they are reproduced in color in the Museum's volume, together with the reproduction in black and white of a copy that was not exhibited. Two of the copies are kept at the Sengen Taisha in Fujinomiya, Shizuoka prefecture. One of them is an Important Cultural Property signed by Kanō Motonobu 狩野元信 (1476–1559). Another is kept by the Yatahara Daisan Nōka Kumiai 矢田原第三農家組合 in Yatahara Town, Nara,

main stations a pilgrim must pass from the mountain's foot to the peak. This kind of mandala was made for the adherents of *sengen shinkō* 浅間信仰, a belief particularly promoted by the *yamabushi* of Fuji Shugendō 富士修験道. In the understanding of Mount Fuji by the believers of *sengen shinkō* the mountain is an image of the other world. On the *Fuji sankei mandara*, which, in a manner similar to that of the *Ise sankei mandara*, is populated with numerous pilgrims, it is shown how these pilgrims in climbing the mountain pass through various symbolic spots beginning with a cleansing ritual, *misogi* 禊, at the trail's entrance to the top where they meet the triad of Amida and his two attendants, Yakushi Nyorai 薬師如来 or Shaka Nyorai 釈迦如来 and Seishi Bosatsu 勢至菩薩, who appear over the three peaks of Mount Fuji (HIRANO 1987, 284; OSAKA SHIRITSU HAKUBUTSUKAN 1987, color plates nos. 46 and 48). And yet, the three are not the pilgrim's ultimate goal. Even for the tourist or mountain climber of today, the particular attraction of climbing Mount Fuji is witnessing the sunrise. This experience is so overwhelming that it makes the climber forget all the hardships of the long and arduous climb on the bald mountain. Hirano Eiji argues that it is really Dainichi Nyorai (大日如来, Mahavairocana) who in the splendor of the *goraikō* ご来光, the sunrise, appears from behind the three figures of Amida and his companions enveloping them (HIRANO 1987, 287; OSAKA SHIRITSU HAKUBUTSUKAN 1987, 185). In this experience the pilgrim standing on top of the mountain can in reality see the world of Buddha, the splendor of the Pure Land. He can even touch it, because the top of the mountain itself, especially the crater, is considered to be the "Palace of the Spirit World," *Yūgū* 幽宮 (HIRANO 1987, 287). The following unattributed statement "our imperial realm Mount Fuji is the Pure Land of Dainichi," 我朝富士山, 大日浄土也, expresses the meaning of Mount Fuji for the pilgrims very succinctly (quoted in OSAKA SHIRITSU HAKUBUTSUKAN 1987, 185).

The *Fuji sankei mandara* do not seem to mention pilgrims passing a spot where they encounter King Enma or the old woman, *datsue ba*. However, in reality Mount Fuji was believed to be a mountain where the dead would go. Furthermore, there were indications at the entrances to the mountain trails that reminded people of their entering the other world, the world of death. At the entry from Murayama the pilgrims had to pay a small sum, the *rokudō sen* 六道銭. This sum of *rokumon* 六文, six coins of old money, was given even up to recent years to the dead and buried with the corpse so that the dead could pay the fee for the crossing of the Sanzu River. At the other entry to the mountain from Yoshida there was a small building housing the *datsue ba*. Such circumstances

and the fourth by the Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art in Shizuoka. They were made for *Fuji kō*, the oldest of which may go back to the Muromachi period. Although they depict life and customs of that period, the mandala may not be that old, but perhaps were most widely used in the early nineteenth century, when the confraternities were flourishing particularly in the Kanto area (OSAKA SHIRITSU HAKUBUTSUKAN 1987, 219).

must, therefore, have made the pilgrims aware that they were entering the other world when they began to climb Mount Fuji (KOBAYASHI 1987, 36).

After this excursion to Mount Fuji we can return to Ise and Mount Asama. It is now possible to conclude that the pilgrims climbing Mount Asama instead of Mount Fuji do it because they hope to encounter the Pure Land there as they would on Mount Fuji, the mountain they expect to climb later when the opportunity arises. For that reason they long for Mount Fuji, whose snow-capped peak they recognize in the far distance, once they have reached the top of Mount Asama. Here we reach the point where we can find a plausible answer to the question of why Mount Fuji appears on top of the *Ise sankei mandara* beyond Kongō Shōji as the point where the pilgrimage described on the mandala finally ends in fulfillment. Here is the point and moment where the Buddhist believer finally finds the fulfillment of the promise which had already clearly been made earlier in the scene of Amida appearing from over the mountains but which also had already been adumbrated, although ambiguously, at the pilgrimage's beginning, when the pilgrim was confronted with King Enma or the *datsue ba*. In other words, by including a visit to Kongō Shōji on Mount Asama the pilgrimage to the Ise Shrines is, for the Buddhist believer, also an entry to and passage through the other world which offers the pilgrim the mystic experience of seeing the Pure Land while still remaining on this earth. And perhaps, if the *kyōtsuka* established by the priesthood of Ise are any indication, even the priestly families of these Shinto sanctuaries had their own expectations of encountering the Pure Land on Mount Asama.

