

Benedetta LOMI

Ox Bezoars and the Materiality of Heian-period Therapeutics

This article addresses the issue of sacred materiality by exploring the production, extraction, and circulation of ox bezoars in the late Heian period. Bezoar, a highly-valued concretion found in the stomachs of bovines, was renowned for its healing properties and employed by Daigoji ritualists as part of safe childbirth practices. Although the bezoar was empowered by Buddhist monks before its therapeutic applications, I suggest that its efficacy is only in part the result of empowerment. The article thus analyzes the ritual, medical, symbolic, social, and organic dimensions of ox bezoars, and assesses them against the broader intellectual context out of which the practice emerged. In so doing, I wish to draw attention to those characteristics that made bezoars uniquely effective in granting a safe and easy parturition. Ultimately, the article also aims at taking this practice as an occasion to probe alternative ways in which materials employed for healing purposes in premodern Japanese Buddhist rituals were conceptualized, thought to be efficacious, and eventually adopted for specific therapeutic purposes.

KEYWORDS: ox bezoar—safe-childbirth—materiality—Juntei Kannon—Buddhist therapeutics—healing practices—talismans

Benedetta LOMI is Lecturer in East Asian Religions at the University of Bristol.

BEZOARS ARE concretions found in the stomach or intestines of animals, generally ruminants, and are formed due to the lack of proper metabolism of lumps of swallowed hair, seeds, vegetable fibers, and other substances. Taking the shape of stone-like objects and characterized by several layers of organic tissue enveloping undigested debris, bezoars can cause gastrointestinal blockages and much discomfort even when expelled by the hosting body. Yet, various Asian therapeutic traditions consider bezoars extremely valuable as both powerful medicinal remedies and as effective antidotes against poisons; the English word “bezoar” comes from the Persian *badzar*, which means “antidote” (BARROSO 2013, 193).

In Buddhist contexts, bezoars are called in Sanskrit *gorocanā*, a term referring to the gallstones found in oxen but also indicating a yellow pigment extracted from the bile of cows. For these reasons, *gorocanā* translates in Chinese as *nihuang* 牛黃, literally meaning “ox yellow.” Consequently, we find two ways of using *gorocanā* in Buddhist sources: as a medicine and as a pigment, both carrying curative properties. When fashioned into pills or ointments they treat a variety of physical ailments, dispel demons, and enhance mental abilities. The therapeutic importance of this drug was so well-established that Japanese ritual manuals compiled between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries present it as one of five medicines (*goyaku* 五藥) that, together with five treasures, five types of incenses, and five grains, are offered during *goma* 護摩 rites. As the substances included in this group changed according to the text and the context, ox bezoars can be found in combinations with roots such as ginseng, with mushrooms, with flowers, or with sage and other aromatic plants, all present on the altar during ritual practices. When used as pigment, ox yellow is employed to write *dhāraṇīs* on talismans and to stamp seals, either on paper or directly on the skin. These methods addressed an even wider array of concerns: warding off all kinds of evils, prolonging life, enhancing knowledge, granting fertility, and even helping women find a husband.

* This article has benefited from the support of numerous individuals who have allowed me to present my research at different stages of its development. I am grateful to Anna Andreeva, Lucia Dolce, Max Moerman, Pierce Salguero, Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim and the Wellcome Trust, and Stefano Zacchetti for their invitations and fruitful feedback. Most of all, I would like to thank Caroline Hirasawa for involving me in the *Modest Materialities* project, for her critical reading of my article, and for being a constant source of intellectual stimulation.



FIGURE 1. Examples of bezoar orientalis, Pharmaziemuseum, Basel.



FIGURE 2. Examples of ox bezoars.

Despite such a broad spectrum of efficacy, Japanese ritual manuals of the Heian and Kamakura periods suggest that ox bezoar was primarily employed in rituals protecting from bodily harm, especially in contexts that targeted safe parturition (*anzan* 安産). One such example is the rite called *goō kaji* 牛黄加持, performed to prepare the ox bezoar used by wet nurses to help royal consorts during labor. Mixed with water and turned into an ointment, the ox bezoar was used to lubricate the vagina or massage the abdomen of the parturient, and eventually drunk to facilitate an effortless childbirth.¹

Why did Japanese Buddhist monks resort to such an unusual product to facilitate the birth of royal offspring? Although the Buddhist sources are not transparent on the matter, the *goō kaji* was briefly discussed in the work of Michel STRICKMANN (2002) in relation to a wide variety of practices entailing the wielding, stamping, or ingesting of talismans and other objects, which constituted the basis of Taoist, Buddhist, and medical therapeutics. In these contexts, Strickmann argues,

The power of the implement is wholly related to the power of the officiating monk or priest, his control of the vital breaths within and his mastery of complex techniques of visualization. The seal is thus a concentrated tool of his own highly trained and heavily charged body. Its potency not only derives from the noble lineage to which the officiant belongs by virtue of his formal initiation but also draws strength directly from those supramundane powers for which his body serves as a conduit or transceiver. (STRICKMANN 2002, 187)

Following this interpretation, the potency of the object is mediated by, if not entirely dependent on, that of the practitioner. This represents an established explanation of how talismans and other similar tools are said to work in ritual environments, which also finds its roots in Buddhist doctrinal texts. In the Japanese Buddhist context, forms of ritual empowerment called *kaji* 加持 played, and still play, an important part in esoteric rituals and in curative techniques more broadly. Doctrinally, *kaji* rites are understood as the process through which the ritual preceptor (*ajari* 阿闍梨) is united in meditative absorption (*samādhi*) with Dainichi, resulting in the acquisition of Dainichi's mental powers. The *ajari* is thus able to channel the power of the Buddha and to transfer it onto material forms for healing and protective purposes. As *ka* 加 means "to add" or "to increase," and *ji* 持 means "to hold" or "to carry," the term *kaji* suggests that an object, or a person, becomes the recipient of an external power and that the *ajari* occupies a central role in this process (WINFIELD 2005, 109–11; RAMBELLI 2007, 217–18). This conceptualization resonates with scholarship dealing with

1. As will be discussed below, Heian-period accounts of royal consorts' childbirth confirm the performance of this procedure.

Buddhist ritual and material culture that interprets the potency of sacred icons, tools, and amulets as derived from monks and lay specialists who, through ritual manipulations, “charge” these items with efficacy (TAMBIAH 1984, 243). The idea that a person should have unilateral control over the object handled presupposes that agency, or signification, is a process of attribution whereby things do not have any power that is not ascribed or inscribed onto them by an individual.

Here one could argue that, if empowerment were sufficient to grant protection and safe childbirth, the objects and substances chosen to give tangible shape to the blessing would not matter. In the Japanese Buddhist context, this was hardly the case and even less so as far as bezoars were concerned; bezoars were valued medicinal remedies deemed particularly efficacious in treating a variety of ailments. Not always easy to come by and requiring, as I will discuss, a problematic retrieval procedure, the choice of this substance was not perfunctory. Furthermore, an exclusive emphasis on empowerment as the principal, if not unique, driving principle behind the efficacy of sacred objects and substances conjures a polarization between inert matter (the bezoar) and active power (the blessing) that does not account for the broader network of relationships in which bezoar participated. In this article, I thus argue that the efficacy of ox bezoar is only in part the result of empowerment, but also functions independently from it.

The Bezoar Empowerment Ritual in the Daigoji Tradition

Instructions on the *goō kaji* provided by Buddhist ritual collections belonging to the Japanese esoteric tradition are generally presented as a transmission of the monks operating at Daigoji. The first substantial mention of the practice is found in Kakuzen’s 覺禪 (1143–ca. 1213) famous compendium *Kakuzenshō* 覺禪鈔 (DNBZ 47: 1166–71), while Chōen 澄円 (fl. 1218–1284) only dedicates a short passage to it in his *Byakuhōshō* 白宝鈔 (TZ 10: 842–43). The Ono 小野 monk Raiyu’s 頼瑤 (1226–1304) thirteenth-century collection *Hishō mondō* 秘鈔問答 provides the most accurate discussion of the practice (T 2536, 79.422a2–423b22).²

According to these sources, the procedure was linked to Juntei Kannon 准胝觀音, and carried out as part of a liturgy called “The Ritual of Juntei, Mother of the Myriad Buddhas” (*Juntei Butsumo mishuhō* 准胝仏母御修法; see FIGURES 3 and 6). The textual origins of the practice are in fact linked to a scripture expounding the fertility-granting powers of the Bodhisattva, *The Dhāraṇī Sūtra of Juntei, Seven Koṭis Buddha-Mother*, which exists in two versions—one

2. For a translation of the passages from the *Kakuzenshō* and *Hishō mondō*, see LOMI (2017). Aside from these collections, shorter manuscripts also address the practice but are disjoined from the Juntei ritual, possibly suggesting that the empowerment could be held independently. Raiyu mentions this in the *Hishō mondō*.



FIGURE 3. *Juntei Butsumo* sketch from *Shoson zuzoshō* 諸尊圖像鈔 by Shinkaku 心覺 (1117–1180). National Diet Library Digital Collection. See NDL (<http://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/2574856?tocOpened=1>).

translated by Vajrabodhi (671–741) and one by Amoghavajra (705–774).³ In both cases, the texts explain the manifold benefits deriving from the recitation and talisman inscription of the deity's *dhāraṇī*, including the benefit of fertility. In some instances, bezoar is used for this purpose as well. For example, the text translated by Amoghavajra reports that, if a woman wishes to have a child, the incantation must be written on birch bark using ox yellow and that, by wearing such a talisman on her body, she will soon have a son or a daughter (T 1076, 20.180a11–12).⁴

Although the Juntei empowerment rite could be included in any other *goma*, or even performed as an independent procedure within Daigoji circles (DNBZ 47:

3. The full title of the version translated by Vajrabodhi is the *Dhāraṇī Sūtra of the Goddess Cundī Spoken by Seven Koṭīs of Buddha-Mothers* (*Fo shuo qi juzhi fomu Zhunti daming tuoluonijing* 仏説七俱胝仏母准提大明陀羅尼經, T 1075, 20). The full title of the version translated by Amoghavajra is the *Dhāraṇī Sūtra Spoken by Seven Koṭīs of Buddha-Mothers* (*Qi juzhi fomu suoshuo Zhunti tuoluonijing* 七俱胝仏母所説准提陀羅尼經, T 1076, 20).

4. The version attributed to Vajrabodhi has the same instruction, minus the bezoar (T 1075, 20.174b7–9), which is instead used to create talismans to attain wisdom or to grant the ability of seeing all spirits only (T 1075, 20.174b24–28).

1166a), the role of Juntei as the mother of innumerable Buddhas—a symbol of immense fertility—was essential. The bodhisattva was linked to the birth of the emperors Suzaku 朱雀 (923–952) and Murakami 村上 (926–967; DNBZ 117: 247a; DNBZ 47: 1166b). In fact, according to Kakuzen, the *goō* rite was first performed by Shōbō 聖宝 (832–909), the much-revered and purported founder of Daigoji, on the occasion of Murakami’s birth (DNBZ 47, 1166b). Raiyu is, however, skeptical of this annotation and remarks that, because Shōbō “passed into nirvana” over fifteen years before the birth of Murakami, this must be a mistaken attribution (T 2536, 79.422a24–27).⁵ Instead, Raiyu suggests that the practice is more likely to have been a secret oral transmission that Rishōin 理性院 monk Genkaku 賢覚 (1080–1156) received from his master Shōkaku 勝覚 (1057–1129), given that they both performed the “Ox Bezoar Empowerment” for the benefit of royal consorts (T 2536, 79.422b12–20 and 422c27; DNBZ 47: 1167–68).⁶

The *kaji* is, in fact, a very short procedure, which takes place before the “supplication to the spirits” section (*jimbun kigan* 神分祈願) of the *goma*, so the Shin-gon sources overall agree on its unfolding. The ox bezoar, previously placed on the altar in front of the main icon, is blessed using a three-pronged vajra by reciting a series of short *dhāraṇī* one hundred times each followed by seven recitations of the following short mantras: “easy birth” (*isan* 易産), the mantra of Kujaku Myōō 孔雀明王, and “prolonged life” (*enmei* 延命) (T 2536, 79.422a7–20). After concluding these recitations, the ritual proceeds as usual, while the bezoar is put aside until the time of parturition.

