

The Ideology of Landscape and the Theater of State Insei Pilgrimage to Kumano (1090-1220)

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The Kumano shrines were among the most popular pilgrimage sites of medieval Japan, drawing devotees across geographic, sectarian, class, and gender barriers. Yet this pilgrimage, which is often seen as a paradigmatic and formative example of Japanese popular religion, was instituted by the country's ruling elite as an elaborate ritual of state. This essay examines the origins of Kumano pilgrimage in the Insei period to suggest how ideological concerns informed religious practices. By exploring the historical context of early Kumano pilgrimage, it argues against the notion of pilgrimage as an activity that levels status and power and offers an example of Japanese pilgrimage as an expression of political and cultural authority.

History begins at ground level, with footsteps.
— Michel de Certeau

Ideology per se might well be said to consist
primarily in a discourse upon social space.
— Henri Lefebvre

BETWEEN THE YEARS 1090 AND 1220, four of Japan's emperors, after abdicating the throne and establishing themselves in private cloisters (*in* 院), undertook a total of nearly one hundred pilgrimages to the Kumano shrines in the southern reaches of the Kii Peninsula. Visiting the three Kumano shrines—the Hongū 本宮, located deep in the mountains; the Shingū 新宮, thirty-five kilometers downstream where the Kumano River empties into the Pacific; and Nachi 那智, another twenty kilometers south in the hills above the sea—entailed a two-hundred-kilometer round trip from the capital that lasted between twenty and thirty days and required a week of preliminary purifications. Carried out in the highest style, with an immense outlay of cash, ceremony, and human labor, these royal progresses were among the most elaborate religious and political spectacles of their day. Clad

in the white robes of Buddhist renunciants, retired emperors traveled with the staff of their private offices (*in no chō* 院の庁) and were attended by grand processions of state ministers and courtiers, priests and poets, consorts and servants. Combining a conspicuous display of social status and Buddhist devotion with a public articulation of the very economy of the body politic, Kumano pilgrimage represented the circulation of both symbolic and material capital. The imperial parties held literary gatherings en route and offered up their verses together with sutras and treasures at the ninety-nine subsidiary shrines that lined the road from the capital to Kumano. Precious commodities and estate holdings were bestowed upon the Kumano shrines, while food, labor, and transportation services were provided by provincial governors as rites of tribute owed to their imperial patrons. As a ritually enacted system of exchange, the pilgrimage served as a mechanism for maintaining relations between court and regional elites yet exacted a heavy toll on the local populace. In one case farmers were reported to have fled to the mountains and forests in order to escape the harsh levies imposed to fund these aristocratic pilgrims (SHINJŌ 1963, p. 18).

In 1118, to meet the needs of the retired emperor Shirakawa, over eight hundred men and nearly two hundred horses were commandeered from each of the provinces through which his party passed (*Chūyūki*, Gen'ei 1/9/22). Toba, on his journeys of 1147 and 1148, drew support from the Kamino-Makuni estate in northern Kii of which he was the patron. Fujiwara no Narimichi, the estate's proprietor and an officer of Toba's *in no chō*, ordered rice, sake, miso, oil, salt, vinegar, firewood, charcoal, serving vessels, and horses to be dispatched to five separate lodging places on designated days during the pilgrimages (MIYACHI 1990, p. 63; TODA 1990, pp. 142-44). The sheer quantity of rice alone must have been a heavy burden on the predominantly forested and mountainous estate, not to mention the forced labor exacted from the peasantry. Local residents, rather than workers from the capital, comprised the mobile corps of servants who transported and prepared the provisions for imperial pilgrims. Similar duties were imposed in 1142 and 1151 on the residents of the Fujiwara *sehkanke* 摂関家 held estate of Yoshinaka, which had the misfortune of being located along the pilgrimage route. Imperial authorities were apparently unmoved by the estate manager's plea that recent floods and poor harvests had left the farmers "starving to death" (*Heian ibun*, vol. 6, no. 2728; TODA 1990, pp. 150-52).

So large were their entourages that one courtier who remained in the capital during Go-Shirakawa's pilgrimage of 1169 lamented that

the imperial court was left as if entirely unpopulated (*Heihanki*, Ninnan 4/1/7). Another, in the age of Go-Toba, complained that the pilgrimage had caused aristocrats and warriors alike to neglect the affairs of state (*Meigetsuki*, Kenryaku 2 [1212]/9/26). Imperial pilgrims were attended by the leading cultural and political figures of their day. In 1160 Taira no Kiyomori accompanied Go-Shirakawa and received dream revelations from the Kumano deities indicating their divine pleasure with the verses dedicated to them by the retired sovereign (KWON 1986, pp. 289–90). Fujiwara no Teika joined Go-Toba on his pilgrimage of 1201 and in his account of the ritual process recorded the ceremonies, performances, and poetry competitions held along the way (*Go-Tobain Kumano gokōki*). The nearly one hundred pilgrimages to the Kumano shrines made by four abdicated emperors serve almost as an index and chronology for this century of “cloistered rule”: Shirakawa went twelve times, Toba twenty-three, Go-Shirakawa thirty-four, and Go-Toba twenty-nine. Before Shirakawa only ex-emperor Uda and Kazan made the journey, and after Go-Toba, with the *in*'s dramatic fall from power, the practice dropped off as suddenly as it began.

How are we to understand the continual pilgrimage to Kumano by retired emperors at the beginning of Japan's medieval age? What are we to make of the sheer excess, the overproduction, the relentlessness of such ritual display? No single reason can explain more than one hundred years of activity by four different individuals. Spiritual, economic, and even military motivations were surely involved, and yet none of these alone provide a compelling enough answer. In their grand scale and minute detail, these royal progresses engaged so many realms of the social order that to search for a solitary cause would miss the complexity and indeed the very logic of practice. In what follows I hope to show that the strategies that drew abdicated sovereigns to so distant a religious goal may be revealed by the details of the pilgrimage itself, by the age in which it flourished, and by the mythic values that invested this site with such spiritual currency. By exploring the institutional and discursive conjunctions between Buddhism and kingship in twelfth-century Japan, I will suggest how a new position of authority was sought by emperors who had to leave the throne in order to claim it. In drawing out the multiple meanings expressed by imperial pilgrimage to Kumano, I hope not simply to state the obvious, that religious, cultural, and political power were inseparable in premodern Japan, but rather to indicate the historically contingent instances in which such a coarticulation was both possible and necessary.

