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From Deer Bones to Turtle Shells

The State Ritualization of Pyro-Plastromancy during the Nara-Heian Transition

This article reviews received and recovered evidence of divination with bone and fire in early Japan to identify and investigate a shift from deer scapulae to turtle shells that took place during the Nara-Heian transition, particularly within the state cult. It questions why this shift occurred and analyzes a detailed explanation of it found in a purportedly early Heian treatise on the divinatory cracking of turtle plastrons known as the *Shinsen kisōki* (Newly compiled record of turtle omens). The *Shinsen kisōki* claims to have been authored by a group of men descended from a common genealogical line of ancestral kami associated with divination. It not only reveals much about why members of a handful of related clans would have promoted a change from scapulimancy to plastromancy at this point in history, but also much about how the state ritualization of the latter affected, and was affected by, other changes in state and local religion and politics during the late Nara and early Heian periods.

KEYWORDS: deer-bone pyro-scapulimancy—pyro-plastromancy—*Shinsen kisōki*—Urabe and Nakatomi clans—state and local kami cults—Tsushima and Iki

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THE EARLIEST known description of divination performed on the Japanese archipelago comes from the *Waren zhuan* 倭人傳 (Traditions of the people of Wa) of the late third century CE *Sanguo zhi* (Chronicles of the three kingdoms). This relatively short compilation of traditions or transmissions describes the lands and customs of a foreign people named Wa thought to inhabit parts of the southern Japanese archipelago during the third century CE. It states that the Wa customarily performed divination with fire and bones:

灼骨而卜、以占吉凶。先告所卜、其辭如令龜法、視火坼占兆。

They scorch bones for cracks, using them to prognosticate auspiciousness and inauspiciousness. The initial declaration of what is to be cracked resembles words used in “charging the turtle” methods, [methods] which involve the careful observation of fire-produced fissures to prognosticate [the auspiciousness and inauspiciousness of] crack omens.¹ (*Sanguo zhi* 3: 30, 856)

Because the divinatory practices of the people of Wa are said to involve “bones” and resemble Chinese “charging the turtle” methods, there is good reason to argue that the passage is referring to something other than divination with turtle shells. Received and recovered evidence can be used to defend and expand on this point.

Archaeologist KANZAWA Yūichi’s (1987, 6) oft-cited work on early Japanese bone divination lists 158 divined bones and shells from thirty-four different sites. The list includes seventy-five deer bones, twenty-one wild boar bones, forty-six dolphin bones, and four loggerhead turtle (*akawamigame* アカワミガメ) plastrons ranging in date from roughly 100 BCE to 800 CE. Ninety-eight examples are dated

* This article is dedicated to the memory of my remarkably fearless and generous teacher and ally, John R. McRae. I hope that it brings to light something you saw when you suggested looking further into the question of deer bones and turtle shells not too long ago.

1. Chinese “charging the turtle” methods involved the “charging” (*ling* 令) or “mandating” (*ming* 命) of a spirit or spirits before scorching a point on bottom half of a turtle shell (that is, the plastron) with the glowing tip of a wood poker. The resultant crack was then interpreted to determine whether the spirit/s deemed the “charge” to be auspicious or inauspicious. Known today as pyro-plastronomy, the technique essentially involves the localized scorching of the surface of a turtle plastron and the interpretation of the resultant crack as a divine image, figure, or omen. Classical Chinese terms for the technique include *guibu* 龜卜 (turtle [shell] cracking), *bu* 卜 ([turtle shell] cracking), and *bujia* 卜甲 (the cracking of [turtle] shells). There is a massive corpus of scholarship on pyro-plastronomy in ancient China. For work on the history and development of the technique in medieval China (coinciding with the time period under investigation in the present study), see LIU (1992, 403–409); BAI (1998); and KORY (2012).

to the Yayoi (ca. 300 BCE–250 CE) period, seventeen to the Kofun (ca. 250–538), and forty-seven to the Nara (710–784) period. Only about half of the total are deer scapulae, but they are found at a majority of the listed sites (26/34), indicating widespread use of deer bones for divination before the Nara period. Kanzawa's list includes only four examples of turtle shells: three late Kofun plastrons from the Maguchi Cavern 間口洞 ruins on the Miura Peninsula in Kanagawa, and one late Kofun to early Nara plastron from the Shitaru 志多留 ruins in northwest Tsushima.

A more recent list of archaeologically recovered divined turtle shells compiled by SASŌ (2006, 105) adds twenty-seven late Kofun to early Nara examples from six different sites. A vast majority of these shells postdate 600 CE and come from the present-day prefectures of Kanagawa, Chiba, and Nagasaki (including Tsushima and Iki). According to the temporal distribution of the shells in Sasō's survey, pyro-plastromancy came to be practiced just as frequently as pyro-scapulimancy by the early eighth century of the Common Era.

The archaeological record, as it stands today, indicates that the most common pyromantic media in Japan were deer bones until, or shortly before, the Nara period, when turtle shells start to appear just as frequently. Received Japanese court-sponsored *texts*, however, suggest a late Nara or early Heian shift from bones to shells. Deer-bone pyro-scapulimancy (*rokuboku* 鹿卜) is portrayed as the standard technique for royal and divine divinatory consultations in the early Nara *Kojiki* (Record of ancient matters) and *Nihon shoki* (Chronicles of Japan), and in other early mytho-histories like the *Kujiki* 旧事紀 (Chronicle of ancient things). Pyro-plastromancy (*kiboku* 龜卜; turtle-shell cracking [with fire]) is never mentioned in these works, but it is clearly the dominant form of divinatory cracking in early Heian court-sponsored historical and bureaucratic texts such as:

1. *Shoku Nihongi* (Chronicles of Japan continued) [ca. 797 CE]
2. *Ryō no gige* (Explanations of the codes and ceremonies) [ca. 833]
3. *Nihon kōki* (Later chronicle of Japan) [ca. 840]
4. *Shoku Nihon kōki* (Later chronicle of Japan continued) [ca. 869]
5. *Nihon Montoku tennō jitsuroku* (The veritable records of Montoku of Japan) [ca. 879]
6. *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* (The veritable records of the three reigns in Japan) [ca. 901]
7. *Engi shiki* (Procedures of the Engi era [901–923]) [ca. 927]

All of these late eighth to early tenth century works portray the divinatory cracking of turtle plastrons as a state rite managed by certain clans in the state department or bureau of religious affairs, the Jingikan 神祇官 (Office of the spirits of heaven and earth). Clan associations are seldom stated, but all seven texts

contain references to pyro-plastromancy,² and the divinatory cracking of deer bones never seems to be mentioned in any of them.

The latest Nara text in the list above, the *Nihon shoki*, mentions deer-bone pyro-scapulimancy in the first two fascicles of the text. The former (1, 30) cites a long passage from an anonymous source introducing the undesirable offspring produced by Izanagi 伊弉諾 and Izanami 伊弉冉 after they had created much of the Japanese archipelago. This kami couple ascends to Heaven to inquire about their defective progeny. The heavenly spirits deliberate before divining the matter with “the grand [pyro-scapulimantic] prognostication” (*futomani* 太占). They determine that the problem was caused by the couple’s improprieties, so they urge the couple to right the wrong by performing proper marriage rites on earth. They then divine an auspicious date—presumably using “the grand prognostication” once again—for Izanagi and Izanami to return to the earthly realm. In the second fascicle (2, 136), heavenly kami Takamimusubi 高皇產靈 dispatches fellow spirits to help pacify the earthly spirits of the Central Land of Reed Plains 葦原中国. Some of these heavenly spirits are ordered to help protect his great-grandson, who is to rule. Others, like Futodama 太玉 and Ame no koyane 天兒屋, are asked to conduct divinatory and sacrificial rites on behalf of the new ruler’s descendants. Ame no koyane is put in charge of “the customary sources for spiritual affairs” (*shingi no sōgenja* 神事之宗源者), including “divination procedures pertaining to the grand prognostication” (*futomani no bokuji/shinji* 太占之卜事). Pyro-scapulimancy is the go-to means of divination for the heavenly spirits in the *Nihon shoki*, just as it is in the earlier *Kojiki* and, depending on how it is dated, the *Kujiki*.³ Pyro-plastromancy is never mentioned in these

2. Pyro-plastromancy is mentioned at least fifty times in the five post-*Nihon shoki* state histories constituting the *Rikkokushi* (Six state histories). It is mentioned in tandem with yarrow-stalk divination (a mantic technique introduced in note 4) in a majority of these instances. For example, *Shoku Nihongi* entries for the years 708 and 782 CE record “turtle and yarrow” (*kizei* 龜筮; that is, pyro-plastromantic and achilleomantic) consultations. Both of these accounts are briefly described below. *Nihon kōki* entries for the years 796, 802, 805, 806, 823, 831, and 832, and *Shoku Nihon kōki* entries for 842 (2 occurrences) and 844 (3) document instances of “crack and yarrow” (*bokuzei* 卜筮; another synecdoche for pyro-plastromancy and achilleomancy); and a *Nihon Montoku tennō jitsuroku* entry for 858 records a “turtle and stalk” (*kizaku* 龜策) consultation. The *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* mentions “crack and yarrow” in entries for 863, 865, 866, 870, 873, 874, 875, 876, 878 (2). The same text mentions “yarrow and turtle” (*shiki* 著龜) in entries for 864, 866 (2), 870, 871, 874, 878 (2), and 881. Two of the examples listed here are particularly significant for the present study. The 806 *Nihon kōki* entry (23rd day of the 3rd lunar month [三月丁亥]) explicitly connects the term *boku* 卜 (crack; divination) with turtles, and the 858 entry (10th day of the 4th lunar month [四月辛丑]) from the *Nihon Montoku tennō jitsuroku* depicts members of a particular Urabe 卜部 clan lineage as masters of the arts of pyro-plastromancy and achilleomancy.

3. For work on the dating and authenticity of the *Kujiki*, see BENTLEY (2006), who argues that the text must have been compiled before the mid-eighth century. The *Kujiki* mentions the

mytho-histories, but according to Heian court-sponsored documents, it was the exclusive method of divinatory cracking in the Jingikan.

The divinatory cracking of turtle plastrons is mentioned a number of times in the first Heian text listed above, the *Shoku Nihongi*. The earliest and latest dated entries containing descriptions of the technique appear in the compound “turtle and yarrow” (*kizei*), a synecdoche for pyro-plastromancy and achilleomancy.⁴ The earliest entry recording this compound is dated 708 CE. It summarizes part of an imperial decree declaring that the time to relocate to a new capital in Heijō-kyō (Nara) had arrived. Among the many auspicious signs introduced in the decree, both “turtle and yarrow” are said to have approved the move, which was carried out in 710.⁵ The latest entry recording the compound claims that a memorial was submitted to the throne in late 782 requesting that “turtle and yarrow” be consulted to inquire about a rash of calamities suffered by the nation (*Shoku Nihongi* 5: 37, 244). While “turtle and yarrow” may have been consulted in 710 and 782, the rare and situational nature of these consultations prevents us from claiming that either technique had become a court convention.

The ca. 833 CE *Ryō no gige* is one of the earliest works to overtly present plastromancy as a state standard. The divinatory cracking of turtle plastrons is depicted as a duty of the *urabe* 卜部 (divination guild or department) in the Jingikan, and appears to have completely eclipsed the art of scapulimancy. A comment on the term *bokuchō* 卜兆 (crack omen) in the *Ryō no gige* reads:

卜者、灼龜也。兆者、灼龜縱橫之文也。凡灼龜占吉凶者、是卜部之執業。

The character 卜 refers to the scorching of a turtle shell. The character 兆 refers to horizontal and vertical patterns caused by the scorching of a turtle shell. Generally, the scorching of turtle shells for the divinatory prognostication of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness is an enterprise controlled by the *urabe*.

(*Ryō no gige* 1: 29)⁶

divinatory cracking of deer scapulae in a number of different places. See *Sendai kuji hongī* (1.23, 2.97, 7.387); BENTLEY (2006, 125, 151–53, 269). This trinity of examples contains: 1. an account of Izanagi and Izanami turning to the heavenly kami for divinatory consultations; 2. an account of Amaterasu charging Ame no koyane with divination and exorcism; and 3. comments on the supervision of royal rites shared by the Nakatomi and Inbe 齋部 during the early Nara period.

4. Achilleomancy involves the casting and counting of achillea (yarrow) stalks to determine numbers, which are calculated or interpreted as omens. The technique represents a form of cleromancy or sortilege. It is commonly used in tandem with the oracular system canonized in the *Yijing* 易經 (Classic of changes), and it is frequently mentioned alongside pyro-plastromancy in early China (for example, in the compounds “crack and yarrow” [*bushi* 卜筮] and “turtle and yarrow”).

5. See *Shoku Nihongi* (1: 4, 130). For more on the long-standing Chinese tradition of consulting turtle plastrons to test a date or site selected for the relocation of an imperial capital, see KORY (2012, 251–61).

6. See *Ryō no shūge* (13: 2, 31–33); and *Ritsuryō* (2, 157). A similar clarification appears later in the *Ryō no shūge*: “The scorching of a turtle [shell] is called *bokūura*” (灼龜曰卜也) (4, 155).

The need for additional explanation in both cases implies that plastronomy was not yet a fully recognized court convention, yet it seems to have already replaced scapulimancy as the preferred method of state divinatory cracking.