When the mother is ready to give birth, the texts instruct the preparation of a special room where midwives and household attendants can aid with the childbirth undisturbed.⁷ To grant privacy and protection, a screen should be set up, theoretically allowing the Buddhist monk to perform additional rites without

5. Raiyu here quotes the *Jōkiin shō* 常喜院抄, according to which the rite for Murakami was held on different dates, specifically Engi 22 (922), but also on Enchō 8 (930), Jōei 7 (937), and Tengen 6 (943), all predating Murakami’s ascent to the throne (T 2536, 79.422b1–6).

6. Specifically, Shōkaku carried out the rite for Taikenmon’in 待賢門院 (1101–1145), the royal consort of Retired Emperor Toba 鳥羽 (1103–1156), on the twenty-first day of the fifth month of Gen’ei 2 (1119), on the occasion of the birth of her first male son, Imperial Prince Akihito (Akihito shinnō 顯仁親王 (1119–1164). Genkaku instead was in charge of the celebrations on the eighth day of the eleventh month of Eiji 1 永治 (1141), when Toba’s third consort Bifukumon’in 美福門院 (1117–1160) gave birth to a daughter, Princess Shushi (Shushi Naishinnō 姝子内親王 [1141–1176]; DNBZ 47: 1167–68; T 2536, 79.422c27). The rite was also performed for Kenreimon’in 建礼門院 (1155–1213) on the occasion of Antoku’s birth. An account of the birth and detailed list of the rituals carried out on the days leading to the occurrence, and on the day itself, is found in Nakayama Tadachika’s 中山忠親 diary, the *Sankaiki* 山槐記 (ST 20: 155–57; 170–72).

7. The Buddhist sources here are brief, while existing childbirth accounts show that the preparation of the birthing chamber was a serious and complex matter. An example is provided in the *Kōgū osan tōjitsu shidai* 后宮御産当日次第 (Procedures during the day of the royal consort’s labor; ZGR 33: 542–49), key portions of which have been translated into English by ANDREEVA (2017).

intruding into the women's space, a scene also found in medieval-period visual representations (ANDREEVA 2014, 358–60; SUZUKI 2014).⁸ Raiyu explains these procedures as follows:

When the time of birth approaches, collect water from the “life *qi*” direction (*shengqi fang* 生氣方)—that is, the pregnant woman's (*ninsha* 妊者) “life *qi*” direction.⁹ Place them in a white, clean vase, and recite the previously mentioned *dhāraṇīs*. Recite the *honzon* 本尊 mantra (of the main deity—Juntei) one thousand times and the safe childbirth *dhāraṇī*—*om praṇi svāhā*—while dispersing the ox bezoar in the water. Return these waters to the parturient's wet nurses, so that they can apply it on her genitals (*sanmon* 産門). Conclude with miscellaneous recitations, and by invoking a one-syllable *dhāraṇī*. [Alternatively], empower the ox bezoar with a five-pronged vajra. Recite the “Fudō saving kindness” *dhāraṇī* as well as the Juntei and “prolonged life” mantra, followed by the Kujaku Myōō, “safe birth,” and the Karitai six-syllable *dhāraṇīs* one hundred times each. At the time of delivery, place the woman in the life *qi* direction. Gather water from a well located in the parturient's life *qi* direction and put it in a clean vase. Disperse the bezoar in the water while visualizing the two syllables *raṃ* 𑖀 and *vaṃ* 𑖂. Then empower it with the Gundari *dhāraṇī*, and the previously mentioned six *dhāraṇīs* three hundred times each. When the recitation is over, apply the bezoar on the woman's genitals.

(T 2536, 79.422a11–21)

The practice of applying a bezoar-based liquid onto the parturient's genitals and abdomen suggested by Raiyu is attested in the accounts of Heian-period royal births as well. For example, the *Procedures During the Day of the Royal Consort's Labor* (*Kōgū osan tōjitsu shidai*), mentions specifically that, as soon as signs of labor occurred, esoteric masters gathered to perform various rites, including the *goō kaji*, to prepare the substance to be spread on the woman's body (ZGR 33: 543a; ANDREEVA 2017, 340). However, the origins of this specific birthing

8. Andreeva has discussed how childbirth in Heian-period aristocratic households was not such a quiet and female-only event. As it emerges from courtier's diaries, aside from wet-nurses and ladies in waiting, there were usually also other relatives and male members of the family in attendance (ANDREEVA 2014, 365–69).

9. This term (“direction of the life *qi*”) occurs frequently in Chinese sources in reference to the position in which the birth should take place. According to the medical sources, the auspicious direction in which all women giving birth should face, and which followed the directions of the life force, were calculated by consulting “birth charts” (*chantu* 產圖) also used to set up the parturition space, and to deal with the directional taboos during pregnancy (FURTH 1999, 94–134; LEE 2005, 228–30). These charts were included in the *Chanjing* 產經 (Birth canon), a sixth-century compendium on pregnancy and childbirth now lost (LEE 2012). Although quoted extensively in the Japanese medical sources, the charts are not included, and neither are these provided in the Buddhist manuals. However, the sources at the time indicate the direction adopted by the parturient; for example, in the *Sankaiki*, the life *qi* direction of Kenreimon'in was west (ST 20: 172).

technique are not clear from the sources. Raiyu suggests a possible connection with two scriptures on Hārīti (*Kariteimo* 訶利帝母) attributed to Amoghavajra (T 2536, 79.422b24–28).¹⁰ While one sutra prescribes drinking “milk of a yellow cow, which is the same color as that of a woman’s milk” as a fertility method (T 1261, 21.289c19–22),¹¹ the other instructs lubricating the parturient’s vagina using empowered milk curd in case of difficult labor (T 1260, 21.287c28–29; T 2536, 79.422c6–8). Although the sutras do not mention any affinity between milk and ox bezoar, the practice is strikingly similar, and the *dhāraṇī* of Hārīti is invoked during the *goō kaji*. Raiyu thus mentioned it in his teachings, even though he is unsure of the possible association between the two practices, and prefers considering the bezoar empowerment a secret oral transmission, the origins of which are unknown.¹² The connection between milk and bezoar in the context of birthing practices, however, emerge from personal diaries and accounts of royal births, and will be discussed later in the article.

This was, in fact, not the only technique to ease parturition. Kakuzen further notes that, in case of difficulty or unusual pain, the bezoar could be applied more extensively, covering the area from the navel down and eventually could even be drunk (DNBZ 47: 1166a). However, according to the *Hishō mondō*, whenever the delivery proved especially hard, the *ajari* could resort to the production of a talisman. Even if the sources on Juntei available to Raiyu and his predecessors gave instruction to fashion talismans for fertility by writing the *dhāraṇī* of Juntei on birch bark, Raiyu suggests using a different one altogether, which he calls a “womb seal” (*sanshō hō* 產生封; T 2536, 79.423a3). This talisman (FIGURE 4) is drawn from a *dhāraṇī* sutra called the *Sūtra of the Supremely Enlightened Dhāraṇī of Āṭavika, the Demon General* (*Azhapoju guishen dajiang shangfo tuoluoni jing* 阿吒婆拘鬼神大將上仏陀羅尼經), a scripture providing different spells and rites to subdue demons, as well as instructions for talismans and seals to treat a variety of ailments (T 21, 1238; STRICKMANN 2002, 143–51). Among these is the “Heart of the Buddhas of the Past, Present, and Future Spirit-seal” (*Kako mirai genzai shobutsu shinjin in* 過去未來現在諸仏心神印; T 21, 1238; 184b; STRICKMANN 2002, 146–47).

10. The two scriptures to which Raiyu refers are *The Sūtra of Mother Hārīti* (*Da yaocha nu huanxi mubing aizi chengjiu fa* 大葉叉女歡喜母并愛子成就法, T 1260, 21) and *The Sūtra of the Secret Teachings of Hārīti* (*Helidimu zhengyenjing* 訶利帝母真言經, T 1261, 21).

11. The instruction goes as follows: “If a woman wishes to conceive, she should take a bath after her period is over. Take the milk of a yellow cow, which is the same color as that of a woman’s milk, place a measure of this milk in a silver container and stir it using the right hand’s ring finger. Recite the empowerment *dhāraṇī* one thousand and eighty times. Then, [have the woman] take a sip. Within seven days, she will become pregnant (T 1261, 21.289c19–22).

12. In fact, Raiyu is not at all sure that the Hārīti text was an antecedent of the bezoar-based procedure, remarking that Shōkaku’s disciple and Daigoji abbot Jichiun 実運 (1105–1160) was himself doubtful of the connection (T 2536, 79.422c5).

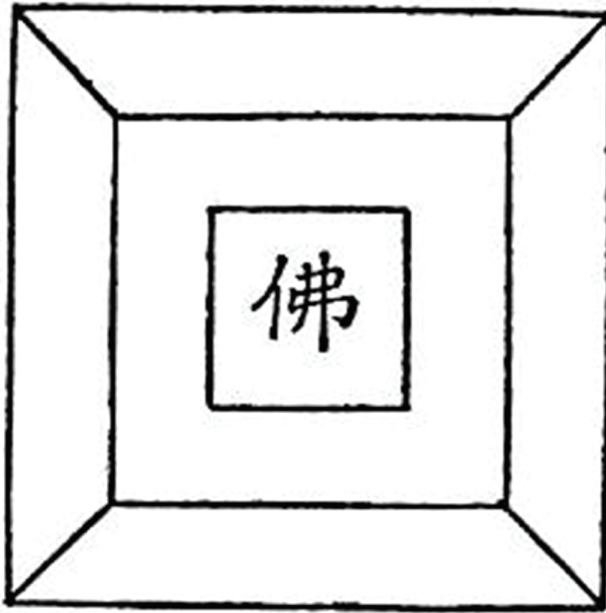


FIGURE 4. Womb seal (*sanshō hō* 産生封). *Hishō mondō*, compiled by Raiyu (T 2536, 79.423a3).

The text explains:

[This seal] nourishes forest vegetation, making flowers and leaves grow luxuriant; it can destroy mountains; it can bewilder reckless demons. If one enters a place full of ailments holding this seal, all these illnesses will be eliminated at once. The Buddha is not lying. I will now explain to you this spirit-seal. The Buddha told the fourfold community: “If you enter flames holding this seal, fire will not burn you. If you enter water, you will not drown. If you enter the mountains, you will not fear lions and tigers. If a monk has committed a transgression, he should smear this seal with ox bezoar and then press it onto a bamboo membrane. Once he has swallowed a hundred thousand such seals, he will accomplish the first or second stage of the bodhisattva path, and all his transgressions will be extinguished. If a woman is struggling with delivery, stamp this seal above and below her heart, and she will have a peaceful, natural birth.” (T 1238, 21.184b5–15)

The scripture continues enumerating other wondrous properties of the seal, but based on this passage, one can appreciate Raiyu’s rationale for choosing this specific talisman for the birthing practice. If using ox bezoar on seal talismans was quite common in Buddhist therapeutics, granting anything from sublime intelligence, control over poisons and demons (STRICKMANN 2002, 148–49), to fertility,

it is nevertheless uncommon to find explicit references to childbirth or safe parturition. This is one of those instances. Raiyu claims that, although Shōkaku knew it well, Raiyu is the only one who transmits it (T 2536, 79.423a3–4). He thus instructs:

Write this talisman on *usuyō* 薄様 paper in very small letters. Have [the woman] swallow it at the appropriate time. Alternatively, engrave it on a pestle, and use the pestle to press the excellent character *butsu* 仏 on the woman's navel. Repeat this for three, seven, or twenty-one times. (T 2536, 79.423a7–10)

Taking talismans to speed up the birthing process, especially in the case of difficult or painful labor, is a common prescription found across *dhāraṇī* sutra and medical literature. Strickmann, for example, discusses the case of the “vajra-heart seal” described in the Nāgārjuna’s *Treatise on the Five Sciences* (T 1420, 21.958c; STRICKMANN 2002, 176). Among its many efficacious uses, if swallowed by a woman suffering from severe labor pains, the talisman will provoke the immediate birth of the child, who will emerge from the mother’s womb holding the piece of paper in his or her hand. Although the talismans can be different, the overall idea is the same; the object must be first pressed onto the woman’s body, starting from her navel, and then swallowed, an act that will automatically result in the swift delivery of the child.

