

Reviews

Felicia Gressitt Bock. *Engi-shiki: Procedures of the Engi era*. Tokyo: Sophia University Press. Vol. 1: 1970. Hardcover. 216 pp. including background essays, appendixes, bibliography, index. ¥3,500 in Japan, \$12 in U.S.A. Vol. 2: 1972. Hardcover. 190 pp. including introductions, map of the provinces, table of measurements, diagram of intervals of day and night, appendixes, bibliography, index. ¥3,000 in Japan, \$10 in U.S.A.

It is a satisfaction to have these two handsome volumes in print, for they make readily available in English translation texts that illumine important aspects of early Japanese civil and religious administration.

The *Engi-shiki* or "Procedures of the Engi era" (A.D. 901-922) are a body of official regulations drawn up by the Japanese authorities, on Chinese models, as supplements to the Taihō and Yōrō Codes of the early eighth century. In their entirety the *Engi-shiki* are comprised of fifty books, but the part of most relevance today is the first section of ten books having to do with matters falling under the jurisdiction of the Jingikan (in rough translation the "Department of Shinto": that governmental agency which supervised all affairs having to do with Shinto or the kami tradition). In two volumes Mrs. Bock has given us her translation of these first ten books, together with explanatory essays and introductions.

Volume one begins with four introductory chapters. In them Mrs. Bock first examines "The development of law in Japan," then proceeds to discuss "The *Jingi-kan*" as well as "The cult of the Sun Goddess" (the chief Shinto kami or divine spirit). The fourth introductory chapter is an overview of the contents of the *Engi-shiki*. Here Mrs. Bock discusses the language of the text and describes each of the first five books. After these introductory chapters we come to the body of the text, books one through five in this first volume. Volume two continues directly with the translation, covering books six through ten. Each book is introduced with an explanatory essay.

Mrs. Bock's is not the first *Engi-shiki* translation, but in some ways it is the best. Her up-to-date critical commentaries are very useful for understanding the role of the Engi "procedures" in the Japanese socio-historical scene of their time. Moreover, covering as it does the first ten books of the *Engi-shiki*, hers is by far the fullest translation

we yet have.

The first and most translated section of the *Engi-shiki* into English is book eight, which contains the *norito* or ritual prayers offered to the sacred kami spirits. Book eight was first translated by Ernest Satow, who read his translation before the Asiatic Society of Japan in three segments, at meetings in Yokohama between November 1879 and May 1881. It appears in the *Transactions* of the society.

A much more readable and somewhat more accessible English translation of the same book by Donald Philippi was published in pamphlet form by the Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics under the title *Norito: A new translation of the ancient Japanese ritual prayers* (1959). In addition to these segments, the only part of the *Engi-shiki* to be translated into English, to my knowledge, consists of material from book seven on early Japanese religious practices, appearing in Daniel Holtom's *Japanese enthronement ceremonies* (1972).

Mrs. Bock has given us an eminently readable translation. It should be understood, of course, that there are very few "literary" passages in these documents. The greatest part of them consist of bureaucratic instructions: names of kami spirits to be revered in the various festivals; interminable lists of offerings for formal presentation; instructions for the participation of government and shrine officials, etc. But one is impressed that infinitely detailed care has been devoted to these rituals, a fact suggestive of the importance attached to the role they played in Japanese politico-religious life. Occasionally, in the midst of the administrative minutiae, there shines through a passage of lyric power and beauty. It is particularly in such instances that one is thankful for Mrs. Bock's translation.

Let me compare translations of the same passage. The very first *norito* ("ritual prayer") in book eight is the one offered during the *toshigoi matsuri*, an agricultural festival celebrated in early February. The Satow translation, though presumably accurate, is tortuous. It is loaded, moreover, with terms that demand continual reference to the notes. His rendition of the first *norito* begins as follows (1879a, p. 109, notes excluded):

He says: "Hear all of you, assembled kaïnushi and hafuri."

