

Hakusan at Hiraizumi

Notes on a Sacred Geopolitics in the Eastern Provinces

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Recent work on Japanese religions has brought into focus the notion of sacred geography as a methodological tool in the analysis of cultic centers throughout the archipelago. This essay proposes a geopolitics of the sacred as an alternative model based on the role of conflict, specifically military, in the formation, preservation, and authority of cultic centers. It uses the model to examine the twelfth-century Hakusan cult in Hokuriku and Ōshū and its primary patrons, the warriors Kiso Yoshinaka and Fujiwara no Hidehira, during the period of crisis that brought the end of political and cultural autonomy for an ancient northern culture.

RECENT DISCUSSIONS OF JAPANESE religious traditions, at academic conferences and in the literature, have brought into focus the idea of sacred geography as a critical tool in the analysis and understanding of cultic centers throughout the ancient archipelago and their ritual and social dimensions as spatial loci where the human meets the divine. For the most part such commentary has addressed the various supernatural beings—kami, buddhas, what might be called “gods” in the broad sense of the term—worshiped at cultic centers; the physical layout of these centers; their art and architecture; the extent and complexity of their monastic and lay communities; and their geographical jurisdictions. What is rarely considered is the role of conflict, specifically military, in the formation, preservation, and authority of such spatial jurisdictions and their resident gods. In short, the geopolitics of the sacred figures little in discussions about the geography of the sacred and its various institutions.

But history reminds us that three terms are best kept in mind when sacred geography is invoked no matter how benign its public transcript: gods, territory, and war. This volatile mix is inextricably bound to notions of honorable rule over land and men, which is to say, social and political legitimacy. It explains the rage of Achilles, the Knights

Templar, St. Joan before the English, even the monks of Hieizan in their street demonstrations against emperors and warlords. “What god drove them to fight with such a fury?” (I, 9) Homer asks at the beginning of the *Iliad*, and the gods themselves join in the fighting (FAGLES 1990, p. 77). For similar reasons the emperor Shirakawa, a shrewd and headstrong man in his own right, famously quipped that the only things he could not control were the fall of the dice, the waters of the Kamo River, and the monks on Hieizan (*Heike monogatari*, 1: 129; MCCULLOUGH 1988, p. 50).

For the classicist Bernard Knox these divine interventions are related to the enigma of combat morale. “This is not a modern way of looking at battle,” he writes, “but it is a striking way of expressing one of the mysteries of combat—the unpredictable currents of aggressive courage or faltering panic which sweep through armies” (KNOX 1990, p. 42). Thus Homer’s Athena breathes fury into Diomedes to send him “whirling into the slaughter” (X, 556–58; FAGLES 1990, p. 292). But it is not combat fury alone, or courage, that the gods inspire on the battleground. Their presence equally instills a sense of rightness, of entitlement, by which the violation of other peoples and other gods is rationalized and their lands appropriated, as Troy was once sacked by the Argives. Machiavelli put it succinctly: secure arms of one’s own and mix with them something of religion (DE GRAZIA 1994, p. 93). The political and cultural history of the eastern and northeastern reaches of the Japanese archipelago, for much of the ancient period seen as the *ultima Thule* of the Japanese states at Nara and Kyoto, is a story in large part driven by this formula.

Taking the East

The paradigm of arms and religion certainly is well known to Japanese myth and history. *Kojiki* 古事記 and *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀, the formative documents of Japanese state and identity in the ancient period, relate how the islands were claimed by Amaterasu 天照 and her progeny; kings and kami advanced eastward to Yamato; and the stage was set for a grand narrative of cinematic scope: the conquest and pacification of the eastern territories beyond Yamato where the sun rose on peoples and places utterly alien to the civilization of the western archipelago and its rulers. In the reign of Keikō 景行 at the dawn of Japanese history the prince Yamato Takeru 日本武尊, first among many so ordered, was sent east “to subdue and pacify the unruly deities and the unsubmissive peoples” whose presence both threatened and attracted the rulers of the early Yamato state. These deities

and peoples were also perceived as an affront to Amaterasu herself, progenitrix of the sparkling green archipelago now ruled in her stead by Yamato kings (*Kojiki*, I: 217, 221; PHILIPPI 1977, pp. 238–39). In this sense Yamato, or Japan—that benevolent sacred geography of kami and their worshipers as portrayed in early texts—was equally a power grid whose provincial magnitude grew in direct proportion to the might of its armies.

The theme of eastern pacification describes hundreds of years of regional conflict in the Japanese archipelago from the earliest consolidation of a ruling class and government in the Yamato plain. *Nihon shoki* and *Shoku Nihongi* 続日本紀, the official histories compiled as the primary records of the Nara state, tell a memorable tale of the conquest of the east and of its native population, the Emishi 蝦夷, by the first decade of the ninth century.¹ It was a process that involved, in the face of intense local resistance, the proven formula of sacred mandate, territorial imperative, and military force. Garrisons, then forts, were constructed along the constantly shifting border between the Nara and Emishi states;² soldiers and settlers were dispatched to man the fortifications; and with them, into the thick of battle, went the buddhas and the kami.

