Relic Theft and Sacred Space in Medieval Japan: Enshrinements of the Buddha's Body a Study of Texts and Objects

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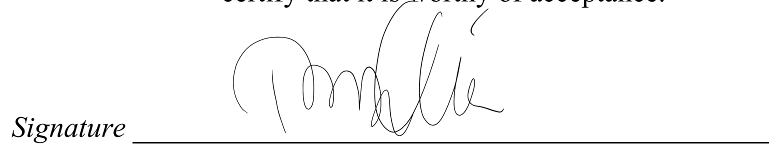

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Relic Theft and Sacred Space in Medieval Japan: Enshrinements of the Buddha's Body a Study of Texts and Objects

Julia Heather Cross

A dissertation
presented to the faculty
of Harvard University
in candidacy for the degree of
doctor of philosophy

East Asian Languages and Civilizations
Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts

December 17, 2020

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Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Ryūichi Abé Julia Heather Cross

Abstract

Relic Theft and Sacred Space in Medieval Japan: Enshrinements of the Buddha's Body a Study of Texts and Objects

The following dissertation examines understandings of relic worship (i.e., worship of the bones of the historical Buddha) in thirteenth through fifteenth century Japan. By this period in Japanese history, various temples had fallen into ruin, priests were often known not to follow the proper presents, and the nunhood had lost much of its power. On a social level, plague, drought, and warfare troubled the land. Doctrinally, it was believed to be the final days of the Dharma. The Buddha's teachings would soon to be lost and rendered unattainable (i.e., *mappō*). This led to the revival of numerous older religious practices, including relic worship, especially in the area of Nanto (i.e., Nara). Relics, the Buddha's bones, offered a means to directly access his sacred power, nature, and ability to respond to the prayers of devotees. Relic worship, in consequence, flourished within many religious circles. Various iconographically complex and visually stunning reliquaries were made, and scores of Buddhist priests drew on relic worship at this time to bolster their teachings and legitimacy. This dissertation examines these aspects of relic worship, looking at phenomenon that was specific to this time, as well as elements that carried over from the past, both in Japan as well as from across East Asia. Through the prism of

relic worship, this dissertation seeks to offer a new understanding of this period's social and religious history.

Accordingly, using material objects and manuscripts, this study shows that relic worship during this time was often more complex than commonly portrayed in scholarship. Reliquaries could, for instance, frequently combine various religious traditions in one frame of worship. Such reliquaries were used in temple rituals as well as in individual worship, illustrating that various beliefs and practices could coexist in one reliquary frame and one ritual. Herein, this project draws on relic worship and reliquaries from temples, shrines, and nunneries in the Nanto region. Some of these reliquaries are adorned with references to classical Chinese or Indian religious or philosophical beliefs. There is often a syncretic element to these objects. At its core, this project is inspired by the question: how can we understand the complexities of these medieval reliquaries within the Japanese religious landscape? I answer this question by focusing on three important temples—Hokkeji, Saidaiji, and Murōji—taken as case studies. Using reliquaries and relic related art, this dissertation examines these reliquaries in the context of the textual sources that exist from this time, while drawing on methods from Religious Studies as well as scholarship on relic worship in the broader field of Medieval Studies. Many of the reliquaries examined in this dissertation are little-studied national treasures housed at Nara National Museum, in Japan.

In regards to female monastics and relics, this period marked, I argue, the first instance of relics magically appearing at nunneries in vast numbers. These new appearances, this project shows, helped to create a differently gendered religious geography by linking certain landscapes

and peoples—e.g., nunneries, female monastics, and female courtiers—to this world of real and imagined relics. This change in the ownership of relics empowered nuns in ways that were, often, unprecedented, while granting peripheral temples and female monastics a promise of salvation in a period when the Buddha's teachings were almost lost. This study examines this history of religion and gender dynamics through the prism of relics and their worship.

