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Edward KAMENS, *The Three Jewels: A Study and Translation of Minamoto Tamenori's Sanbōe*. Michigan Monograph Series in Japanese Studies, Number 2. Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1988. xii + 446 pp. ISBN 0-939512-34-3. Cloth, \$29.95.

In 984, Minamoto Tamenori completed his *Sanbōe* 三法絵 (Illustrations of the Three Jewels) and presented it to Sonshi, an imperial princess who had just become a nun, as a guide to her understanding and practice of Buddhism. Tamenori himself was not a monk but a poet whose education included the study of Buddhism. The work, therefore, was written by a layman for a layman who had only recently given up that status. It was designed to be easily understood, and even contained illustrations which have not, unfortunately, survived to our time. It is an important document precisely because it is not a technical treatise, and it gives us an accurate reflection of what educated lay persons understood about Buddhism in the Heian period.

Edward Kamens, assistant professor of Japanese language and literature at Yale University, has produced an excellent translation of *Sanbōe* accompanied by important background information. In his "Short History of *Sanbōe*," Kamens tells us about Sonshi, Tamenori, the various texts, and the place that *Sanbōe* occupies in relationship to other literary works. In Chapter 2, "A Reading of *Sanbōe*," Kamens gives a detailed summary of the text, discussing its sources, motifs, major ideas, and unique characteristics. The reader is thus well prepared for the text itself in three volumes, one for each of the Three Jewels: the Buddha, the Teachings, and the Clergy.

Tamenori's general preface makes it clear that these stories are basically didactic. As if fearing that she might miss the point, or that she might still not be convinced of the wisdom of her decision to become a nun, Tamenori advises,

exhorts, and argues to convince her that the world she has abandoned was worth discarding: “forget it and pray.” Sonshi must now give up secular *monogatari* with its foolish stories of plants and animals that are made to speak, and take up a sacred literature of even greater miracles.

The stories about the Buddha are patterned after *jātaka* tales to illustrate the virtues of perfection. These wondrous tales evoke the mythic times, places, and characters of a magical cosmos. In his preface to the first volume Tamenori describes the Buddha as one who hears all prayers, speaks but is not always heard, walks on water, and lives forever in heaven and our hearts [p. 102]. It is clear that for Tamenori the Buddha was less of a teacher and more of a maker of miracles.

The second volume on the Teachings is remarkable for its lack of discussion of the teachings, perhaps because, as Tamenori explains in his preface, “the Buddha’s teachings were entirely lost” in India, and “declined once more” in China [p. 166]. Fortunately the teachings “have come to rest here in our land, where they now flourish!” What is important, however, is not philosophical content, but the magical power of the scriptures to destroy ignorance and the cycle of birth and death in those who hear the sūtras or chant them but once. It is necessary, therefore, not to discuss doctrines but their miraculous virtues exemplified in the lives of believers. All of the entries in the volume on Teachings are of people who experienced “the miraculous power of the *Heart Sūtra*” [p. 210] or the “great power of the Mahāyāna sūtras” [p. 229].

In the preface to the third volume on the Clergy, Tamenori praises the “admirable virtues” of monks and nuns [p. 243]. He does this by telling stories of the activities for which the clergy is admired: ceremonies and rituals. Here again Tamenori is explicit about the rites as the means to cure illness, achieve longevity, become a buddha, increase one’s merit, and so forth.

The message to Sonshi is simple and clear: Buddhism is a religion of miracles wrought through its founder, teachings, and practices. This was, and may still be, the common understanding of Buddhism in Japan. Kamens’s book makes a significant contribution to our understanding not only of the centrality of magical thinking in tales and legends, but also about the manner in which it is intertwined with the classical literature of the Buddhist tradition and Japan.

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