It is not simply that commanders of Nara armies prayed to the Great Deity of Ise before setting out for the eastern frontier and its ferocious denizens, as did the celebrated warrior Sakanoue no Tamuramaro 坂上田村麻呂 in 800 (*Ruijū kokushi*, 2: 335, Enryaku 19.11.6). The Buddhist gods were also mustered: at forts and stockades along the eastern perimeter of pacified territory, temples were raised, combative deities such as Bishamonten 毘沙門天 and the Shi Tennō 四天王 installed, and sacred claim to the land invoked through celebration of the *Konkōmyō saishō kyō* 金光明最勝王經, the *Ninnōgyō* 仁王經, and other scriptures. For example, after decades of skirmishing with Emishi guerrillas followed by some hard fighting, Nara forces under Tamuramaro in 802 took the Emishi stronghold at Isawa 胆沢, in what is now northern Iwate Prefecture, and an epochal victory in the east seemed imminent. A fort was immediately built, Fort Isawa, as was the policy whenever important territory was wrested from the Emishi (*Nihon kōki*, p. 31, Enryaku 23/1/28, pp. 48–49, Enryaku 24/12/7). And on a

¹ For the “Emishi wars,” see YIENGRUKSAWAN 1998, pp. 25–27.

² The existence of an Emishi “state” in northern and eastern Honshū has been a subject of debate for several decades. However, citations in *Nihon shoki* and *Shoku Nihongi* do suggest that something like a state—termed a *kuni* or *koku* 国 by Nara chroniclers—was recognized for the Emishi confederacy that formed in what are now Iwate and Akita prefectures at the close of the seventh century. For further discussion of the problem, see YIENGRUKSAWAN 1998, pp. 13–16.

hill nearby, overlooking the fort and its environs from the northeast, the colonial forces constructed a temple complex, Gokuraku-ji 極樂寺, with a colossal statue of Bishamonten—guardian of the north and leader of the Shi Tennō—its principal object of worship.³

The iconography of Bishamonten explains such installations at frontier temples in the north and east. Primarily a Central Asian god despite Indian origins, with a cultic base in what is now Chinese Turkestan, Bishamonten—Vaiśravaṇa in Sanskrit—emerged in the sixth and seventh centuries as a militant protector of Buddhism and Buddhist rulers. One of the most detailed articulations of that role is found in the eleventh and twelfth chapters of the *Konkōmyō saishō kyō*, a text dear to the hearts of many a Nara sovereign for its promise of divine protection for Buddhist kings (T. 16. 427–432). There were also legendary accounts of the barbarian-quelling powers of Bishamonten. A story made the rounds of Changan 長安 and Nara that Bishamonten had saved the Chinese military outpost of Anxi 安西 from destruction by an army of northern savages. The Tang emperor who had invoked Bishamonten at the Anxi ramparts, Xuanzong 玄宗, subsequently had statues of the god placed in city gates (*Kakuzenshō*, 2: 533b–c). Later a Japanese emperor, Kanmu 桓武, would install a monumental sculpture of Bishamonten in the upper story of Rajōmon 羅城門, the main gate to his new imperial capital, Heiankyō (the predecessor of Kyoto), which he had ordered built and occupied as the Emishi wars came to a close (MATSUURA 1992, p. 53).

This is an iconography that helps explain, albeit in subtext, why shrine-temple complexes and military outposts bear so many structural similarities, why pagodas, to name but one example, are reminiscent of watchtowers. For the story of religion and state in ancient Japan, as on the continent, involved a sacred geopolitics of conquest, colonization, and civilization. Even the scriptures favored by Nara imperialists in their confrontations with the Emishi—the venerable *Lotus Sutra* and its royal cousin the *Konkōmyō saishō kyō*—manifestly articulate a rhetoric of holy empire.⁴ This is not to argue that the peaceable splendors of Buddhist civilization at Nara and Kyoto, or at outposts in the Emishi lands, are negligible or imaginary. It is simply to caution that, in the degree that such factors rationalized the inscription of one

³ Gokuraku-ji no longer exists but has been extensively excavated. For a major study of the complex, see ITABASHI 1972. The colossal figure of Bishamonten, some four meters in height, is now located at the temple Narushima Bishamondō in the nearby town of Tōwa.

⁴ For example, in one of many such passages, the *Konkōmyō saishō kyō* explains that the Shi Tennō, led by Bishamonten, will assist and protect those “kings of men” who cherish monks, the Dharma, and the sutra itself (T. 16.427a28). The *Lotus Sutra* likens Buddha to a great and wise king (T. 9.39a1–13).

landscape over another in a climate of political and religious ferment, they are in effect the lid on the trash barrel.