This dissertation concludes that relic worship in twelfth through fourteenth century Nanto drew on various older traditions related to relic worship from India, China, and Japan, but it also shows that many of the beliefs around relics and iconography displayed in reliquaries from this time were specific to this region, its temple networks, and its tendency to combine several traditions. It also shows how the location and rate of appearance of relics was used to denote and reinforce sacred spaces, granting these landscapes and their monastics legitimacy. Nuns, moreover, drew on relics during this time to help them reestablish the nunhood, as well as to prove their own legitimacy within the various traditions of this period. And, finally, there was an increased appearance of relics in Japan during this period, thus making relics from China and India less necessary, as relics started, for one of the first times, to originate on Japanese soil.

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life interesting. Lastly, this dissertation is dedicated to my kind parents, Pauline and Jerry, who gifted me a love for the pursuit knowledge, international travel, and intellectual curiosity.

Introduction

I. Introducing the Dissertation

This dissertation focuses on relic worship in thirteenth through fifteenth century Japan. It seeks to show the eclectic nature of relic worship during this period by looking at temples, nunneries, and some sub-cases of shrines. Previous studies in North American scholarship have shown how relics were worshipped in the court, specifically in the ninth through the twelfth century. By using records, chronicles, and other such textual sources, past scholarship in Religious Studies has shown, often in a topdown fashion, how relics were used as objects of political and religious power as well as prestige. This study offers a new angle for studying relic worship. It focuses on relic worship through reliquaries and other visual objects. By using these objects to ask questions about relic worship at this time, it asks what such objects can illuminate about relic related beliefs from this period. These stories matter in that religion, specifically religious art, can offer certain insights into the human condition that other fields of study cannot. They can tell us about: how people understood death, enshrinements of the sacred, why people pray and to whom, and what their anxieties were hundreds of years ago about this life and the next. Relics, in particular, are important ritual and spiritual objects in Buddhist practice. They are viewed as the Buddha himself. They are seen, herein, to embody his religious power, sacred nature, and ability to respond to the prayers of devotees. In this sense, the way they are used, written about, and enshrined can tell us a great deal about the people who performed acts of devotion.

Existing scholarship on relic worship in Japan tends to focus on religious studies or art historical studies, but rarely both. Although there has been a trend in this direction within the

field in the west, it has not influenced relic studies in Japan, which tend to focus more on doctrine and court-centric texts. Herein, in regards to relic worship, the first English language scholarship published on East Asian relic worship focused primarily on China, specifically on the Tang dynasty 唐朝 (618–906). Robert Sharf and Bernard Faure published some of the earliest and most influential articles on this topic. Simultaneously, various publications on full-body-relics in China, especially in the Chan tradition, were also published around this time. Most of this research looks at Chan relic worship, or, when focusing on Japan, at the court based relic worship of the elite.[1] It rarely considers more popular forms of relic worship, the nunhood, or relic worship in relation to shrines.[2]

In English language scholarship, however, we lack a detailed study that combines a visual and textual reading of this material. Given that relics, by nature, are sacred objects, it is difficult to study them solely through textual means without looking at the actual relics and reliquaries. In Japanese, scholars of art history have published on reliquaries as material objects. Noteworthy publications in this area include those by Nagai Hiroyuki 永井洋之, Naitō Sakae 内藤 栄, Kageyama Haruki 景山春樹, Kawada Sadamu 河田 貞, the Nara National Museum 奈良国立博