The *Ryō no gige* clearly states that pyro-plastronomy was administered by the *urabe*. The term *urabe* already appears in the early eighth century *Ritsuryō* (regulatory and administrative codes) as a reference to state diviners, but their exact responsibilities are never described. It is only with early ninth century texts like the *Ryō no gige*—and the perhaps earlier *Shinsen kisōki*—that the pyro-plastronomic duties of Jingikan *urabe* are made explicit.⁷ Although received court-sponsored texts point to a mid-to-late eighth century shift from deer bones to turtle shells, neither archive explains why this occurred. We could simply write off the matter as one of many aspects of Tang (618–907) Chinese culture adopted by the early Heian court, but in doing so, we would be missing a good opportunity to clarify something about how specific appropriations were carried out, legitimized, and maintained. The *Shinsen kisōki* is particularly helpful in this regard, as it offers a clear description—and defense—of the Nara-Heian incorporation of plastronomy into the religious branch of the theocracy. The text reveals much about why a certain group of men acted to privilege and elevate one form of divination over another, and much about how historical circumstances and cultural strategies were used to achieve the state incorporation and ritualization of pyro-plastronomy.⁸

The History and Content of the Shinsen kisōki

In the late summer of 830 CE, a team of writers and editors headed by Urabe Tōtsugu 卜部遠継 (fl. 830 CE) purportedly presented a treatise on pyro-plastronomy titled *Shinsen kisōki* to the throne.⁹ The earliest extant edition is a 1620

7. This is also stated in NAKANO (1975, 178); SHIGEMATSU (1986, 325–39); GRAPARD (2003, 84).

8. My use of the term “ritualization” is adopted from the work of Catherine BELL, who generally describes it as a process of “differentiation and privileging” (1992, 204); more specifically as “a matter of various culturally specific strategies for setting some activities off from others, for creating and privileging a qualitative distinction between the ‘sacred’ and the ‘profane,’ and for ascribing such distinctions to realities thought to transcend the powers of human actors” (1992, 74).

9. According to line 605 of the *Shinsen kisōki*, the completed text was offered to Emperor Junna 淳和 (r. 823–833) on the eleventh day of the eighth lunar month (5 September) of 830 CE by Urabe Tōtsugu, an acting junior eighth-rank lower-grade superior supervisor of divinatory cracking (*boku no chōjō* 卜長上). Lines 602–605 of the *Shinsen kisōki* list the following co-compilers and commentators: 1. Urabe Katsumuro 卜部勝謀麿, a great scribe (*daishi* 大史) and senior sixth-rank upper-grade official; 2. Urabe Shimatsugu 卜部嶋継, a junior sixth-rank upper-grade official; 3. Masunaga 益長 of the Izu Island Atai [clan] 伊豆嶋直, a senior sixth-rank upper-grade official; and 4. two members of the Iki Atai clan 壹岐直氏 (the director of the Seisai Shrine 成齊宮, and a junior seventh-rank lower-grade official of Kamizukasa Shrine 神司宮 named Hirokichi 廣吉). None of these individuals appear elsewhere. For more on the system of ranks used here (first rank highest), see HALL (1966, 71–72).

CE manuscript copied by Bonshun 梵舜 (1553–1632),¹⁰ which was subsequently transmitted within a larger collection known as the *Kiboku shō* 龜卜抄 (Notes on turtle divination).¹¹ Bonshun's copy records only part of the first fascicle of what is said to have originally been a four-fascicle text, and is presently held in the archives of the University of Tokyo's Department of Religious Studies. All published editions of the *Shinsen kisōki* are based on this text.¹²

The *Shinsen kisōki*, as mythologist and historian Tsubaki Minoru (1957, 41) contends, is an extremely valuable text for three major reasons: it is the earliest known treatise on pyro-plastromancy ever produced in Japan, it is one of the earliest texts recording fragments of Japanese *norito* 祝詞 (words for reciting spells; incantations),¹³ and it is one of the earliest texts to draw from multiple sections (the preface, beginning, middle, and end) of the *Kojiki*.¹⁴ I would add that the *Shinsen kisōki* also provides a valuable record of the mytho-histories and corresponding genealogies recorded—and at least partially constructed—by certain members of the Nakatomi 中臣, Urabe 卜部, and Atai 直 clans to help legitimize distinct but related ancestral lines extending back to kami named in the early eighth century state mytho-histories. These kami are associated with incantation, divination, and ritual purification; skills that defined the sacerdotal duties of members of the Chinese-inspired Jingikan during both the Nara and Heian periods.¹⁵ What remains of the *Shinsen kisōki* distinctly shows that members of

10. Bonshun, also known as Ryūgen 龍玄 or Jinryū 神龍 (after the Jinryū Shrine 神龍院 in Kyoto where he once studied), served as head abbot of Toyokuni Shrine 豊国神社 for a number of years, indicating membership in both the Yoshida clan 吉田氏 (a branch of the royal clan) and the priesthood of Yoshida Shintō 吉田神道. More on connections between the Urabe and Yoshida clans is discussed below, particularly connections detailed in GRAPARD (1992b). Remembered as a prolific writer, Bonshun's most famous work is the lengthy *Shun kyūki* 舜日記 (Shun's records of former times).

11. KUDŌ (2003, 144) traces the transmission of the *Shinsen kisōki* from its presentation to the throne in 830 CE, to a 973 copy by Urabe Masanobu 卜部雅延 (fl. 973 CE), to a mid-sixteenth-century edition attributed to Funabashi Nobukata 船橋宣賢 (1475–1550) and his son Funabashi Narikata 船橋業賢 (1499–1566), and finally to Bonshun's 1620 handwritten copy. For more on the transmission of the text between 830 and 1620, see KUDŌ (2005, 176–78).

12. I primarily rely on KUDŌ's (2005, 22–62, lines 362–605) typeset, annotated, and collated edition of the *Shinsen kisōki* throughout the present study. KUDŌ (2005, 10–14) critically compares Bonshun's copy of the *Shinsen kisōki* with fourteen later editions. Eight are dated (1691, 1713, and six Meiji); six are not. Oft-cited modern editions of Bonshun's *Shinsen kisōki* include a photographic facsimile prepared by Tsubaki (1957, 111–64), a hand-copied and annotated edition by AKIMOTO (1978, no page), and a typeset and annotated edition by AKIMOTO (1992, 13: 177–237). At least five editions of the *Shinsen kisōki* have been published since 1913, and its full title appears in at least thirty academic Japanese articles published since 1938.

13. For more on *norito*, see PHILIPPI (1959); and BOCK (1970–1972, 2: 57–105).

14. Connections between the *Kojiki* and *Shinsen kisōki* are detailed in KURANO (1959); KUDŌ (2005, 213–43 and 318–19).

15. Discussion on the early history of the Jingikan can be found in BOCK (1970–1972, 1: 17–24).

the Nakatomi and Urabe clans relied on kami myths and Chinese precedents to redefine their duties and roles in the early Heian theocracy.

But is the *Shinsen kisōki* an early Heian text? Most twentieth century Japanese scholarship on the work argues or assumes it is. Although text-critical research on the dating of the text is rare, some of this work is introduced in the following discussion. A few preliminary and general defenses of the early-Heian dating of the text include the fact that it claims to be an early ninth century work. All Chinese and Japanese works cited in the text pre-date 830 CE, and the strongest motives for its composition are bound to early Heian geopolitical history, particularly to the intense competition for political and religious power that took place between powerful clans during the Nara-Heian transition.

TSUBAKI (1957), AKIMOTO (1978, 111), and KUDŌ (2005, 6–7) all argue that, as a collection of statements regarding the divine descent and sacerdotal duties of the Urabe and Nakamoti clans, the *Shinsen kisōki* closely resembles Inbe Hiro-nari's 齋部広成 (ca. 803–807) early ninth century *Kogoshūi* (Collected traces of ancient tales).¹⁶ A collection of myths and legends set before the reign of the legendary Emperor Jinmu 神武天皇 (great-grandson of Amaterasu), the *Kogoshūi* was reportedly offered to the throne in 807 CE. It borrows from the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, but rearranges and supplements accounts in those works with materials passed down hereditarily (and orally) through the Inbe 齋部 clan. As a record of clan achievements that selectively draws from and attempts to fill in blanks in the early Nara myths of state to establish divine descent and mastery of theocratic rites, the *Kogoshūi* seems to have provided a clear and nearly contemporary precedent for the *Shinsen kisōki*. It might have even inspired the *Shinsen kisōki* as a response to its list of complaints about the Inbe's loss of traditional ritual responsibilities to other clans.¹⁷ Both texts extend and rewrite orthodox myths of state to establish links between state kami and the ancestral kami of the authors of each text. Both also represent responses to perceived threats against the sacerdotal authority of the kinship groups responsible for their compositions.

16. For more on the aims, historical value, dating, and transmission of the text, see KATŌ and HOSHINO (1972, 1–12).

17. A significant portion of the *Kogoshūi* is devoted to eleven complaints about the Nakatomi. For a translation of these complaints, see KATŌ and HOSHINO (1972, 63–66). For a clear and concise description of them, see GRAPARD (2002, 224–25). The official responsibilities of the Nakatomi and Inbe clans are clearly stated in lines 501–503 of the *Shinsen kisōki*, where Ame no koyane and Futodama are both summoned to serve the early divine rulers of the nation. The heavenly kami invest Ame no koyane—apical ancestor of the Nakatomi clan—with control and management of divination and divine invocations, while Futodama—apical ancestor of the Inbe clan—is afforded control and management of matters involving sacrificial offerings and the handling of the royal regalia. The *Kogoshūi*, however, states that biannual royal divinatory consultations (*miura* 御卜) were instituted and controlled by the Inbe clan in the mid-seventh century; see *Kogoshūi* (1: 63); translated in KATŌ and HOSHINO (1972, 43).

Could the *Shinsen kisōki* have been composed as late as the early seventeenth century? It is possible, but it would have been a brilliant fabrication. Not only would the author/s have refrained from completing the text, but they would have also created a work that perfectly fit into a much earlier historical context. Finally, we would expect a combination of mythical persistence and technical innovation in an early seventeenth century copy of an early ninth century text on divination, and that is exactly what we find in Bonshun's copy of the *Shinsen kisōki*. These points are further defended below.

The received edition of the *Shinsen kisōki* was transmitted within a larger collection of works known as the *Kiboku shō* (Notes on turtle divination; also the title of a separate work in the collection). The *Kiboku shō* dates no later than the early seventeenth century. Bonshun's copy includes the following six titled works, three of which were likely initially composed before the end of the tenth century CE (#3, #4, and #6).

1. *Kiboku shidai* (Rules for turtle divination) <no line numbers>
2. *Kiboku shō* <lines 1–361>
3. *Shinsen kisōki* <lines 362–605> [ca. 830 CE]
4. *Kisō bubun* (Section on turtle omens) <lines 606–648> [ca. 973 CE]¹⁸
5. *Mondō bubun* (Question and answer section) <lines 649–819>
6. *Saigi kankei kiji* (Records related to sacrifices and ceremonies) <lines 820–871> [ca. 806 CE]

The *Shinsen kisōki* records thirty section titles for fascicle 1 and titles for the now-lost second through fourth fascicles of the work. Fascicles 2–4 are titled:

1. <untitled>
2. “On the Identification and Interpretation of Earth [Graphs]” (*Setsu chi no shōkō* 說地之稱候)
3. “On the Identification and Interpretation of Heaven [Graphs]” (*Setsu ten no shōkō* 說天之稱候)
4. “On the Interpretation and Identification of the Three Line Forms: Spirit, Human, and Omen [Graphs]” (*Setsu shijinchō sankā shōkō* 說神人兆三卦稱候)

18. AKIMOTO (1992) presents the *Kisō bubun* (lines 606–648) as part of the *Shinsen kisōki*, and this text accompanies all fifteen editions of the *Shinsen kisōki* compared in KUDŌ (2005, 10–14 and 174). Because of this, I maintain—following Akimoto and Kudō—that the *Kisō bubun* was bound to the *Shinsen kisōki* long before Bonshun's copy, likely in or before Urabe Masanobu's 973 edition. Considered along with the court-commissioned *Saigi kankei kiji* (a record of the “royal cracking for the royal sovereign” [*ōmima no miura* 御體御卜] allegedly instituted by Emperor Heizei 平城 [r. 806–809] in 806 CE), these three works seem to provide a fairly detailed and consistent view of pyro-plastromantic practice in the early- to mid-Heian court. A description of the technique based on these works is presented below. For more on royal plastromantic rites during the Heian period, see *Engi shiki* (18: 1, 23–24); BOCK (1970–1972, 1: 79); and INOUE (2008).

Based on these titles, we can assume that fascicles 2–4 featured omens and oracles based on five basic types of pyro-plastromantic cracks or line-graphs.¹⁹ The content of fascicle 1, however, differs, as it provides a much more general introduction to the text as a whole.

Each of the following numbered entries translates, transcribes, and records one of thirty section titles from the *Shinsen kisōki* table of contents for fascicle 1. Corresponding content in the body of the *Shinsen kisōki*—or in other works found in the *Kiboku shō* collection—is cited in brackets at the end of each entry.