In Mel Gibson's "Braveheart" a foot soldier quips that "history is written by those who do the hanging." Walter Benjamin gave eloquent voice to this truth in his ruminations on the philosophy of history, when he cautioned that "empathy with the victor" invites a kind of selective representation of the past heavily weighted toward conquerors and rulers. The image of an enemy's past, or that of the losers in political and cultural conflict, "threatens to disappear irretrievably" (BENJAMIN 1968, pp. 255, 256). This observation certainly holds true for the Emishi in classical Japanese history, where so little is recorded about the east and its peoples, other than an abiding representation of barbarism and rebellion, that it amounts to an erasure. By negative dialectic this posits for the eastern edge of the early Japanese state a discursive formation of massive political, cultural, and religious resistance. Victory at Isawa, and subsequent incorporation of Emishi territories into Mutsu 陸奥 and Dewa 出羽 provinces, collectively called Ōshū 奥州, simply relocated the site of conflict from outside to inside the Japanese state. For another three centuries the descendants of the Emishi held fast to their lands and their gods in what became the outback of the Japanese imperium at Kyoto.

Most writing and commentary on the history of Japan in this period, from 802 through the close of the twelfth century, focuses primarily on the Kyoto capital and does not address this eastern sphere of politics and culture. The result is a skewed picture of the Japanese past inasmuch as what was of abiding concern to the Kyoto leadership—the old Emishi provinces in the deep north, the military men who ruled them, and how to gain and maintain control of so conflicted a region—is generally left out of the discussion except in passing reference. It is worth noting that, for much of this period, the eastern territories marked an autonomous political and cultural zone where the mainstream civilization of the Kyoto-Nara-Yamato nexus met what might be called its "Other." At once turbulent and dynamic, this crossroads produced a series of idiosyncratic political and cultural formations that in turn gave shape to Kyoto norms. Among the most potent of these formations was a sacred geopolitics involving military chieftains, a group of gods, and a territory.

Around 1087 the warlord Fujiwara no Kiyohira 藤原の清衡, heir to the most powerful Emishi lineage in the eastern outback, moved his military headquarters from a site near Fort Isawa to Hiraizumi 平泉 at the confluence of the Kitakami and Koromo rivers in what is now southern Iwate Prefecture. Kiyohira had recently emerged as victor in

a territorial dispute with another Emishi lineage, in which he had fought on the side of Minamoto warriors dispatched by the Kyoto government to maintain law and order. No sooner were the Minamoto leaders recalled, having been accused by Kyoto courtiers of waging too private a war in the east, than Kiyohira set about building at Hiraizumi a new capital and a new regional polity whose structural origin lay for the most part in the Emishi confederacies of old.

Over the course of the twelfth century, as Kiyohira's heirs Motohira 基衡 and Hidehira 秀衡 flourished in Ōshū, Hiraizumi became the seat of an enormous gold-wealthy domain that encompassed nearly all of northern Honshū and stood largely outside the jurisdiction of the Kyoto government. But as the domain grew and prospered, so also did the enmity of the Minamoto lineage that had been bested by Kiyohira in the Ōshū wars. Factionalism at the Kyoto court, and the civil war that ensued when the Taira 平 and Minamoto 源 military houses clashed over political influence in the capital, brought that lineage to power in the formidable guise of Minamoto no Yoritomo 源頼朝. Having dispatched the Taira in 1185, Yoritomo turned his attention to Hidehira and Hiraizumi in what became a final chapter in the pacification of the eastern frontier. For by that time, with Hidehira at the head of a powerful domain in eastern and northern Honshū with only minimal ties to the Kyoto government, the possibility of another state in the archipelago had become too serious a concern to be ignored by the new hegemon.

The story of Yoritomo's conquest of Hiraizumi is told in *Azuma kagami* 吾妻鏡, a thirteenth-century history of the Kamakura shogunate. What that document also makes plain is the unique importance of Hiraizumi, not simply as a regional military capital akin to a shogunate, but as the site of a rich Buddhist culture embodied in four shrine-temple complexes and a vast array of statues, paintings, and votive sutra transcriptions (*Azuma kagami*, pp. 352-54, Bunji 5/9/17). Of particular significance is the correlation of politics and Buddhist praxis under the Hiraizumi Fujiwara, for with every move to expand and consolidate the Hiraizumi domain, with every show of force, more temples and more icons were commissioned. The old formula of religion and state, so effective in the conquest of the Emishi, was here turned on its head to accommodate their heirs, the Hiraizumi Fujiwara, in a political and ideological bid for local autonomy in Ōshū in which the protagonists stood at once inside and outside the Japanese state.⁵

That a Hakusan Shrine was pivotal to the sacred geography of

⁵ For the politics and culture of the Hiraizumi domain, see YENGRUKSAWAN 1998.

Hiraizumi is not well known. Nor is there much sustained interest in the role of the Hakusan cult, a system of belief deeply rooted in the northwestern and northeastern provinces, in the territorialization of Ōshū and Hokuriku by Hidehira as war with Yoritomo loomed in the last decades of the twelfth century.⁶ But Hiraizumi in fact began and ended with the Hakusan cult: the city and its first temple were built around a Hakusan Shrine; and offerings to the Hakusan kami, sent overland to the cultic center in Hokuriku, marked a final strategy of defense as Hidehira girded for battle.