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[1] Examples include Kevin Gray Carr "Pieces of Princes: Personalized Relics in Medieval Japan" (2011); Faure's article "Relics and Flesh Bodies: The Creation of Ch'an Pilgrimage Sites" (1992), and "Buddhist Relics and Japanese Regalia" (2004); Brian Ruppert "Pearl in the Shrine: A Genealogy of the Buddhist Jewel of the Japanese Sovereign" (2002), *Jewel in the Ashes: Buddha Relics and Power in Early Medieval Japan* (2000), and "Buddha Relics and Power in Early Medieval Japan" (PhD dissertation 1997); Robert Sharf's "On the Allure of Buddhist Relics" (1999), and "The Buddha's Finger Bones at Famensi and the Art of Chinese Esoteric Buddhism" (2011); Abe Yasurō's article on sacred jewels, entitled "Hōju to ōken—Chūsei ōken to mikkyō girei" 宝珠と王権—中世王権と密教儀礼. In regards to South Asia, perhaps most noteworthy is the work of John Strong, such as "Buddhist Relics in Comparative Perspective: Beyond the Parallels" (2004) and *Relics of the Buddha* (2004); as well as that of Gregory Schopen from his various books and articles, including *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy* (1997), "Relic" (1998), *Buddhist Nuns, Monks, and Other Worldly Matters: Recent Papers on Monastic Buddhism in India* (2014), and so on.

[2] Perhaps with the exception of Brian Ruppert's article "Pearl in the Shrine: A Genealogy of the Buddhist Jewel of the Japanese Sovereign" (2002), which focuses on Ise Shrine and relic worship in relation to the Japanese sovereign.

物館, and Sekine Syun’ichi 関根俊一 to name a few. These tend to take the form of catalogue entries or articles. The work of Naitō is significant in that it looks, with great precision, at medieval Japanese reliquaries along with their related Buddhist texts. In many ways, Naitō has inspired the angle that I take in this dissertation. Although my material differs in the following pages, I build on his style of research by combining the original documents with the objects that they discuss. I also tie in interdisciplinary research from relic studies across the humanities, not limiting the discussion to only Japan.

In regards to religious studies, a number of scholars have published in Japanese on relics and relic worship in medieval Japan, ranging from topics such as Zen and relics to wish-granting-jewels. Some of the scholars working in this area include: Horibe Aiko 堀邉 阿伊子, Hosokawa Ryōichi 細川涼一, Ishii Kōsei 石井公成, Kamiya Nobuaki 神谷信明, Nakamura Kazumoto 中村一基, Nishiwaki Tsuneki 西脇 常, Nishiyama Mika 西山美香, Nōtomi Jōten 納冨常天, and Steven Trenson.[3] Each of these scholars’ works focuses on an aspect of relic worship, through the lens of religious or historical studies. Although each of these studies are well researched, they tend not to cross disciplines. As very historical Japanese-style studies, they tend not look at the objects themselves. Thus, in the following pages I seek to offer a novel approach to relic studies by combining these two fields, art history and religious studies, to create a new and, ideally, more complex understanding of relic worship within Japan’s religious history. By taking such an approach—looking at chronicles, records, myths, and other writings about relics and reliquaries—we can study relics in a way that textual studies, when taken alone,

[3] Please see the bibliography for each of these scholars’ specific publications.

would not otherwise allow. This permits for a bottom up approach and, moreover, allows us to examine issues related to gender and the periphery. Such new insights into relic worship, through texts and objects, are one of the key contributions of this dissertation.

Another goal of this dissertation is to show that relic worship in the Nanto area was distinct from that of other regions and periods in Japanese religious history. In the following pages, I seek to shed light on the multifaceted nature of certain reliquaries from this period, what made them unique, as well as the stories and beliefs behind them as sacred religious objects. Scholars have argued that some of Japan's most beautiful gold work, even to this day, was created in Nanto during this time (Sekine 1991, 84). Many cabinet reliquaries (*shari zushi* 舎利厨子) created in the Nanto painting ateliers of this period also drew heavily on Nanto inspired temple and shrine landscapes. Their iconography was specific to this area—to the temples, shrines, and workshops that thrived here. Buddhism in Nanto at this time, moreover, drew on traditions, art, and texts from Nara's earlier religious history in the Nara and Heian periods, something that we will discuss in more detail below. Thus, in many ways, Nanto relic worship was unique from that of the Kamakura area.