The early involvement of ruling elites in what has been generally regarded as a marginal and popular religious practice raises as well a number of issues for historians of Japanese religion. Besides drawing our attention to the role of Buddhism in the construction of imperial power, a subject that has been emphasized by Kuroda Toshio and others, it also forces us to rethink some of our more common assumptions about pilgrimage both in Japan and cross-culturally. Perhaps most at odds with the evidence of imperial pilgrimage to Kumano is Victor Turner's notion that pilgrimage is a paradigmatic example of *communitas*, "a liminal phenomenon which combines the qualities of lowliness, sacredness, homogeneity, and comradeship" (TURNER and TURNER 1978, p. 250). For Turner, pilgrims "are stripped of status and authority, removed from a social structure maintained and sanctioned by power and force, and leveled to a homogeneous social state" (p. 249). Yet in the case of imperial journeys to the Kumano shrines, which marked the beginning of and set the patterns for later pilgrimages to Kumano and other sites, the opposite seems to be true. Kumano pilgrimage served to enforce rather than dissolve social distinctions; it represented not the negation of power and force but its very articulation. The pilgrimage was not generated out of populist *communitas* but created at the highest levels of Japan's political and ecclesiastical institutions. Kumano was one of the most visited pilgrimage sites of medieval Japan. Saigyō, Ippen, Izumi no Shikibu, Gofukakusa In Nijō, and Hōjō no Masako were among its more famous devotees, and pilgrims became so numerous as to be likened to a trail of ants (*ari no Kumano mōde* 蟻の熊野詣で). Yet the elite and explicitly political origins of the pilgrimage suggest that it was more a product of the center than of the periphery. Far from being a simple expression of folk piety, Kumano pilgrimage was from the start a consciously constructed ritual of state. To understand its unique appeal for abdicated sovereigns we must look to the convergence between the political culture of the late Heian court and the religious prospect of the Kumano shrines.

The Political Landscape

Although the twelfth century is often characterized as an age of decline at court, marked by palace coups, open warfare, natural disasters, and a belief in the currency of *mappō* 末法, the final corrupt period of the Buddhist Dharma, it witnessed also an increase in imperial power and the growth of an estate system through which traditional factions were able to maintain control over the land even as their command over the organs of state seemed to be shrinking. While the

cast of political players may have fluctuated throughout this period, the ultimate figure of authority, or rather the form in which authority was figured, proved remarkably constant. The emperor remained the central legitimizing symbol of governance, the aegis that could transform force into authority. Political struggle in this age has been likened to “a human chess game where the object was to capture the king—but the king could not be removed from the board” (HURST 1976, p. 35). And with an adroit “feel for the game, for a particular, historically determined game” (BOURDIEU 1990, pp. 62–63), retired emperors proved to be proficient players for over a century. Countering the matrimonial politics of the Fujiwara *sekkanke* with strategically timed abdication, they maintained control of imperial succession and remained the power behind the throne. As a result of the efforts of the retired emperors Shirakawa, Toba, Go-Shirakawa, and Go-Toba, the imperial house held more prestige, wealth, and actual political influence in this century than at any other period in the history of Japan (HURST 1976, pp. 212–13). The Insei period was thus one in which abdicated sovereigns fought to raise their economic and political might to the level of their symbolic authority.

This is not to suggest that the abdicated monarchs went unchallenged—indeed, retired sovereigns were often at the heart of late-Heian and early-Kamakura power struggles—but simply that ex-emperors proved more embattling than embattled. Their campaigns were waged on multiple fronts: economic, political, and cultural. In their efforts to revive imperial fortunes, retired emperors not only manipulated offspring, accumulated provincial clients, and compiled estate portfolios; they also engaged in a great deal of religious and cultural production. They commissioned Buddhist art works, studied and held performances of music and dance, compiled national histories and poetry anthologies, built and rebuilt temples and shrines, and undertook a staggering number of religious pilgrimages. The construction and contestation of authority extended to all forms of imperial activity by they legislative decrees, juridical arbitrations, poetic competitions, architectural aggrandizements, religious rituals, or doctrinal debates. One need not subscribe to the position “that pilgrimage is above all an arena for competing religious and secular discourses” (EADE and SALLNOW 1991, p. 2) to admit that imperial pilgrimage might have had a meaningful place in the political as well as the religious landscape of the Insei period.

In light of the political conditions of the age, in which the court’s authority was continually threatened by the armed forces of temples and shrines, it is tempting to interpret Kumano pilgrimage in terms of

military goals. In this view, Shirakawa's initial journey of 1090 might be seen as an attempt to cultivate the allegiance of Kumano's warrior monks as a bulwark against those of Enryaku-ji (KAMATA 1976, p. 12). Kumano after all represented a formidable military power throughout the Insei period and was institutionally linked with Onjō-ji, Enryaku-ji's Tendai rival. Yet the Kumano shrines were to defy as often as defend the imperial court.

The infamous practice of *gōso* 強訴, petitioning the court through forceful protest, was first perpetrated by Kumano monks. In 1082 more than three hundred Kumano monks entered the capital with their shrine palanquin to protest the murder of one their brethren by an official of the administrative headquarters of Owari Province (*Fusō ryakki*, Eihō 2/10/17). Later, in the ninth month of 1104, armed Kumano monks again entered the capital, this time to protest the crimes of the provincial governor (*Chūyūki*, Chōji 1/9/25). Ten days later they are reported to have rioted in Uji, leaving one man dead and seven others under arrest (*Denryaku*, Chōji 1/10/5). Go-Shirakawa is said to have admitted only three things beyond his control: the roll of the dice, the flood waters of the Kamo River, and the armed monks of Enryaku-ji. This dubious honor was apparently not limited to the residents of Mt. Hiei. In 1157 Go-Shirakawa ordered an end to the violence perpetrated by the monks of Kumano as well as those of Enryaku-ji, Onjō-ji, Kōfuku-ji, and Kimpusen (MIYAKE 1992, p. 24). The Kumano shrines had long controlled the Inland Sea's maritime routes used by traders, pirates, and naval forces (NAKAMURA 1990, p. 20). In 1114 the imperial police had presented the Kumano *bettō* 別当 with a decree to pursue and capture pirates along the Nankaidō (*Denryaku*, Eikyū 2/8/16). Kumano had in this capacity forged early alliances with the Taira, whose subjugation of piracy on the Inland Sea helped to fuel the clan's rise to power.

But the Genpei War brought about changes in Kumano's military allegiances. According to the *Azuma kagami*, the Kumano monks fought fiercely as Genji partisans in 1181. They attacked Taira forces on Kakiri Island in the Nankaidō and in Ise and Shima provinces. The monks seized and burned homes along their path, killed Taira warriors, and took women and children hostage when forced to retreat (*Azuma kagami*, Jishō 5/1/5 and 1/21; SHINODA 1960, pp. 203-204). In response to these attacks the Heike sent Taira no Yorimori and Taira no Tamemori to hunt down and kill the shrine forces (*Gyokuyō*, Jishō 5/9/28; *Hyakurenshō*, Jishō 5/10/16). When a senior Kumano priest went over to the Heike side, the shrines retaliated with a punitive attack on his son and retainers (*Gyokuyō*, Jishō 5/10/11). Within the

war literature of the period such internecine conflicts were given a more epic scale. The Genpei warfare, according to the *Heike monogatari*, began with a three-day battle between one thousand men under the Kumano Hongū *bettō*, Tanzō, fighting for the Taira against two thousand troops of the Shingū and Nachi, who took the Minamoto side. Later, on the oracular command of the Kumano deities, Tanzō defected to the Genji cause and led the Kumano navy's participation in the battle of Dan no Ura.¹ Kumano remained a significant military force in the retired emperor Go-Toba's bid to overthrow the Kamakura bakufu in 1221. But again the shrines' leaders were divided. Some supported the retired emperor, some supported Kamakura, and others waited out the Jōkyū War seeking self-preservation through neutrality.²