1. “The Two Kami Izanagi and Izanami Give Birth to Onogoro Island” (*Izanagi Izanami ryōjin shō Onogoro* 伊佐諾伊佐波兩神生游能已侶嶋) [*Shinsen kisōki* lines 408–416 (hereafter cited as *Ssksk* 408–416)]
2. “The Two Kami Give Birth to the Nation and Establish Marriage Ceremonies and Fire Pacification Rites” (*Ryōjin shō kokudo chō fugi kachin sai* 兩神生國土肇婦義火鎮祭) [*Ssksk* 416–429]
3. “The Fiery Well and the Metamorphosis of the Trinity of Kami” (*Kasei sanjin shokei* 火井三神所化) [*Ssksk* 429–444]
4. “Izanagi Orders Each of the Trinity of Kami to Rule Sun, Moon, and State, but Sentences Susanoo to be Exiled, and More” (*Izanagi no mikoto sanjin haichō hitsugi kokushu shika harai Susa no mikoto tō* 伊佐諾命三神配定日月國主科祓素戔命等) [*Ssksk* 444–485]
5. “The Eight Million Kami Fine Susanoo a Thousand ‘Tables’ [of Reparations], Exile Him, and More” (*Yaoyorozu no kami Susa no mikoto chikura no okido harae tō* 八百萬神素戔命千座置戸祓等) [*Ssksk* 475–485]
6. “The Heavenly Kami Send Down and Install a Ruler of the Nation” (*Tenjin kōkyū kokushu* 天神降給國主) [*Ssksk* 485–498]
7. “The Nakatomi and Inbe Clans Take Control of Crack Omens and the Offering of Silk, and More” (*Nakatomi Inbe ryōshi shō bokuchō hanpei tō* 中臣忌部兩氏掌卜兆班幣等) [*Ssksk* 501–503]
8. “The Heavenly Descendant Descends to Rule the Chiho Peaks in Himuka” (*Tenson kōzei Himuka Chiho shin* 天孫降陞日向千[穗]岑) [*Ssksk* 503–505]
9. “Emperor Izahowake sumera and His Illustrious Younger Brother Mizuhawake no mikoto Kill Sobakari After the Divine Deed Is First Carried Out During His Reign” (*Izahowake sumera mikoto Miyo kōtei sai Sobakari wa kamigoto saki kaijo* 伊耶本和氣天皇 御世皇弟水齒別命殺曾波加理於神事先解除) [*Ssksk* 506–518]

19. This claim is based on the likelihood that the titles of fascicles 2–4 collectively mention all five parts of a *machi* 町 or a *machigata* 町形 (*machi* form). The *machi* was carved or chiseled on shells to direct scorching and to help control the direction of cracking. The five categories featured in the titles for fascicles 2–4 refer to the five lines that constitute a *machi*. This strongly suggests that all three fascicles were devoted to pyro-plastromantic omens and oracles associated with *machi* lines. All five lines, along with the image of a *machi*, are introduced in TABLE 1.

10. “Reigning Sovereign Emperor Ōnagatani Prohibits the Placement of ‘Fish Logs’ on Human Abodes and Standardizes Gift Offerings and Restitution Paid with Rolls of Silk” (*Ōnagatani tennō Miyo kin seido jinkyō okujyō katsuogi hōrai kaenusa* 大長谷天皇御世禁制度人居屋上竖魚木奉礼代幣) [Ssksk 518–520]
11. “The Invasion of Silla Ordered by Emperor Tarashina hiko’s Great Empress Okinaga tarashi” (*Tarashina hiko tennō no ōkisaki Okinaga tarashi hime no mikoto shū Shinra* 代中日子天皇之大后息長帶比賣命襲新羅) [Ssksk 520–527]
12. “Short Explanations from the *Classic of Turtles* and the Major Purports of Pyro-plastromancy” (*Ryakujutsu Kikyō ōji kame taii* 略述龜經凡龜大意) [Ssksk 527–533]
13. “Tabooed Days According to the Branches of the Four Seasons and Five-Colored Turtles from the *Classic of Turtles*” (*Dōkyō shiji shiyō goshiki kame kijitsu* 同經四時支用五色龜忌日) [Ssksk 534–536]
14. “An Explanation of the *Pledge of the Turtle*” (*Jutsu Kisei* 述龜誓) [Ssksk 536–567]
15. “The Principal Shrine of Turtles, the Hahaka Wood Shrine, and the Use of Water in [Divinatory] Scorching and Cracking” (*Kame honsha Hahakaki no jinja shakuki yōsui* 龜本社母鹿木神社灼卜用水) [Ssksk 567–572]
16. “The Supreme Ancestors of the Urabe of the Four Provinces Oversee and Formally Offer Up Pyro-plastromantic Omens” (*Shikoku Urabe kamiso shihō bokuchō* 四國卜部上祖仕奉卜兆) [Ssksk 573–578]
17. “The Urabe Clan of the Four Provinces” (*Yokuni Urabe uji* 四國卜部氏) [Ssksk 581–584]
18. “Tsushima Island Comes to Be Comprised of Two Provinces” (*Tsushima shima shō ryōkoku* 對馬嶋稱兩國) [Ssksk 584–587]
19. “Cases of Oral Transmission from the *Record of Ancient Matters*” (*An Kojiki yō kuden* 案古事記用口傳) [Ssksk 587–598]
20. “The Original Recognition of Superior Supervisors of Divinatory Cracking” (*Shinin boku no chōjō* 始任卜長上) [Ssksk 598–602]
21. “Purification Ordinances for Divinatory Cracking” (*I boku seikai* 為卜齋戒) [*Kiboku shō* line 606]
22. “Prayerful Words for the Cracking of Scapulae” (*I bokukata kitsushi* 為卜肩乞詞) [*Kiboku shō* lines 606–608]
23. “Specifications for the Division and Use of Turtle Shells” (*Bunyō kikō jōsū* 分用龜甲條數) [*Kiboku shō* lines 608–613]
24. “The Presentation of Offerings to the Two Planks of Shell Used in Royal Divinatory Cracking” (*Gubu miura yōkō niban* 供奉御卜用甲二板) [*Kiboku shō* line 613]

25. “Methods for the Raising of Fire and the Use of Water in the Scorching and Cracking” (*Shakuki jūka yōsui kata* 灼卜充火用水方) [*Kiboku shō* lines 614–617]
26. “Chief Principles of the Five Branches of Cracks: Earth, Heaven, Spirit, Human, and Omen” (*Jiten shinjin chō goshi jūji* 地天神人兆五枝主治) [*Kiboku shō* lines 618–628]
27. “Explanations of the Twenty-Nine Earth and Heaven Line-Graphs, the Thirty-Eight Spirit and Human Line-Graphs, and the Three Omen Line-Graphs” (*Setsu jiten kaku nijūkyū ka shinjin kaku sanjū hachi ka, chō sankā kotai* 説地天各廿九卦, 神人各卅八卦, 兆三卦こ體) [*Kiboku shō* lines 628–648]
28. “Incantatory Methods for Beseeking Cracks to Divine Miscellaneous Matters” (*Boku zatsuji kitsu bokushi kata* 卜雜事乞卜詞方) [*Mondō bubun* lines 649–819]
29. “Increases and Decreases in the Number of Fires in Royal Pyroplastromantic Consultations for Sacrificial Rites” (*Gubu omima no ura kasū zōgen* 供奉御體卜火數増減) [*Saigi kankei kiji* lines 820–854]
30. “The Recognition and Observation of Auspiciousness and Inauspiciousness in Royal Divinatory Consultations for Sacrificial Rites” (*Gubu omima no ura kikyō shōkō* 供奉御體卜吉凶稱候) [*Saigi kankei kiji* lines 854–868]

The first twenty titles in the contents perfectly correspond to what remains of the *Shinsen kisōki*; titles 21–30 do not. These last ten section titles match up remarkably well with other works compiled in the *Kiboku shō* collection. Section titles 21–27 correspond (in perfect order) to the contents of the *Kisō bubun*.²⁰ Section title 28 mirrors the content of the *Mondō bubun*,²¹ and section titles 29–30 more or less transcribe the 806 CE or earlier *Saigi kankei kiji*.²² According to the table of contents, the first fascicle of the *Shinsen kisōki* is comprised of three approximately equal parts devoted to the retelling of *Kojiki* myths,²³ the

20. Nearly a third of the section titles for fascicle 1 correspond to what is now recorded in the *Kisō bubun*, and all extant editions of the *Shinsen kisōki* are directly followed by the *Kisō bubun*. A closer bond exists between these works than any others in the *Kiboku shō* collection.

21. The *Mondō bubun* (lines 649–819) is a compilation of questions and answers on the fabrication and interpretation of pyro-plastromantic cracks to divine a wide variety of different topics.

22. The *Saigi kankei kiji* or *Records Related to Sacrifices and Ceremonies* outlines the history of, procedures for, and participants involved in early ninth century “royal divinatory [consultations]” (*omima no ura* 御體卜) to determine auspicious dates for the Divine Offering of Foods (Jinkonjiki/Kamuimake 神今食). The Jinkonjiki was a sacrificial rite in which specially prepared rice was offered to the reigning thearch who was to receive it in the company of Amaterasu. For more on the rite’s early history, see KUDŌ (2005, 180).

23. Three of the most significant myths, for our purposes, are *Kojiki* (1, 34 and 50–66; and 2, 242–44). The first includes a description of pyro-scapulimantic consultations (*futomani* 布斗麻邇) performed by the heavenly kami on behalf of Izanagi and Izanami (a *Nihon shoki* version

historicization of pyro-plastromancy in Japan,²⁴ and descriptions of pyro-plastromantic rites and techniques.

KUDŌ (2005, 174) argues that although the *Shinsen kisōki* gradually collapsed onto a faithfully transmitted base (fascicle 1, sections 1–20) after the mid-ninth century, it also generated separate transmissions that expanded, but never completely shed their original contents. I agree with Kudō's assessment, but I see little evidence to support his conclusion that content from fascicles 2–4 was incorporated into the body of fascicle 1. Instead, I follow others who argue that fascicles 2–4 are now lost, but that technical portions of fascicle 1 (sections 21–30) were separately transmitted and periodically re-appended to a diminished version of the *Shinsen kisōki* over time.²⁵ A very

of this account is introduced above). The second includes a description of pyro-scapulimantic consultations performed by the kami of heaven to help lure Amaterasu 天照 out of the heavenly stone chamber (*ame no iwaya* 天石屋). The third myth describes the Great Purification Sacrifice (Ōharae sai 大祓祭) organized by Empress Jingū 神功 (trad. r. 209–269) after the death of Emperor Chūai 仲哀 (trad. r. 192–200). The *Shinsen kisōki* faithfully retells these myths, but it adds information on the *urabe*-managed Fire Pacification Sacrifice (*kachin sai* 火鎮祭) to the second mythical account (lines 428–429), and adds information on the Great Purification Sacrifice and related sacrificial and divinatory rites to the third (lines 477–485 and 501–502). The Pacification of Fire Sacrifice (*chinka sai* 鎮火祭), according to commentary in the mid-ninth-century *Ryō no gige* (2, 77–78), was held in all four corners of the palace precincts in the sixth and twelfth lunar months, was managed by “the *urabe* and others” (卜部等), and involved the burial of old fires and the lighting of new ones for purification and protection. Later descriptions of special *Urabe* techniques for gathering kindling, lighting and extinguishing fire, and invoking spirits to help control fire can be found in TSUGITA (1927, 334). The *Shinsen kisōki* introduces the Great Purification Sacrifice along with part of a *norito* used in the rite. It also comments on related rites like the offering of silk to Ise shrines and the divinatory determination of abstinent imperial princesses confined to Ise. The Inbe clan is said to have been in charge of the former; the Nakatomi the latter. For more on the history of the Great Purification Sacrifice, see KUDŌ (2005, 276–91); BOCK (1970–1972, 2: 84–87); and OOMS (2009, 181–82).

24. This historicization is examined in more detail below, but note that lines 587–598 of the *Shinsen kisōki* draw from the preface of the *Kojiki* for a concise history of the transmission of texts in ancient Japan (including texts on plastromancy). The *Shinsen kisōki* comments on early attempts to chronicle the history of the royal clan, a dependency on oral transmissions in these efforts, and the eventual compilation of a written record entitled *Kojiki* in 711 CE (712 according to the *Kojiki*). It explains that dates begin to be noted in the *Kojiki* during the reign of Emperor Kinmei 欽明 (r. 539–571), and that “the Buddha's *dharma*” (*buppō* 佛法) was first presented to the throne from Paekche 百濟 during Jinmei's reign. It also states that a monk from Paekche named Kanroku 觀勒 (fl. 602–614) presented calendrical, astrological (specifically astro-calendrical *tonkō* 遁甲 [Ch. *dunjia*] divination-table methods), medical, and other technical texts to the throne during the reign of Emperor Suiko 推古 (r. 593–628). Finally, the *Shinsen kisōki* argues that Japan began to produce its own texts in earnest from the mid-seventh century, most of them based on oral transmissions. “Pyro-plastromancy”—according to a concluding statement—“was also recovered in this manner” (龜卜亦復如此).

25. The practical nature of technical portions of the *Shinsen kisōki* (final third of fascicle 1 and fascicles 2–4) would have made these materials especially attractive, but especially susceptible to

similar hypothesis has been proposed and well defended by KINOSHITA (2000, 145–47). The present study adopts Kinoshita’s view that the mythological and historical sections of fascicle 1 were more or less faithfully transmitted, while most of the technical material in the final third of fascicle 1 was compromised and corrupted—yet never completely lost—between the early ninth and seventeenth centuries.

What remains of *Shinsen kisōki* fascicle 1 provides a bit of mytho-historical background, introduces Chinese precedents for the divinatory cracking of turtle plastrons, and stakes claims about the related ancestral kami and sacred skills of the Nakatomi and Urabe clans. It suggests that influential members of the Fujiwara 藤原 and Nakatomi clans played significant roles in the state transition from deer-bone pyro-scapulimancy to pyro-plastronomy, yet it clearly presents the Urabe as the “frontmen” in this transition.²⁶ The Urabe are portrayed as descendants of the Nakatomi in the *Shinsen kisōki*, but many early texts and modern secondary studies depict them as the forefathers of both the Nakatomi and Fujiwara clans. Although Urabe Hiramaro 卜部平麻呂 (807–881) is traditionally remembered as the first person to have been officially rewarded the surname Urabe by the throne,²⁷ quite a few Japanese studies convincingly show that local occupational and kinship groups adopted the surname long before the ninth century (for example, INOUE 1980; YOKOTA 1982; NAGADOME 1984). Many of these works also argue that the surnames Nakatomi and Atai should be traced back to early Urabe kinship groups in Tsushima and Iki.²⁸

The *Shinsen kisōki*’s detailed descriptions of the Urabe clan’s early history and achievements are often used to defend the aforementioned claims. For example, the preface to the *Shinsen kisōki* (lines 362–369) begins by informing us that “turtle techniques” (*kijutsu* 龜術) originated in the high heavens and have been

loss. Historian LIU Lexian (2002, 13–14) argues that both innovation and continuity, both “love of the new and satiety with the old” (*xixin yanjiu* 喜新厭舊), are essential for the long-term perpetuation of mantic techniques. Mythical foundations for mantic arts tend to remain relatively resilient through time, while technical aspects of practice demand constant reformulation to keep up with the times. The textual history of the *Shinsen kisōki* well reflects this combination of mythical continuity and technical change.