It is this complexity and richness of Nara relic worship that inspires this dissertation. Many of the questions I ask in the following pages have been inspired by the objects themselves. They are a result of the fascinating and iconographically complex reliquaries that exist from this time, which often combine multiple schools of thought, multiple religious sites, and, in some cases, religious teachers from various continents and traditions. These reliquaries are often multifaceted and captivating objects. Furthermore, although many national treasures from this period are enshrined in national museums across Japan, especially in the Nara National Museum

known for its Buddhist art, little has been published on these objects in English. As valuable cultural objects, they can, however, teach us a great deal about Japan's past. However, most English readers have little to no access to the histories, stories, religious context, and visual culture of these national treasures. Through textual and material means, this dissertation seeks to illuminate the histories of these objects and the stories that they tell. One of the major goals of this dissertation is to bring meaning to these objects.

Finally, this dissertation also partakes in a larger conversation in the humanities. This conversation is about the theft of relics, the sacred body, gender and death. To such an end, it draws on the notion of *furta sacra* (sacred theft) a common phenomenon within the territories of the Roman Empire in medieval Europe. I use this term not to compare, but, rather, to question the social significance of the theft, borrowing, or exchange of relics, and the symbolic capital that such transfers (or, translations) generated. As Gregory Schopen points out, although the meaning of the Christian and the Buddhist terms for relic and the differences between the two traditions may differ,[4] what is done to them, said about them, or done by them is often quite similar (Schopen 1998, 257).[5]

In this vein, I draw on interdisciplinary scholarship on relics throughout this study. I look, for example, at Caroline Bynum's work on the body, gender, and fragmentation in medieval Europe; Katherine Verdery's writings on the exhumation and political use of corpses in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Soviet Bloc; and, Patrick Geary's writings on plundered tombs and raided churches in Europe's middle period. By using such methods, I seek to open a new avenue

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[4] As well as differences within the traditions of those traditions.

[5] Also, see Strong 2004, xvi.

for considering relic worship within the field of Religious Studies, as well as for thinking about the theft of relics in medieval Japan, and the role that relics played in rewriting history, shifting gender dynamics, and the place of relics within the political landscape. Although medieval Japan is its own case, and the Buddhist notion for relics differs from that of Christian relics, these comparative studies can offer new ways of framing questions around the socioreligious use of relics in Japan, and the reliquaries in which these relics are enshrined—concepts that I will explore in more depth in the following pages.[6]

In order to situate my dissertation within the history of relic worship in Japan, I have created, in the following pages, an overview of Buddhist relic worship on the archipelago. I also hope that this overview will prove useful for scholars and students of Buddhism, as there are few to no teaching resources, or chronological outlines, for teachers or students hoping to gain a basic understanding of the history of relic worship in Japan. This sub-section seeks to offer a comprehensive overview of such materials, and it is my hope that it can be used as a reference for the history of Japan's relic faith.

After this chronological outline of relic worship in Japan, we will look at the socioreligious anxieties of this period and how these historical fears and concerns attracted

[6] Christian relics and their reliquaries can represent the narrative of a given saint's death, for instance. One example of this is the reliquary bust of St. Just of Beauvais. This bust shows the moment after the saint was beheaded for being Christian by pagan soldiers. In this moment, the saint picked up his own head and gave thanks to the heavens above him. His reliquary, a bust of the boy holding his own head, shows a surrogate face of the saint, Scott Montgomery explains (Montgomery 1997, 52). It is this face with which devotees interact. This differs greatly from the Buddhist reliquaries that we will look at in the following chapters, which often show depictions of buddhas or bodhisattvas, but do not have images representing the relics of the saint or buddha they enshrine. In regards to the relics themselves, Buddhist relics are unique in that, Strong argues, they retell a tale. They summarize a bibliographical narrative that cannot be repeated, which embodies the life-story of the Buddha (Strong 2004, 7; Collins 1998, 242–249). This includes his teachings and cremation. They do not, like Christian relics, make manifest a transcendent reality—a notion that is evident in the Christian notion of time (Ibid). For a discussion on the Christian notion of time and the afterlife, see Heine 1985. On the reliquary bust of Satin Just, see Montgomery 1997, 48–64.

people toward relic worship, and spurred a revival of relic worship, in an effort to reach individual salvation; followed by an overview of the influential monks from this period and the roles they played in relic worship in the Nanto region; then the plan of the dissertation; and, finally, an explanation of the specific terms that I use in the dissertation to discuss relics and relic worship, as well as why I have chosen certain terms and forgone others.