Because of the inconstancy of the Kumano forces and the vicissitudes of the imperial court throughout this period, military strategy provides at best a piecemeal explanation for over a century of pilgrimage by retired emperors. But if the Insei is best understood in terms of the competition for power in the late Heian period, characterized by literary, artistic, and religious, as well as explicitly political contestations, then perhaps the ritual activities of abdicated sovereigns should be seen as attempts to “transform their power into a legitimate authority and to ground it, beyond their military might, in symbolic—often religious—terms” (OOMS 1985, p. 17). It may thus prove more illuminating to view the ideological strategies of Kumano pilgrimage as “a continuation of warfare by other means” (p. 228). It is precisely because political authority in medieval Japan was represented and justified by religious ritual that the religious and political activities of retired emperors cannot be so easily disaggregated. To insist that imperial pilgrimage to Kumano was either one or the other, either symbolic display or economic exchange, either spiritual quest or military plan, would be to miss the source of its power. Such a view would only enforce rather than transcend “the classic disjunctions between expressive and instrumental action, between ideology and practice, between power as pomp and power as control of resources and people” (TAMBAH 1985, p. 321). In order to gain a more comprehensive

¹ For the *Heike* accounts see McCULLOUGH 1988, pp. 138, 372. Cf. *Azuma hagami*, Jishō 5/3/6; SHINODA 1960, pp. 212–13. Tanzō was the uncle of Minamoto no Yoritomo. The conflicts between the Hongū and Shingū and their respective military allegiances were not historical fictions. Tanzō of the Tanabe *bettō* lineage had been affiliated with the Heike since aiding Taira no Kiyomori in the Heiji Disturbance.

² On Kumano's Jōkyū allegiances and repercussions, see MIYAKE 1992, p. 22. Even after Jōkyū, Kumano remained a major military player in the warfare of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

understanding of such practices we must ask how retired emperors sought not only to profit from the economic and military resources that pilgrimage offered but also to mine the rich store of symbolic wealth that lay beneath Kumano's religious landscape.

The Religious Landscape

In the *Nihon shoki* of 720, Kumano appears at the very point of Japan's mythic origins. Kumano is associated with Japan's cosmogonic deities and legendary first emperor. It represents at once the cradle and sepulchre of the imperial cult. The genealogies of the Kumano deities include the creator gods Izanagi and Izanami as well as their offspring Susano-o and Amaterasu. According to the *Nihon shoki*, Izanami, who died after giving birth to the deity of fire, "is buried at the village of Arima in Kumano in the province of Kii" (ASTON 1956, p. 21). Her tomb is identified as a cavern near the Kumano Shingū shrine where "the inhabitants worship the spirit of this goddess by offerings of flowers [and] with drums, flutes, flags, singing, and dancing" (pp. 21-22). The Shingū's Hayatama deity was born of Izanagi out of the purifications performed after encountering Izanami's corpse (p. 31). Susano-o, the tempestuous brother, spouse, and rival of the sun goddess Amaterasu, is also linked to the shrines. He, too, dwelt in the mountains of Kumano before joining his mother in *Ne no kuni* 根の国, the land of origins (p. 59). A twelfth-century source was to later explicitly identify the Hongū's Ketsumiko deity as Susano-o and Nachi's Fusumi deity as his mother Izanami (*Chōgan kanmon* 1940, p. 314). Kumano's close ties to the first family of Japanese myth are further illustrated by rare eleventh-century sculptures of Izanami, Izanagi, and Amaterasu housed at the Shingū (KANDA 1985, p. 66). Kumano figured not only as the dark and forbidding land of death but also as the legendary birthplace of the imperial line, the turning point in Jinmu Tennō's eastern campaign. It was here that Japan's first emperor vanquished local resistance to the Yamato state and its "hereditary institution" (ASTON 1956, p. 116). When Jinmu's forces were nearly overcome at Kumano, a man named Kumano Takakuraji revealed to the Heavenly Grandchild a divine sword by which he "subdued the land" (p. 115). When Jinmu's army lost their way in the trackless Kumano mountains, Amaterasu sent a divine crow to guide them to victory.

Imperial recognition of the shrines themselves date from the mid-ninth century. According to the *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* the Hongū and Shingū deities were raised from Junior Fifth Rank, Lower Grade to

Junior Fifth Rank, Upper Grade in 859/1/27. Four months later, in 859/5/28, they were further elevated to Junior Second Rank, and after another four years, in 863/3/2, to Senior Second Rank. The next promotion came in 909/10/2, the day before the retired emperor Uda set off for the first pilgrimage to Kumano undertaken by an abdicated sovereign. In the *Engi shiki* of 927, the Hongū is listed as a *myōjin taisha* 名神大社 (great shrine of a principal deity) and the Shingū as a *taisha* 大社 (great shrine) and in 940/2/1 the two shrines were granted the very highest court rank in reward for prayers performed for the subjugation of pirates (MIYAKE 1992, pp. 1–2). Thus from its earliest documentary appearance the Kumano cult was tied to imperial institutions. Its deities were recognized in court registers and enjoyed the economic perquisites attendant such rank. The shrines prospered through service to the state and the attentions of royal pilgrims.

These imperial associations, however, were later compounded by Buddhist traditions. In 1086, for example, Fujiwara no Shinshi, the highest-ranking female official in the imperial palace, commended a number of parcels of tax-exempt lands to the Nachi shrine in the hope of gaining a more favorable rebirth. Nachi was to receive this gift because, in the words of her commendation, “the Kumano deities are manifestations of Amida and Kannon (*Kumano gongen Mida Kannon suijaku* 熊野権現弥陀観音垂迹)” (*Kumano Nachi Taisha Monjo*, v. 5, p. 17).³ The use of the terms “*gongen*” (provisional manifestation) and “*suijaku*” (manifest trace) indicate the currency of *honji suijaku* 本地垂迹 thought, in which local deities were presented as native forms of buddhas and bodhisattvas. The documentary context of this claim, located as it is within a conveyance of land rights, suggests the institutional ramifications of such a doctrinal position. KURODA Toshio has argued that the theory of *honji suijaku*, developed by powerful temple-shrine complexes such as Kumano, also expressed the hierarchical relationships between main and branch temples and shrines and their disparate agricultural estates (1983, pp. 12–13). *Honji suijaku* was as much a practice as a theory and Shinshi’s contribution to Nachi’s portfolio of Buddha-lands (*butsudo* 仏土) offers a materialist corollary to the theological process in which the territories of local gods were transformed into Buddhist domains.

Within this reconfigured arena Hongū’s Ketsumiko deity, Shingū’s Hayatama deity, and Nachi’s Fusumi deity were seen respectively as traces of Amida Nyorai (Amitābha), Yakushi Nyorai (Bhaisajya-guru)

³ See also HAGIWARA 1983, p. 252; MIYACHI 1985, p. 71; MURAYAMA 1974, pp. 150–51; WAKAMORI 1972, p. 312.

and Senju Kannon (Avalokiteśvara), buddhas and bodhisattvas who promised salvation in the present life and the life to come. Their presence marked the Kumano shrines as sacred sites of a second order, places both transformed and transformative, in which Buddhist cosmologies were naturalized into the local terrain. As the deities of the Hongū, Shingū, and Nachi shrines were equated with Amida, Yakushi, and Kannon, so too were their precincts imagined as the pure lands (*jōdo* 浄土) of these buddhas and bodhisattvas. Behind the manifestly visible shrine compounds lay a latent and invisible world of Buddhist paradises: Amida's Gokuraku, Yakushi's Jōruri, and Kannon's Fudaraku.