26. For an article linking the Fujiwara, Nakatomi, and Urabe clans to Tsushima and to one another, see UMEHARA (1990).

27. For early accounts of the accomplishments of Hiramaro, see *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* (9: 39, 507); and *Dai Nihon shi* (8: 226, 161). Both works describe Hiramaro as a native of Izu skilled in pyro-plastronomy who visited Tang China in 838 before an illustrious career in court. They also claim that he received the surname Urabe from the throne in the mid-ninth century. Hiramaro is traditionally remembered as the patron of the Urabe clan and as an exemplar in the history of Yoshida Shinto.

28. Iki Island is just a few kilometers off the northwest coast of Kyushu. Tsushima Island is situated almost a hundred kilometers north-northwest of Iki, in the middle of the Korea Strait.

esteemed through the ages.²⁹ It argues that, just like a number of other mantic arts, an “original canon” (*hongyō* 本經) of “plastromantic omens” (*kisō* 龜相; literally, “turtle figures”) still exists in lineage transmissions. The best transmissions, claims the preface, were received by the Urabe clan. Urabe lineages and their connections to the divinatory cracking of turtle plastrons, as we will see below, are both traced back to mythical times in the *Shinsen kisōki*.

The term *urabe* 卜部 was used in different ways during the late eighth and early ninth centuries. As an official title, it referred to divination and ritual specialists employed under the Nakatomi supervisors of the Jingikan. As a surname, it referred to kinship groups associated with specific locales, kami, and crafts. Like the Nakatomi, the Urabe were known for their expertise in incantation, but unlike their Nakatomi descendants (or ancestors), their namesake or eponym was directly tied to divination (*ura* 卜). The *Shinsen kisōki* establishes and promotes genealogical ties between the Urabe and prominent kami in the early Nara state histories by weaving what appears to have been a local Urabe cult complex devoted to pyro-plastromancy into the state cult. One of the major goals of the present study is to determine the effects that this local cult—real or imagined—might have had on the late Nara and early Heian theocratic cult of *jingi*. A brief review of the history of the Urabe clan, however, is needed to set up our analysis.

The Urabe Before, In, and After the Shinsen kisōki

Modern Japanese scholarship on the origins and early achievements of the Urabe is extensive (for example, see HIRANO 1966; INOUE 1980, 126–87; YOKOTA 1982, 221–302; NAGADOME 1984; and KUDŌ 1994.). This work is important because relations between the Urabe, the Nakatomi, and the Fujiwara clans had a great impact on the geopolitical and religious history of Japan. Little of this work, however, has made its way into modern Western scholarship. An article by Allan GRAPARD (1992b) on the Shinto of Yoshida Kanetomo 吉田兼俱 (1435–1511) is one of the few exceptions. Grapard introduces some of the most substantial modern Japanese research on the early history of the Urabe, and is one of the only detailed English-language discussions on the subject (outside of encyclopedia entries) published to date.

GRAPARD’s brief history of the “Urabe diviners” (1992b, 27–33) opens with Gari LEDYARD’s notion of a maritime state or power called the “Thalassocracy of Wa” (1975, 230–32). This thalassocracy, or loose confederation of thalassocratic

29. KUDŌ (2003, 144) points out a number of similarities between the preface and body of the text to stipulate that the former was either part of the original *Shinsen kisōki* or was added to it sometime before or in a 973 CE edition attributed to Urabe Masanobu. For similar views, see TSUBAKI (1957, 86) and KUDŌ (2005, 177–78).

chiefdoms, is supposed to have covered the southern portions of the Korean Peninsula and the southwestern coastal areas of Japan during the first half of the first millennium CE. Ledyard argues that this “empire at sea” was upset by an influx of continental culture during the centuries following the fall of the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220), and Grapard dates the birth of the Urabe to this era’s large-scale eastward migrations. GRAPARD extends this thesis to contend that Urabe diviners settled in the coastal areas of Wa, where they “customarily accompanied travelers on both land and sea, ... were held responsible for their ‘projections’ on direction, weather, time, and the outcome of the travel,” and were “closely associated with the rulers, for they [also] made predictions and offered projections regarding battles, auspicious days and sites, and crop conditions” (1992b, 29). Plausible as they may be, none of these claims are defended, and the others that are rely on a combination of conclusions drawn from relatively late texts like the *Engi shiki* and the late fourteenth century *Sonpi bunmyaku* (Genealogies of the venerable and base).

The Urabe, according to GRAPARD (1992b, 30), continued to follow the expansion of Wa over organized and well-travelled sea routes to the eastern reaches of present-day Honshu. By the end of the fifth century, some had settled in places like the eastern province of Izu,³⁰ where their expertise in divinatory practices—particularly the art of deer-bone pyro-scapulimancy—was recognized and awarded by the nascent Yamato court. Most of these points are borrowed from INOUE (1980) and other contemporary Japanese scholars whose studies on the early development of the Urabe are more fully introduced below.

GRAPARD (1992b, 33) goes on to contend that the rising status of the Urabe during the Nara and early Heian periods should be attributed to the support they received from the ruling political clan at that time, the Fujiwara. The Fujiwara shared the same ancestral kami as the Nakatomi and Urabe,³¹ and by the mid-ninth century, all three clans were prominent players in state religion and politics. The Urabe further distinguished themselves as authorities on the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki* during the early Heian, and their control of Yoshida Shrine 吉田神社 in Heian-kyō—from its founding in the mid- to late ninth century—eventually led to the establishment of Yoshida Shinto (GRAPARD 1992b, 33).

30. Izu refers to the Izu Peninsula and nearby islands.

31. The apical ancestral kami of the Nakatomi clan is Ame no koyane 天兒屋根. The Fujiwara clan is traditionally traced back Nakatomi no Kamatari 中臣鎌足 (614–669), who was officially awarded the surname Fujiwara by Emperor Tenji 天智 (r. 661–671). See *Kojiki* (1, 116); *Nihon shoki* (1: 1, 82 and 1, 128); and *Ryō no gige* (2, 78, and 79). The Fujiwara dominated late first and early second-millennium CE Japanese politics by intermarrying with the royal clan and by serving as regents to the throne. For more on the early history of the clan, see KITAGAWA (1987, 98–116); NOMURA (1995); and TAKASHIMA (1999).

Grapard relates much more about the early history of the “Urabe diviners” to set up the central topic of his article. His conclusion offers a brief synopsis:

[I]t seems that in very early times the Urabe and Nakatomi sacerdotal lineages existed in the western part of the isles, and that they became closely associated during the sixth or seventh century when the Yamato court evolved in central Japan. The Urabe were also present in the Izu Islands, although they do not appear in records of that area before the year 746.³² And, finally, the Urabe and Nakatomi sacerdotal lineages also settled in Kashima and Katori, in the province of Hitachi. The Urabe diviners played an important role during the Heian period; according to *Engi shiki*, a member of the Urabe lineage was to accompany all embassies bound for China. (GRAPARD 1992b, 33)

Grapard’s history of the early development of the Urabe is eloquent and succinct, but his supporting evidence is rarely cited. The *Kojiki*, the *Nihon shoki*, the *Engi shiki*, the *Kujiki*, and the *Sonpi bunmyaku*, along with secondary studies by HIRANO (1966) and INOUE (1980), are referenced to support some of the details in his summary of Urabe history. While I find the grand narrative that Grapard proffers to be both viable and compelling, I am also left with many questions. Where did all of this information about the Urabe come from? When, why, and how did Urabe plastromancy come to be favored over scapulimancy in Japan, and where can one find evidence to help defend answers to these questions? The *Shinsen kisōki*—a text never mentioned by Grapard—provides at least one set of contingent answers. However, before investigating exactly what it relates about the Urabe, we survey a few of the earliest occurrences of the term in Japanese texts.

Some claim that the earliest recorded mention of the term *urabe* 卜部 appears in the 718 *Yōrō ritsuryō* 養老律令 (Regulatory and administrative codes of the Yōrō reign period [717–724]).³³ This, however, is difficult to substantiate because the Yōrō Codes were lost early on, and the *Ryō no gige*, which provides commentary on a version of them, was not completed before 833. Others argue that the earliest dateable mention of the term *urabe* should be attributed to one of a number of eighth century occurrences of terms like *bokusha* 卜者, *Ura no uji* 卜氏, and *urabe* 占部, which are all commonly read as

32. Here, Grapard equates the term Urabe 卜部 with Urabe 占部. He is referring to a Heizeikyū mokkan 平城宮木簡 (Heijō Palace wooden tablet) dated 746 that mentions two different branches of the Urabe 占部 of Izu. This tablet is introduced and quoted in INOUE (1980, 163).

33. See *Ryō no gige* (1, 29–30), that simply states that twenty *urabe* served in the Jingikan. The same number of *urabe* is listed in lines 581–584 of the *Shinsen kisōki*, which state that five members from each of the four Urabe provinces served the throne in the capital. Comments on the *Yōrō ritsuryō* are recorded in both the court-sponsored *Ryō no gige* of 833 and the privately compiled *Ryō no shūge* (Collected expositions on the civil codes) of the mid-to-late ninth century.

variants of 卜部.³⁴ The first definite occurrence of the term in received Japanese texts does not seem to surface until the mid-eighth-century *Man'yōshū* (Collection of a myriad leaves).³⁵ The poem in which the term appears almost certainly predates this period, but it does not provide any evidence that would allow a more exact dating. The clear allusion to the divinatory cracking of turtle shells it contains, however, points to a clear connection between Urabe diviners and the art of pyro-plastronomy.

At least one other text predating the 830 *Shinsen kisōki* mentions the term *urabe* 卜部. The *Shoku Nihongi* records the term once (3: 18, 104), in an entry dated to the fourth lunar month of 750. It records part of an edict describing rites for the purification and renewal of the nation and a great imperial amnesty (*taisha* 大赦) meant to initiate the process. The end of the entry adds that, “mid-level crimes committed by Nakatomi-Urabe-Ki no Okiko no maru were cleared” (中臣卜部紀奧乎麻呂, 減配中流). We are never told what these crimes were,³⁶ but the entry is informative in other ways. It lends credence to at least two important claims made in the first *Shoku Nihongi* entry: that the term *urabe* 卜部 was used in a surname during the mid-eighth century, and that connections between the Urabe and Nakatomi were close.

34. For example, the term *bokusha* 卜者 (diviner) occurs in the 720 *Nihon shoki* (2: 20, 490), the 721 *Hitachi no kuni fudoki* (Regional gazetteer of Hitachi Province) (364), and the early ninth century *Nihon ryōiki* (Record of numinous anomalies in Japan) (2: 5, 231).

Another term commonly read as Urabe is Ura no uji 卜氏 (Ura clan). It occurs twice in the following *Hitachi no kuni fudoki* (392) passage translated by Grapard: “On the tenth day of the fourth moon of each year a ritual feast is held and rice-wine is served. Members of the Urabe sacerdotal lineage [卜氏] assemble men and women, and day after day, night after night, people deport themselves in drinks, songs, and dances.... The Urabe [卜氏] dwell in the immediate surroundings of the shrine” (GRAPARD 1992a, 38–39). The term 卜氏 is not 卜部, but there are reasons to associate the former with the latter. An earlier *Hitachi no kuni fudoki* entry, for example, records a tale about Ikatsu ōmi 雷大臣, apical ancestor of the Urabe clan. This account portrays Ikatsu ōmi as the son of the Great Kami of Kashima 香島大神. Also known as Atomimi no mikoto 跨耳命 or Oshimi no sugune no mikoto 忍見足尼命/押見宿祢, Ikatsu ōmi is said—in certain traditions—to have received the surname Urabe because of his or her expertise in plastronomy. The proximity of these accounts strongly suggests a connection between 卜氏 and 卜部, yet they remain distinct terms.

Finally, the term *urabe* 占部 appears on the 746 Heijō Palace wooden tablet introduced in note 32. It is also frequently read as a variant of 卜部, but both terms surface in close proximity in later state histories like the *Shoku Nihongi*, the *Nihon Montoku tennō jitsuroku*, and the *Nihon sandai jitsuroku*.

35. For the Japanese, see *Man'yōshū* (4: 16, 28–30 [#3811]). For English translations, see Nihon GAKUJUTSU SHINKŌKAI (1940, 110–11); BATES (2005, 37–38).

36. However, knowing that the amnesty mentioned here was declared in preparation for the unveiling of the Great Buddha 大佛 of Tōdai-ji 東大寺 in 751, these mid-level crimes could very well have involved criticisms of the project, or of Emperor Shōmu's 聖武 (r. 724–749) lavish support of Buddhism during this era.

