

REVIEWS



Fumiaki Miyazaki, Kate Wildman Nakai, and Mark Teeuwen, eds. *Christian Sorcerers on Trial: Records of the 1827 Osaka Incident*

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THIS EXCELLENT volume offers a valuable addition to the field of Japanese religious studies and to our understanding of early modern Japanese history more broadly. Through an annotated translation of authentic documents related to the Keihan Incident, a late Tokugawa-era trial for sorcery in the Kyoto-Osaka area, the authors paint a comprehensive picture of commoner society in urban centers in the Edo period and the role of Kirishitan religion within it, as well as a snapshot of the Japanese judiciary system of the time. The translated and annotated documents presented in *Sorcerers on Trial* include court proceedings, testimonies, commentaries by the prosecutor, the sentence for each accused, a list of the measures taken against them, and three different popular accounts of the incident, as well as a range of additional materials such as maps and illustrations. In this respect, the book aligns with a range of recent scholarly works that investigate aspects of Tokugawa society by presenting a significant amount of translated source materials in a relatively unfiltered way, such as the volume *Lust, Commerce, and Corruption: An Account of What I Have Seen and Heard, by an Edo Samurai* (Columbia University Press, 2014), also edited by Miyazaki, Wildman Nakai, and Teeuwen in collaboration with Anne Walthall and John Breen, or Amy Stanley's *Stranger in the Shogun's City: A Japanese Woman and Her World* (Scribner, 2020).

Through its translations of the proceedings from the trial against a group of practitioners of the *jashūmon* 邪宗門 (pernicious creed) that took place in Osaka in the years 1827–1829, *Christian Sorcerers on Trial* presents us with a compelling

picture of the complex role of this “domesticated foreign religion” at a time when it seemed to have been all but eradicated in the late Edo period. Earlier Shogunal and domainial investigations into groups of religious practitioners that scholars today consider to be *kakure Kirishitan* 隠れキリシタン (underground Christians), held in the Kyushu region, where the religion continued to be practiced in increasingly modified forms, had abandoned the vocabulary of anti-Christian discourse in favor of generic references to deviant beliefs. By contrast, the Osaka magistracy insisted on identifying the practices of the accused as Kirishitan, condemning their crimes specifically as a violation of anti-Christian law. For this reason, as the book’s introduction convincingly argues, the incident acquired important symbolic significance beyond its minimal social impact, notably because it coincided with the arrival of Western warships in Japanese waters, thus reviving the perception of a foreign threat. The incident was therefore featured in the writings of anti-Western scholars from the Mito domain, such as Aizawa Seishisai, for example, who referred to it as a sign that the Christian threat was still alive. He and others also presented the incident as supporting evidence in their argument against accepting the demands of the United States to open Japanese ports to foreigners for trade.

The most fascinating aspect of the book is the picture of the Kirishitan religion that emerges from the testimonies of the accused and their relations, on the one hand, and the institutional and popular response to them on the other hand. The sorcery practiced by the accused appears to share elements in common with Japanese hidden Christians’ rituals, notably the hybridization of Christian and Shinto elements, like spiritual purification through water. But it also comprises elements that are heterogenous to it, and which are derived from other popular practices, notably *Yijing* 易經 and Inari 稲荷 divination. The accused pretended to be practitioners of these popular practices. The prosecutors’ attempt to tease out the specifically Kirishitan elements of these practices thus highlights interesting contradictions in the Tokugawa institutional approach to Christianity. A recurrent theme both in the testimonies and in the prosecutor’s argument is that Inari divination could not have been as effective as the Kirishitan sorcery, and that the economic and social success of the accused was ultimate proof that they were guilty of practicing the pernicious creed.

One of the most intriguing examples of these contradictions, both on the part of the practitioners and on the part of the institutions, is the way in which the accused accessed knowledge about the forbidden religion. They traveled all the way to Nagasaki to participate in the *fumie* 踏み絵 ritual of treading on an image of the Virgin Mary, so as to prove their rejection of the Christian faith. The accused engaged in the *fumie* to witness the image with their own eyes, and with hopes to increase their magical power. The episode encapsulates the complex interplay of deception and belief that characterizes *kakure Kirishitan*

practices and institutional responses to them. The significance of this episode was not lost on the shogunal authorities, who ordered the reference to the *fumie* to be excised from the final draft of the proceedings. The editors' critical analysis of three different manuscript copies of the documents concerning the investigation and judgment, discussed in one of the appendixes, is vital in highlighting the significance of this element for our understanding of the role of Kirishitan religion in the late Tokugawa.

The book contains many more compelling instances of these complexities that make it a rich source of critical reflections for scholars of religions in Japan. It also offers excellent teaching materials, making available in English a plethora of authentic documents from the time, each framed by a clear introduction that outlines its circumstances of production and reception. These introductions also support the reader in positioning the materials in their context. Furthermore, the English translation balances well between readability and faithfulness to the tone and structure of official documents of the time, rendering the text engaging also for non-specialist readers without detracting from the book's accuracy and scholarly value. Overall, this is a brilliant volume. *Christian Sorcerers on Trial* is not only a very useful resource, both for specialists of Japanese religions and for scholars of early modern Japanese history, but also a captivating read for a general audience.

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