He says: "I declare in the presence of the sovran gods, whose praises by the word of the sovran's dear progenitor's augustness and progenitrix, who divinely remain in the plain of high heaven, are fulfilled as heavenly temples and country temples.

And so it goes. Very hard to follow.

Donald Philippi's more recent translation (1959, p. 17, italics in original) is a distinct improvement:

Hear me, all of you assembled *kamu-nusi* and *hafuri*. Thus I speak.

The *kamu-nusi* and *hafuri* together respond: "ôô."

The same below whenever "Thus I speak" occurs.

I humbly speak before you,

The Sovereign Deities whose praises are fulfilled as

Heavenly Shrines and Earthly Shrines

By the command of the Sovereign Ancestral Gods and Goddesses

Who divinely remain in the High Heavenly Plain:

This year, in the second month. . . .

Philippi explains technical Japanese terms in his notes, but referring to them is something of an interruption for the average reader.

Mrs. Bock's translation (1972, p. 66, italics in original) reads yet more smoothly:

Oh ye assembled shrine chiefs and all ye priests, hearken unto what we say. (Shrine chiefs and all priests are to respond "Ooh!" to this and to all succeeding pronouncements.)

Before the mighty ancestral gods and goddesses who augustly reside in the Plain of High Heaven, before the many *kami* enshrined in heaven and earth, we raise our words of praise; and to the mighty *kami* we make bold to say: In this second month of this year, at the beginning of the sowing of seed, with choice offerings from the divine descendant at this moment of the majestic and brilliant dawning of the morning light, we humbly raise our words of praise.

I have quoted more from Mrs. Bock's translation than from the others, as it reads so well. One reason for this is that, though her work includes explanatory notes in full, it is not burdened with many Japanese terms in the translation itself. The purist might call for the use of more Japanese expressions. Where to draw the line is a problem; the solution will depend much on what sorts of readers one is translating for. In today's economy, when scholarly books are expected to sell, there is of course increased pressure for more readable work, including translations; and who is to say that, on balance, this is not a good thing. Wisely, I believe, Mrs. Bock decided to hold untranslated Japanese terms to a minimum. In consequence her work should be more useful to a larger number of readers.

Unfortunately, Mrs. Bock's work is somewhat marred by typographical errors, as well as by numerous changes she made in the translation after it had been published. These she conscientiously

presents in a list of corrigenda which should accompany the books wherever they are sold. One can only speculate, but it almost seems as if Mrs. Bock showed the translation to some (presumably Japanese) expert after the manuscript had gone to press, at a time when it was too late to change the original type. However regrettable, these changes nevertheless reflect Mrs. Bock's conscientious approach to her scholarly task. Whatever the awkwardness, she was determined that the translation should be right—and after all, that is what matters most in the end.

I cannot conclude these remarks without putting in a word for my own conviction regarding how we should speak of religious phenomena. I refer to the reification of thought reflected in the use of the nominal term "religion" itself. Wilfred C. Smith, in *The meaning and end of religion* (1963), has shown how we historians tend to convert the dynamic, living flow of past events into hardened conceptual entities. One way we do this is to use nominal terms when adjectival expressions are available to us. For example, if we would speak, wherever possible, of "the Shinto religious tradition" instead of "the Shinto religion," we would avoid some of the hard conceptualization into which we force events in the process of labeling them. This would enable us to retain more of the living reality itself.

One more point about the use of language. I personally prefer the term "indigenous" to "native" in referring to the Shinto tradition. Even here, of course, the complex pattern that came to be called "Shinto" should not properly be called *the* Japanese indigenous tradition. It is merely the most indigenous of the religious strands imported to the islands beginning with prehistoric times.

I am sure Mrs. Bock knows this history well. But her putting it the way she does in her preface (1970, p. v), where she speaks of "this native—or *kami*—religion," permits a blurb writer to carry it over onto the jacket as the "native (*kami*) religion." Thus we end up with a native religion which is neither strictly native nor, according to my lights, a "religion." So it is that small distortions are perpetuated in the historical record.

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