The Mandala's Use as a Physical Object

If the *Ise sankei mandara* offered such an interpretation of the sacred realm of the Ise Shrines, for what concrete purpose was it drawn and used? The most obvious purpose was to physically display before the eyes of believers and prospective pilgrims an overview of the sacred precincts, the arrangement of sacred places to be visited, and also a visual instruction for the pilgrims' behavior at these places. But as I hope to have shown the *Ise sankei mandara* is an illustration of Ise's sacred places in a double sense: it describes their reality but it also offers a mystic interpretation in the sense that it depicts the pilgrims route through the sacred realm as an itinerary not only through the real world, but also or even more so through the other world. And as such it promises the viewing pilgrim a meeting with deities and Buddhas and the viewing or experiencing of the Pure Land.

Fukue Mitsuru recently writes of the *Tateyama mandara* 立山曼荼羅 that it was used in order to explain the main features of the mountain and the pilgrimage as well as the salient points of the belief related to the mountain. For that purpose, a wandering *hijiri* 聖 or *onshi* would once a year visit a village in

an area where there was a Tateyama confraternity. He would take lodging at the house of a village headman and gather the believers. At their meeting he would hang up the mandala scroll and explain the religious and physical features depicted on it (FUKUE 2005, 9). By the means of his explanation he would not only guide his audience on the mountain trails but also on the route to the other world, which was the mystic interpretation of the *Tateyama mandara* and the pilgrimage to that mountain. Considering Fukue's statement we are probably on safe ground in assuming that the *Ise sankei mandara* had been used in a similar manner. However, a final problem remains.

Today, little information remains about how the *Ise sankei mandara* was actually used. But the few remarks that are known are still useful. It is generally assumed that the *sankei mandara* were made and used for a religious purpose at least in the sense explained by Fukue for the *Tateyama mandara*. Yet, there is more to this, because each mandala itself could become in fact an object of worship and veneration (HAYASHI 1993, 89). That is exactly what is known of the *Ise sankei mandara* now in the Mitsui Bunko in Tokyo. This mandala was offered by the Kyoto Branch of the Mitsui clothing store to the *San'ei kō* 三永講, a confraternity formed by the store's craftsmen for the purpose of making a pilgrimage to Ise. On the day the *kō* gathered for its regular meeting, the mandala was hung up and worshiped. The writer of the introductory explanation to the *Jingū sanpaiki taisei* is quick to add that the mandala of the Jingū Chōkokan was most probably made for the same purpose (JINGŪ SHICHŌ 1942, no pagination). In this religious environment viewing the mandala and listening to its explanation provided by an *etoki* 絵解き, a specialized storyteller, made it possible for the audience to mentally perform the pilgrimage and gain its spiritual and religious fruits as if they had performed the pilgrimage in the real world of Ise as the chosen delegates of their *kō* would actually be able to do. In this sense the *Ise sankei mandara* served a purpose similar to that of many "miniature pilgrimage sites" in Japan, such as for example the "Mini Shikoku" 三二四国, where people can step on earth collected from the eighty-eight temples of Shikoku at their local temple so that they do not need to make the pilgrimage and yet can receive the benefits of the real pilgrimage (FUKUHARA 1987, 225).

Conclusion: Ise as a Reflection of Its Visitors' Popular Religious Syncretism

It now appears that the statement of the Ise priest mentioned at the beginning represents only one view of the Ise pilgrimage, and does not coincide with the interpretation and expectation the common people nurtured about it. However, the priest's view is not entirely new and modern. The shrine authorities seem to have had a complex and at times even ambiguous relationship with the folk interpretation of the Ise pilgrimage as can be gathered from the many injunctions issued against folk interpretations in the long history of the shrines. In

the *Ise sangū annai* 伊勢參宮按内記 of 1707 the inclusion of Mount Asama in the pilgrimage to Ise by calling the pilgrimage *sangū* 三宮 is strongly rejected as being “extremely mistaken. Asama, being a temple, is not to be added to form something called *sangū*” (JINGŪ SHICHŌ 1937, 737). The shrines’ attitude notwithstanding, there was another interpretation which appealed to the people. This interpretation seems to be neatly symbolized by the statement of Ozu mentioned above, that on Mount Asama he really found the Pure Land of Miroku because he felt the presence of Amaterasu. This statement peacefully combines a Shinto deity with a Buddhist bosatsu. The *Ise sankei mandara*, I would like to conclude, is probably not a product commissioned by the shrine authorities. However, it is a fine example of how a sanctuary which officially promotes a particular elite form of beliefs and worship is used in order to cater to beliefs that are most significant because most “practical” for the common people, in the sense that they answer directly their expectations (READER and TANABE 1998). For the people the *Ise sankei mandara* supported their beliefs concerning the source of their life in this world as well as those concerning their expectations in regard to the other world waiting for them after death. In this the *Ise sankei mandara* answered the people’s longing for the Pure Land.

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