II. Relic Worship in Japan: A Brief Overview

In Japan, relic worship has existed since the seventh century. It was first recorded in the Asuka period 飛鳥時代 (592–710), along with the advent of the initial Buddhist technologies imported from the Korean Kingdoms.[7] The *Nihon Shoki* 日本書紀, Japan's second oldest chronicle dating to the eight century, contains the earliest reference to relics as well as to relic worship (*shari shinkō* 舎利信仰) in Japan.[8] It mentions relics twice. Once in regards to a relic appearing at a ceremony to initiate the first Buddhist nuns in Japan, and once in regards to the construction of

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[7] On the first Asuka temple, Asukadera (literally, "Asuka Temple"), otherwise known as Hōkōji 法興寺, see, for instance, McCallum 2009; Buswell and Lopez 2013; and, *Nihon Shoki*. In his book on the great temples of the Asuka period, Donal McCallum explains that Asukadera, the first complete monastic compound in Japan, was built by a team of Korean builders between 588 and 596. This temple, which was constructed after the Soga achieved victory over Mononobe no Moriya 物部守屋 (d. 587), was commissioned by Soga no Umako 蘇我馬子 (d. 626) and served as the capital temple for the Soga clan. The Soga came from the Korean peninsula and were strong supporters of Buddhism. Prince Shōtoku 聖徳太子 (574–622), who will surface in later chapters and who is widely acknowledge for his relic worship, was a member of the Soga clan. Many earlier relic stories from the Asuka and Nara periods can be linked to the prince as well as to other members of the Soga family. See Buswell and Lopez 2013, 76.

[8] On *shari shinkō*, see Ruppert 2002b.

Asuka-dera 飛鳥寺, the first temple built in Japan.[9] These relics, like many Buddhist objects and architectural techniques that came to Japan at this time, were brought from the Korean kingdoms.[10] The emergence and dissemination of Buddhist practices and technologies during this period can further be accredited to the Soga 蘇我 clan, a powerful aristocratic family from the Korean peninsula. Many of these earlier stories of relics involve members of the Soga family (e.g., Soga no Umako and Prince Shōtoku) and a number of them include female and male protagonists.[11]

In practice, many relic stories, both fiction and not, contain female protagonists.[12] It is often overlooked that the first reference to a relic appearing on Japanese soil, as noted in the *Nihon shoki*, occurred in front of three nuns receiving tonsure, in the sixth century. The relic appeared on top of one of their rice bowls, during their initiation banquet. Although Soga no Umako later enshrined this relic himself, there is, as we will see below, power in the place and in

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[9] Interestingly, the first incident of relics mentioned in this text involves Buddhist nuns from the Korean peninsula. References to women occur repeatedly throughout this text. See for instance, Barnes 2006. For more on the *Nihon Shoki*, see Shirane and Suzuki 2015. For an interesting discussion on the two thousand and five hundred Buddhist relics (identified as pieces of glass and beads) enshrined in a gilt-bronze reliquary placed into a wooden box at Asukadera, which was dug up in the eleventh century after a fire. See Kidder 1992, 219.

[10] The Three Kingdoms of Korea (*sangoku jidai* 三国時代) refer the three kingdoms of Paekche (*Kudara* 百済), Silla (*Shiragi* 新羅), and Goguryeo (*Kōkuri* 高句麗), which dominated modern-day Korea and parts of Manchuria. Buddhist art flourished in the Korean states during the late Asuka period, from the sixth to seventh century. On Buddhist technologies that were brought to Japan during the Asuka era, also see McCallum 2009.