Hakusan

Hakusan 白山, “the white mountains,” is a range of peaks that spans Ishikawa, Fukui, and Gifu prefectures in what were once Echizen 越前, Kaga 加賀, and Mino 美濃 provinces.⁷ Also called Shirayama, the region is dominated by three mountains: Gozenmine 御前峰 at the heart of the range; Ōnanji 大汝 to the north; Bessan 別山 to the south. There is evidence that Hakusan was the site of local mountain worship long before it became the Shugendo center for which it is best known. The focus of worship was a triad of kami—two female, one male—each of which was understood as inhabiting one of the three Hakusan peaks. The primary god of the three was the female who resided at Gozenmine, called Shirayamahime 白山比咩, who had been born from a spring on the mountain and was related to Izanami 伊邪那美. The others were the second female, Ōyamazumi 大山祇, on Bessan, and the male, Ōnamuchi 太男知, on Ōnanji. By the tenth century the group was known as Hakusan Gongen 白山権現, a Buddhist configuration in which Shirayamahime (alternatively known as Hakusan Myōri Daibosatsu 白山妙理大菩薩) was represented as Jūichimen Kannon 十一面観音, Ōyamazumi as Shō Kannon 聖観音, and Ōnamuchi as Amida 阿弥陀.

The legendary eighth-century ascetic Taichō 泰澄, with En no Gyōja 役の行者 and Fuseri no Gyōja 臥の行者, was a prominent figure in the early development of the Shugendo movement and is credited with having established a cultic center at Hakusan after experiencing a vision atop Gozenmine. Accounts in *Shirayama no ki* 白山記, *Hakusan*

⁶ The Hokuriku region included the provinces Echizen 越前, Echigo 越後, Nōto 能登, Kaga 加賀, Wakasa 若狭, Etchū 越中, and Sado 佐渡, or what are now Fukui, Ishikawa, Toyama, and Niigata prefectures. The Ōshū region, to the north and east of Hokuriku, included the provinces Mutsu and Dewa, or what are now Fukushima, Miyagi, Iwate, Aomori, Akita, and Yamagata prefectures—an enormous area at the northern end of the archipelago.

⁷ Discussion of the Hakusan cult is based on SHIMODE 1986; YOSHIDA 1986; and YOSHITANI 1994.

shōnin engi 白山上人縁起, and other local histories indicate that, by the ninth century, the Hakusan region had been organized into an extensive system of linked shrines and temples. The network was developed around three pilgrimage routes, or *zenjōdō* 禪定道, entering from Mino to the south, Echizen to the southwest, and Kaga on the north.

Each route had its own shrine-temple gateway into the mountains, called a *banba* 馬場 (rest stop for horses) in regional dialect, where pilgrims began their trek in earnest (and on foot): Nagataki Hakusan Shrine 長滝白山 and Nagataki-ji 長滝寺 on the Mino route; Shirayama Shrine and Heisen-ji 平泉寺 in Echizen; and Hakusan Hongū 白山本宮 (Shirayamahime Shrine) and Hakusan-ji 白山寺 in Kaga. These gateways, and the many subshrines and subtemples along their respective pilgrimage routes, with the hundreds of priests and lay believers attached to them, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries constituted an integrated and aggressive power block in Hokuriku whose influence was felt throughout the northwest and northeast.

The leading institutions in this consortium were the Shirayama-Heisen-ji complex in Echizen and the Hakusan-Hakusan-ji complex in Kaga. Although both were affiliated with Enryaku-ji 延暦寺 by 1084, theirs was a community highly resistant to interference from outside interests such as the Kyoto government and its allied temples and shrines. In the 1150s the Hakusan consortium even challenged Hieizan. In a pattern of action as old as the Emishi subculture of northern and eastern Honshū, to which Hokuriku belonged as a later manifestation of an ancient frontier zone called Koshi 越, such insularity spelled trouble for those who would govern Hakusan, and Hokuriku, from without.

In the twelfth century it was the Taira who bore the brunt of such separatism. Between 1163 and 1170 the Taira house under Kiyomori 清盛 had worked to gradually gain control of Hokuriku as provincial governors or through land management by proxy. Nonetheless the Hakusan community, allied with local clans such as the Saitō 斎藤, continued to test the mettle of the Taira through sabotage and direct military engagement. One of the most violent clashes, described in *Genpei seisui ki* 源平盛衰記, occurred when Kondō Morotaka 近藤師高 was appointed governor of Kaga at the behest of Kiyomori in 1176 and sent his younger brother Morotsune 師經 to take office in his stead.