Refiguring Kumano's landscape from the memorialized realm of Izanami and Jimmu to Amida and Kannon's land of rebirth was the work of centuries of ritual practice. As early as the Nara period religious ascetics had entered the Kumano mountains to convert its wilderness into habitable spaces and narrative sites: the *topoi* of Buddhist legends. Place-names were reformulated in terms of a Buddhist vocabulary, Buddhist images were carved directly into cliffs, rocks, and trees, hermitages and stupas were erected, and the mountains' paths were seen as pilgrimage routes to the Pure Land. Under the guidance of mountain priests, retired emperors traveled to Kumano, mimetically dressed in the white robes of Buddhist renunciants, to visit these local paradises, to establish karmic bonds with the resident deities, and to make preparations for rebirth in paradise.

Kumano was an important stage for the ritualization of death and rebirth so characteristic of late Heian religious culture. Sites of mediation between present and future worlds marked the beginning and the end of the pilgrim's route. At Shitennō-ji, believed to be the eastern gate to the Pure Land, devotees visualized Amida in the sun as it set over the ocean, and some even drowned themselves there to assure their immediate rebirth. From the shores of the Nachi shrine, Buddhist priests were cast adrift in boats that were little more than floating coffins. Sealed inside the craft's cabin, itself constructed as a Buddhist funeral ground, these pilgrims to the other world hoped to reach Kannon's island paradise across the sea.⁴ In what was conceived

⁴ An episode from the *Heike monogatari* offers a grim but vivid picture of Kumano as just such a gateway to the Pure Land. After the defeat at Dan no Ura, Taira no Koremori made a pilgrimage to Kumano in order to end his life. He visited the three principle shrines and prayed: "Take my life and help me in the afterworld. May Amida Buddha, who manifests himself as a god of this shrine, lead me to the Pure Land in accordance with his vow to save all mankind." He then set out in a small boat from Nachi to drown himself. The accompanying priest assured him of his imminent rebirth in paradise: "Though you may expect to sink to the bottom of the blue sea, you will surely mount a purple cloud." Koremori faced west, joined his palms, chanted the nenbutsu one hundred times, dove into the ocean, and

as the final age of the Buddhist Law, other pilgrims with a religious desire heightened by apocalyptic anxiety traveled to Kumano to bury Buddhist scriptures, images, and ritual implements. One hundred and fifty-three sutras and forty-seven mirrors engraved with Buddhist images have been excavated from the Nachi shrine and over a hundred sutras and images from the Shingū shrine (MIYAKE 1978, pp. 206–10). As early as the tenth century the mountain tomb of Izanami at the Shingū had become the focus of sutra burials dedicated to Miroku (Maitreya), the buddha of the next age, thereby transforming the site into a shrine to both an imperial past and a Buddhist future (*Ionushi*, p. 720). Such sutra burials betray a double trajectory of wishfulness: preserving the Buddhist institution until the return to a new golden age and requesting the devotee's more immediate rebirth in the Pure Land. These two goals, one concerned with the salvation of the Dharma and the other with the salvation of the self, were both expressed in the prayers accompanying sutra burials. A similarly dual quest—on the one hand, for an individual salvation that looks to the future and, on the other, for an institutional regeneration that looks back to an idealized past—is implicit as well in the aspirations of Kumano's imperial pilgrims. In an era that recognized a growing equivalence between Buddhist eschatology and imperial chronology, between the age of the latter Dharma (*mappō*) and that of the latter reigns (*masse* 末世, *matsudai* 末代), an acute sense of historicism was shared by priests and aristocrats alike. For retired emperors, who hoped to fashion a new age out of the old, the present appeared both as crisis and opportunity.

Imperial Itinerancy and Grounded Authority

The inaugural pilgrimage of the Insei era was made by the retired emperor Shirakawa in 1090. Shirakawa's guide was the son of Gondainagon Fujiwara no Tsunesuke, the Tendai priest Zōyo, who had served as the protector-monk (*gojisō* 御寺僧) of the retired emperor since 1074. On the occasion of this pilgrimage Shirakawa conferred the rank of Bridge of the Law (*hokkyō* 法橋) on the Kumano *bettō* Chōkai and commended three hundred acres of land to the Kumano shrines. He also instituted the office of *Kumano sanzan kengyō* 熊野三山檢校 (Overseer of the Kumano shrines) and appointed Zōyo to

drowned with Amida's name on his lips. See McCULLOUGH 1988, pp. 347–50. Koremori's suicide finds a parallel in an *Azuma kagami* entry of 1233 relating that a certain Chijōbō, sealed within a tiny boat, crossed the sea to Kannon's Paradise from Kumano's Nachi bay. See GORAI 1967, pp. 155–56. On this practice, known as *fudaraku tokai*, see TOYOSHIMA 1990, pp. 54–73.

this post, and later to that of chief abbot (*chōri* 長吏) of Onjō-ji.⁵ The *Kumano sanzan kengyō*, nearly always a high-ranking priest from Onjō-ji, would serve as the pilgrimage guide for retired emperors throughout the Insei period. He acted as officiating priest for the sutra services, offerings, and purifications before and throughout the pilgrimage, answered religious questions, and oversaw the regime of ablutions undergone at the rivers, inlets, and beaches along the route. Beneath the *Kumano sanzan kengyō* was the Kumano *bettō*, who administered the shrines' land holdings and had immediate jurisdiction over the shrine priests, temple monks, *yamabushi*, and military police. This post as well was appointed by imperial order and the *bettō* received income from land commensurate with his priestly rank. Chōkai's elevation to *hokkyō* in 1090 may in part explain the retired emperor's generous commendation of that year. In 1119 Shirakawa granted an additional fifty fields in five provinces (*Chūyūki*, Gen'ei 2/9/17). By these acts—the commendation of lands, the elevation of priestly ranks, the establishment of administrative posts, and the institutional linking of Kumano and Onjō-ji—Shirakawa set the pattern by which Kumano's economy and institutions would be bound to imperial fortunes.

The rites of Kumano pilgrimage began many days before the actual departure from the capital with the abdicated sovereign's removal to the Toba-dono in a procession throughout the entire length of the city (*Meigetsuki*, Shōji 2 [1200]/11/22). The selection of the Toba-dono as the first stage of the ritual performance was significant. This detached imperial palace was constructed by Shirakawa in the year of his abdication. Funded by special taxes on all of the provinces, with land contributed by both courtiers and commoners, and building materials presented by provincial governors in order to gain reappointment to their posts, the project was such an elaborate undertaking that contemporary accounts likened it to a relocation of the capital (*Fusō ryakki*, Ōtoku 3 [1086]/10/20; HURST 1976, pp. 133–34). It was to this great palace, situated on three hundred acres of landscaped grounds beside the Kamo River, replete with boat landings, moats, gardens, pavilions, and chapels, that retired emperors secluded themselves for the period of purification and abstinence in preparation for the pilgrimage.⁶ Shirakawa instigated this practice with his

⁵ On the relations between Shirakawa and Zōyo see KAMATA 1976, p. 10. Onjō-ji was the headquarters of the Jimon branch of the Tendai sect. A list of the officeholders and guides is given in TAKEZONO 1990, pp. 117–22.