From these various instructions, we can gather that the empowered bezoar is first placed and dispersed in water, producing a liquid or an ointment which can be used in three different manners, according to the progress of the delivery. The substance is to be applied onto the genitals of the birthing mother, to be taken internally, or to be utilized to write a talisman. The unctuous product is often referred to as “bezoar water” (*goō mizu* 牛黄水; TZ 10: 842c–43a), “water” (T 2536, 79.422a15), or even “bezoar-empowered water” (*goō kaji mizu* 牛王加持水),¹³ as in the case of an entry pertaining to the parturition of Shōkunmon’in 昭訓門院 (1273–1336), one of the consorts of Retired Emperor Kameyama, found in Saionji Kinhira’s 西園寺公衡 (1264–1315) diary, the *Kinhira kōki* 公衡公記 (*Kinhira kōki* 3, 106). This suggests that what is given to the parturient is essentially empowered water. For example, aside from the passage of the *Hishō mondō* translated above, in *Byakuhōshō* Chōen explains:

This [*goō*] *kaji* consists of dispersing the ox bezoar in a small water container. Visualize the two syllables *raṃ* 𑖦 and *vaṃ* 𑖧 on the bezoar water, then [recite] the Gundari short incantation either with a three-pronged vajra or a seal.... This water is then offered to the parturient. (TZ 10: 842c–43a)

13. Brian Ruppert mentions that *goō kaji mizu* is nothing other than *kaji kōzui* 加持香水, the perfumed-water empowerment performed as part of esoteric rites (RUPPERT 2000, 334).



FIGURE 5. Daizuigu Bosatsu.
Date unknown, height 0.59 m.
Paris, Musée Guimet-Musée
National des Arts Asiatiques.
Photo copyright of RMN-Grand
Palais (MNAAG, Paris) / Thierry
Ollivier.

In this case, placing or dissolving the ox bezoar in water seems to be part of the *kaji* process. Additional textual and material-culture sources further clarify what is suggested here; in medieval Japan, bezoar was not only *subject* to empowerment but is itself an empowering substance, a point I will return to later.

Even if the sources explored so far claim an exclusive transmission of the *goō* empowerment practice, they were not the only ones who made the connection between ox bezoar and parturition. Ritual manuals belonging to the Tendai esoteric tradition (*taimitsu* 台密), such as Jōnen's 静然 (fl. 1154) *Gyōrinshō* 行林抄 and Shōchō's 承澄 (1205–1281) *Asabashō* 阿婆縛抄 discuss the use of this substance for safe-birthing purposes as part of a rite dedicated to the bodhisattva Daizuigu 大随求 (see FIGURE 5) called *Zuiguuhō* 随求法, generally performed for protection against bodily harm (T 2409, 76.297C12–308a9; DNBZ 38: 1518–35; BEGHI 2011, 669).

The origins of the practice go back to another scripture attributed to Amoghavajra, *The Dhāraṇī Sūtra of Great Fulfillment* (*Dasuiqiu tuoluonijing* 大随求陀羅尼經),¹⁴ a scripture introducing different methods of employing a

14. There are, in fact, two versions of this scripture. The earliest was translated by Baosiwei 宝思惟, (*Manicintana d. 721) in 693 and is titled *The Scripture of the Dhāraṇī Incantation of Great Sovereignty, Preached by the Buddha, Whereby One Immediately Attains What is Sought* (*Fo shuo suiqiu jide dazizai tuoluoni shenzhou jing* 仏說隨求即得大自在陀羅尼神呪經, T 1154, 20).

powerful incantation that assures, as the name suggests, that all the practitioner's wishes will be fulfilled. In the Heian period, recitation of this *dhāraṇī* can be found in different contexts, from rituals of protection, to practices devoted to attainment of a propitious rebirth (GERHART 2009, 40; MEEKS 2010, 220). However, in the sutra, there are several explicit references to fertility and safe pregnancy. For example:

For a woman wishing to conceive a child, you should write the deity's *dhāraṇī* on silk, birch bark, leaf, or on any other material and then, using ox bezoar, paint an image of a child seated on a lotus flower, adorned with a necklace, and surrounded by mountains on four sides. (T 1153, 20.624a12–14)

The version of this same *dhāraṇī* sutra translated by Baosiwei provides further important explanations related to this use of the *dhāraṇī*:

If a woman holds this incantation, she will be influential and she will always give birth to male heirs. By wearing this spell while pregnant, her parturition will be peaceful and without any ailments. (T 1154, 20.637c25–27)

Further on, the sutra explains that the spell can grant either a male or a female child, according to what one desires (T 1154, 20.641a18), and narrates the story of the King of Magadha who, wishing to have a child, gave a talisman bearing this incantation to his wife to be worn around her neck; she immediately became pregnant and gave birth to a child (T 1154, 20.641a19–29).¹⁵

Jōnen follows the instructions found in the *dhāraṇī* sutra *ad litteram*; his manuals instruct to inscribe the Daizuigu *dhāraṇī*, using ox bezoar on a white silk cloth measuring three *shaku* 尺—roughly a meter—for the benefit of women seeking to become pregnant, and to draw a figure of a bejeweled prince seated on a lotus flower while holding in his hand a golden vessel which contains a jewel (T 2409, 76.304c8–305a18; DNBZ 38: 152ob). By wearing the silk cloth, the woman is guaranteed a peaceful pregnancy. The original sources are clear that the method involving the bezoar is meant exclusively for women; if the petitioner

The full title of the version translated by Amoghavajra is *The Dhāraṇī Sūtra of the Universally Radiant, Pure, Incandescent, Wish-granting Gem, and Sealed Essence of the Invincible Vidyārāja Mahāpratisarā* (*Pubian guangming qingjing chicheng ruyibao yinxin wunengsheng damingwang dasuiqi tuoluonijing* 普遍光明清淨熾盛如意宝印心無能勝大明王大隨求陀羅尼經, T 1153, 20). For a study on the two scriptures, the spell, and its material culture, see COPP (2014, 59–140).

15. The child-bearing powers of Mahāpratisarā are explicitly stated also in the extant Sanskrit version of the text, the *Mahāpratisarādhāraṇī*. For a full translation of the seventh-century Gilgit manuscript, see HIDAS (2012). The child-bearing powers of the deity were thus well-known in the broader Asian context, and are attested by both textual documents and material culture. Thomas CRUIJSEN et al. discuss, for example, a Javanese copperplate inscription now at Leiden Kern Institute and University Library that shows a figure of the deity holding a child, and has an inscription referring to her fertility functions (CRUIJSEN, GRIFFITHS, and KLOKKE 2012).

is a man, then a heavenly figure—or Kannon, in case it is the emperor—should be drawn on the cloth using another yellow product, turmeric (*ukon* 鬱金) (T 2409, 79.297c28–98a1; DNZ 38: 152ob).

Although Jōnen draws on the two versions of the *Dhāraṇī Sūtra of Daizūigu*, which describe the talisman as meant for both fertility and uncomplicated pregnancy, he remarks:

Nowadays, this is a very common ritual, but when performed for safe-birthing purposes, it depends upon the successful acquisition of ox bezoars.

(T 2409, 79.297c25–26)

A comparative reading of the injunctions explored in this section suggest that even if Japanese ritualists of the Heian period were exposed to sources explaining the various powers of ox bezoars, and knew of incantations written using this substance that were intended to produce a range of results, they focused specifically on those promising fertility and safe parturition. The existence of two similar practices performed by two different esoteric branches, both requiring ox bezoar for safe childbirth, suggests that by the end of the Heian period this had become an established use of this substance.

In both cases the sources make clear that reciting or inscribing the spell was, in itself, not enough. As Jōnen explicitly states, without ox bezoar the practice cannot be carried out (T 2409, 76.297c26). Thus, whether diluted in water, applied on the body, or inscribed on a clean cloth, it is evident that this substance was thought to provide an essential component of whichever spell promised an easy, uncomplicated pregnancy.

Raiyu and his fellow Daigoji monks did not seem to question the efficacy of this substance for safe-birthing purposes, either. Applying ox bezoar on the body, using it to make a yellow mark on the forehead, or rubbing it onto clothing are well-attested practices described in sutra literature, and certainly scholar-monks were aware of the many ways in which this substance could be employed. However, as none of the sources cited by the ritual manuals matches instructions for turning ox bezoar into an ointment, spreading it directly on genitals, or drinking it to help deliver a healthy child, it is likely that this procedure was either fashioned by Daigoji monks themselves or by medical specialists operating at court. We will further consider the Daigoji monks' choice of sources below, but now turn to an entirely different type of literature that specifically treats these themes.

Therapeutic Uses of Ox Bezoar

Ox bezoar was considered a potent substance not only in Buddhist ritual contexts; we have evidence of its use from Daoist therapeutic and other Chinese



FIGURE 6. *Juntei Butsumo* talisman for safe childbirth. Daigoji. Personal item.

medical sources as well.¹⁶ From these documents emerge a degree of continuity with Buddhist literature, especially as far as dispelling demons are concerned, but also more targeted uses of the substance. For example, numerous medical manuals discovered at Dunhuang that were surveyed by Catherine Despeux reveal that ox bezoars were also employed against indigestions, cramps, bloating, as well as abdominal and epigastric pain in both adults and children (DESPEUX 2010, 404, 415, 521, 575, 786). Among the sources of Chinese *materia medica* circulating in Japan at the time, the renowned *Ishinpō* 医心方, composed by the court physician Tanba no Yasuyori 丹波康頼 in the tenth century, mentions

16. Examples of different injunctions on ox bezoars in these sources are discussed by DESPEUX (2010), CHEN (2006), and SIVIN (2015, 99–115). Later texts are also discussed by UNSCHULD and ZHENG (2012).

several possible uses of ox bezoar for similar ailments. Namely, ox bezoars were administered to treat high fevers in infants and small children, generally in the form of pills. Otherwise, rubbed on the body or on the garments of the child, they could help ward off demons that cause all sort of nightmares and agitated states of mind (*Ishinpō* 6: 2222, 2301–308). Similarly, bezoar pills were employed to treat liver problems (2: 645) and abdominal edema (3: 924).

Ox bezoars and ox galls (*gotan* 牛膽) also feature in the chapters dedicated to the well-being of women (*Ishinpō* 5–6). For example, among the different remedies recommended for irregular vaginal bleeding (*tsuenaka* 崩中) is a dose of ox bezoar (69-5: 1939–46).¹⁷ If a woman is suffering from genital coldness (*hotorei* 陰冷) and other vaginal maladies, ox galls can be used together with other remedies to alleviate discomfort and to ease sexual intercourse (5: 1923–30).

Incidentally, the *Ishinpō* also instructs to use spells and talismans in conjunction with medical remedies during parturition. For example, Yasuyori draws from a text called *Zimu bilu* 子母秘祿 (Secret records of mother and child) by Xu Renzhe 許仁則 (mid-Tang) to explain the following method for handling a difficult childbirth:

First, when the time of childbirth approaches, compose a four-character sentence and divided it into four talismans. Press them on the woman's body, from navel up to the heart, then have her swallow it with water, and the baby will immediately be born.
(*Ishinpō* 6: 2059)

This description is very close to the one provided by Raiyu: as part of the birthing procedures of the *goō kaji*, the *ajari* was also in charge of producing a talisman to ease childbirth that was pressed on the woman's navel and then ingested to assure a swift delivery of the child.

Preoccupation with a smooth and painless childbirth is also clear from instructions of special herbal remedies and decoctions a pregnant woman could take in the month leading to parturition (LEE 2005, 225–27). In this regard, Yasuyori, drawing on the sixth-century Chinese compendium *Chanjing* 產經 (Birth Canon), reports that a salvia-based ointment (*danjinkō* 丹參膏) should be administered regularly from the seventh month onward for this purpose (*Ishinpō* 6: 2055), but no mention of ox bezoar occurs in this specific context.

Although not directly targeting parturition, the *Ishinpō* clearly indicates that ox galls and bezoars were employed to address vaginal problems. Furthermore, these substances had an established record as an antiseptic and antipyretic, as well as the power of appeasing a distressed and agitated mind, which arguably

17. The ox bezoar entry of the *Shen nong bencao jing* 神農本草經 (The divine farmer's *materia medica*), written in the latter part of the Han dynasty period, specifies that the marrow of the horn of the ox (*niujiao sai* 牛角髓) can treat vaginal discharge and uterine bleeding (WILMS 2016).

could come in handy during childbirth. Drinking it or smearing it on the stomach could ease abdominal pain, applying it on the genitals could disinfect and soothe the area most exposed to lacerations and bleeding, and finally its ingestion could dissipate the worries and fears of the parturient.