[11] According to the *Nihon Shoki*, the inception of Buddhism in Japan first occurred when Kinmei tennō 欽明天皇 (509–571) received a bronze image of the Buddha from King Song Myong (*Seimei Ō* 聖明王) of Paekche in 552 (or, in 538). Under Empress Suiko, Buddhism later became the central religion of the Asuka court.

[12] One example is a touching and potentially tragic second to fourth century story, noted in the *Mahāvatsu*. In this south Asian story, a young Buddhist woman denies her suitors, who then threaten her life. Worried that they will find her, she tells her mother that if they are to kill her, then her mother should gather the girl's bones and burn them. She should then build a shrine (literally an *elūka*, or funereally monument) for the remains of the girl and plant a tree over this. When the tree blossoms in the spring, the mother will be able to remember the beauty of her daughter. See: Jones 1949–1956, 3:19; and, Strong 2004, 15.

front of whom a relic was believed to have manifested. Shortly after this incident, Empress Suiko 推古天皇 (554–628), the first of Japan's seven female sovereigns, sent an edict to every province ordering them to erect a *stūpa* for the *Sovereign Kings of the Golden Light Sūtra* (*Konkōmyō-saishō-ō-kyō* 金光明最勝王経).[13] This order, issued shortly after a massive smallpox epidemic had spread across the country, was meant to safeguard the nation (Kidder 1992, 227).[14] Empress Shōtoku 称徳天皇 (718–770), who was widely regarded for her relic faith, also commissioned a *stūpa* construction project. She issued a decree that one-hundred thousand small wooden *stūpa* (lit., *stūpa* of the hundred directions, or *hyakumantō* 百万塔) should be constructed and distributed to influential, powerful temples throughout Japan, including the Seven Great Temples of Nara 南都七大寺 (which included, among other temples, Saidaiji 西大寺 and Kōfukuji 興福寺).[15] These *stūpa* each enshrined a printed *dhāraṇī* (a Buddhist incantation), i.e., a word relic.[16] The idea behind these two *stūpa* distribution enterprises was more or less the same: the power of the Buddha, manifested through his relics—

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[13] This *sūtra* was used throughout Japanese history to protect the nation.

[14] The *Gold Light Sūtra* is believed to be a state protecting *sūtra* in large part because of its content. It details the Four Heavenly Kings (*shitennō* 四天王) and other benevolent deities, who are said to protect the country of a righteous ruler that upholds the correct teachings. If the ruler is deviant, however, then natural disasters will strike and invasions will ensue. For a summary of this *sūtra*, see, for example, *Soka Gakkai Nichiren Buddhism Library*, accessed January 15, 2020.

[15] These were: Daianji 大安寺, Gangōji 元興寺, Hōryūji 法隆寺, Kōfukuji, Saidaiji, Tōdaiji 東大寺, and Yakushiki 薬師寺. Sūtra relics became more popular in the seventh century, J. Edward Kidder Junior explains, possibly because of the rapid increase of temples and great demand for relics, but there also seems to have been a strong political nature to this. See Takada 1986, and Kidder 1992.

[16] Katsura Noriko and Joan Pigget have both shown that female rulers in Japan tended to be more supportive of Buddhism. Herein, it is not surprising that they would draw on Buddhist relics for their rulership.

either bone relics, or word relics—would protect the nation from political harm and natural disasters.

Architecturally, during the Asuka period, relics were generally placed into wooden pagodas, specifically into the base of pagodas under a temple's heart stone (i.e., base stone).[17] This enshrinement style of relics in architectural reliquaries shifted slightly in the Nara period 奈良時代 (710–794), when it became common practice to construct two pagodas, rather than one. At this time, twin pagodas were placed on flanking sides of the interior of the temple's central gates (*chūmon* 中門).[18] An example of this can be seen with the eastern and western pagodas of Kasuga Grand Shrine 春日大社, as illustrated in certain *Kasuga Shrine Mandala* (*Kasuga Miya Mandara* 春日宮曼荼羅). Although the Kasuga pagodas are no longer extant, we know from temple foundation stones and from *Kasuga Shrine Mandala*, such as the Harvard Art Museum