⁶ This period was known as *Kumano goshōjin* 熊野御精進. The term *shōjin* translates *vīrya*, one of the six *pāramitās*, and signifies exertion in the virtues of the Buddhist path. See IMAI 1990 and TAKEZONO 1990, p. 109.

first pilgrimage of 1090, three years after the palace was built (*Chūyūki*, Kanji 4/1/16).

The temporal and spatial boundaries of the pilgrim's progress were defined by a combination of Taoist, Shinto, and Buddhist traditions. The commencement and duration of imperial confinement was geomantically determined by a Taoist court diviner, or *on'yōji* 陰陽師. For five to seven days the retired sovereign remained set apart in a sanctified hall known as the *Kumano shōjinya* 熊野精進屋 marked off by sacred rope and surrounded by barriers of folding screens and hanging blinds (*Shumeimon'in Kumano gokōki*, Jōgen 4 [1210]/4/17). During his seclusion the ex-sovereign received purifications, performed ablutions, and made offerings to his *sendatsu* 先達, or priestly guide.⁷ Buddhist sutra services were held along with ceremonies for the kami.⁸ As the moment of departure was calculated by the *on'yōji*, any deviance from it was highly inauspicious, and the royal party was occasionally forced to set off in the midst of rainstorms (*Chūyūki*, Chōjō 3 [1134]/1/13) or even when the retired emperor suffered from body aches and chills (*Chōshūki*, Chōjō 3 [1134]/10/6). Having exchanged his robes of office for the costume of a *yamabushi* ascetic—white priestly robes, silk *kesa*, hood, leggings, straw sandals, and walking staff—the ex-sovereign set off at dawn, his path lit by pine torches (*Chōshūki*, Daiji 5 [1130]/11/27 and 12/1; see also *Honchō seiki*, Kōji 2 [1143]/2/5).

The pilgrims sailed down the Yodo River from the Toba-dono to the port at Kawajiri, in present-day Osaka, and continued by horseback, palanquin, boat, and foot through the provinces of Settsu, Izumi, and Kii. They followed the coastal road along the Kii peninsula and then climbed the mountain paths from Tanabe toward the Kumano Hongū shrine. Their first stop was Shitennō-ji, the temple of the Four Heavenly Kings, that commemorated the military origin of Japan as a Buddhist state under the paradigmatic Buddhist royal, Shōtoku Taishi. Here the imperial pilgrims venerated Buddhist relics and held sutra services into the night (MIYAKE 1992, p. 75). The pilgrims next visited the Sumiyoshi shrine, whose deity was revered as the god of poetry. The Sumiyoshi deity also shared Shitennō-ji's martial associations, having led the Empress Jingū in her assault on Silla.

⁷ The purifications, known as *kaijo* 解除, were performed by *on'yōji* during *goshōjin* but also by *sendatsu* along the pilgrimage route. On their joint pilgrimage of 1134, Toba and Taikenmon'in were each accompanied by their own *on'yōji* (*Chōshūki*, Chōjō 3/10/20).

⁸ "Sutra services" translates the term *kyō kuyō* 經供養. Ceremonies for the kami were referred to as *goshinji* or *kamigoto*. For the *kyō kuyō* performed before one of Shirakawa's pilgrimages, see *Chūyūki*, Tenei 2 [1111]/9/22; for that before one of Toba's, see *Hyakurenshō*, Hōen 3 [1137]/10/15.

Shitennō-ji and Sumiyoshi, which together marked the early stages of the pilgrimage, may be seen as prefiguring the themes of Buddhist kingship, imperial force, and poetic authority that were invoked throughout the journey.

Along the route the pilgrims stopped to rest and worship at the ninety-nine *ōji* 王子, a series of smaller shrines on the road to Kumano.⁹ Offering respite along the journey, the *ōji* shrines served as stages as well for a vast repertoire of cultural and religious performance. Here the imperial pilgrims underwent purifications and made offerings, sponsored sutra readings and prayers, watched dance performances and wrestling matches, dedicated votive plaques and shrine mirrors, presented gold and silver, silk and cotton, and other objects of value from the capital. They also held poetry contests (*uta awase* 歌合) in which the traveling aristocrats challenged each other in displays of literary skill and dedicated their verses to the deities. Literary reputations were made and unmade as matches were recorded in court diaries and winning entries preserved in imperial anthologies. This poetic inscription of the landscape, combining religious devotion and social competition, was an important dimension of Kumano pilgrimage.

More obligatory forms of social performance were also involved. Provincial governors, whose fortunes relied on the patronage of imperial pilgrims, provided the party with temporary accommodations either commandeered or constructed by conscripted labor. From the time of Shirakawa, the levies imposed on provincial governors were converted into contributions for imperial pilgrimage, and the governors of Settsu, Izumi, and Kii bore the duty of escorting and serving the royal party as they passed through their domains. Contributions from the temples, shrines, and powerful families along the route supplemented these costs, but much of the financial support came from the land holdings of the retired emperors themselves and other estates in their path (MIYACHI 1990, pp. 65–67).

In their tours through the countryside royal pilgrims were thus both subjects and objects of devotional acts. Yet the most intense period of ritual activity took place at the Kumano shrines themselves. Here shrine maidens performed religious dances (*kagura* 神樂), Buddhist ascetics competed in exhibitions of spiritual power (*genkurabe* 験比), and the retired emperors honored the Kumano deities with Buddhist texts and ceremonies. The most common of these rites were sutra recitations.¹⁰ On his visits of 1119 and 1127, Shirakawa

⁹ On the history and development of these *ōji* shrines, see TODA 1985, pp. 5–8.

¹⁰ These were generally *tendoku* 転読, or "turning and reading" recitations in which the resident priests displayed the sutras and chanted brief excerpts.

sponsored the recitation of a copy of the *Daihannyakyō*, the six-hundred-fascicle *Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom*, that had been inscribed in gold ink (*Hyakurenshō*, Gen'ei 2/9; *Chūyūki*, Daiji 2/2/18). In 1118 the entire *Issaikyō*, the complete Buddhist canon numbering over five thousand volumes, was recited for his benefit (*Hyakurenshō*, *Chūyūki*, Gen'ei 1/int. 9/22). Shirakawa's visits were marked as well by memorial feasts, known as *sensō kuyō* 千僧供養, held during four of his pilgrimages for the total assembly of monks.¹¹ The retired emperor Toba also sponsored recitations of the *Lotus Sūtra*, *Muryōgikyō*, *Kanfugengyō*, *Yakushikyō*, *Kongōjumyōkyō*, and *Hannyashingyō* on his pilgrimage of 1125. Later, in 1153, he had a gold-ink copy of the *Issaikyō* read (*Hyakurenshō*, *Nimpyō* 3/2/14). Go-Toba, too, held a *Daihannya* service at the Shingū, and at the Hongū sponsored a *Hokke hakkō*, a four-day series of eight lectures on the *Lotus Sūtra* (MIYAKE 1992, p. 80).¹² Kumano was rewarded handsomely for such services. On his pilgrimage of 1134 Toba granted two hundred *koku* of rice to the Hongū priests and thirteen *ryō* of gold to the *bettō* (*Chōshūki*, Chōjō 3/2). By Go-Shirakawa's pilgrimage of 1187 these rice offerings had increased to one thousand *koku* (*Azuma kagami*, Bunji 3/10/3). And on his journey of 1201 Go-Toba presented the shrines with six bolts of silk, one hundred and fifty *ryō* worth of cotton, and three horses (*Go-Tobain Kumano gokōki*).