The medical sources also reveal that ox bezoar was employed to treat small children and especially newborns. Yasuyori's relative Tanba no Masatada 丹波雅忠 (1021–1088), in his eleventh-century collection *Iryakushō* 医略抄 (Selected first-aid treatments), draws on the *Ishinpō* to explain a series of methods to help with the first breastfeeding of the child:

As soon as the child is born, check his or her mouth for a small amount of blood on the tongue. If swallowed, this will cause much abdominal pain to the child. Therefore, clean it off with a piece of cotton wrapped around your fingertip. Then, take a small piece of licorice root and rub it on your fingers. The *Ishinpō* instructs to boil it in two measures of water, and then let the child taste some of it off your finger. According to another method, after three days, red honey can help calm the vigorous *hun* and *po* souls of the child.... Next, use ox bezoar, which benefits the liver and gall bladder by preventing any burning sensation as well as unpleasant smells. Finally, give the child milk.

(ZGR 31: 128b–29a)

The very same steps to help the infant take milk for the first time are described in the *Kōgū osan tōjitsu shidai* as well as in the *Kōwa gannen osan buruiki* 康和元年御産部類記 (“Accounts of royal childbirths of the Kōwa era,” which is in fact the account of the birth of Emperor Toba; ZGR 33: 530–41). The former text explains that the red honey (*shumitsu* 朱蜜) is applied directly on the mouth of the infant, with the help of a piece of cloth. The bezoar is instead placed in the child's mouth to be suckled or held in the mouth (ZGR 33: 145b).¹⁸ Clearly, the sweet taste of the honey helped to balance the bitterness of the bezoar, which was, however, useful to prevent stomach burns.

Considering these activities were carried out at birth in the presence of Buddhist monks, and they were further recorded in diaries including lengthy details of ritual proceedings as well, it is very likely that medieval scholar-monks were knowledgeable of those properties that made ox bezoar useful during and after parturition. In fact, their manipulation of ox bezoar in esoteric rituals for safe parturition may have been a direct consequence of the medical uses of this substance to facilitate the nursing of the newborn and to prevent stomach discomforts. The latter function could have been seen to soothe the condition of the mother as well. In this sense, Raiyu may not have known exactly where the practice originated, as far as Buddhist literature was concerned, or whose master

18. Similar methods, not including ox bezoar, are discussed in LEE (2000).

transmitted it first, simply because it was a custom that probably developed out of the interaction between court doctors and wet nurses. As Buddhist monks were also part of this environment, their procedures may have adapted to its needs and observances.

Furthermore, even if the ritual manuals explored in the previous chapter did not explicitly mention *materia medica*, it was not uncommon for Buddhist scholar-monks to draw from such sources. For example, Jōnen quotes directly from medical collections in his *Gyōrinshō* when explaining the use of ox bezoar to write talismans.¹⁹

Q: Why is ox bezoar used to write this *dhāraṇī*?

A: The Buddha's intentions are difficult to penetrate, and I have not heard the master explain it. Only ox bezoars can chase away demons. The reason is either unclear or has been lost.

Q: What are the characteristics of ox bezoar?

A: According to the *Collected Classified Materia Medica*, ox bezoars have a bitter taste because they contain a little poison.²⁰ This protects against the attacks of demons that cause children's many illnesses. Once retrieved from the ox, it should be left drying in the shade for one hundred days. When drying, it should not be exposed to the light of the sun and the moon at all.

According to the explanations [included in the text] there are three types of bezoar. *Sanhō* 散黃 (lit. "loose yellow"), which is small, like beans or seeds; *manhō* 慢黃 (lit. "mellow bezoar"), which is creamy like an egg yolk and is found between the liver and in the gall bladder; and *enhō* 円黃 (lit. "round bezoar"), which has the shape of a lump. This type of bezoar can be small or big and is also found in the liver and gall bladder. It is also said that when this spirit appears and disappears [within its body], the ox cries and grunts.²¹ According to the Tang edition, when oxen have a bezoar, they moan and growl profusely. In this regard, the *Materia Medica of the Jiayou Period* explains that

19. According to this manual, the bezoar is used in different ritual contexts. It is used to fashion talismans against high fevers produced during a ritual for Yōe Kannon 葉衣觀音 (Leaf-Clad Kannon; T 2409, 76.59c27–60a17); to grant children (T 2409, 76.101c11–12); to treat infectious fever (T 2409, 76.236c4–6); to protect from weapons of all sorts (T 2409, 76.291b12); and for safe childbirth (T 2409, 76.297c25–26).

20. The text says *Materia Medica of Kaizhong* (*Kaizhong bencao* 開重本草), but this source does not seem to exist. However, the passage quoted by Jōnen could have originated from a number of Chinese sources from the eleventh-century collection *Zhenglei bencao* 証類本草 (*Collected Classified Materia Medica*) written by Tang Shenwei 唐慎微 (1056–1093).

21. This passage, as mentioned by the author, is taken from Chinese *materia medica*, but some parts are missing. According to Tao Hongjing, the bezoar is like a spirit, a night light that enters from the horns of the animal (LUO 2003, 6: 3986–87).

whenever [the bezoar] enters or exits, the ox cries.²² Also, oxen with bezoars have glossier hides, and red eyes.

The *Collected Classified Materia Medica* explains that one should wait for the bezoar to emerge from the horns, or collect it in a water container when it is spewed by the animal (FIGURE 7). However, nowadays, people mostly obtain bezoar from the gallbladder. The Tang edition explains that the bezoar that is obtained by pushing and screaming is called “living yellow” (*shenghuang* 生黄) and is exceptionally good.²³ The *Materia Medica of the Jiayou Period* says that [bezoar] manifests like a light inside the horns of the ox, and the ox dies when it enters the liver. It is yellow like a chick.

There are thus four types of bezoar. The bezoar that is obtained by pushing and screaming is called “living yellow.” Bezoars [extracted from] dead oxen are located in the horns, thus called “horn bezoar,” or in the heart, and therefore called “heart bezoar.” This latter type is like a sap, so once extracted, place it immediately in water and it will harden. Then compact it with pieces of *tribulus terrestris* (*jili* 蒺藜) or with *gleditsia sinensis*’ seeds (*zaojia* 皂莢). Finally, they are also found in the liver gallbladder, which is called “liver yellow.”

People generally do not know that the type of bezoar obtained by pushing and screaming is the most valuable. There are thus many counterfeits. For this reason, people nowadays examine it by scraping its shell to make the yellow appear.

(T 2049, 76.237c1–238a12)

This passage is important when considered in conjunction with the previously mentioned sources. First, it corroborates that Japanese scholar-monks were not only aware of Chinese *materia medica*, but that they also employed it to make sense of substances, herbs, and minerals employed in ritual practices. In this case, Jōnen mentions two Song-period sources, the *Collected Classified Materia Medica* (*Zhenglei bencao* 証類本草) and the *Materia Medica of the Jiayou Period* (*Jiayou bencao* 嘉佑本草). Both texts, however, include information found in previous sources as well, notably Tao Hongjing’s commentary (*Bencao jing jizhu* 本草經集注), and its revised edition, the *Collected Commentaries of Shennong’s Classical Materia Medica* (*Shennong bencao jing jizhu* 神農本草經集注), the main pharmacopeia of Ten’yakuryō 典藥寮 until the end of the eighth century (MARCON 2015, 29) (see FIGURE 8).

Furthermore, the medical documents they consulted already included instructions consistent with Buddhist and Daoist sources as well, confirming

22. This is taken from the *Jiayou bencao* 嘉佑本草, another Song-period medical text, which revised and expanded on the previously mentioned sources. For a history of the compilation of these texts see GOLDSCHMIDT (2011, 109–12).

23. LUO (2003, 6: 3987) translates *shenghuang* as “raw yellow.” However, I prefer to translate it as “living yellow” because it is clear from the sources that the rarity of this type of bezoar is connected to the fact that it does not kill the animal, it is expelled naturally.

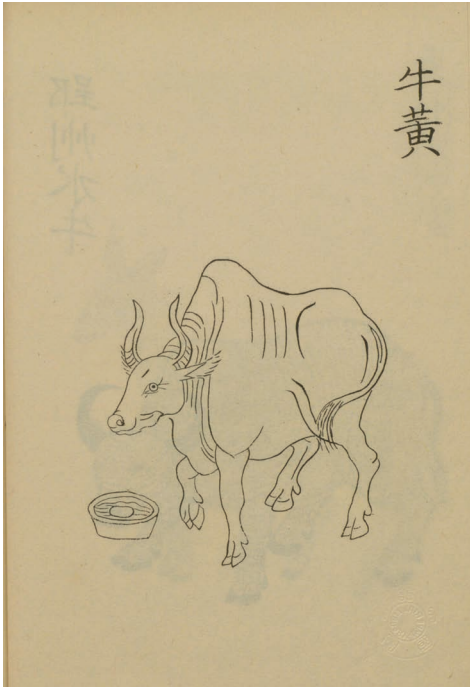


FIGURE 7. Ox bezoar with living ox. From *Illustrations to the Shaoxing (1131–1162) Revision of the Zhenglei beiji bencao (Shōkō kōtei shōrui bikyū honzō gazu 紹興校定証類備急本草 画図)*. National Diet Library Digital Collection. See <http://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/1241918/11?viewMode=>.

that therapeutic knowledge, although wielded by specialists belonging to different institutions with their own training and discourses, had very fluid boundaries. In this regard, recent scholarship has consistently shown that during the late Heian and Kamakura periods, physician-monks who treated members of the royal and aristocratic families fashioned procedures that tapped into a variety of different prescriptions: Buddhist, Daoist, and medical (DROTT 2010, 251–53; TRIPLETT 2014; ANDREEVA 2014 and 2017; LOMI 2015). Monks belonging to leading institutions like Ninnaji, Hieizan, Daigoji, and Kōyasan played an active role in the production of this medico-ritual knowledge by also researching and classifying plants, herbs, drugs, and *materia medica* (*honzo* 本草) that were required for ritual practices (TRIPLETT 2014).²⁴ The resulting catalogs reflected an environment in which familiarity with a variety of substances, herbs, and drugs was indispensable to performing rituals properly, and thus monastic institutions stored such items for ritual and therapeutic purposes.

24. Katja Triplett has discussed the example of Ninnaji monk Fujiwara Ken'i 藤原兼意 (also Jōrenbō ajari 成蓮房阿闍梨; 1072–ca.1169), who compiled a number of compendia on *materia medica* based on Chinese classical works, as well as the circulation of these documents within Daigoji circles (TRIPLETT 2012, 77–82). This tradition continues in the Kamakura period as well with monk-physicians such as Kajiwara Shōzen (ca. 1265–ca. 1337). See GOBLE (2011).

The availability and production of *materia medica* at Daigoji is established by extant sources such as the *Kōyakushō* 香藥抄 (Notes on incense and herbs) by the Daigoji abbot Shōgen 勝賢 (1138–1196),²⁵ which includes a brief entry on ox bezoars. Specifically, Shōgen mentions two key scriptures for Buddhist medicine: the *Sūtra on the Use of Medicinal Herbs for Healing Illness by the Thousand-eyes Avalokiteśvara* (*Qianshou qianyan Guanshiyin pusa zhibing heyao jing* 千手千眼觀世音菩薩治病合藥經; T 1059, 20), translated by Bhagavat-dharma (Qiefandamo 伽梵達摩) in the seventh century, and the *Golden Light Sutra* (*Jinguangming zuishengwang jing* 金光明最勝王經; T 665, 16) (DNBZ 51: 2643b). In the former text, the bezoar is prepared in a similar fashion as the instructions provided above. It is placed in a container with fresh water, placed in front of the statue of the deity, and then, following a recitation of the deity's *dhāraṇī*, “the oily substance” is used to make a dot on the forehead (T 1059, 20.104c8–9). This procedure will assure happiness to all beings, humans and nonhumans, heavenly and spirit (T 1059, 20.104c9–10). In the latter text, bezoars are instead listed among thirty-two medicaments used to dispel a variety of calamities, from bad dreams to poisons, from war to adversity (T 665, 16.434c8–35a1).