The *Shinsen kisōki* first mentions the term *urabe* 卜部 in line 366 of the preface, where “mid-level functionaries in the guild of official diviners” (*urabe shokujō* 卜部職掌) are said to have composed the text to illustrate their authority in the art of pyro-plastromancy. Ten of a total of twelve occurrences of the term in the body of the text appear in the following passage (roughly corresponding to titled entries 15–17 in the table of contents). This portion of the *Shinsen kisōki* introduces specific sites, kami cults, and clans associated with biannual “pyro-plastromantic consultations for the royal body” (*omina no ura* 御體之卜). It reads:

太詔戸神社本社在三國。今祭卜部坊櫛間智神社本社在二國。又祭卜部坊行馬社。大嘗灼卜用水。凡壹岐嶋卜部上祖，天比豆部柱命，對馬嶋直之上祖、押瞻命，陪於天兒屋命仕奉龜卜。御體吉凶，三年為期。申天之兒屋，執奏神倭伊波礼比古天皇始，御倭豐秋津嶋宮、今是卜部也。活目入伊佐知天皇，定賜國境及天神地祇之社。始從男弭御調太詔戸社，更建於大和國。帶中日子天皇御代，兒屋命十二世孫雷大臣命執掌神事。曰、在東國卜部姓者，皆我之後也。以伊豆之卜部令供卜事。今以号稱四國卜部。所謂四國卜部在數氏焉。伊豆國卜部五人。一氏壹岐嶋卜部五人。二氏對馬嶋卜部十人。三氏惣廿人。

The base shrines of the Futonorito Shrine complex are in the three provinces.³⁷ Today, [royal] sacrificial rites are performed at the base shrines of the Urabe-managed Kushimachi Shrine complex in the two provinces.³⁸ Sacrificial rites [for the royal body] are also performed at the Urabe-housed Kōba Shrine complex.³⁹ Most of the time, water is used in scorching and cracking.

37. According to the in-text commentary, this refers to a set of shrines located 1. in the Iki district 壹岐郡 of Iki island; 2. in the Soekami district 添上郡 (in Nara) of Yamato province; and 3. in the Kamiagata 上県 and Shimoagata 下県 districts of Tsushima Island. The early tenth century *Engi shiki* (18: 9, 181 and 10, 320) only records the Soekami and Shimoagata shrines in its lists of state shrines.

38. Commentary explains that this is where Kushimachi 櫛間智, manifest as Hahakaki no kami 母鹿木神 (kami of the wood used for pyromantic pokers), was worshipped. It also claims that Kushimachi shrines were located on Iki island, and that Kushimachi was worshipped at Ame no Kaguyama shrine 天香山社 in Yamato province's Toochi district 十市郡 (in Nara). The Ame no Kaguyama shrine is listed as a state shrine in the *Engi shiki* (18: 9, 181).

39. In particular, at the central shrine in Yamato province's Heguri district 平群郡 (Nara) where, as the commentary explains, *hikribi no kami* 火籬神 (kami of kindling) or *hikrigrig no kami* 火籬木神 (kami of firewood) was worshipped. This particular Kōba Shrine must refer to Ikomanii masu Ikomatsuhiko Shrine 往馬坐伊古麻都比古神社 (better known as Ikoma Shrine 生駒神社, Nara), where Ikomatsu hiko no kami 伊古麻都比古神 and Ikomatsu himeko no kami 伊古麻都比賣神, both known as kami of fire and kindling, are still worshipped. Exactly how they relate to Kagutsuchi 具土/軻遇突智 is too complex a question to answer here, but the *Kojiki* (1, 40) refers to Kagutsuchi as “Hinokaga biko no kami” 火之炫毘古神, a designation that shares much in common with the name Ikomatsu hiko no kami. Finally, although we are told that the central Kōba shrine was located in Yamato's Heguri district, it likely originated elsewhere. Given the origins of the other shrines introduced here, and what we have already identified as traditional associations between fire and the Urabe (see note 23), the most probable points of origin are Tsushima, Iki, or Izu.

The apical ancestor of the Urabe of Iki Island is Amahitotsuwashira no mikoto. The apical ancestor of the Atai on Tsushima Island is Chinsen no mikoto.⁴⁰ Both assisted Ame no koyane in pyro-plastromantic consultations. [What is determined about] the good or bad fortune of the royal body [in these consultations] is valid for a three-year span. Today it is the Urabe who report to Ame no koyane and handle memorials submitted to the [spirit of] the First Sovereign Kamuyamato Iwarehiko (Emperor Jinmu) at the Ooyama totoyō akitsushima no miya (a shrine devoted to the island of Honshū). Sovereign Ikumeiri no Isachi (Emperor Suinin [trad. r. 29–70]) decreed awards for border provinces that established [branch] shrines for the spirits of heaven and earth. When the male attendants of the Futonorito Shrines [in Tsushima and Iki] were first informed of these decrees, they established another [Futonorito Shrine] in the province of Yamato. During the reign of the Sovereign Tarashinakatsu hiko (Emperor Chūai [trad. r. 192–200]), the Great Lord of Thunder (Ikatsu ōmi), twelfth-generation descendant of Koyane, was placed in charge of the administration of divine affairs. He declared that everyone with the surname Urabe in the eastern provinces were his descendants. He had the Urabe of Izu administer the handling of divinatory matters. Today, [these responsibilities] have come to be associated with the Urabe of the four provinces, including five members of the Urabe of Izu, five members from one Urabe clan of Iki Island, and ten members from two Urabe clans of Tsushima Island;⁴¹ altogether twenty people from three clans. (*Shinsen kisōki*, lines 567–84)

The network of Urabe-managed shrines described at the beginning of the passage introduces established cults in Tsushima and Iki devoted to the spirits of turtles and *hahaka* wood 母鹿木.⁴² The underlying message of the whole passage is clear:

40. Lines 573–578 of the *Shinsen kisōki* introduce the divine ancestors of Iki and Tsushima. Both are said to have assisted Ame no koyane in ancient pyro-plastromantic consultations. The supreme ancestor of the Urabe clan of Iki is identified as Amahitotsu hashira no mikoto 天比豆都柱命, and the supreme ancestor of Tsushima's Atai clan is identified as Chinsen no mikoto 神瞻命. The *Kojiki* account (1, 36) of the birth or creation of major islands in the Japanese archipelago (by Izanami and Izanagi) lists the same Amahitotsu hashira no mikoto 天比登都柱 as the kami of Iki Island, but it names Ame no sadeyori hime 天之狭手依比壳 rather than Chinsen no mikoto as the kami of the island of Tsushima. Neither of the latter two kami is, as far as I can tell, connected to divination, Ame no koyane, the Urabe, or the Atai in the *Kojiki*, and neither is mentioned elsewhere in the *Shinsen kisōki*. In the *Shinsen kisōki*, the term “four provinces” (*yokuni* 四國) refers to Upper and Lower Tsushima, Iki, and Izu (versus the more commonly recognized set of Tsushima, Iki, Izu, and the capital). For more on the history of the four Urabe provinces, see KAWABATA (1988).

41. The *Shinsen kisōki* (lines 585–587) explains that Tsushima is traditionally divided into two provinces: a northern or “upper” province named Kamiagata, and a southern or “lower” one named Shimoagata.

42. *Hahaka* 母鹿/波波迦 is an ancient name for the Japanese bird cherry (*uwamizu zakura* 上溝桜) tree. The wood of the tree is hard, and is often identified as “metal-hard cherry” (*kongō zakura* 金剛桜). The wood was commonly used for tool handles and for pyro-osteomantic pokers used to scorch and crack bones.

the Urabe of the four provinces are bound together and bound to the state cult because of their traditional ties to the divinatory cracking of turtle plastrons.

The centripetal force of the increasingly centralized Yamato chiefdom appears to have drawn pyro-plastronomy into the Kinai Plain, where it contended with deer-bone pyro-scapulimancy as the preferred method of state divination. The *Shinsen kisōki* passage translated above explains that the Urabe of the eastern provinces were descendants of Ikatsu ōmi 雷大臣 and shared lineage ties to Ame no koyane 天兒屋/天兒屋根 (apical ancestor of the Nakatomi; distant ancestor of Ikatsu ōmi and Futonorito 太詔戸).⁴³ The eastern Urabe of Izu may have been the first group to win imperial recognition in Japan, and they may have also been the first to crack turtles in the Jingikan, but they were not the first people to use the surname Urabe, and were certainly not the first to crack turtle plastrons in Japan. The *Shinsen kisōki* constructs a genealogy meant to elevate the standing of the eastern Urabe at court.⁴⁴ The value of these claims depends on our ability to discern the intentions behind their expression. This task is continued below, but knowing that there is a substantial body of Japanese scholarship devoted to unraveling the history of the Urabe, I will continue with a general overview of it. Much of this research focuses on the Urabe of Tsushima and Iki. Without the space to introduce more than a few insights from the most seminal and oft-cited studies, I will be brief.

In perhaps the most detailed modern study on the Urabe to date, historian INOUE Tatsuo (1980) emphasizes that Urabe lineages in different locales must be examined separately to understand the early history of the clan. Inoue explains that members of Urabe lineages in different parts of Japan were purposefully brought together in the Jingikan sometime during the late seventh and early eighth centuries, but local Urabe lineages and kinship groups extend much further back in time and have their own histories. Inoue attempts to reconstruct these histories with hundreds of references to works dating to a wide variety of different time periods. He concludes that the term *urabe* 卜部 was already a surname used by different local clan-based guilds in fifth century Tsushima and Iki, and that certain members of these groups moved to the eastern reaches of the empire where they were awarded the name Nakatomi in the sixth century. The Nakatomi maintained close relations with the eastern Urabe, emerged as leaders of the Jingikan during the seventh century and, with political support from their Fujiwara descendants, propagated shared genealogies and mytho-histories to

43. The earlier *Nihon shoki* (1: 1, 50) alleges that Ikazuchi 雷 was born from a piece of the fire kami Kagutsuchi 軻遇突智, who Izanagi cut up with his sword after its birth caused Izanami's death. Ikazuchi no mikoto Shrine 雷命神社 is listed in the *Engi shiki* (18: 10, 320) as one of thirteen major state shrines in Lower Tsushima.

44. These lineage claims are, as John McRae has brilliantly pointed out with regard to traditional Chan Buddhist lineages, likely “just as wrong as they are strong” (McRAE 2003, xix).

bind all three clans together during the eighth century. Inoue concludes that by the mid-ninth century, the Urabe had been recognized as a divine clan, plastro-mancy had displaced scapulimancy as the orthodox method of state divination, and the Nakatomi had become the sole supervisors of state sacerdotal matters in the Jingikan (INOUE 1980, 183–87).

Historian and mythologist YOKOTA Ken'ichi (1982) reexamines the origins of the Urabe through the lens of myth. In one sequence of comparisons, he draws from the *Shinsen kisōki*, the late fourteenth century *Sonpi bunmyaku*, and the late eighteenth century *Matsunoo shake keizu* (Diagramed genealogy of the shrine lineages of Matsunoo) to trace the mythical origins of the Urabe back to Ikatsu ōmi and the reign of Emperor Chūai.⁴⁵ Yokota admits this evidence is relatively late, but his comparative exercise is meant to identify traditions that can help explain fragmented records from earlier times. Like Inoue, he argues that the Nakatomi branched off from an Urabe family before the sixth century CE and employed members from eastern Urabe families in and around the capital during the sixth century as official diviners. The Nakatomi were written into the early Nara mytho-histories as descendants of the already recognized state kami Ame no koyane, and they turned to the Urabe of the four provinces during the eighth century to promote pyro-plastro-mancy. Yokota also contends that scapulimancy and plastro-mancy were both performed from the mid-fourth to the mid-sixth century, and the gradual transition from deer to turtles in state divinatory consultations is ultimately attributable to the branching out of the Japanese aristocracy that occurred during the eighth and ninth centuries (YOKOTA 1982, 231–35).⁴⁶ In short, little in the mythical

45. The *Shinsen kisōki* reports that it was Emperor Chūai who first put Ikatsu ōmi in charge of the administration of divine affairs. Ikatsu ōmi subsequently declared that everyone with the surname Urabe in the eastern provinces were his descendants and put the Urabe of Izu in charge of divination. The *Sonpi bunmyaku* (58: 1, 23) and *Matsunoo shake keizu* (181, 238a) both explain that Ikatsu ōmi no mikoto 雷大臣命 mastered the art of plastro-mancy and was granted the surname Urabe by the court of Emperor Chūai. The *Matsunoo shake keizu* not only introduces Ikatsu ōmi as a descendent of the same Ame no koyane worshipped by the Nakatomi, Oonakatomi 大中臣, Urabe, Yiki 伊伎, and Fujiwara clans, but it also clearly states that the Urabe lineage originated when his original surname, Nakatomi, was changed to Urabe. For additional comments on this passage, see YOKOTA (1982, 237–38). For more on the *Sonpi bunmyaku* passage, see INOUE (1980, 137); YOKOTA (1982, 237); and GRAPARD (1992b, 31). All three texts posit associations between Emperor Chūai, Ikatsu ōmi, Ame no koyane, the Nakatomi, and the Urabe. Connections between Ikatsu ōmi and the Nakatomi clan were established in or before the 815 *Shinsen shōjiroku* 新撰姓氏錄 (Newly compiled register of surnames and clans); see SAEKI (1962, 2, 212; 231; 259; and 334).

46. Yokota argues that the official duties of prominent sacerdotal clans in the Jingikan become far more specific in the transition from the *Kojiki* to the *Nihon shoki*. The *Kojiki* depicts Ame no koyane and Futodama jointly engaged in pyro-scapulimantic consultations and incantations used to help lure Amaterasu out of the cave, but the closest corresponding account in

accounts mentioned above contradicts previous research on the history of the Urabe. Yokota concludes that the Urabe originated sometime before the sixth century, were associated with divination and incantation from the start, and gained prestige during the late Nara and early Heian periods as their Nakatomi patrons outmaneuvered competing clans (like the Inbe) for dominance in the Jingikan.