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[17] Note: the pagoda in East Asia developed out of the Indian *stūpa* (Skt. "heap"), a dome-shaped burial mound housing relics. In Japanese, these are referred to as *tō* 塔 ("tower" or "pagoda"), a tower-like-architecture in the case of Japan, China, and Korea, which houses the relics of monks, nuns, or a buddha. Across these continents, the shape and materials differ greatly. In the ancient Indian context, *stūpa* were hemispherical mounds made of brick or stone. They are not meant to be entered or mounted (as seen with the Great Stūpa at Sanchi, in Madhya Pradesh, India). Such *stūpa*, which were also built by Jains, are meant to be circumambulated and used as a place of prayer. Some South Asian Buddhist *stūpa* were built in open-air complexes, while other smaller *stūpa* were carved into the sides of cliffs, designs which Lars Fogelin, the South Asian archaeologist, argues were constructed to encourage a more spontaneous form of group worship (Fogelin 2003). Moving to China, the *stūpa* became taller and thinner; they were constructed to look more like towers and less like mounds. Chinese *stūpa* were usually made of stone or brick and could be painted in various bright primary colors, much like Chinese temples. In Japan, the pagoda was constructed as a much thinner, lighter structure made of timber. This is the same material used for most premodern Japanese temples. If painted, these pagoda were usually only painted red, but more commonly they were designed to be a natural brown, the color of the cypress wood from which they were made. On *stūpa* in South Asia, see: Hawkes and Shimada 2009. On the notion of the *stūpa* as a living Buddha, see Schopen 1996. And, on the ritual use of *stūpa* in ancient India, see Fogelin 2003.

[18] The *chūmon* is the second or inner gate of the temple compound. It is the main entrance of the sacred precinct. There are no extant *chūmon* from the Asuka period. These gates are thought to have been two-storied gates during the early seventh to eighth century. By the ninth century, the *chūmon* was greatly reduced in size or just simply not made due to influences from Shingon 真言 and Tendai 天台 building styles. See, for instance, *Jaanus: Japanese Architecture and Art Net Users System*, "chuumon 中門" accessed May 22, 2019.

Fig. 1. *Kasuga Miya* Mandara. Twin pagodas in the bottom left of image (c. 1300). Harvard Art Museum/Arthur M. Sachet Museum. Hanging scroll. Ink, color, and gold on silk. Height 79.1 cm, Width 28.2 cm.[19]

example on the left, that the twin five-storied pagodas were built side-by-side at the entrance of the shrine (Fig. 1).[20] These were the first buildings a pilgrim would see upon entering the shrine precincts. Under each pagoda were relics.[21] As seen in the case of Empress Suiko, from the Asuka period into the Nara period, relic worship was closely linked to the rulership and prosperity of the realm.

As we move from the late Nara period into the Heian period 平安時代 (794–1185), we witness an increased interest in relic rituals in the court. During this time, various court funded scholar-monks embarked on dangerous nautical journeys, in the hopes of studying at one of the celebrated monasteries in the Tang capital, Chang'an 長安, and, thereafter, bring their religious insights

[19] This height and width is of the image without its mounting.

[20] This image dates to the thirteenth century. The twin pagodas of Kasuga actually burnt down in the Siege of Nara in 1180, when the Taira set fire to various temples in Nara, including Kōkukuji and Tōdaiji. Nakashima 2008, 66.