The question-and-answer passage from Jōnen's *Gyōrinshō* highlights aspects of bezoars, and ox bezoars specifically, that are either omitted or taken for granted in other manuals: namely, their particular qualities and rarity. The question over the physical properties of bezoars suggest that these were not at all common items, and the detailed response about their generation and extraction further suggest a link between the efficacy of these objects and their unique appearance. The fact that counterfeits existed, requiring people to scrape the surface of the bezoar to reveal its authentic bright yellow color, is a further testament to its highly sought-after, precious status.

In a context where ritual specialists belonging to powerful temple institutions often vied with each other over the patronage of the imperial household and wealthy aristocratic families, leading to a proliferation of ritual practices often openly meant to outshine those of competing groups (LOMI 2015, 259–60; DOLCE 2011, 357–58), the choice of exclusive materials and substances was a crucial element of distinction.²⁶

Although the Taimitsu monk Jōnen reminds us that bezoars not only inhabited liturgical and medical spaces, but existed apart from them as well, Daigoji monks claimed that the use of ox bezoar for safe childbirth was a secret transmission

25. This is an abbreviated version of Ken'i's *Kōyōshō* 香要抄 and *Yakushushō* 藥種抄. For a discussion of the origin and circulation of these scriptures see TRIPLETT (2014).

26. According to TRIPLETT (2012, 74–77) and DROTT (2010, 249–54), the same type of rivalry existed between monk/ritualists and medical specialists, leading to a fertile environment for the development and diversification of healing therapies. For an analysis of the interaction between different specialists, see HAYEK (2006).



FIGURE 8. Woodcut from the first edition (published 1590) of Li Shizhen's monumental pharmaceutical encyclopedia, *Bencao gangmu*. The illustrations in this edition are credited to his son Li Jianyuan. Courtesy of the Wellcome Collection.



FIGURE 9. Animal gallstone (*jūtan* 獸膽), possibly belonging to either a bear or an ox. Shōsoin Treasure number 132 (North section). The Imperial Household Agency Website (<http://shosoin.kunaicho.go.jp/ja-JP/Treasure?id=0000010337>). © Imperial Household Agency. All Rights Reserved. Courtesy of <http://www.kunaicho.go.jp/copyright/kiyaku.html>.

(T 2536, 79.422c11). In this regard, the omission of any reference to non-Buddhist sources in Raiyu's *Hishō mondō* seems strategic. In a context where ox bezoars were also used by other lineages for the very same purpose, as the *Zuiguhō* reveals, Raiyu sought to establish this practice as an essentially Daigoji tradition. Indeed, aside from its ritual use, the ox bezoar existed as a precious commodity within networks of exchange that were not exclusively religious in nature. Therefore, it is important to look more closely at the process whereby ox bezoars acquired their value in medieval Japan.

From Gallstone to Gem: The Social Life of Bezoars

As the previous section has highlighted, at the time when Daigoji monks fashioned the *goō kaji* as a birthing ritual, the therapeutic value of ox gallstones was already well established. Across Buddhist and medical sources we find numerous remedies that include or consist of ox bezoar, and this in spite of or because of its rarity. For this reason, bezoars had long been considered a valuable and precious commodity within the broader Sino-Japanese sphere.

An anecdote confirming the high price of ox bezoars in sixth-century China is found in Tao Hongjing's *Bencao jing jizhu*, which reports: "This is a pricey drug, with none more expensive. One bezoar weighing between two and three *fen*, if good, may sell for five, six, or up to ten thousand in cash" (NAPPI 2009, 118). According to the text, ox bezoars often came from areas within modern-day Shandong, such as Qingzhou, Laizhou, and Rongzhou, but also from Sichuan and Gansu. Under the Tang (618–907) these regions continued sending to Chang'an annual tributes of bezoars (SCHAFER 1985, 191–92), which started, however, to be also traded and received as gifts from neighboring countries. One of the official dynastic histories, the *Old Book of Tang* (*Jiu Tang shu* 旧唐書) mentions, for example, that in 773, the Korean Kingdom of Silla sent an envoy with precious gifts to the Chinese court, including ox bezoars (*Jiu Tang shu* 16: 5338). The *Annals of Silla* in the *Samguk Sagi* 三国史記 include the same information, but also mention other instances in which large amounts of ox bezoar were sent to the Tang court (SCHAFER 1985, 192).²⁷

Japan participated in this exchange of wealth between different courts (VER-SCHUER 2006, 1–22). Aside from tributary gifts, Korean missions to Japan in the eighth century also entailed commercial acquisitions of medicines and precious goods, featuring bezoars of different kinds. This is testified, in the Japanese case, by their presence in the inventories of imported medicines, and among drugs

27. The fame of Chinese ox bezoars was, according to SCHAFER (1985, 193), well known in Persia, and traded for other valuables. Eventually, bezoars in general became part of the Euro-Asian trade, and examples of different types of Oriental bezoars start to appear in different European contexts from the sixteenth century onward (BORSCHBERG 2010).

stored at Shōsōin 正倉院, the treasure house of Tōdaiji in Nara (ZZGR 16: 37; FIGURE 9). Similarly, records of goods acquired by a Japanese noble from Silla merchants in the eighth century also list ox bezoar among the medicinal remedies purchased (TŌNO 1977, 313–16; VERSCHUER 2006, 11–12). Bezoars were thus situated at the center of an important network of transnational exchanges which included a broad range of herbal, medicinal, and also textual and artistic goods that were traded and sought after. However, bezoars were not only imported, but also “produced” in Japanese provinces and sent to the capital as tributes. The *Shoku Nihongi* 続日本紀, for example, mentions two occasions in 698 during the reign of Monmu Tennō 文武天皇 (r. 697–707) when ox bezoars were sent as offerings from Tosa and Shimōsa provinces (SZKT 2: 3, 6).

Although these sources all confirm the precious status of ox bezoars, their rarity was also linked to their complex yet extremely humble origins. While scholars generally use the term “production” when discussing Chinese and Korean bezoars, these substances could not technically be farmed. Consisting of a concretion of vegetal and animal substances that coalesced with gastric juices, and then nestled within animal organs and tissues, bezoars are first and foremost organic byproducts formed as a reaction against something the body cannot fully metabolize or expel. For this reason, bezoars could not be planted, grown, or stimulated in any way; they could only be collected or extracted postmortem, something the sources discussed in the previous section make clear.

Bezoar retrieval is mentioned in Nara- and Heian-period legal sources, and specifically among the laws regulating official stables and pastures included in the *Kumokuryō* 厩牧令 of the Yōrō code. Aside from dealing with the treatment of live animals, such as their breeding, training, and healing, the text also included instructions on how to dispose of them after death. As specific parts of the animals were employed for a variety of reasons, from tanning to fashioning medicinal remedies, the removal and eventual use of the hide, brain, horn, and gallbladder was also regulated (MATSUI 2012, 131–32). In particular, the annotated edition of the code, the *Ryō no shūge* 令集解, stresses that “special precautions” should be taken in case an ox bezoar is found when dismembering the animal (*Ryō no shūge* 2: 441–42). The text further clarifies this injunction:

Q: I do not understand what “special” refers to.

A: Skin, brains, and horns should be collected until they can be dispatched together at the same time to satisfy different domestic uses. However, if a bezoar is found, it should be offered at once with no delay. Therefore, it is said “use special precautions.”

(*Ryō no shūge* 2: 42)

Dealing with ox bezoars with no delay was of paramount importance because they were not employed for the same purposes as the other parts of the animal. Although the passage does not clearly state where and to whom the bezoar was

sent, it nevertheless confirms the unique status of this product in the Nara and Heian periods.

According to historical and archaeological evidence, in the Heian period deceased animals were processed and dismembered not far from the city, to the south along the banks of the Kamo River (MATSUI 2012, 133). Those responsible for the skinning and scavenging of animal carcasses were thus called *kawara mono* 河原者 or *kawarabito* 河原人 (literally “people of the dry river beds”) although these activities were shared by a variety of groups providing “cleansing” services such as *hinin* 非人 and *inu jinin* 犬神人 (dog shrine attendants). Although outcasts due to the pollution that their direct contact with dead carcasses exposed them to, these individuals fulfilled an important social function (NAGAHARA 1979, 390; AMINO 1989). Temples, shrines, private mansions, and official agencies kept animals such as oxen and horses on their grounds, but the inhabitants of these places could not easily dispose of animal corpses without the necessity for lengthy purifications, and so the employment of such professionals was necessary (AMINO 1989). Their scavenging activities are corroborated by annotations and entries in the private diaries of eleventh-century aristocrats, who explain both the detailed restrictions households had to comply with following any death, including that of an animal, as well as how *kawarabito* were called in to dispose of deceased oxen. Considering that the injunctions included in the legal codes explain in detail which parts of the animals should be treated with care, it is plausible to envision that officials in charge of temples or royal and aristocratic pastures and stables had *kawarabito* look out for bezoars and had them immediately delivered if they were discovered. A short passage in the *Sakeiki* 左經記, the personal diary of the nobleman and minister Minamoto no Tsuneyori 原經頼 (985–1039) recounts the events leading to the discovery of an ox bezoar:

On the same day, the Saemonfu 左衛門府 Fujiwara no Yoritō told me: “This morning, at the Office of the Minister of the Left, the Governor of Izu said that yesterday someone’s ox used during the New Year’s celebrations unexpectedly died. So, some *kawarabito* were called to skin the ox, and, in its intestines, they found a black jewel (*kurotama* 黒玉). They then took it and left. Upon hearing this, I looked for the *kawarabito* to inquire about the matter. Such a regrettable thing! After reproaching him, he finally produced the jewel, which, upon closer inspection, turned out to be a bezoar. So exciting! So very profound!” At this point, [Yoritō] took the bezoar out of his pocket to let me see it. It is like a big egg, black in color. It is one of those things narrated in old legends and to see one is truly rare... I thus had to write it down! (Sakeiki, 3)

When considered alongside Jōnen’s elucidation, discussed earlier, this passage helps us to further appreciate the intricate and delicate process of formation

and acquisition of ox bezoars. As organic animal products, their utilization depended upon two things. First, on the concretion forming in the biliary duct of an ox. Although this was not an extremely rare occurrence, it was not one that could be foreseen nor controlled. Second, while in rare cases a bezoar was naturally expelled by the ox, under normal circumstances it was retrieved post-mortem. It thus required someone to look for it by examining the entrails of the dead animal, and finally to extract it. Enmeshed in internal organs, encased in skin and guts, a bezoar had then to be pried out of a decomposing carcass of animals by specialists, summoned to take care of the dead animal. This was beyond doubt a dirty and, in the context of premodern Japan, polluting business. As Tsuneyori seems to imply in his narration, the horrifying process of discovery and extraction was left to the *kawarabito* and, only once the bezoar had been carefully inspected and polished perhaps revealing its unique color, could it manifest as a precious gem. The mixture of disgust and awe, of abjection and wonder experienced at first view of the black stone came from the realization that bezoars are at the same time powerful medicines, expensive goods, gems, and by-products of animal galls.

The concomitance of these qualities is corroborated by medieval-period material culture. For example, small bronze statues called “ox-jewel image” (*goō zō* 牛玉像) offer a visual reminder of the role of bezoars as medicinal substance, jewel, and animal product. These are containers taking the shape of a gracefully seated ox, which can be opened at the level of the stomach. Inside, they hold a small treasure: a round, dark orange stone resembling a bezoar.

NAITŌ Sakae (2011, 75) mentions a passage in the Kamakura-period *Shōtoku Taishi denshiki* 聖徳太子伝私記 (Private annotation of the biography of Prince Shōtoku) possibly referring to these images. The text explains that, in the Jōgūō Hall 上宮王院 at Hōryūji, there is an ox jewel stored inside of a water container (*mizutsubo* 水壺), and one round ox jewel placed into a green ox container (ZZGR 17:28–29). This jewel was used during a ritual called “method of the ox-jewel water” (*goōmizu sahō* 牛玉水作法), performed in the second lunar month. The jewel was left soaking in water for seventeen nights, then, after reciting *dhāraṇīs*, it was divided into two pieces, assigned to two different containers, and offered as part of ritual celebrations (DNBZ 112: 87b–88a).