Kumano found perhaps its greatest patron in the retired emperor Go-Shirakawa, who undertook thirty-four pilgrimages and established the Imakumanosha, a Kumano branch shrine, at his Hosshō-ji palace. In 1160 he granted estates to this shrine and to the Imakumano of the Zenrin-ji temple in Kyoto that had established the Nachi *gongen* as its tutelary deity (MIYAKE 1992, p. 94). Later, in 1181, Go-Shirakawa commended another twenty-eight *shōen* in sixteen provinces to the

¹¹ These were held in Kanji 6 [1092]/3, Kanji 7 [1093]/2, Kōwa 4 [1102]/4, and Daiji 2 [1127]/3.

¹² The *Hokke hakkō*, one of the most popular Buddhist ceremonies among the Heian elite, was held primarily as a memorial service in which the merit accrued was transferred to effect the salvation of the dead. Throughout the Heian period the *hakkō* took on an increasingly public aspect. Aristocrats sought to outshine each other in displays of wealth and status, while priests used these debates to compete for patronage. The *Hokke hakkō* performed in the spring and autumn at the Hongū differed in some significant ways from those of the capital. Known as *kechien hakkō* 結緣八講 (*hakkō* to establish ties with the buddhas), it served to expiate the karma of local hunters and fishermen whose livelihood depended on killing animals. The influence of Shugendō traditions is suggested by the account of these rites given by Minamoto no Tamenori in his *Sanbōe* of 984: "Neither wooden nor metal bowls are used to receive the offerings to the monks. Instead, they receive them in hollowed pieces of wood and put them inside the bags they carry at their waist. The monks who lecture do not wear their usual formal robes; they appear in deerskin coats and leggings" (KAMENS 1988, p. 357). See also TANABE 1984, p. 407.

Imakumanosha and exempted these estates from the taxes and conscripted labor under the jurisdiction of provincial authorities, the emperor, or retired emperors.¹³ With the Kumano deities enshrined at estate holdings across the country, and priests of the Kumano *bettō* line often serving as estate managers, these lands provided the shrines with a financial and operational base as well as a staging ground for the geographic expansion of the cult.

The following case of Yashiro estate in Kai Province is emblematic of the powers that retired emperors lent to Kumano's sacred and economic landscape and also suggests the forms of symbolic value that imperial pilgrims may have found there. Sometime in the late 1140s Fujiwara Akitoki, the governor of Kai Province, in gratitude for the benefits he received from the miraculous power of the Kumano *gongen*, granted the Yashiro estate to Kumano to support the *Hokke hakkō* held at the Hongū. Its status as a shrine holding was clarified when the Kumano *bettō* established the estate boundaries and was upheld a few years later by an edict of the retired emperor Toba exempting it from public taxation and prohibiting any interference by provincial administrators. Yashiro was later augmented by two other nearby estates to contribute to the annual payment of rice to the shrines, and these lands as well were rendered tax-exempt by the retired emperor's edict. However, a new provincial governor was appointed in 1162, after the abdication of Go-Shirakawa, and received a command from the emperor Nijō to put an end to all augmented and newly established estates in the province. His deputy then led an armed force to the Yashiro estate, besieged the Kumano *jinin* 神人, removed the estate's boundary markers, and seized the shrine's annual rice dues. Kumano petitioned the court and received a ruling in its favor that punished the governor with exile and his deputy with imprisonment (*Chōgan kanmon* 1940, pp. 312-14).

The ruling illustrates the enormous power of Kumano's imperial patrons, by which an edict of a retired sovereign was given priority even over a directive of a reigning monarch.¹⁴ Yet even more interesting for our purposes than the court's legal decision was the process of its inquest. The court's investigative report, known as the *Chōgan kanmon* 長寛勘文, quoted from a text entitled the *Kumano gongen gosuijaku engi* 熊野権現御垂迹縁起 (The origins of the Kumano avatars) to argue that the governor's violation of the Yashiro estate constituted an

¹³ The twenty-eight estates included the lands of temples and shrines such as Enchō-ji in Yamashiro, Shōgan-ji in Yamato, and Tsugawasha in Izumi, as well as Shugendo mountains such as Tateyama in Etchū and Hikosan in Buzen. MIYAKE 1992, p. 100.

¹⁴ This seems to contradict Hurst's claim that "imperial government documents were more authoritative than those of the *in no chō*" (HURST 1976, p. 232).

offense against the Kumano *gongen*, a deity equal in status to that of the great shrine of Ise. The *Kumano gongen gosuijaku engi* may seem a rather unusual document to find cited in a land rights dispute. The passages excerpted in the affidavit describe the Kumano *gongen* as originally a Chinese prince and assistant to the lord of Mt. T'ien-t'ai, the Chinese headquarters of Tendai Buddhism. It recounts the deity's flight to Japan and descent on Kyūshū's Mt. Hiko in the shape of a four-foot-high octagonal piece of quartz. The *engi* goes on to relate the *gongen's* residence at other sacred mountains across Japan affiliated with Tendai Buddhism, and finally his manifestation in the form of three lunar discs hanging in the trees at the Kumano Hongū (*Chōgan kanmon* 1940, p. 317).

That such fantastic accounts were accepted as evidence by the highest court in the land in arbitration over governmental edicts, temple offerings, shrine history, tax codes, and the violation of estate boundaries is indeed remarkable. It suggests the very real and, for Kumano, legally binding relationship between miraculous and juridical literature, ritual and economic practices, and religious and political institutions in medieval Japan. The details of this law case also illustrate many of the ideological issues involved in the pilgrimages of retired emperors. The parameters of imperial authority, like the disputed boundaries of Yashiro estate, were marked out through ritual and narrative practices. In both cases claims of dominion were buttressed by acts of public devotion and stories of sacred origins. By invoking the Kumano *engi*, the judgement adduced legal argument from myth. Like the tales of Kumano in the *Nihon shoki*, the *engi* had the function of spatial legislation: adjudicating territorial rights on the basis of a founding narrative.

Yet the court's citation of the *engi* reveals a wider set of associations as well. *Engi* is of course a Buddhist term, a translation of the Sanskrit phrase *pratītya-samutpāda* ("dependent origination"), which denotes the conditioned arising of all phenomena. In medieval Japan, however, *engi* acquired a meaning at once more literal and literary as a genre recounting the Buddhist genealogies of local gods and their sacred sites. The Kumano deities were the subject of two such narratives. In the *Kumano gongen gosuijaku engi* cited in the *Chōgan kanmon*, the origins of the Kumano deities are traced to a Chinese prince in the service of Buddhist traditions. An even more ancient pedigree is claimed by the *Ōmine engi* 大峰縁起, in which the Kumano *gongen* is provided with a lineage that combines Japanese divine ancestry with Indian Buddhist royalty. In this text, the Kumano *gongen* is revealed to have been an ancient king of Magadha, a fifth-generation descendant of

both Amaterasu Omikami and the Buddha Śākyamuni. At the foot of Mt. Ḡḍhrakūta, where the Buddha preached the *Lotus Sūtra*, the Kumano *gongen* was worshiped to protect the royal law. This Indian king had married the daughter of his retainer, who was himself a descendant of the Buddha's disciple Mahākāśyapa, and their progeny became the Shingū and Nachi deities. The Indian avatars, taking the form of shrine mirrors, then flew to Japan, where they were granted the sacred sites of Kumano by both Amaterasu and Jinmu in order to transmit the Buddhist Dharma and protect the imperial law (MIYAKE 1989).