Archaeologist and historian NAGADOME Hisae (1984, 90–110) argues that pyro-plastromancy entered Tsushima long before the earliest dates of transmission to Japan proposed by scholars like Inoue.⁴⁷ According to Nagadome, the technique was transmitted directly from China, and its earliest appearance in Japan coincides with the emergence of the Urabe of Tsushima and Iki sometime during the fourth or fifth centuries CE. Three insights are offered to defend these views. First, the long history of plastromancy in China and the transmission of continental cosmological schemes through places like Tsushima and Iki before the middle of the first millennium CE both suggest that the technique would have likely entered those areas much earlier.⁴⁸ Second, the divined shell recovered from the Shitaru ruins in northwest Tsushima should be dated much earlier than previously claimed (to the third or fourth rather than the sixth

the *Nihon shoki* (1: 1, 82) records that Ame no koyane oversaw divine incantations, while Futodama—ancestor of the Inbe—controlled the presentation of offerings. By the end of the eighth century, the Nakatomi had begun to claim both incantation and divination as their own exclusive duties. This becomes clear in early ninth century texts like the *Kogoshūi*, the *Shinsen kisōki*, and the *Engi shiki*, all of which are referenced in Yokota's lengthy discussion on how the Inbe lost—to the Nakatomi—the authority to recite state liturgy (that is, perform incantations) during the late Nara and early Heian periods (YOKOTA 1982, 260).

The *Kojiki* claims that both Ame no koyane (ancestor of the Nakatomi no Muraji 中臣連) and Futodama 布刀玉 (ancestor of the Inbe no Obito 忌部首) were charged with extracting the shoulder blade of a “true male deer” (*mao no shika* 眞男鹿) from Heavenly Mount Kagu. They were also charged with selecting *hahaka* wood from the same mountain for scapulimantic consultations on how to lure her out. Lines 462–463 of the *Shinsen kisōki* draw from the *Kojiki* to state that, “Ame no koyane reached in, pulled on, and extracted the scapulae of a true male deer of Heavenly Mount Kagu and selected bark from the *hahaka* [trees] of Heavenly Mount Kagu. Ame no koyane then divined a fire-produced [scapulimantic] crack omen.” Note that Futodama is absent from this retelling of the myth. *Shinsen kisōki*, lines 463–475, continue with an account of enticing Amaterasu out of the cave. The last few lines tell us that when she exited, “The multitude of deities were joyful, and having witnessed the emergence of divinatory cracking (scapulimancy), it was repeatedly done in this manner.”

47. At least two other studies on pyro-plastromancy in Tsushima explore similar hypotheses. See IWASA and HARADA (1992, 182–201); FUJII (2008).

48. The connection that Nagadome draws between pyro-plastromancy and the transmission of Chinese cosmological and correlative systems like yin-yang and the five phases is not explained in detail, but the technique was certainly connected to these systems in China by the early medieval period. For more on these connections, see KORY (2012, 148–68).

century).⁴⁹ And third, there are no archaeologically recovered turtle shells from the Korean peninsula.⁵⁰ Nagadome claims that pyro-plastronomy likely arrived in Tsushima and Iki during the third century, giving rise to specialists by the fifth century. He further speculates that by the sixth century, Urabe lineages in the east were performing pyro-scapulimantic consultations with deer bones, but this practice was gradually displaced by the divinatory cracking of turtle plastrons during the Nara period,⁵¹ and a new Urabe genealogy was constructed to serve Nakatomi interests sometime during the late Nara and early Heian periods (NAGADOME 1984, 98).⁵² The Nakatomi relied on the services of the *urabe*

49. Nagadome contends that the Shitaru plastron from Tsushima predates the three Maguchi Cavern shells, which are usually recognized as the earliest known examples of divined shells in Japan. The Shitaru shell, claims Nagadome, must predate the Kofun period because it was discovered next to ceramic objects dating to the mid-Yayoi. While the Shitaru shell might be slightly older than the Maguchi Cavern shells, I remain unconvinced of Nagadome's radical re-dating of the former, though it does better reflect the main direction of transmission in early Japan (sw to NE).

50. Divined turtle shells have not yet been discovered on the Korean peninsula, but there is a substantial archive of mid-first millennium CE textual evidence claiming that practice was performed there. For example, see LEE (1981, 67–70). For more on the early transmission of plastronomy from China to Korea to Japan, see MISHINA (1970, 114, note 63); ŌBAYASHI (1977, 54); and NITTA (1977). Nitta combines textual and archaeological evidence with folklore and ethnographic studies to conclude that pyro-scapulimancy was a Tungusic practice transmitted to Japan during the late Yayoi or early Kofun period (route of transmission unknown), while pyro-plastronomy was a Chinese practice transmitted via the Korean peninsula during the late Kofun. Similar conclusions are defended in KANASEKI (1982, 69–93, especially 84–87); KANZAWA (1976, especially 24; and 1987).

51. NAGADOME (1984, 92) asserts that Tsushima and Iki remained important during the Heian, and that pyro-plastronomic consultations are still being conducted there. To support the former claim, Nagadome points out that almost half (53/107) of the imperial shrines listed under “Western maritime [regions]” 西海 in the *Engi shiki* (18: 10, 313–320) are located in Tsushima and Iki. He also reminds us that Ban Nobutomo's 伴信友 (1773–1846) mid-nineteenth-century *Seiboku kō* (On correct divination) opens with a section on “correct” or orthodox forms of pyro-plastronomic consultations attributed to the Urabe of Tsushima. See *Seiboku kō* (1, 447a–448a). Perhaps the most radical claim in Nagadome's article is that the royal Yamato Sun line and its imperial cult are at least partially based on the early solar and lunar cults of Tsushima and Iki. NAGADOME (1984, 98–99 and 102) theorizes that prominent deities of sun and moon, and a prevalence of spirit mediums devoted to spells and dependent on these natural and divine phenomena in Tsushima and Iki provided a model for the creation and legitimization of the imperial sun line of Amaterasu. Much of the evidence used to support this hypothesis is drawn from relatively late texts like the *Sonpi bunmyaku* and *Matsunoo shake keizu*. For a study that focuses on earlier works to help untangle the processes leading to the creation of the imperial sun line of Amaterasu, see KIRKLAND (1997). Connections to Tsushima are briefly mentioned on page 149, note 70.

52. Like Yokota, Nagadome identifies Ikatsu ōmi as the apical ancestor of the Urabe, and largely relies on post-Heian texts to do so. Unlike Yokota, he emphasizes post-Heian textual traditions depicting Ikatsu ōmi as a prominent invocator (*saniwa* 審神者) and female spirit-medium (*miko* 巫女) once in the service of Empress Jingū.

because of genealogical and professional relations, and because diviners—particularly pyro-plastromancers—played a significant role in the continental Chinese theocratic models promoted by both the Nakatomi and their Fujiwara relatives. While Nagadome pushes the history of the Urabe much further back in time than Inoue or Yokota, there is very little received or recovered evidence to support this theory.

Finally, an article by KUDŌ (1994) introduces an interesting hypothesis on the origin of Kamezu hime no mikoto 龜津比女命, kami of turtles and emanation of the divine apical ancestor of the Urabe clan in the *Shinsen kisōki*. Kudō begins with the following entry from the *Nihon shoki*, dated to the seventh lunar month of 477 CE:

丹波国余社郡管川人首水江浦嶋子、乘舟而釣、遂得大龜。便化爲女。於是浦嶋子感以爲婦。相逐入海。到蓬萊山、歷觀仙衆。語在別卷。

Mizunoe no Urashimako of Tsutsugawa in the Yosa District of Tanba Province (north of present-day Kyoto, near the coast) boarded a boat and went fishing. He ended up catching a large turtle that transformed into a woman. Thereupon, Urashimako was moved and made her his wife. They entered the sea together, went to Mount Hōrai (Ch. Penglai), and mingled with the transcendents there. This account is recorded in other texts. (*Nihon shoki*, 2: 14, 206)

Urabe Kanekata's 卜部兼方 (fl. 1274–1301) late thirteenth century *Shaku Nihongi* (Commentary on the *Nihon shoki*) cites a fragment from the long-lost mid-eighth-century *Tango no kuni fudoki* (Regional gazetteer of Tango Province) recording the name of Urashimako's 浦島子 wife as Kamezu hime 龜津比賣 (5, 112). Though it is impossible to say for certain whether the *Shinsen kisōki* appropriated from or contributed to this legend (Kanekata could very well have added the name of Urashimako's wife to the *Tango no kuni fudoki* account based on a likely familiarity with the Urabe traditions described in the *Shinsen kisōki*), Kudō cites the account as evidence that Kamezu was neither created by the authors of the *Shinsen kisōki* nor exclusively bound to the Urabe. He argues that Futonorito was traditionally a major object of the Urabe cult, while Kamezu and Ikatsu ōmi were appropriated and elevated in status by the authors of the *Shinsen kisōki*. Of the three, Futonorito is most directly associated with incantation—the one skill that the Urabe and Nakatomi seem to have consistently held in common. Other associations (Futonorito as Ikatsu ōmi, as Atomimi, or as a primary form of Kamezu) would have been easier to justify and sustain given this long-standing skill-based commonality.⁵³ In short, Urabe ties to Futonorito

53. See KUDŌ (2005, 295–98). The late thirteenth century *Shaku Nihongi* also identifies Futonorito as the daughter of Ame no anmochi and manifest in turtle form as Kamezu hime. For more on all of these kami and their associations with the Urabe, see NAKAYAMA (1930, 143–52). The whole *Kisei* synopsis recorded in the *Shinsen kisōki* perfectly matches a long fragment from

and spells appear to predate more consciously constructed links to spirits explicitly associated with plastronomy.

The Nakatomi gained official clan status by the mid-seventh century and are regularly depicted as sacerdotal supervisors of the Jingikan in eighth and ninth century texts.⁵⁴ The Urabe, on the other hand, are not formally recognized as a state clan until the mid-ninth century—many decades after the earliest descriptions of their official pyro-plastronomic duties in the Jingikan. The earliest extant record of the pyro-plastronomic duties of the *urabe* in this office likely appears in the *Shinsen kisōki*, which claims that the title “superior supervisor of divinatory cracking” (*boku no chōjō* 卜長上) was instituted by the throne in 774 (line 598). Moreover, the character *ura/boku* 卜 refers to pyro-plastronomy throughout the *Ryō no gige* (for example, 1, 29; 2, 81; and 4, 155), where all occurrences of the term *urabe* refer to diviners in the Jingikan.

Neither the early Nara *ritsuryō* nor the early state mytho-histories ever mention the divinatory cracking of turtle shells. This appears to have left the door open for different clans to stake claims to the technique during the mid- to late eighth century, and attempt to monopolize it as their own during the early Heian period.⁵⁵ The Nakatomi must have seen an opportunity to increase their power and legitimacy in court by replacing the older, imperially-sanctioned deer-bone scapulimancy with a “new” brand of pyro-osteomancy revered in China and familiar to the *urabe* in their employ. The *urabe*, as a professional group

a *Kichō den* 龜兆傳 (Traditions of pyro-plastronomic omens) cited in the *Shaku Nihongi* (5, 112–113). Immediately preceding this fragment is a brief passage asking “What is *ura* 占?” After telling us to equate it with *ura* 卜, we are told that it referred to the cracking of deer scapulae in ancient times, but later came to more commonly refer to the cracking of turtle plastrons. The origins of this innovation, says the passage, remain unclear, but the *Kichō den* fragment (perhaps originally drawn from the *Kisei*) is offered as a relatively early and illustrative record of this change.

54. The Fujiwara clan, for example, was awarded *uji* status in the middle of the seventh century as a branch of the Nakatomi; see note 31. The *Taihō ritsuryō* 大宝律令 (Regulatory and administrative codes of the Taihō reign period [701–704]) of 701 is purported to have established the Nakatomi as supervisors of the Jingikan, and the Yōrō Codes is said to have listed positions for *bokuchō* 卜兆 (diviners of crack omens) and “twenty *urabe*” serving under the Nakatomi as subordinate specialists; see note 33. The Taihō Codes can be partially reconstructed from a commentary entitled *Koki* 古記 (Ancient records), which is quoted throughout the *Ryō no shūge*’s commentary on the Yōrō Codes, but neither set of codes is fully extant.

55. NAGADOME (1984, 113) submits a much earlier date for the start of pyro-plastronomic dominance at court. He clearly illustrates a nearly half-century gap in *Nihon shoki* passages referring to divinatory prognostication (*bokusen* 卜占) between the reigns of Ingyō 允恭 (r. ca. 412–ca. 453) and Keitai 繼体 (r. ca. 507–ca. 531), and argues that a radical change in technique must have taken place during this time. However, neither the absence of terms like 卜 or 占, nor minor changes in divinatory topics over the course of this period convincingly demonstrates that a major transition from eastern scapulimantic prognostication to western plastronomic divination transpired between the mid-fifth and early sixth centuries. The present study uses a combination of received and recovered evidence to date this shift between the mid-Nara and early Heian periods.

of mantic specialists subordinate to—but working closely in tandem with—an imperially-recognized *uji* 氏 or clan, would have been at least partially bound to the clan kami (*ujigami* 氏神) of the Nakatomi, but they also had their own kami cults. It was not their place to demand an officially recognized lineage connection to the royal clan, but this does not mean that they did not relish an opportunity to construct a mythical foundation for it with Nakatomi support. The *Shinsen kisōki* promotes Nakatomi aims, but it veils them in the more transparent and immediate intentions of certain members of Urabe kinship groups. Both groups benefitted from these claims, and the Nakatomi and Urabe clans continued to play important roles in state religion and politics for the rest of the Heian period and beyond.⁵⁶

Pyro-plastromancy in the Shinsen kisōki

What remains of the first fascicle of Bonshun's *Shinsen kisōki* provides a number of interesting hints about how pyro-plastromantic consultations might have been conducted in early Heian Japan, and how this technique's displacement of deer-bone scapulimancy was justified. For example, lines 536–566 draw from a lost work titled *Kisei*, or *The Pledge of the Turtle*, to record an account of a pledge or promise made by a kami of turtles to a retinue of heavenly spirits.⁵⁷ The covenant expressed through this pledge is said to have been responsible for the replacement of the heavenly art of scapulimancy with a mantic technique better suited for both heaven and earth.