Morotsune set about inspecting the tax-immune estates of Hakusan shrines and temples but was refused access by Yūzen-ji 涌泉寺, a sub-temple within the Hakusan-Hakusan-ji complex. In retaliation Morotsune had Yūzen-ji set afire, and the temple was destroyed. The entire Hakusan network rose “as one mountain,” sending an army to the

provincial capital and chasing Morotsune back to Kyoto as Shirayamahime herself rode along in a palanquin borne by her loyalists. The warlike monks of Enryaku-ji, never at a loss when a fight was to be had, quickly joined their Hakusan brethren to riot in the capital. Morotaka and Morotsune were exiled in 1177.⁸

Four years later, in 1180, the Hakusan community was pivotal to the rise of Kiso Yoshinaka 木曾義仲 and his north-country fighters, so memorably described in *Heike monogatari* 平家物語 as a swashbuckling army that descended on Kyoto in the summer of 1183 (2: 93; McCULLOUGH 1988, p. 241). It remains unclear how Yoshinaka, a man from the same Bandō 坂東 lineage as his cousin Yoritomo,⁹ came to be so closely affiliated with Hakusan, as devotee and patron, but also as ally. That he grew up in nearby Shinano 信濃, or Kiso 木曾, may have facilitated the connection. But there was another bond as well that led further eastward and into the past, to Hiraizumi, and to the Hakusan Shrine that occupied its physical and conceptual center.

Shadow Warriors

When Kiyohira around 1100 ordered the construction of Chūson-ji 中尊寺, first temple of Hiraizumi and its ideological fulcrum, it was on a small mountain where a venerable Hakusan Shrine stood. The mountain, Kanzan 関山, rises from the Hiraizumi plain to overlook the confluence of the Kitakami and Koromo rivers and for Kiyohira marked the critical mass of the Hiraizumi domain, its ground zero.¹⁰ Subsequently other temples and halls were built down the mountain in Hiraizumi proper, but, home to Chūson-ji and Hakusan, Kanzan served as the nucleus of the Hiraizumi polity and its cultic center.

In *Azuma kagami* the Hakusan Shrine on Kanzan is succinctly described as tutelary to Chūson-ji (p. 353, Bunji 5/9/17). A later source in the Chūson-ji archives, the *Kenmu gannen no taishū sojō* 建武元年大衆訴状 of 1334, is more thorough. It relates that the shrine is called Hakusan Sannō 白山山王—Hakusan, Lord of the Mountain—and has been in existence for some seven hundred years. During the Ōshū wars, the document continues, Minamoto no Yoriyoshi 源頼義 and his son, Yoshiie 義家, worshiped at the shrine on their way into

⁸ *Genpei seisui ki*, pp. 75–77. See also SHIMODE 1986, p. 97, and ASAKA 1978, p. 319.

⁹ The Bandō region encompassed the provinces Sagami 相模, Musashi 武蔵, Kazusa 上総, Shimousa 下総, Hitachi 常陸, Kōzuke 上野, and Shimōzuke 下野, or what are now Kanagawa, Saitama, Tokyo, Chiba, Tochigi, and Ibaraki prefectures.

¹⁰ It is clear from citations in *Azuma kagami* that Kanzan was understood as the center of the domain; see *Azuma kagami*, pp. 353 (Bunji 5/9/17) and 358 (Bunji 5/9/27).

battle (p. 102b). Kiyohira, a man attentive to his eastern roots among the Emishi,¹¹ had reason enough to respect and possibly even fear this cohort of Hakusan kami on Kanzan. The mountain stood on highly charged terrain, where Emishi and Nara armies had met in battle at the close of the eighth century, and where the old border had been drawn between barbarian and civilized. Men of Kiyohira's eastern lineage had maintained a military base at the foot of Kanzan at least since the tenth century, and before them Emishi generals—the great Aterui 阿弋流為 among them—had used the mountain as a strategic headquarters.¹² The Hakusan Shrine, centuries old, was their shrine, on their landscape; it signaled, perhaps, their right to that landscape as its proper rulers.

Thus the Minamoto generals Yoriyoshi and Yoshiie had seen the wisdom in paying their respects at Hakusan on Kanzan before bringing down its patrons, the local Abe 安倍 family, in the first Ōshū war of 1051–1062. In the second war, waged intermittently from 1083 to 1087, the Minamoto under Yoshiie struggled to overthrow another local military house, the Kiyohara 清原, who had taken over the region after the Abe defeat. When Yoshiie finally was able to bring the Kiyohara to heel, after hard winter fighting in the Dewa mountains, it was but a Pyrrhic victory. Within a few months Fujiwara no Kiyohira, born to an Abe woman by a Fujiwara father and raised among the Kiyohara, had taken de facto control of the enormous northern territory—encompassing Mutsu and Dewa provinces—that was his birthright. On the old lands of the Abe and Kiyohara, once the ancient domain of the Emishi, Kiyohira began to build the regional polity that would grow into the Hiraizumi domain, while Yoshiie earned but the censure of Kyoto bureaucrats and an eclipse to his career.

Reasonably enough, Kiyohira formed his new regime around the kami who had kept his homeland in the hands of its local rulership. He moved out of his old stronghold, at Toyoda 豊田 in what is now northern Iwate Prefecture, south to the river plain at Koromo 衣 where Kanzan stood. At the foot of the mountain, quite literally in the shadow of its Hakusan Shrine, Kiyohira established a headquarters and a new capital. The name that he coined for that new capital, Hiraizumi 平泉, yields several interesting readings. Composed of two Chinese characters—the first connoting flatness or evenness, the second, a natural spring—the word has been understood as meaning

¹¹ At the consecration of Chūson-ji, Kiyohira referred to himself as *Tōi no Shuchō* 東夷首長, or “Chieftain of the Eastern Barbarians”; see *Chūsonji rakkei kuyō ganmon*, p. 60b.