These convoluted family histories reflect something more than literary excess. They belong to a larger project, a reconciliation of religious difference, in which Japanese Buddhists sought to assimilate local traditions. Kumano was after all not an unoccupied territory; its resident deities had an ancestry rooted in Japan's mythic past. The *Ōmine engi*, recognizing its productivity, attempts not to uproot but to graft onto such a noble family tree: the figures of Amaterasu and Śākyamuni are intertwined, and the emperor Jinmu and the Sun Goddess jointly grant the Buddhist *gongen* their blessing.

Religious Politics and Buddhist Emperors

Retired emperors were familiar with this *engi* literature. The *Ōmine engi* was enshrined at the Hongū in 1070 and was viewed by imperial pilgrims ever since Shirakawa's first journey of 1090 (GORAI 1984, p. 208). The recurrent theme in these legends of sacred kingship, and its profoundly syncretic formulations, would not have gone unnoticed by this royal audience. For the Insei era, as we have seen, was a time in which the legitimation of imperial authority was a preeminent concern. It was also an age in which that authority was rooted in a variety of religious traditions. As the descendant of Amaterasu, the emperor was both divine monarch and chief priest of the realm. The unity of religious cult and government administration had long been a feature of Japanese politics, and Buddhism, once incorporated into the apparatus and ideology of the state, provided symbols and rituals of sovereignty as well. Indeed, much of eleventh- and twelfth-century religious discourse was concerned with an ideology of kingship defined in distinctively Buddhist terms: the mutual dependence of imperial law and Buddhist law (*ōbō-buppō sōi* 王法仏法相依). This relationship was likened to the two wings of a bird, or the two wheels of a cart (*Heian ibun* 3, no. 702). In 1113 Toba explained this interdependence as follows:

Ours is the country that upholds the way of the gods and is the

land where Sākyamuni left his traces. The authority of the gods is supported by the authority of the emperor. The brilliance of the gods is increased by the brilliance of the emperor. The gods are not revered in themselves: they are revered by humans. Buddhism does not spread itself; it is spread by humans.
(*Heian ibun* 4, no. 1793)

Toba's formulation suggests an interdependence that favors the imperial position. The *ōbō-buppō* relationship, like that of *honji suijaku*, articulates an identity with an implied hierarchy. It creates distinctions that can be mobilized, and even inverted, for different ends. Locating state authority in an alliance between the gods, the Buddha, and the emperor thus allowed for a certain degree of slippage. A semantic shift in the ideology of kingship can be seen, for example, in changes within the imperial accession rites of medieval Japan. The accession ceremony (*sokuishiki* 即位式) in this period contained an esoteric Buddhist ordination ritual (*sokui kanjō* 即位灌定) in which the emperor received the *mūdra* and *dhāraṇī* of the Buddha Dainichi (Mahāvairocana) during his enthronement (KAMIKAWA 1990). Both the emperors Uda and Go-Sanjō—the former Kumano's first imperial pilgrim, the latter credited with instituting the *insei* system—are recorded as having performed this ritual.¹⁵ Dainichi Nyorai, the Great Sun Buddha, identified through the logic of *honji suijaku* with the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu, seems here to have been given priority in the imperial equation. In 1209 the Tendai prelate Jien would take the account of Go-Sanjō's enthronement as the historical source for equating the emperor with Dainichi, and the union between the sword and jewel of the imperial regalia as representing the unity of Buddhist and imperial law (KAMIKAWA 1990, pp. 249–50).

But this ritual vocabulary of Buddhist kingship was to play an even more central role in the figure of the retired sovereign. However motivated by political or economic concerns it may have been, imperial abdication was portrayed as an eminently Buddhist act. Although no Japanese monarch ever took priestly vows while on the throne, all who abdicated were later ordained and lived out their lives with the tonsure and robes of a monk. By receiving dharma transmission, abdicated sovereigns supplemented imperial with Buddhist lineages. In 899, after receiving the tonsure, Uda was the first abdicated sovereign

¹⁵ The account of Go-Sanjō is the contemporaneous *Go-Sanjōingosokuiki* written by Ōe Masafusa, who served as superintendent (*bettō*) in the cloister government of both Go-Sanjō and Shirakawa and who accompanied Shirakawa on his first pilgrimage to Kumano. The source for Uda is a retrospective account in the *Shūi ōjōden*, compiled by Miyoshi Tameyasu in 1123 (see KAMIKAWA 1990, pp. 247–49).

to assume the title *hōō* 法王 “Dharma emperor,” or “Dharma king.” Uda was also, in 907, the first retired emperor to make a pilgrimage to Kumano. Abdicated emperors with the title *hōō* claimed for themselves this fusion of Buddhist and imperial authority and explicitly articulated, in both word and deed, the interdependence of imperial and Buddhist law.

In a classical formulation of Buddhist kingship, the Dharma emperor Shirakawa declared that “imperial law is the prosperity of the king who relies on the Buddha. The Buddhist law is thus disseminated for the protection of the imperial law” (*Heian ibun*, 5, no. 1993). The king and Buddha are structurally opposed yet mutually reliant figures in a moral economy in which authority circulates between religious and state institutions. The *cakravartin*, or wheel-turning universal monarch, a figure parallel to the Buddha in iconography, legend, and cult, is emblematic of the intimacy between religion and royalty. Śākyamuni was destined to become either a *cakravartin* or a buddha, a world conqueror or a world renouncer, and chose the religious life over his father’s kingdom.

The eleventh-century *Eiga monogatari* characterizes Kazan’s abdication in precisely such terms. Invoking the famous parable from the *Lotus Sūtra*, it describes Kazan as fleeing “the burning house of the three worlds to tread the dewy earth of the four roads.” Like both a buddha and *cakravartin*, “the soles of his feet would soon bear the sign of the thousand-spoked wheel, lotus flowers would blossom in his footsteps, and a place would await him at the highest level of the first class in Amitābha’s paradise.”¹⁶ Kazan was the second imperial pilgrim to Kumano.¹⁷ According to the *Genpei seisuiki*, Kazan visited Kumano three times and in 987, accompanied by sixty attendants, went into seclusion for three years at the Kumano Nachi shrine. While practicing austerities the Dharma emperor is said to have protected the local priests from demons and to have been granted, as a sort of Buddhist supplement to the imperial regalia, a wish-fulfilling gem and a crystal rosary from the dragon god of the Nachi falls (MIYAKE 1992, pp. 9–10; TAKEZONO 1990, p. 106). The early twelfth-century *Ōkagami* describes how on pilgrimage at Kumano, Kazan displayed his “impressive supernatural powers” by overpowering a possessed Kumano monk with a guardian spirit stronger than that summoned by the shrine’s own

¹⁶ McCULLOUGH and McCULLOUGH 1980, vol. 1, p. 133. The thousand-spoked wheel on the soles of the feet are one of the thirty-two bodily marks of a *mahāpurusa* shared only by buddhas and *cakravartin* kings. See the *Lakkhana Sutta* in WALSHE 1987, p. 441.