The account of the “pledge of the turtle” begins with a meeting called by Kami rogi 神魯岐 (that is, Amaterasu) and Kami romi 神魯美 (that is, Takamimusuhi no kami 高御產巢日神). Deliberations end in a decision to send down Mima no mikoto 御孫命 (great imperial grandson of Amaterasu) to rule over the land. As Mima is leaving, he asks the kami above who they will dispatch to assist him in political administration and religious rites. A white and truly famed deer (*shiro manaka* 白真名鹿) of Heavenly Mount Kagu 天香山 steps forward and declares:

56. Later texts, like 927 CE *Engi shiki*, continue to afford significant roles to the Nakatomi and the Urabe in the Jingikan. Both clans are also given prominent places in developing branch-bureaus outside of the department but still within the chimeric imperial cult complex. For example, see BOCK (1970–1972, 1: 20, 116 note 359, and 151–185; 2: 9 note 15, 74 note 341, 86 note 385, and 89 note 410).

57. As a whole, this section of the *Shinsen kisōki* promotes a transition from bones as a medium for the spirits of heaven, to shells as a medium for the spirits of both heaven and earth. The term *sei/ukehi* 誓 refers to “a pledge” or “vow” (often glossed as *ukehi/inori* 祈). For more on the term in a religious context, see NAKAYAMA (1930, 139–40). KUDŌ (2005, 300–301) points out that the first few lines (536–539) of the *Kisei* closely match a number of “Nakatomi no yogoto” 中臣壽詞 (Words for the longevity of the Nakatomi clan; for example, *norito* for the Great Purification Sacrifice) recorded in book eight of the *Engi shiki*. Later pyro-plastromantic treatises, like the *Kiboku shidai*, use this whole “explanation” as “sacrificial liturgy” (*saimon* 祭文).

“I will assist and offer myself up. Reach in, pull on, and extract my scapulae. Inquire about matters with a fire-induced crack omen” (lines 541–542).⁵⁸ Afterwards, Futonorito steps forward to say:

白真鹿者、可知上國之事、何知地下之事？吾能知上國地下天神地祇。

The white and true deer can discern matters above the nation, but how can it discern matters below the ground? I am able to discern above the nation and below the ground, the matters of the heavenly deities *and* the earthly spirits.

(*Shinsen kisōki*, lines 543–545)

Mima no mikoto then descends from the heavens for a tour of the underwater realm of Futonorito. Futonorito, who we learn later is in the manifested form or substitute body of a turtle spirit (Kamezu hime), proclaims the following processes to which she is to be subjected:

吾八十骨乾曝日。以斧打天之千別。千別甲上甲尻。真澄鏡取作之。以天刀掘町、判、掃之。

Dry my “eight-cross bone” (that is, shell) by exposing it to the sun. Use an axe to chop the “thousand-like dividers” (that is, the bridges).⁵⁹ “Thousand” refers to the [two] dividers separating the upper shell from the lower shell. Take the “perfectly clear mirror” (that is, the lower shell or plastron) and prepare it. With a heavenly blade, hollow out *machi* on, slice,⁶⁰ and sweep it.⁶¹

(*Shinsen kisōki*, lines 552–554)

58. The hide of a “truly famed deer” or “true stag” is mentioned in one of the *Nihon shoki* accounts of luring Amaterasu out of the cave (1: 1, 80). The translation in ASTON (1956, 47), reads, “[Ishi kori dome] stripped off in one piece the hide of a true stag, and made of it Heavenly bellows” ([石凝姥]全剥真名鹿之皮、以作天羽鞆).

59. The two walls of bone flanking the sides of a turtle shell, between the fore and hind limbs, which connect the lower shell or plastron to the upper shell or carapace, are known as bridges or dividers.

60. Section titles 23 and 24 for *Shinsen kisōki* fascicle 1 specify that shells were divided into at least two plates (*han/ita* 板) for pyro-plastromantic consultations. The *Kisō bubun* (lines 608–611) provides a more detailed description of this process. Plastrons were to be divided into two sheets or plates (*mai* 枚), which were each sliced into six strips (*suji* 條). These strips are said to resemble “tallies” or “insignia” (*kei/tama* 圭), suggesting that they shared the same “△”-shape commonly used for Heian court tallies. The *Engi shiki* (18: 1, 24) records that four knives and chisels were needed for pyro-plastromantic consultations, further supporting the view that shells were cut and sliced into sheets and strips carved or chiseled with *machi* during the early to mid-ninth century. While later texts, like Ban Nobutomo’s *Seiboku kō*, stipulate that plastrons were to be sawn into pentagonal planks, this practice is never brought up in the *Shinsen kisōki*. Frequent mention of the slicing of shells and use of the *machi* in the *Kisō bubun*, however, strongly imply that tally-like strips of plastron were used by the mid-Heian period.

61. The phrase *kore o harau* 掃之 (sweep it) can be understood in a number of different ways. It might refer to the cleaning or ritual purification of the shell or a site for pyro-plastromantic consultations, it might describe the act of running a poker along carved *machi* lines, or it might allude to the act of writing with a brush.

Kamezu hime sacrifices her turtle body for pyro-plastromantic consultations expected to be conducted by kami diviners in the heavenly retinue of Mima no mikoto.

The rest of this section of the *Shinsen kisōki* (lines 554–566) provides brief directions for how to start a fire and how to select *hahaka* wood to scorch a shell. In both cases, materials are to be procured from Heavenly Mount Kagu and are associated with named kami connected to an organized cult managed by the Urabe. Two of the most significant kami named in this part of the *Shinsen kisōki* are Hikiribi 火燧 / 火鑽火, a kami of fire, and Hahakaki no kami 母鹿木神, kami of *hahaka* wood pyromantic pokers (and a manifestation of Kushimachi 櫛間智). Details on the technical processes involved in pyro-plastromantic cracking begin in lines 527–536 of the *Shinsen kisōki*. This section of the text provides a brief synopsis of technical information purportedly drawn from a no longer fully extant medieval Chinese work entitled *Guijing* 龜經 (Classic of turtles), including comments on nine basic types of turtles and five colors of turtles; taboo days for pyro-plastromantic consultations; and associations between seasons, quarters of turtle shells, and the proper placement of hollows for cracks. Much of this information appears to have been directly appropriated from the early to mid-eighth-century *Tang liudian* (Six institutes of the Tang) (14, 412). Some of these concepts might have been adopted in practice, but a majority of the specifics do not match processes detailed in the remainder of the *Shinsen kisōki*. For example, unlike the *Guijing* (a text traditionally attributed to Liu Shilong 柳世隆 [442–491]),⁶² the *Shinsen kisōki* consistently affords a separate place to the center of the shell. The plastron was not simply quartered (as it was in Han and medieval China), but was marked with a five-line symbol known as a *machi* 町 or *machigata* 町形 (*machi* form). The *machi* symbolically divided the surface of the medium into five separate parts corresponding to each of the five phases: 1. top vertical fire; 2. left horizontal wood; 3. middle vertical soil; 4. right horizontal metal; and 5. bottom vertical water. The *machi* symbol is not found on the Maguchi Cavern or the Shitaru shells, and is not attested outside of Japan. This convention almost certainly originated in Japan, probably with the Urabe.

The use of the *machi* is not carefully explained in what remains of the *Shinsen kisōki*, but the table of contents provides just enough information to conclude that the five omen and oracle lists in fascicles 2–4 were likely organized according to the five lines comprising this symbol. Each of the five *machi* lines is named, correlated with one of the five phases, and associated with a particular class of crack omen in lines 623–628 of the *Kisō bubun*. The table above records these names, correlations, and associations.

62. For more on Liu Shilong, see KORY (2012, 149, note 83). For more on extant fragments attributed to Liu Shilong's *Guijing*, see KORY (2012, 148–53 and 454–60).

1	<i>hō</i> 寶 (south) summer/fire/red; Heaven 天 line-graphs (29卦)	
2	<i>kami</i> 可弥 (east) spring/wood/green; Spirit 神 line-graphs (38卦)	
3	<i>tame</i> 多米 (center) mid-season/soil/yellow; Omen 兆 line-graphs (3卦)	
4	<i>emi</i> 依弥 (west) fall/metal/white; Human 人 line-graphs (38卦)	
5	<i>tō</i> 斗於 (north) winter/water/black; Earth 地 line-graphs (29卦)	

TABLE 1. The five *machi* lines with basic prognostic correlations, omen types, and diagram.

Details about the fabrication and interpretation of pyro-plastromantic crack omens must have been much better documented in the earliest editions of the *Shinsen kisōki*. Although the table of contents details certain aspects of these processes, little of this information appears in what remains of the text. For example, section titles 26 and 27 in the table of contents advertise the production and reading of crack omens, but the body of the *Shinsen kisōki* says very little about them. They are, however, mentioned in the *Kisō bubun*,⁶³ where a total of 137 crack forms are introduced.⁶⁴ It is impossible to determine the extent to which these lists might have matched the content of fascicles 2–4 of the *Shinsen kisōki*, but a connection is hard to deny.

The *Shinsen kisōki*, the *Kisō bubun*, and the *Saigi kankei kiji* collectively describe pyro-plastromancy as an interpretive art based on cosmological schemes adopted from medieval Chinese texts. They also depict it as a mechanical technique based on an innovation called a *machigata*, and as an Urabe-managed ritual and cultic practice devoted to the kami of turtles, *hahaka* wood, fire, and spells. None of these texts link specific divinatory topics to descriptions of crack forms or prognoses, but, as mentioned above, the *Kisō bubun* includes detailed comments on the production and reading of cracks. It is possible that the *Kisō bubun* dates later than the *Shinsen kisōki*, but the latter must have contained omens and

63. For instance, the *Kisō bubun* states that, “there are twenty-nine line graphs for Earth, the same for Heaven” (地有廿九卦天亦同之) (line 629). All twenty-nine are then named. Line 639 states that “there are thirty-eight line graphs for Spirit and the same for Human” (神有卅八卦人亦同之). The names of all seventy-six of these omens follow. Finally, line 647 claims that, “there are three line graphs for Omen” (兆有三卦). They are: 1. subordinate crack (*jiboku* 次卜) ... Spirit above, Human below (神上 人下); 2. even crack (*sōboku* 相卜) ... Earth to Heaven, and Spirit to Human, like the written character “十” (地天神人如十之字); and 3. superior crack (*shōboku* 上卜) ... Spirit below, Human above (神下人上).

64. For explicit mention of this total, see *Kisō bubun* line 629 and *Kiboku shō* line 12. The total of 137 includes 29 Earth, 29 Heaven, 38 Divine, 38 Human, and 3 Omen [line-graphs]. For additional comments on these lists, see KUDŌ (2005, 179–80). Modern reconstructions of traditional Japanese plastromantic interpretive methods tend to rely on Ban Nobutomo’s *Seibokukō*. See, for example, BLACKER (1981, 68–69); and NAKAJIMA (2002–2006).

oracles sharing much more in common with what was eventually transmitted as the *Kisō bubun* than with any version of a Chinese *Guijing*. Names of the five *machi* lines fill the *Kisō bubun* lists, while terms like head (*shou* 首/*tou* 頭), body (*shen* 身), and foot (*zu* 足)—common in Han and medieval Chinese descriptions of pyro-plastromancy—never appear.⁶⁵ The *Shinsen kisōki* plainly reveals that the Urabe drew from mid-Tang Chinese sources to construct a revised brand of pyro-plastromancy with its own cult, consecution, and semiotic system.

I submit the following outline of what a pyro-plastromantic consultation would have entailed according to information drawn from the *Shinsen kisōki*, the *Kisō bubun*, and the *Saigi kankei kiji*.

1. Preparation of the shell:

Dry a turtle shell in the sun. Cut the bridges connecting the plastron to the carapace with a small ax, dividing the shell in two. Cut each half of the plastron into six pentagonal plates,⁶⁶ and carve or chisel a *machigata* on the surface of all twelve of them.⁶⁷

2. Preparation of the fire and poker:

Gather firewood, ignite fires with this wood, and light the tips of *hahaka* wood pokers with these fires.⁶⁸

65. The “head-body-foot” division of pyro-plastromantic cracks is employed in texts like the early to mid-first-century BCE *Shiji* (Records of the grand scribe-astrologer), “Guice liezhuan” 龜策列傳 (Arrayed traditions of turtles and stalks), the late fifth century *Guijing*, and the mid-eighth-century *Taibai yinjing* 太白陰經 (Secret classic of Grand White [that is, Venus]) or *Shenji zhidi Taibai yinjing* 神機制敵太白陰經 (Secret classic of Grand White, divine trigger and controller of enemies); see KORY (2012, 121–91). Terms in the *Kisō bubun* (lines 630–647) commonly used to describe major crack lines include *tada* 直 (straight), *kai* 廻 (curling back), *shin* 振 (rising up), *kei* 繼 (extending out), *tan* 短 (broken), *setsu* 切 (cut off), and *ki* 起 (ascending).

66. See *Kisō bubun* (lines 608–610), and note 60. The backside (that is, flesh side) or base (*moto* 本) of each strip is for scorching; the green topside (*sue* 末) or outer surface is for reading. Lines 611–617 record names for each of the six strips produced from each half of the plastron.