¹² For the military base, called Koromo, see *Mutsu waki*, pp. 20–22, and SAITO 1992, pp. 39–40. For battles at Koromo, see *Shoku Nihongi*, pp. 534 (Enryaku 8/3/9, Enryaku 8/3/10), 535 (Enryaku 8/5/12), and 536 (Enryaku 8/6/3).

“source of the Kiyohira lineage.” (All male descendants of Kiyohira shared the ideograph for flatness, *hira* 平, in their given names.) Also, Kanzan has a number of natural springs along its slopes, one of them so large that it fed a three-cascade pond that Kiyohira built for the Chūson-ji complex. But most intriguing, in view of the shrine atop Kanzan, is the use of the same characters in “*Hiraizumi*” as in “*Heisen*,” the name of the most influential of the Hakusan shrine-temples. The difference is merely in pronunciation: “*Hiraizumi*” is the “Japanese” (*kun*) reading, “*Heisen*” the “Chinese” (*on*) reading of the same ideographs. It bears noting as well that the natural springs atop Kanzan may have been linked to Shirayamahime, the Hakusan kami who was born from a spring on Gozenmine.

A century after Kiyohira founded Hiraizumi, at a closure instead of a beginning, the Hakusan Shrine would figure yet again at Hiraizumi, but this time in an epic (and epistemic) narrative that marked the end of an epoch in Japanese history. As Yoritomo rose to prominence, first defeating the Taira with the help of Yoshinaka, and then turning on Yoshinaka as well, he grew increasingly mindful of Hiraizumi as a troublesome entity on his northern flank. Its ruler, Hidehira, was the grandson of Kiyohira and a man of many reputations: northern barbarian, ferocious warrior, generous patron of the arts, devout Buddhist, and virtuous paterfamilias. According to *Azuma kagami*, Yoritomo also believed that Hidehira held sway over lands that rightfully belonged to the Minamoto, who had been cheated out of this vast holding by Kiyohira at the end of the Ōshū wars (p. 407, Hōji 2/2/5).¹³

Hidehira had flourished during the years of Taira ascendancy in Kyoto, when Kiyomori dominated both court and government even as sentiment mounted against his regime. In 1170 Hidehira was named Chinju Shōgun 鎮守將軍, a high-status constabulary post limited to Ōshū, and in 1181 he became governor of Mutsu Province. These were exceedingly irregular appointments, for Hidehira was considered a descendant of the Emishi and unsuited to civil service, and they deeply shocked his contemporaries in Kyoto. The courtier Kujō Kanezane 九条兼実 was probably right when he attributed the appointments to Taira machinations against the Minamoto. Rumors to that effect certainly flew in Kyoto in 1180 and 1181: Hidehira had been ordered by Kiyomori to march against Yoritomo; his army of 20,000 fighters was massing at the Mutsu border; he would soon march on Yoritomo and his Bandō warriors. None of this was true, as time would tell. Viewed as the barbarian general who could intimidate Yoritomo,

¹³ For the Minamoto grudge against the Hiraizumi Fujiwara, see also *Heiji monogatari*, p. 219.

Hidehira ignored Taira demands and kept to his own territory in the north.¹⁴

There is evidence that Hidehira, courted by the Taira, was also negotiating an alliance with the Minamoto on two fronts. Yoritomo's younger brother Yoshitsune had come to live with Hidehira around 1174, and although in due time the brothers famously came into conflict, it is clear that Hidehira initially maintained good relations with both of them. Indeed, in *Azuma kagami* it is related that Yoritomo at an early stage was even urged to move to Ōshū to escape Taira attackers (p. 30, Jishō 4/6/19). But Hidehira had another potential Minamoto ally closer to hand: Kiso Yoshinaka in neighboring Hokuriku, whose ties to the Hakusan cult would link him to Hidehira as definitively as any political or military concern.

Yoshinaka, like Yoritomo and Yoshitsune, claimed descent from Yoriyoshi and Yoshiie.¹⁵ He had been sent to Shinano as a child, to live with the local warlord Nakahara Kanetō 中原兼遠, after his father, Yoshitaka 義賢, was killed in a Minamoto turf war in the Bandō region. In 1180, as Yoritomo and Yoshitsune maneuvered against Kiyomori, Yoshinaka drove the Taira out of Shinano and in 1181 laid claim to the Hokuriku provinces. Hidehira, a few days away at Hiraizumi, is believed to have sided with Yoshinaka against the Taira: there is evidence that Hiraizumi forces fought on the Minamoto side when Yoshinaka clashed with the Jō 城 and other pro-Taira clans in the region (TAKAHASHI 1993, pp. 265–66).