Although it is unclear whether these containers now hold a “real” ox bezoar, the presence of stones and jewels resembling the actual substance hidden inside a statue of an ox may indicate that bezoars were thought of and treated almost as relics. Like many relics, these are likely to be fabricated objects that are placed within containers that function as receptacles for their power.

The existing Kamakura-period examples found at Kaijūsenji (FIGURE 10) and Hōryūji in the West Round Hall (Saiendō 西円堂; FIGURE 11) and Picture Hall (Edono 絵殿; FIGURE 12) may suggest that their purpose was linked to the use of

ox bezoars during specific celebrations and ritual performances. The one located in the Saiendō, generally kept behind a sculpture of Yakushi Nyorai, is brought out only for the temple's New Year service (*shushōe* 修正会), when the bezoar stone is displayed in front of the Medicine Buddha (NAITŌ 2011, 75). At this time the temple also produced a protective amulet originally stamped using ox bezoar, the renowned "Ox King Precious Seal" (*goō hōin* 牛王宝印) or "Ox Jewel Precious Seal" (*goō hōin* 牛玉宝印) (FIGURE 8). Since at least the Heian period, these talismans were employed to fight off epidemics, a function probably derived from the medicinal and thaumaturgic properties of the bezoar itself.²⁸ Often distributed at the beginning of the year, these stamps are linked to both *shushōe* and *shunie* 修二会 celebrations and are still produced by several temples and shrines.²⁹ As their popularity grew in the medieval period, it also became common practice to use them to seal oaths (*kishōmon* 起請文) (FIGURE 9) (CHIJIWA 2006).³⁰

Although the visual styles of the amulets change according to the institution that issues them—the shrines at Kumano, for example, have distinctive black crows (*o karasu san*, FIGURE 13), while those of Hōryūji only bear the name of the temple along with the seal—all feature a print of one or more *cintāmaṇi* jewels in a warm orange or red color and a distinctive flaming shape (FIGURE 14). The amulet thus acted as a visual signpost for the conflation of the ox bezoar and jewel. The names of these objects were also conflated, allowing for a substitution of the character 玉 for 王, read identically (and willfully) as *goō* 牛黃.

In the seventeenth century the Shingon scholar-monk Unshō 運敞 (1614–1693) lucidly summarized the semantic connections created by the *goō* in the first fascicle his *Jakushōdō kokkyōshū* 寂照堂谷響集 dedicated to the "Ox King Precious Seal":

For some people, *goō* 牛王 means "ox gem" (*goō* 牛玉), which is an ox treasure (*gohō* 牛宝). According to the *materia medica*, dogs have "dog treasures" and oxen have "ox treasures." They generate in the liver and in the bowels and are also called "*satafu*" (*satō* 鮭答).³¹ Because they are extremely hard to obtain,

28. There is much speculation over the origin of these seals and talismans as well as over their appellation, but scholars agree they all related to warding off epidemics. Aside from the fact that these talismans were stamped using ox bezoar, in itself a remedy against fevers and disease-bearing demons, they could also be related to the cult of the ox, as a deity that prevented epidemics. Among the possible interpretations of the name of the talisman is that it constituted an abbreviation of the name of the deity Gozu Tennō 牛頭天王, also worshipped to ward off diseases (GRAPARD 2017, 171–72).

29. For example, Tōdaiji and Yakushiji employ these seals, carved on a large wooden stamp, by impressing them onto the practitioner's forehead during the *shunie*. The stamps are yellow in color and are believed to protect the practitioners. For a discussion, see DOLCE (2010, 451–52).

30. For an analysis of *kishōmon*, their deities, and cosmological dimension see SATŌ (2003).

31. This is pronounced *zhada* in Chinese, written either 鮭答 or 鮭苔, and is an alternative way of indicating animal bezoars in general in the Chinese *materia medica*.



FIGURE 10. Ox-jewel statue (*goō zō*), Kaijūsenji 海住山寺, late Kamakura period. Source: NAITŌ (2011, 16).



FIGURE 11. Ox-jewel statue (*goō zō*), Saiendō 西門堂 of Hōryūji 法隆寺, Nara, Kamakura period. Source: NAITŌ (2011, 76).



FIGURE 12. Ox-jewel statue (*goō zō*), Edono 絵殿 of Hōryūji, Nara, dated 1261. Source: NAITŌ (2011, 76).

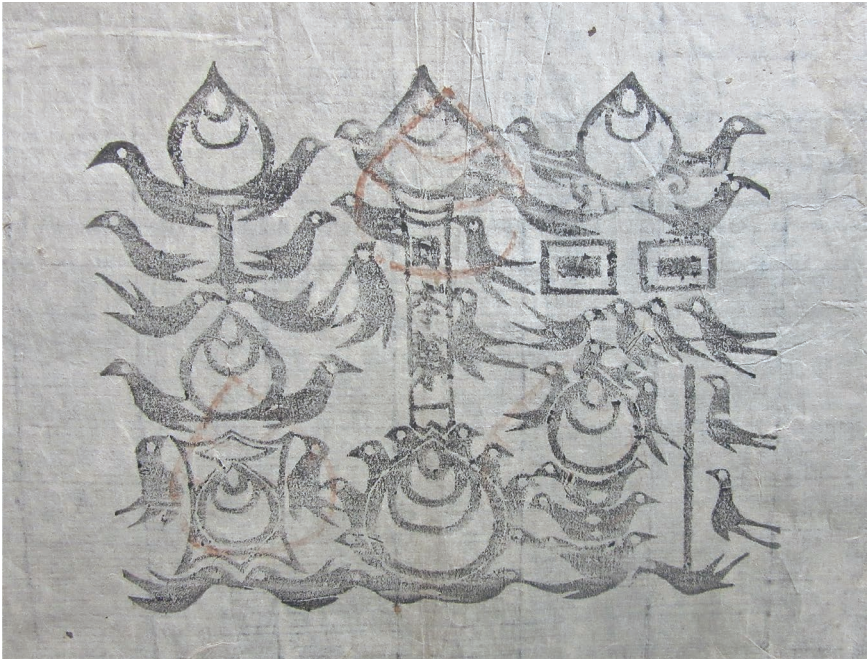


FIGURE 13. *Goō hōin* 牛王宝印 (Kumano Hongu).
Sekimori collection. Courtesy of Gaynor Sekimori.



FIGURE 14. Kishōmon of Uesugi Kagekatsu 上杉景勝起請文 (1555–1623), dated
1582, 28 × 42 cm. Copyright Waseda University Library.

people consider them as numinous gems (*reihō* 靈宝). For this reason, the talisman is called *goō hōin* 牛王宝印. I do not think this is the correct meaning, however.

For some people, *goō* 牛王 refers to “ox bezoar” (*goō* 牛黄), an expensive medicine retrieved from the gall of oxen or spewed by the animal. In the sutras it is called *gorocanā*, and it is also used to produce the yellow color of the seal, and this explains its name. The *Dhāraṇī Sūtra of Jūichimen Kannon* explains that dotting the space between your eyebrows or cleansing your body with bezoar that has been previously blessed by the Bodhisattva’s *dhāraṇī* will remove all hindrances, all nightmares, and all diseases. This seal is thus produced for healing purposes. Yet, this explanation does not explain why [the seal] is red....

In fact, nowadays we say that *goō* 牛王 is an epithet of the Buddha. According to the seventeenth fascicle of the *Nirvana Sutra*, the Thus-come One is called “King of the Herd among men” 人中牛王.... For this reason, the seal bears an engraving of the seed syllable of the Buddha’s name, and therefore it is called the “Ox King Precious Seal.” (DNBZ 149: 4a–b)

The sound *ō* thus refers to the bezoar—the yellow of the animal, which gives the seal on the talisman its distinctive color—and to the bitter taste of the medicine. It is also simultaneously a precious stone, a gem which people regard as valuable in its own right. Finally, it refers to the Ox King as the “King of the Herd among Men,” an epithet for the Buddha.³² Unshō may be skeptical of the first two interpretations, but his explanations not only confirm the bezoar-jewel-king association but also reveal the extent of its circulation by the seventeenth century.

From Living Yellow to a Living Ruler?

Thus far, we have seen that ox bezoar lends itself to interpretation as a precious object of some sort. Its rarity makes it an expensive commodity, requiring specific instructions and cautious handling; the striking circumstances of its discovery, almost a numinous manifestation, is marvelous and rare and thus worth recounting. In this context, ox bezoars came to be interpreted not only as medicines or strange gems but also as jewels, a link supported by material and visual sources from the medieval period.

I believe the polysemic nature of the term *goō* had bearing on its employment during birthing rituals of royal consorts. As mentioned at the beginning of the article, the “Ox Bezoar Empowerment” of Daigoji was performed as part of a ritual dedicated to Juntei. Also known by the epithet Butsumo 仏母 (literally “Mother of Buddhas,) the bodhisattva was already a powerful symbol of fertility,

32. Although by no means an accepted way of transliterating the Buddha’s name (Gautama), it is however worth mentioning that 牛王 could be read also as *go tama*.

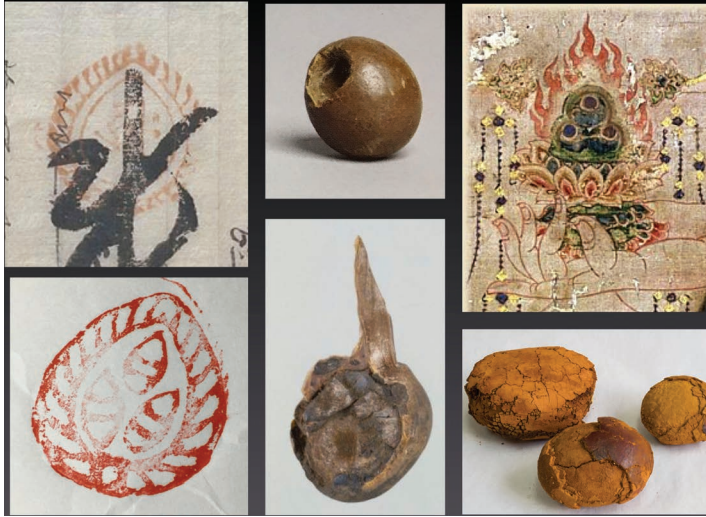


FIGURE 15. Representations of different types of *goō*: stones, gallstones, jewels, and *cintamani*.

as suggested by its child-giving *dhāraṇī*.³³ At Daigoji, however, the bodhisattva was also tightly linked to royal offspring. According to the tenth-century *Dai-goji engi* 醍醐寺縁起 (DNBZ 117: 246–52), the Junteidō 准胝堂 enshrining the deity was commissioned by Emperor Daigo 醍醐 (884–930) to pray for an heir, and, thanks to his vow, the rulers Suzaku and Murakami were born (DNBZ 117: 247a; ZGR 24: 202) (FIGURE 16).

In the case of Murakami's birth, the efficacy of the *goō* empowerment—here written using the kanji for “jewel” rather than “yellow,” *goō kaji* 牛玉加持—was essential for the successful realization of Daigo's wish, and thus the *engi* encourages the use of this practice for future royal births (DNBZ 117: 247a). On this occasion, the rite may have been performed to wish for a child rather than for safe parturition, as the *engi* also implies. In line with the *dhāraṇī* sutra literature surveyed at the beginning of the article, the bezoar can be seen to function as a wish-granting tool as well. This would not be unusual in the context of imperial rites performed at Daigoji. Brian RUPPERT (2000, 151–77) has discussed how, during the late Heian and early Kamakura periods, there was progressive interest in the worship of wish-fulfilling jewels (*nyoi hōju* 如意宝珠), considered as full-fledged relics. Monks operating at Daigoji were at the center of rites devoted to the creation and transmission of these items, and wrote extensively on their value and on the importance of their preservation. Furthermore, their veneration

33. For a discussion of the origin of Juntei's appellation as the “Buddha Mother,” see GIMELLO (2004).



FIGURE 16. Juntei Hall. Daigoji 醍醐寺, Kyoto. Source: SHIRAKI (2008, 81).

tion was also presided over by royal consorts, including Bifukumon'in 美福門院 (1117–1160) (RUPPERT 2000, 192–229). As wish-fulfilling jewels were produced with valuable materials and precious stones, but also out of substances known to have medicinal efficacy (RUPPERT 2000, 151–77), bezoars could have been ideal objects for this purpose.³⁴

Yet, not all bezoars were considered to have the same value. Their shape and color changes according to the part of the animal in which they are found, and, most importantly, their efficacy depends on whether they are expelled naturally or retrieved postmortem. In the *Gyōrinshō*, Jōnen remarks that bezoars released naturally are the most precious, because, although painful, they do not kill the host. For this reason, they are called “living yellow” (*shōō* 生黄) and are of superior quality. This is apparent from their appearance as well, he claims, being warm but bright, while the ones extracted from a dead ox are yellow like a chick (T 2049, 76.237c1–238a12).