67. For a mid-to-late-ninth-century description of how the *machi* was to be applied to the shell, see *Jōgan gishiki* (3, 218).

68. Lines 820–825 of the *Saigi kankei kiji* explain that a total of 160 fires (80 for auspicious pyro-plastromantic inquiries; 80 for inauspicious inquiries) were used before the end of the Enryaku 延暦 era (782–806). However, in the first year of the Daidō 大同 era (806–810), the total number of fires was decreased to 48 (24/24). The next ten lines provide details concerning the diviners (two *urabe* officials from each of the four Urabe provinces), liturgists (Nakatomi officials), and palace representatives expected to participate in pyro-plastromantic consultations concerning dates for the Divine Offering of Foods Rite. Lines 834–854 focus on the roles of Nakatomi representatives in the consultations, along with ritual preparations. They also record the names of the spirits to be summoned, the invocations used to summon them, and some of the other persons and objects used in the rite. Lines 855–868 of the *Saigi kankei kiji* describe how a total of 48 fires were used to produce 48 cracks by four *urabe* pyro-plastromancers. Four plates (*mai* 枚) of plastron were to be selected by the superior supervisors of cracking and the “Invocatory Words for the Divinatory Cracking of Scapulae” (*bokukata kitsushi* 卜肩乞詞) was to

3. Preparation of the diviner:

Observe ritual purifications for a number of days and bathe.⁶⁹ Two diviners take their proper places at dawn.⁷⁰ They begin by invoking Amatsunorito no Futonorito no mikoto 天津詔戸太詔戸命 (spirit of turtles).⁷¹ One diviner holds the two sheets of the shell and recites pledges to them. Each diviner uses a separate fire and poker to scorch *machi* on their respective sheets.

4. Fabrication of the crack:

First scorch from earth below to heaven above, then douse the plastron with water. Next, scorch from east to west, then once again douse it with water.⁷² Repeat this process until a crack forms.

5. Interpretation of the crack:

be recited. After four different diviners cracked each plate (or plank), the process was repeated twelve times by each diviner until all 48 decisions could be tabulated to determine a date (the number 48 suggests that this particular description dates to the Daidō era [806–810] when the same number of fires are said to have been used). The final decision was to be offered to the throne conjointly by the Urabe diviners and the Nakatomi liturgists. The former was responsible for recording which of the five basic types of line-graphs or crack omens (Earth, Heaven, Spirit, Human, Omen) had been obtained in each consultation. The last three lines of the *Saigi kankei kiji* (lines 869–871) record the number of turtle shells presented to the throne from different provinces for the Divine Offering of Foods Rite: 17 from Kii no kuni 紀伊國 (present-day Wakayama and Mie prefectures), 13 from Awa 阿波 (present-day Tokushima prefecture), and 10 from Tosa 土佐 (present-day Kōchi prefecture). The total of 40 plastrons (each divided into twelve strips) would have been more than sufficient to conduct 48 consultations.

69. Line 606 of the *Kisō bubun* explains that one must fast, bathe, be clear and focused, and be without deviant thoughts to conduct an efficacious and accurate pyro-plastronomic consultation.

70. Lines 606–608 of the *Kisō bubun* state that two diviners were to be seated for royal offerings at dawn. Each was to take hold of the two halves of the plastron and recite a pledge to them.

71. Commentary in line 836 of the *Saigi kankei kiji* claims that Futonorito (shell) and Kushimachi (*hahaka*-wood poker) must be invoked for pyro-plastronomic consultations. The same statement is found in *Engi shiki* (18: 1, 23). Lines 567–584 of the *Shinsen kisōki* (translated above) associate both Futonorito and Kushimachi with a shrine-based Urabe-managed pyro-plastronomic cult centered in Tsushima and Iki, but it is important to point out that Futonorito appears to have been the primary kami summoned in the rite. *Kisō bubun* lines 606–608, for instance, explain that while Amatsunorito no Futonorito had to be invoked, the summoning of Kushimachi was optional.

72. Lines 615–617 of the *Kisō bubun* record detailed directions for how to scorch a *machi* and when to douse water on the shell. First, the poker is to be rubbed along the vertical axis of the *machi* (bottom to top). Water is then doused on the plastron before the poker is rubbed along each of the horizontal lines of the *machi* (first east then west). Finally, water is once again used to douse the shell. This process is to be repeated until a crack forms. Lines 619–620 of the *Kisō bubun* claim that in ancient times, major crack lines were divided into two basic types (up/down 上下), but later, use of the *machigata* gave rise to five different categories of line graphs or crack omens.

Match crack omens to five separate lists based on the *machi* line from which each crack emanates. Interpret the oracles in these lists to determine auspiciousness and inauspiciousness.⁷³

Pyro-plastromantic consultations performed in the Heian Jingikan likely involved the scorching of strips of plastrons to manufacture cracks that were interpreted as divine figures, images, or omens. The transmission of the technique from China, to the islands of Tsushima and Iki, and into central Honshu transformed the practice in significant ways. The plastron came to be divided into placard-like strips for divinatory consultations, and the round, oval, square, and rectangular hollows typically found on Chinese shells were replaced by the *machigata*. We have already touched on a number of other changes, and while much more could be said about the functions, the ritual uses, and the technical processes involved in ninth century and later Japanese practice,⁷⁴ detailed explanations would take us much further from our expressed focus on the transition from deer bones to turtle shells in late Nara and early Heian Japan.

Conclusion

Japan is the only place in the world where the art of pyro-plastromancy is still widely practiced. Transmitted in Shinto lineages throughout the second millennium CE, this variety of divination continues to be performed under imperial auspices and at local shrines throughout Japan.⁷⁵ The present study traces the early rise and development of divination with fire and plastron in Japan. It details the local and state clans, spirits, and cults involved in the technique's transmission and growth, and reveals much about the Nara and Heian state and local religious traditions that would eventually contribute to the advent and growth of Shinto.

Scholars of Japanese religion continue to question Shinto's view of itself as the religion of the Japanese people since time immemorial. Some regard the *Kojiki*

73. A basic list of directions, seasons, colors, and a number of other associations for cracks produced from each of the five *machi* lines is recorded in lines 618–623 of the *Kisō bubun*. Lines 623–628 describe “the principles of the five branches of crack omens.”

74. Some of the functions listed in the *Seibokukō*, for example, include the selection of places, dates, offerings, and agents to be used in rites; the identification of curses; and the interpretation of natural anomalies. For general comments on premodern Japanese pyro-plastromantic topics and functions, see BLACKER (1981, 66–71).

75. Pyro-plastromancy is still practiced in Japan under imperial auspices and in local shrines (particularly Yoshida Shinto shrines). Consultations were reportedly carried out for Emperor Hirohito's 裕仁 (r. 1926–1989) formal enthronement ceremony in February of 1928, and most recently for Emperor Akihito's 明仁 (r. 1989–) enthronement in November of 1990. For informed descriptions of these ceremonies see, respectively, HOLTOM (1972, 75–78); and DEMURA (1991, 75). For more on the divinatory cracking of turtle shells in contemporary Japanese shrines, see FUJINO (1974) and NITTA (1977).

as the beginning of Shinto, and some argue that the term should be reserved for post-Meiji Reformation (1868) state religion. Mark Teeuwen, a well-published advocate of the view that Shinto was born when people began to talk about it as a distinct tradition, dates its emergence to sometime between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁷⁶ Much of his work on the advent of “Shinto” is devoted to the historicization of earlier traditions recognized as building blocks for this native Japanese “Way.” Teeuwen frames Shinto as a medieval creation that drew much from earlier traditions like local kami cults, the state cult of *jingi* 神祇 (spirits of heaven and spirits of earth), and the Way of the Buddha. While Buddhism was already well established and quite pervasive by the end of the Nara period, the present study has focused much more intently on the first two traditions.

The *Shinsen kisōki* provides evidence that local kami cults in places like Tsushima and Iki continued to redefine and shape the state cult of *jingi* long after the Taika Reforms, the inception of the *ritsuryō* system, and the writing of the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki*. The adoption of Chinese imperial models by the Nara and Heian courts was an ongoing and selective process motivated by the contingent needs and aims of particular groups of people with the power, capital, and predilection to make specific innovations work.⁷⁷ The *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* appear to institutionalize the divinatory cracking of deer scapulae in the early Nara imperial court by writing the technique into state myth. Both of these early eighth century mytho-histories name divine progenitors of the art, and both present these progenitors as apical ancestors of specific clans. The *Shinsen kisōki* submits a rewrite. It substitutes pyro-plastromancy for pyro-scapulimancy and proposes a new, named, and streamlined set of divine progenitors and associated clans. Its compilers tell us that pyro-plastromancy was adopted into the late Nara imperial ritual system on a very limited basis, only to be elevated and

76. See TEEUWEN (2002, 257; 2007, 386–900. Both articles provide excellent synopses and comparisons of contemporary views on the history of the development of Shinto. In the former, TEEUWEN argues that, “Together, kami worship, the *jingi* system, and Shinto form a triangle consisting of three closely related but at the same time very different sides, each with its own historical development. If we fail to distinguish between them, we lose sight of the dynamics that formed all three of them” (2002, 259). In the latter, he contends that, “the *jingi* cult offered a concrete model for the institutionalization of an autonomous Shinto” (2007, 399).

77. The Urabe managers of the Futonorito cult outlined in the *Shinsen kisōki* and *Ryō no gige* may have been cracking turtle shells and offering cult to kami associated with the technique before the official enactment of the *ritsuryō* system, before the official arrival of Buddhism, and even before the consolidation of the Yamato empire. Textual support for these claims, however, is either lacking or late. According to the early tenth century *Engi shiki* (18: 9, 181 and 187), a shine-based cult in Tsushima devoted to Futonorito was replicated in Yamato Province during the Asuka, in Nara-kyō during the Nara, and in Heian-kyō during the Heian period. Both INOUE (1980, 129 and 196) and GRAPARD (1992b, 32) cite this information as evidence of the appropriation of peripheral kami cults into the early imperial Japanese theocracy.

more definitively institutionalized—along with its associated deities and clans—by the early Heian court. The *Shinsen kisōki* justifies the incorporation of a clan-based cult devoted to kami of turtles, *hahaka* wood, and fire into the Japanese theocracy. It weaves this allegedly local, Urabe-managed, shrine-based, pyro-plastromantic kami cult complex into the then-contemporary mythology of the Japanese imperium. Although much purposeful reimagining must have occurred in the composition of the text, there is good reason to believe that plastromantic cults and kami existed long before the early Heian period.⁷⁸

The Japanese theocracy experienced a number of major changes during the late eighth and early ninth centuries. In 784 CE, the capital and court were moved to Nagaoka-kyō, and in 794, they were moved to the nearby Heian-kyō. Nevertheless, at the start of the Heian period, members of the Fujiwara clan continued to hold many of the most important political posts in the Office of the Imperial Bureaucracy (Daijōkan 太政官), members of the Nakatomi clan continued to supervise the Office of the Spirits of Heaven and Earth, and members of the Urabe of the four provinces continued to crack turtle plastrons as *urabe* officials under the direct supervision of the Nakatomi. The official shift from deer-bone pyro-scapulimancy to pyro-plastromancy benefitted and empowered certain clans (at the expense of others) within the imperial hierarchy.

Members of Urabe clans may have led the turn from deer scapulae to turtle plastrons, but the Nakatomi seem to have been just as invested in the change. As supervisors of the Jingikan, and as relatives of the Fujiwara, the Nakatomi were in an excellent position to reestablish their authority at the beginning of the Heian period. A change in the conventional method of divining state affairs would have provided them with a way to redefine and establish their own sacerdotal duties, distinct from those of competing clans. It would also have allowed them to identify more closely with the Tang Chinese imperial models then in vogue at court, and to elevate the status of relatives in their employ who had strong geopolitical ties to both eastern and western Japan, and could be fairly easily woven into state myths. The Nakatomi used Fujiwara political power and Chinese-inspired Urabe pyro-plastromancy to help gain control of the Jingikan, and the Nakatomi and Urabe clans rose to new heights during the Heian period as kinship groups with common professions and related ancestral kami. The ritualization and official adoption of pyro-plastromancy for state divinatory consultations empowered all three of these clans.

78. Like the *Shinsen kisōki*, the *Ryō no gige* clearly identifies pyro-plastromancy as the preferred form of state divination, and it is hard to believe that the technique would not have been established for some time before these works were presented to the throne. Moreover, the *Shinsen kisōki* contains the earliest evidence of the use of the *machi*-form, and it is doubtful that a campaign to fabricate a local tradition from scratch—for incorporation into the theocratic cult—would have used anything but Chinese versions of the technique.

The *Shinsen kisōki* is the earliest known treatise on pyro-plastronomy ever produced in Japan. It describes and defends the state's use of turtle plastrons rather than deer scapula, includes some of the earliest recorded examples of *norito*, and is the earliest text recording passages from different sections of the *Kojiki*. Look a bit more closely at both its content and the context in which it claims to have been produced, and the text takes on additional significance as an early history of the Urabe, the Nakatomi, and the Jingikan; as a rare record of eighth century local cults; and as a window into the development of late Nara and early Heian state religion and politics. It also plainly promotes many of the lineages and traditions that would, centuries later, coalesce into a Japanese “Way” known as Shinto.

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ABBREVIATIONS

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 SNKBT *Shin Nihon koten bungaku taikai* 新日本古典文学大系. 100 vols. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1989–2005.
 SSKSK *Shinsen kisōki no kisoteki kenkyū: Kojiki ni ikyoshita saiko no kibokusho* 新撰龜相記の基礎的研究—古事記に依拠した最古の亀卜書, ed. Kudō Hiroshi 工藤浩. Tokyo: Nihon Editā Sukūru Shuppanbu, 2005.

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