In 1183 Yoshinaka met a Taira punitive force in the Battle of Kurikara 倶利伽羅 on the Kaga-Echizen border not far from the Hakusan complex, and then moved on to take Kyoto a few months later with his army of northern ruffians. Yoshinaka credited the local Hakusan kami for his victory at Kurikara. As a Minamoto, Yoshinaka worshiped Hachiman, but in Hokuriku he had become a patron of the Hakusan gods as well. After Kurikara, and with future battles in mind, Yoshinaka made offerings of land to Hakusan shrines and temples, even presenting Heisen-ji with the revenues of seven villages (*Heike monogatari*, 2: 74–75; McCULLOUGH 1988, pp. 231, 232).

Hidehira had a role to play at Kurikara as well, as ally of Yoshinaka, but probably also as devotee of the Hakusan cult. On the day after the battle, two “superb horses” were presented to Yoshinaka “from Hide-

¹⁴ For shocked courtiers, see *Gyokuyō*, 1: 102b (Kaō 2/5/27) and 2: 523b (Jishō 5/8/15). For Kanezane's comments on Taira strategy, see *Gyokuyō*, 2: 520b–521a (Jishō 5/8/6); see also *Hyakurenshō*, p. 106 (Yōwa 1/8/15). For various rumors, see *Gyokuyō*, 2: 448b (Jishō 4/12/4), 2: 451b–452a (Jishō 4/12/12), and 2: 491b (Jishō 5/3/1).

¹⁵ Discussion of Yoshinaka is based on ASAKA 1978.

hira in Michinoku [Hiraizumi].” Yoshinaka in turn gave them to the Hakusan Shrine, possibly because they were intended as an offering to the kami (*Heike monogatari*, 2: 74; MCCULLOUGH 1988, p. 231). In his struggle against the Taira, Yoshinaka had been backed by Heisen-ji and the Hakusan community as a whole. It is not unreasonable to expect that Hidehira, as head of a domain with a Hakusan Shrine at its logistical center, stood to benefit from an association with Yoshinaka mediated by the Hakusan cult and its own power base in Hokuriku.

Certainly Hidehira in his own right had ties to Hakusan shrines and temples throughout the region. Along the Hakusan pilgrimage routes, legend still holds that Hidehira was a patron of Shirayama-hime and the other Hakusan gods. Local histories such as *Shirayama no ki* make the same claim, even ascribing to Hidehira the many gilt-bronze and gilt-wood statues of Kannon and Kokūzō 虚空藏 found at temples and shrines in the area (ŌYA 1993, p. 111; TSUNODA 1990, p. 82; YOSHITANI 1994, p. 54). According to *Uesugi keizu* 上杉系図, a genealogy of the Uesugi family, Hidehira presented a gilt-bronze image to Heisen-ji in 1184; it was brought overland from Hiraizumi in a palanquin and offered to the temple by one of his sons. Art historians have identified what they believe to be this statue at the Itoshiro Hakusan Shrine 石徹白白山 on the old Mino route (INOUE 1986).¹⁶

The ties that bound Hidehira to the Hakusan community in Hokuriku are understandable in view of the Hakusan Shrine at Hiraizumi. His grandfather Kiyohira, founder of the domain, had designed his capital around the Hakusan kami and worshiped them as its protectors. Hakusan at Hiraizumi was linked to the past, to a cohort of gods special to local rulers for hundreds of years, and thus served the goals of its Hiraizumi Fujiwara patrons in Ōshū. For Hidehira at the end of the twelfth century, with the threat of war ever present, it meant access to a religio-political enclave in Hokuriku that forcefully defended its regional autonomy. Such insularity made Hakusan useful, even crucial, to the equally insular Hiraizumi domain and offered a means to continued independence in the north through alliance, cooperation, and religious mandate.

It is less clear why Hidehira, given the opportunity to align with Yoritomo, turned to Yoshinaka instead. He probably knew that Yoritomo harbored ill will toward his family and planned to settle scores; a citation in *Azuma kagami* suggests that as early as 1182 Yoritomo was already plotting to overthrow Hidehira and claim Hiraizumi for the Minamoto (p. 83, Yōwa 2/4/5). The relationship with Yoshitsune had also become a liability: Yoritomo had grown wary of his influential

¹⁶ For relevant passages in *Uesugi keizu*, see INOUE 1986, pp. 26–27.

younger brother after his return from Hiraizumi in 1180 and finally ordered his death in 1185. In the meantime Yoshinaka had been killed, his men a scourge on Kyoto, he himself despised as “rude and vulgar beyond description” (*Heike monogatari*, 2: 139; McCULLOUGH 1988, p. 268). When Yoshitsune arrived yet again in Hiraizumi in 1187, running from assassins sent after him by Yoritomo, Hidehira no doubt realized that a Minamoto army was not far behind.