The notion of “living yellow” reminds us of another rare substance for safe childbirth featured in esoteric rites: the “human yellow” (*ninō* 人黄). An attribute of Aizen Myōō, the “human yellow” could be found in the human heart or brain

34. The *Kakuzenshō*, for example, describes the transmission of a jewel, round, black, and measuring three *sun* 寸 (around 9 cm) that was made by combining different fragrances, medicines, silver, and gold into a ball, with a relic inside; this object was then surrounded by an ox jewel, a deer jewel, a crystal, and other pearls (DNBZ 51: 2458a).

and symbolizes a key vital principle shared by different creatures (IYANAGA 2015). The monk Ningai 仁海 (951–1046) explains that just as oxen have “ox yellow” and deer have “deer yellow,” so humans have “human yellow” (T 2536, 79.500C12). This yellow substance is an essence animating human beings and animals alike and can grant all wishes to those who consume it (T 2536, 79.500C14–16). Although Ningai is quoting here from the *Dainichikyō sho* 大日經疏 explaining the power of movement and subjugation that *dākinīs* have because they prey on human yellow, the text also implies that these substances function like wish-granting tools. In fact, Iyanaga Nobumi has recently discussed how in the medieval period Japanese monks interpreted and identified *ninkō* as *nyoi hōju* (IYANAGA 2015, 351–53), an association consistent with conceptions of “ox yellow.” Elaborating on Ningai’s teachings, Kakuzen explains that oxen have within their bodies a jewel called “the king of oxen” (*goō* 牛王), which is extremely subtle and constitutes their essence (*shō* 精). For this reason, the characters “king” and “yellow” are intimately connected, if not interchangeable (DNBZ 49: 1643a). Once again, we are reminded of the jewel-yellow-king association, but this time we can add that the yellow jewel of sentient beings is nothing other than a vital essence.

What better substance to facilitate the successful delivery of a living child? Just like an embryo, the bezoar coalesces and nests in the belly of the ox; just like a fetus it grows and is felt by the hosting body; just like a baby it is released into the world, a living thing, all the more blessed when the “mother” does not die in birthing it. This is the sublime “ox yellow,” the life-giving substance “living yellow.” It is therefore not surprising to find that ox bezoar was not simply provided for royal births, but was offered as a gift. According to the *Kōwa gannen osan buruiki*, on occasion of the birth of prince Munehito 宗仁 (the future Emperor Toba), the vice-minister of military affairs Fujiwara no Tsunetada 藤原経忠 (1075–1138),

... offered several gifts to the newborn: a metal dagger to cut the umbilical cord; an ox bezoar; bright red honey, and licorice. He then cut the umbilical cord with the dagger, while the head physician prepared the other drugs and offered it to Lady Suetsuna 季綱, the wife of the *sashoben* Fujiwara no Akitaka 藤原顕隆, who, in turn, gave it to the wet nurses. (ZGR 33: 531b)

Even though in this case, the text does not explicitly indicate how to use these products, coeval accounts surveyed earlier confirm they were employed to facilitate the first breastfeeding of the child. Gifting an ox bezoar at birth thus held multiple values. If this association of bezoar-child can look like sympathetic magic, the semantic web in which the term “bezoar” is entangled allows for a further interpretative step, directly related to the royal context in which these rites were performed. Thus, given the ontological and visual overlap of the active

principle (the bezoar), the symbolic function (the wish-granting gem) and the desired outcome (regal power), it is precisely this “living yellow” that can give birth to a “living king.”

Empowering Matter(s)

In the esoteric Buddhist tradition, *kaji* is a key procedure that allows the blessing and attribution of power to different substances, tools, and objects. This power is predicated on the assumption that the rite can transform an object into an “alternative body” of the Buddha. In this context, the empowering process is understood as being mediated by the ritual practitioner, who is able to actualize the transfer of the Buddha’s power onto something else. The answer to the questions “who does the empowering?” or “who empowers matter?” is generally a straightforward one: the *ajari*. As mentioned in the introduction, while at a doctrinal level this interpretative framework cannot be overlooked, it does not immediately account for the targeted choice of specific substances and objects to be employed in ritual practices.

The Japanese religious context allows for the presence of objects endowed with qualities that make them empowering tools in their own right; for example, relics are generally thought to charge their surrounding environment and containers, or to enliven statues and other objects. However, the present investigation into the social and organic dimensions of ox bezoars has shown that even modest, simple, or seemingly defiled materials can have, for other reasons, this function too.

On the one hand, a bezoar is part of a network of exchanges and uses through which it acquires a social life, however shaped by its engagements with human agents who “encode things with significance” (APPADURAI 1986, 5). As my analysis has shown, these agents belong to different social strata if not to different cultural contexts, geographical locations, and even times. Sometimes they are aware of each other’s interpretations and employments of bezoar, as in the case of different authors of *pharmacopeia* and ritual manuals; sometimes they are not. Therefore, considering *kaji* as the only manipulation that grants efficacy to the bezoar not only oversimplifies the characteristics and status of this substance. Confining ox bezoar to one context of use only, this approach also overlooks the dynamics that led to the creation and performance of a ritual using a specific substance over another. Instead, shifting focus on the bezoar “in motion”—that is, on its multiple uses, interpretations, as well as on its circulation—can inform us of the broader intellectual, human, and social dimension of the ritual practice itself (APPADURAI 1986, 5).

At the same time, there is also an aspect of bezoar that seems to disrupt the notion that the life of matter is only possible through an attribution of a derivative agency, even when the object is part of multiple interactions. This challenge

comes from the very process of formation and natural expulsion of the bezoar, during which the substance slowly and inexorably changes without the need of interference by human agents. From a collection of debris, to a stone, and eventually to powder, these changes, considered together, make for another biography of bezoar that is not social but purely material. To use Tim Ingold's reflections on stones, the quality of the object derives from the object's "involvement in its total surroundings—including you, the observer—and from the manifold ways in which it is engaged in the currents of the lifeworld" (INGOLD 2007, 15). This type of processual reshaping informs the material dimension of the bezoar in a unique way, but also actively affects the ways in which the object is perceived, interpreted, and eventually utilized. In considering the object embedded in a broader lifeworld, which includes but is not limited to a narrative of use, circulation, and disposal, a bezoar, just like any other thing, can produce meaning even when nothing is actively done with it. For this reason, part of the power of the ox bezoar originates with its own coming into being, with its own formation. We can thus talk about a power of the bezoar, which is not simply the result of something that is attributed to it or put in it, but that rather is enmeshed with it.

The social and biological lives of the bezoar encompasses the formation of organic debris in the body of the animal, the process of petrification that creates the stone, its expulsion or extraction (its coming into the world, so to speak), its handling by outcasts, perhaps tainting it with the type of pollution derived from the contact with death, and its transmission to an individual or institution, whether an imperial office or a temple, which sanctions its introduction into a specific market of luxury goods. Precious and humble, healing and dangerous, fascinating and disgusting, the ox bezoar situates itself not solely at the receiving end of an act of ritual empowerment, but concomitantly at the origin and center of it.

Finally, there is an uncanny continuity between the organic dimension of ox bezoar and its materiality which makes it an empowering object, rather than an object of empowerment. Just as the actual gallstone of an ox is not made of just one thing, but of multiple organic products petrified into a bright, egg-like stone, so the *goō* is, at a conceptual level, a combination of different things: a medicine, an organic formation, a gem, a wish-fulfilling jewel, a symbol of royal power, a life-giving substance. While each of these interpretations is the result of a specific way in which ox bezoar has interacted with its surroundings, the totality of them eludes the control of any single external agent. It is here, in the unstable, problematic, defiling, miraculous, blessed, and pure nature of ox bezoar that we can understand its affinity with childbirth. From the gut of an ox to the genitals of a royal consort, the bezoar materializes a coming to life that can never be controlled, only hoped for.

REFERENCES

ABBREVIATIONS

- DNBZ *Dai Nihon Bukkyō zensho* 大日本仏教全書. 151 vols. Tokyo: Bussho Kankōkai, 1912–1922. Reprint. Ed. Suzuki Gakujutsu Zaidan 鈴木學術財団. 100 vols. Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1970–1973.
- ST *Shiryō taisei* 史料大成. Sasagawa Taneo 笹川種郎 and Yano Tarō 矢野太郎, eds. 43 vols. Tokyo: Naigai Shoseki, 1934–1944.
- SZKT *Shintei zōho, kokushi taikei* 新訂増補・国史大系. 66 vols. Kuroita Katsumi 黑板勝美 and Maruyama Jirō 丸山二郎, eds. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1929–1964, 1964–1967.
- T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. 85 vols. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaikyoku 渡辺海旭, eds. Tokyo: Issaikyō Kankōkai and Daizō Shuppan, 1924–1934.
- TZ *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō zuzō* 大正新脩大藏經圖像. 12 vols. Ed. Ono Genmyō 小野玄妙. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1933–1934.
- ZGR *Zoku gunsho ruijū* 続群書類従. 37 vols. Hanawa Hokiichi 塙保己一 and Ōta Tōshirō 太田藤四郎, eds. 3rd ed. Tokyo: Zoku Gunsho Ruijū Kanseikai, 1957–1959.
- ZZGR *Zokuzoku gunsho ruijū* 続々群書類従. 16 vols. Ed. Kokusho Kankōkai 国書刊行会. Tokyo: Kosho Hozonkai, 1906–1909.

PRIMARY SOURCES

- Asabashō* 阿娑縛抄. Comp. Shōchō 承澄. DNBZ 35–41.
- Azhapōju guishen dajiang shangfo tuoluoni jing* 阿吒婆拘鬼神大將上仏陀羅尼經. T 1238, 21.
- Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目. By Li Shizhen 李時珍. 6 vols. Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1940.
- Byakuhō kushō* 白宝口鈔. Comp. Ryōson 亮尊. TZ 3119, 6.
- Byakuhōshō* 白宝鈔. Comp. Chōen 澄円. TZ 3191, 10.
- Da yaocha nu huanxi mubing aizi chengjiu fa* 大藥叉女歡喜母并愛子成就法. Trans. Amoghavajra. T 1260, 21.
- Daigoji engi* 醍醐寺緣起. DNBZ 117: 246–52.
- Fo shuo qi juzhi fomu Zhunti daming tuoluonijing* 仏說七俱胝仏母准提大明陀羅尼經. Trans. Vajrabodhi. T 1075, 20.
- Fo shuo suiqiu jide dazizai tuoluoni shenzhou jing* 仏說隨求即得大自在陀羅尼神呪經. Trans. Baosiwei 宝思惟. T 1154, 20.
- Gyōrinshō* 行林抄. Comp. Jōnen 靜然. T 2409, 76.
- Helidimu zhengyenjing* 訶利帝母真言經. Trans. Amoghavajra. T 1261, 21.
- Hishō mondō* 秘鈔問答. Comp. Raiyu 賴瑜. T 2536, 79.
- Iryakushō* 医略抄. By Tanba no Masatada 丹波雅忠. ZGR 31: 120–30.