¹⁷ Kazan, who abdicated in 986, took the Hinayana ordination at Tōdai-ji and the Mahayana ordination at Enryaku-ji (McCULLOUGH and McCULLOUGH 1980, vol. 1, p. 134).

ascetics. "It was natural that such a thing should have happened," the text explains,

since the strength of a person's spiritual powers is influenced by his station in life, not even the most outstanding ascetic can hope to compete with a former Emperor. To the powers accumulated by obeying the Buddhist commandments in a previous existence, His Majesty had added the merit of renouncing the throne to become a monk, which meant that his virtue was beyond calculation. (McCULLOUGH 1980, p. 150)

By exchanging the mantle of state for priestly robes, ex-emperors replaced one form of regalia with another. The silk *kesa* that all imperial pilgrims put on before setting off to Kumano and that most wore throughout their cloistered retirement represented both royal and ascetic status. In Dōgen's words, the *kesa* allows one to "reach the highest rank [and] quickly realize the body of the Dharma king" (FAURE 1995, p. 350)—the very transformation revealed by the Insei emperor's new clothes. As suggested by the Dharma wheels on Kazan's feet, one of the thirty-two bodily marks of both buddhas and universal kings, renunciation only increased the emperor's power. The Dharma wheel, while the common sign of buddhahood and kingship, retains a different symbolic valence for the two figures. For the Buddha, turning the wheel of the Dharma connotes the spread of his teachings, a rolling back of the veil of ignorance. For the *cakravartin*, according to the *Cakkavatti-Sihanada Sutta* (WALSHE 1987, pp. 395–405), it suggests a geopolitical conquest in which all local principalities submit to the king's incomparable moral force as he passes through their lands: a tradition that offers a Buddhist parallel to the *Nihon shoki* account of Jinmu's triumphs at Kumano. Both the wheel of morality and the wheel of dominion are implied by the title *hōō*, and Insei pilgrims relied on the mutual support of Buddhist and imperial symbolism, the two wheels of the royal cart, to propel their quest for spiritual and temporal power. The image of the king in monk's clothing suggests how a Buddhist ritual vocabulary could reinforce, supplement, or even displace traditional forms of state authority.

Paradises Future and Past

If the goal of the *in* was a renaissance of the imperial house and a reclamation of traditional authority, then this project, engaged on several fronts, was conceived of as a return as well as an advance. It entailed a literal rewriting and reconstructing of the imperial past.

Go-Shirakawa, for example, reinstated imperial estate regulations, reconstituted the imperial records office (*kirokujo* 記録所), commissioned the composition of a new national history (*Honchō seiki* 本朝世紀), and rebuilt the imperial palace, which had fallen into disrepair. Go-Shirakawa also undertook to repair the great Nara temple of Tōdai-ji and its *daibutsu* statue, which had been nearly destroyed in 1180 by Taira forces. Originally built by the emperor Shōmu in the eighth century, Tōdai-ji was the hub of a national system of provincial temples and its statue of the cosmic Buddha stood as the symbolic center of this galactic polity. Go-Shirakawa's restoration of this monumental emblem and institutional mechanism of a Buddhist state was an attempt to restore the religious image and authority of imperial rule (GOODWIN 1990). Through a country-wide campaign for support, Go-Shirakawa sought to reinforce his claim of jurisdiction over all of Japan. Assuming the role, and hence the mantle, of Shōmu, Go-Shirakawa, like the eighth-century emperor before him, performed the priestly act of painting in the eyes of the Great Buddha, thereby animating the icon that protected the imperial state and represented its sacred center.

A similar confluence of religious ritual and political theater is, I believe, at the heart of Insei pilgrimage to Kumano. Just as Go-Shirakawa, in rebuilding Tōdai-ji, sought to equate himself and his rule with the ideals of Buddhist kingship and the golden days of the Nara imperium, he and other abdicated sovereigns journeyed to Kumano to claim the religious mandate of their imperial past. In the competition for power and legitimation that characterized the Insei period, ceremonial statecraft, never absent from Japanese politics, assumed an even greater urgency.

Kumano pilgrimage offered an ideal stage for such performances. A surplus of religious meanings rendered Kumano a paradise of both the past and the future, a political as well as a religious utopia: it represented the Pure Land of Buddhist rebirth and the native land of imperial origins combined in a single site. Kumano provided a theater of possibility in which a surfeit of signification was matched by an almost extravagant redundance in the attempt to fix it. In their repeated royal processions through this national landscape (a natural world profuse with historical and religious significance), retired emperors—performing rituals, exacting tribute, asserting status, and mobilizing loyalties—cast themselves as the prime movers in the pageantry of state. Enacting the prerogatives of Buddhist kingship while retracing the route of Jinmu's conquest, imperial pilgrimage to Kumano functioned as one of the leading “ceremonial forms by which

kings take symbolic possession of their realm,” which “locate the society’s center and affirm its connection with transcendent things by stamping a territory with ritual signs of dominance” (GEERTZ 1983, p. 125).

But this was not a “symbolology of power disconnected from the pragmatics of politics and economics” (TAMBIAH 1985, p. 319). For retired emperors “the rituals of state, the historical myths enshrined in the chronicles, and the pattern of politics in these realms were all of a piece” (p. 321). In their pilgrimages to Kumano abdicated sovereigns sought both expressive and instrumental ends. The performative nature of the ritual process is suggested by the poetry it occasioned. Imperial progresses provided an ancient context for literary production. Land-viewing poetry (*kuni-mi* 国見) was an early Japanese practice in which rulers would climb mountains, survey the territory, and, by their gaze and poetic recitation, mark the land as their own (EBERSOLE 1989, pp. 23–44). Mountain pilgrimage and poetry was thus an established method of claiming dominion. Go-Toba returned to this tradition in the *Shinkokinshū* 新古今集, a poetry collection constructed by the emperor himself in an attempt to revive the golden days of imperial dominance and assert the cultural superiority of the court over the Kamakura shogunate (HIROTA 1989, p. 13). In this work Go-Toba gave prominence of place to land-viewing poems and through them sought to forge an identification between himself and the sage kings celebrated in ancient chronicles (pp. 142–43). Go-Toba concluded the *Shinkokinshū*’s Book of Travel with a land-viewing poem of his own, written while on pilgrimage to Kumano, and addressed to its deities, as a prayer for the restoration of imperial rule (p. 158). Go-Toba would not forever be satisfied limiting his political desires to literary expression. Sixteen years after the composition of the *Shinkokinshū* he was to seek imperial restoration through military means, with the help of Kumano forces, in the Jōkyū War of 1221.

But throughout the century before Jōkyū, retired emperors confined their battles to a more ritualized arena. By traveling to Kumano abdicated sovereigns invoked Buddhist and pre-Buddhist traditions in order to naturalize a particular social order, to reconstitute symbolically a political ideal that was no longer self-evident. Like Go-Shirakawa’s restoration of Tōdai-ji and Go-Toba’s compilation of the *Shinkokinshū*, Kumano pilgrimage was a cultural practice shot through with political and religious meanings. Kumano, representing the mythic territory of imperial ancestry as well as the Pure Lands of celestial rebirth, was in every sense a syncretic realm: the place of both kami and Buddhas, of both past and future utopias, of both tradition

and transformation. This overdetermined site offered therefore a powerful goal for imperial pilgrims in search of both institutional preservation and personal salvation, of both restoration and rebirth, in what was seen—in the religious and the political imagination—as the final age.

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