It was an engagement that Yoritomo approached with trepidation, and not until Hidehira was dead of old age later in 1187. Several times Yoritomo turned his armies back, and when he did move east, he called on his tutelary gods—Benzaiten 弁財天, Aizen 愛染, Shō Kannon—for victory in 1189.¹⁷ Hiraizumi was a powerful domain on the liminal border that marked the edge of the Japanese state as governed from Kyoto; for centuries regional warlords based there had ruled Ōshū as if it were a private interest. Yoritomo’s forebears had lost battles to those northerners, and his hesitation in advancing on yet another generation of them is not surprising. Moreover, there was the myth of Hidehira’s military prowess, itself founded on old legends about the ferocious Emishi of the eastern frontier.

Perhaps Yoritomo also believed that, as his soldiers pressed deep into the ancient Emishi homeland, they were trespassing on a political and religious domain that stood beyond the safety net of Kyoto norms. Granted, these were for the most part Bandō warriors ill suited to life in the capital, but they came from provinces long within the purview of the Japanese state at Nara and Kyoto. The landscape that they entered as they crossed the barrier station at Shirakawa 白河, in what is now southern Fukushima Prefecture, was a place of indigenous gods and fighting men where battle over territory had always been the measure in staking claims of difference—of heterogeneity and heterodoxy—in the face of empire and orthodoxy. From Hakusan to Hiraizumi, the northeast constituted a kind of shadow state, its rulers distant reflections of those early Emishi chieftains who had defied many an imperial army. By entering that landscape, a field of conflict as perilous as any he had yet encountered, Yoritomo would step into a timeless world of cyclical battles like something out of the *Mahabharata*. In that matrix of gods, war, and territory Yoritomo just might become the imperial envoy who eternally lost to the Emishi warlord.

¹⁷ For Yoritomo’s hesitation before battle, see *Cyokuyō*, 2: 634b (Juei 2/10/9) and 2: 643–644 (Juei 2/10/ intercalary 27), and *Kikki*, p. 73b (Juei 2/11/4). For Yoritomo’s invocations, see *Azuma kagami*, pp. 83 (Yōwa 2/4/5), 333 (Bunji 5/6/29), 336 (Bunji 5/7/18), 341 (Bunji 5/8/8), and 369 (Bunji 5/10/22).

With God on Our Side

In 1189 Yoritomo won his war against Hidehira and laid claim to Hiraizumi in the name of the emperor Go Shirakawa, for whom, as shogun, he had served as proxy in the field. For the first time the northeast lay fully within the administrative and military purview of the Japanese state. The histories that would be written in times to come would be those of a unified archipelago and culture as Japan became a homogeneous entity forged nonetheless on the battle-grounds of the Emishi and the Hiraizumi Fujiwara. It is exactly this history, of difference turned to homogeneity, that must give us pause, knowing as we do that it is the victors who tell the stories. In so doing it is important that we keep in mind, not only that wars and territories were lost, but also the gods that sustained them, on the landscape of defeat that became a kind of oblivion.

This essay has examined the Hakusan cult as a case study in sacred geopolitics. It has discussed Hakusan at Hiraizumi in the context of a robust northern culture for which the Hakusan cultic system was a central religious and political institution. The Hakusan mix of arms, territory, and gods afforded autonomy, whether for Kiso Yoshinaka or Hidehira, and a negotiating position when push came to shove along the outer edge of the Japanese state. Modern historians of culture and religion tend to treat the Hakusan cult as a peripheral or regional phenomenon, but for the men and women of the north, it was Hakusan, and not the Buddhist high cultures of Kyoto and Nara, that in the end made their lands their own. This alternative logic, where Hakusan is the central institution and Kyoto the periphery, comes into focus when we step into the shoes of the soldier who faces his enemy and knows that god is on his side. That men like Kiyohira and Hidehira managed to hold at bay the forces of conquest and colonization must be viewed in light of what the Hakusan cult gave to northerners: gods, a geography, and the potent formula of arms and religion.

The image of Shirayamahime in her palanquin, the routed Taira governor fleeing before her army, leaves ample room for thought. It serves as a useful metaphor for the Hakusan phenomenon in its most fundamental aspects as both cultic center and war machine. But it raises a broader issue as well and one worth our close attention in these last years of the twentieth century. Like Athena the god has breathed fire into her army and sent its enemies into faltering panic. The scene reminds us that the history of religions is also one of battles.

ABBREVIATIONS

- NKBT *Nihon koten bungaku taikei* 日本古典文学大系. 100 vols. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1957-1969.
- SZKT *Shintei zōho kokushi taikei* 新訂増補国史大系. 60 vols. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1929-1964.
- T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經, 100 vols. Takakusu Junjirō et al., eds. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai and Daizō Shuppan, 1924-1932.

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- Genpei seisui ki* 源平盛衰記. In *Kokumin bunko* 國民文庫, vol. 15. Tokyo: Kokumin Bunko Kankōkai, 1911.
- Gyokuyō* 玉葉. 3 vols. Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1906-1907.
- Heiji monogatari* 平治物語. In NKBT, vols. 31.
- Heike monogatari* 平家物語. In NKBT, vols. 32-33.
- Hyakurenshō* 百鍊抄. In SZKT, vol. 11.
- Kakuzenshō* 覺禪抄. In T, *Zuzōbu*, vols. 4-5.
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