- Ishinpō* 医心方. By Tanba no Yasuyori 丹波康頼. 7 vols. In *Nihon koten zenshū* 日本古典全集. Ed. Masamune Atsuo 正宗敦夫, vol. 69. Tokyo: Nihon Koten Zenshū Kankōkai, 1978.
- Jakushōdō kokkyōshū* 寂照堂谷響集. By Unshō 運敞. DNBZ 149: 1–188.
- Jinguangming zuishengwang jing* 金光明最勝王經. T 665, 16.
- Jiu Tang shu* 旧唐書. By Liu Xu 劉昫. Beijing: Zhong Hua Shu Ju, vol. 16, 1975.
- Kakuzenshō* 覺禪鈔. Comp. Kakuzen 覺禪. DNBZ: 45–51.
- Kinhira kōki* 公衡公記. By Saionji Kinhira 西園寺公衡. 3 vols. *Shiryō sanshū* 史料纂集. Tokyo: Zoku Gunsho Ruijū Kanseikai, 1968–1974.
- Kōgū osan tōjitsu shidai* 后宮御産当日次第. ZGR 33: 542–49.
- Kōwa gannen osan buruiki* 康和元年御産部類記. ZGR 33: 530–41.
- Kōyakashō* 香藥抄. By Shōgen 勝賢. DNBZ 51: 2634–47.
- Pubian guangming qingjing chicheng ruyibao yinxin wunengsheng damingwang dasuiqiu tuoluonijing* 普遍光明清淨熾盛如意宝印心無能勝大明王大隨求陀羅尼經. Trans. Amoghavajra. T 1153, 20.
- Qi juzhi fomu suoshuo Zhunti tuoluonijing* 七俱胝仏母所說准提陀羅尼經. Trans. Amoghavajra. T 1076, 20.
- Qianshou qianyan Guanshiyin pusa zhibing heyao jing* 千手千眼觀世音菩薩治病合藥經. T 1059, 20.
- Ryō no shūge* 令集解. 2 vols. Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1913.
- Sakeiki* 左經記. By Minamoto no Tsuneyori 原經頼. Tokyo: Nihon Shiseki Hozonkai, 1915.
- Sankaiki* 山槐記. By Nakayama Tadachika 中山忠親. 3 vols. ST 19–22.
- Shoku Nihongi* 続日本紀. SZKT 2.
- Shoson zuzoshō* 諸尊圖像鈔. By Shinkaku 心覺. National Diet Library Digital Collection.
- Shōtoku Taishi denshiki* 聖德太子伝私記. ZZGR 17: 27–112.

SECONDARY SOURCES

AMINO Yoshihiko 網野善彦

- 1989 Yūjo to hinin, kawaramono 遊女と非人、河原者. In *Sei to mibun: Jakusha, haisha no seisei to hiun* 性と身分—弱者・敗者の聖性と悲運, ed. Miyata Noboru 宮田 登, 93–128. Tokyo: Shunjūsha.

ANDREEVA, Anna

- 2014 Childbirth in aristocratic households of Heian Japan. *Dynamis* 34: 357–76. doi.org/10.4321/s0211-95362014000200005
- 2017 Childbirth in early medieval Japan: Ritual economies and medical emergencies in *Procedures During the Day of the Royal Consort's Labor*. In *Buddhism and Medicine: An Anthology of Premodern Sources*, ed. Pierce C. Salguero, 336–50. New York: Columbia University Press.

APPADURAI, Arjun

- 1986 Introduction: Commodities and the politics of value. In *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai, 3–63. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

BARROSO, Maria Do Sameiro

- 2013 Bezoar stones, magic, science and art. *Geological Society, London, Special Publications* 375: 193–207. doi.org/10.1144/sp375.11

BEGHI, Clemente

- 2011 The dissemination of esoteric scriptures in eighth-century Japan. In *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, Charles D. Orzech and Henrik Hjørt Sorensen, eds., 659–82. Leiden: Brill.

BORSCHBERG, Peter

- 2010 The Euro-Asian trade in bezoar stones (approx. 1500 to 1700). In *Artistic and Cultural Exchanges between Europe and Asia, 1400–1900*, ed. Michael North, 29–43. London: Routledge.

CHEN, Hsiu-fen

- 2006 Wind malady as madness in medieval China: Some threads from the Dunhuang manuscript. In *Medieval Chinese Medicine: The Dunhuang Medical Manuscripts*, ed. Vivienne Lo, 345–62. London: RoutledgeCurzon.

CHIJIWA Itaru 千々和 到

- 2006 *Nihon no ofuda bunka: Gōfu, Goō hoō'in no shiryō ron* 日本のおふだ文化—護符、牛玉宝印の資料論. *Kokushigaku* 187: 1–7.

COPP, Paul F.

- 2014 *The Body Incantatory: Spells and the Ritual Imagination in Medieval Chinese Buddhism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

CRUIJSEN, Thomas, Arlo GRIFFITHS, and Marijke J. KLOKKE

- 2012 The cult of the Buddhist *dhāraṇī* deity Mahāpratisarā along the maritime silk route. *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 35: 71–157.

DESPEUX, Catherine

- 2010 *Médecine, religion, et société dans la Chine médiévale: Étude de manuscrit de Dunhuang et de Turfan* [Medicine, Religion, and Society in Medieval China: A Study of the Chinese Manuscripts from Dunhuang and Turfan]. 3 vols. Paris: Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises.

DOLCE, Lucia D.

- 2010 The contested space of Buddhist public rituals: The *Shunie* of Tōdaiji. In *Grammars and Morphologies of Ritual Practices in Asia*, Axel Michaels et al., eds., 433–58. Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag.
- 2011 Taimitsu rituals in medieval Japan: Sectarian competition and the dynamics of tantric performance. In *Transformations and Transfer of Tantra in Asia and Beyond*, ed. Istvan Keul, 329–64. Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter Publishers.

DROTT, Edward

- 2010 Gods, Buddhas, and organs: Buddhist physicians and theories of longevity in early medieval Japan. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 37: 247–73. doi.org/bft8

FURTH, Charlotte

- 1999 *A Flourishing Yin: Gender in China's Medical History, 960–1665*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

GERHART, Karen M.

- 2009 *Material Culture of Death in Medieval Japan*. University of Hawai'i Press.

GIMELLO, Robert M.

- 2004 Icon and incantation: The goddess Zhunti and the role of images in the occult Buddhism of China. In *Images in Asian Religions: Text and Contexts*, Phyllis Granoff and Koichi Shinohara, eds., 225–56. Vancouver: UBC Press.

GOBLE, Andrew

- 2011 *Confluences of Medicine in Medieval Japan: Buddhist Healing, Chinese Knowledge, Islamic Formulas, and Wounds of War*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

GOLDSCHMIDT, Asaf Moshe

- 2011 *The Evolution of Chinese Medicine: Northern Song Dynasty, 960–1127*. London: Routledge.

GRAPARD, Allan G.

- 2017 *Mountain Mandalas: Shugendo in Kyushu*. London: Bloomsbury.

HAYEK, Matthias

- 2006 Abe no Seimei (921–1005) and illness: Physicians, masters of the way of the Yin and Yang, and monks in ancient-medieval narratives (11th–13th centuries). *Sokendai Review of Cultural and Social Studies* 2: 43–52.

HIDAS, Gergely

- 2012 *Mahāpratisarā-Mahāvidyārājñī, The Great Amulet, Great Queen of Spells. Introduction, Critical Editions and Annotated Translation*. New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan.

INGOLD, Timothy

- 2007 Materials versus materiality. Extracted notes. *Archaeological Dialogues* 14: 1–16.

IYANAGA, Nobumi

- 2015 “Human yellow” and magical power in Japanese medieval Tantrism and culture. In *Transforming the Void: Embryological Discourse and Reproductive Imagery in East Asian Religions*, Anna Andreeva and Dominic Steavu, eds., 344–419. Boston: Brill.

LEE, Jender 李貞德

- 2000 Wet nurses in early imperial China. *Nan Nu: Men, Women and Gender in Early and Imperial China* 21: 1–39. doi.org/10.1163/156852600750072295
- 2004 “Yinxinfang” lun “furen zhubing suo you” ji qi xiangguan wenti 『醫心方』論「婦人諸病所由」及其相關問題 [The origins of women’s disorders and related issues in the *Ishinpō*]. *Qinghua xuebao* 34: 479–11.
- 2005 Childbirth in early imperial China. *Nan Nu: Men, Women and Gender in Early and Imperial China* 7: 216–86. doi.org/10.1163/156852605775248658
- 2012 *Ishinpō* and its excerpts from Chanjing: A Japanese medical text as a source for Chinese women’s history. In *Overt and Covert Treasures: Essays on Sources for Chinese Women’s History*, ed. Clara Wing-chung Ho, 185–216. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.

LOMI, Benedetta

- 2015 Dharanis, talismans, and straw-dolls ritual: Choreographies and healing strategies of the *Rokujikyōhō* in medieval Japan. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 41: 255–304. doi.org/bbsb
- 2017 The ox-bezoar empowerment for fertility and safe childbirth: Selected readings from the Shingon ritual collections. In *Buddhism and Medicine: An Anthology of Premodern Sources*, ed. Pierce C. Salguero, 351–57. New York: Columbia University Press.

LUO Xiwen (trans.) and Li Shizhen (1518–1593)

- 2003 *Compendium of Materia Medica*. 6 vols. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press.

MARCON, Federico

- 2015 *The Knowledge of Nature and the Nature of Knowledge in Early Modern Japan*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

MATSUI, Akira

- 2012 The use of livestock carcasses in Japanese history: An archaeological perspective. In *Coexistence and Cultural Transmission in East Asia*, Naoko Matsumoto, Hidetaka Bessho, and Makoto Tomii, eds., 127–39. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.

MEEKS, Lori Rachelle

- 2010 *Hokkeji and the Reemergence of Female Monastic Orders in Premodern Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press.

MILLER, Daniel

- 2005 *Materiality*. Durham: Duke University Press.

NAGAHARA, Keiji

- 1979 The medieval origins of the *eta-hinin*. *Journal of Japanese Studies* 5: 385–403. doi.org/10.2307/132103

NAITŌ Sakae 内藤 栄

- 2011 *Shari to hōju* 舍利と宝珠. *Nihon no bijutsu* 539. Tokyo: Gyōsei.

- NAPPI, Carla S.
 2009 *The Monkey and the Inkpot: Natural History and its Transformations in Early Modern China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- ORZECCH, Charles D., Henrik Hjort SORENSEN, and Richard Karl PAYNE
 2011 *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*. Leiden: Brill.
- RAMBELLI, Fabio
 2007 *Buddhist Materiality: A Cultural History of Objects in Japanese Buddhism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- RUPPERT, Brian D.
 2000 *Jewel in the Ashes: Buddha Relics and Power in Early Medieval Japan*. Cambridge: Harvard East Asian Monographs.
- SATŌ, Hiroo
 2003 Wrathful deities and saving deities. In *Buddhas and Kami in Japan: Honji Suijaku as a Combinatory Paradigm*, Mark Teeuwen and Fabio Rambelli, eds., 95–114. London: RoutledgeCurzon.
- SCHAFFER, Edward H.
 1985 *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand: A Study of Tang Exotics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- SHIRAKI Toshiyuki 白木利幸, ed.
 2008 *Saigoku sanjūsansho kannon junrei no hon* 西国三十三所観音巡礼の本. Tokyo: Gakushū Kenkyūsha.
- SIVIN, Nathan
 2015 *Health Care in Eleventh-Century China*. London: Springer.
- STRICKMANN, Michel
 2002 *Chinese Magical Medicine*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- SUZUKI, Yui
 2014 Twanging bows and throwing rice: Warding off evil in medieval Japanese birth scenes. *Artibus Asiae* 74: 17–41.
- TAMBIAH, Stanley J.
 1984 *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets: A Study in Charisma, Hagiography, Sectarianism, and Millennial Buddhism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- TŌNO Haruyuki 東野治之
 1977 *Shōsōin monjo to mokkan no kenkyū* 正倉院文書と木簡の研究. Tokyo: Hanawa Shobō.
- TRIPLETT, Katja
 2012 Magical medicine? Japanese Buddhist medical knowledge and ritual instruction for healing the physical body. *Japanese Religions, Special Issue: Religion and Healing in Japan* 37: 63–92.

- 2014 For mothers and sisters: Care of the reproductive female body in the medico-ritual world of early and medieval Japan. *Dynamis* 34: 337–56.

UNSCHULD, Paul U., and Jinsheng ZHENG

- 2012 *Chinese Traditional Healing: The Berlin Collections of Manuscript Volumes from the 16th through the Early 20th Century*. Leiden: Brill.

VERSCHUER, Charlotte von

- 2006 *Across the Perilous Sea: Japanese Trade with China and Korea from the Seventh to the Sixteenth Centuries*. Ithaca: Cornell University.

WILMS, Sabine, trans.

- 2016 *The Divine Farmer's Classic of Materia Medica: Shen nong bencao jing*. Corbett: Happy Goat Productions.

WINFIELD, Pamela D.

- 2005 Curing with *kaji*: Healing and esoteric empowerment in Japan. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 32: 107–30. doi.org/bf3h