[21] It is understood that Chinese traders and pilgrims who traveled along the Silk Road across Central Asia adapted northern Indian *stūpa* styles as the basis for their pagodas. See Moffett and Fazio 2003.

back to Japan. Chang'an was a major center of academic Buddhist activity and scholarship.[22] During these sojourn in China, many scholar-monks procured relics, which they brought back to Japan to prove their linage and credibility.[23] Some of the most celebrated relics from this time were procured by Ganjin 鑑真 (688–763) and Kūkai 空海 (774–835); these relics were placed into temples such as Tōji 東寺, Tōshōdaiji 唐招提寺, and Murōji 室生寺.[24]

The rich cultural exchange that stewed between the two courts is expressed and illustrated in *sūtra*, paintings, ritual objects, statues, relics, and other sacred objects brought from China at this time. Because Tang Buddhism was idealized as "more authentic," and because many of the relics in China were thought to have come from India, these objects were viewed as sacred and prestigious. Through this proximity to the Buddha's body they, in turn, helped to prove legitimacy and to authenticate the transmission of the teachings of these great masters, much as the corpses of saints gained churches recognition in medieval Europe. As John Kieschnick points out in regards to early Buddhism in China: people wanted proof of the

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[22] There were thousands of monasteries in Tang China and tens of thousands of smaller Buddhist establishments, Jacques Gernet explains (Gernet 1995, 6). Some monasteries were more sought after than others. These monasteries were known for having trained famous monks and were regarded as ideal sites of study and for *sūtra* translation. One such example is Ximing Temple 西明寺, located in Chang'an (modern-day Xi'an 西安) the capital of the Tang. This monastery, where both Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664) and Yijing 義淨 (635–713) translated scriptures they brought back from India, became a major center for academic Buddhist activities (Abé 1999, 116). This is where Kūkai would later become a resident priest, under the Indian Tripitaka master Prajñā (734–810?). Ximing Temple was seen as an an ideal place to receive Buddhist training at this time. On Buddhism in Chinese society in the Tang, see Gernet 1995. On the notion of the monastery in Chinese material culture, and the persistent presence of the monastery in the Chinese landscape through memories and associations of the past, see Kieschnick 2003, 185–198.

[23] In the eighth century, for instance, Ganjin brought back several thousand relics from Tang China. On Ganjin's relics, see Tōno 2009.

[24] These famous relics became symbolic to uphold the law of the king (*ōbō goji* 王法護持), as pointed out by Nishiguchi Junko 西口順子. Nishiguchi 2006, 121.

miraculous powers of Buddhism, they wanted material signs of Buddhism's worth (Kieschnick 2003, 32). In this light, Kieschnick explains:

> It was not enough to introduce concepts, rituals, and beliefs; whether it was holy images or holy relics, skeptics and devotees alike wanted tangible evidence of the edict of the new religion. Chinese pilgrims responded to this thirst for relics by traveling to India, seeing as many relics as they could and bringing samples back to China…Travel accounts and subsequent pilgrims are similarly filled with meticulous descriptions of relics and records of legends associated with them. Pilgrims brought back more than stories; they also acquired in their travels actual relics (Kieschnick 2003, 32–33).

This tradition of procuring relics from abroad can be seen in earlier examples of Chinese monks traveling to India. For instance, Faxian 法顯 (337–c. 422) and Xuangzang 玄奘 (602–664) both carefully recorded how relics were worshipped and enshrined, as well as what types of offerings were made to relics, upon their visits to sacred sites in India.[25] In addition to texts, Xuangzang brought back over a hundred relics, and, thereafter, Yijing 義淨 (635–713) followed suit, returning from India with three hundred relic grains.[26]

The Japanese monks who traveled to China in the late Nara and early Heian periods reproduced this trend by acquiring relics from their travels to China—the same relics, so it was believed, that these earlier monks had sought out across India.[27] Many of the more "culturally valuable" relics from this time were brought to Japan by scholar-monks who had studied in Tang

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[25] For translations of Faxian and Xuanzang's writings in English, see, for instance, Li 2006 and Li 1996.

[26] There also seems to have been a steady stream of relics brought to China from merchants along the Silk Road—a topic that warrants further research. This draws certain parallels, as we will see, to the merchant trade of Christian relics, some of dubious authenticity, in medieval Europe.

[27] For more on China's interaction with Japan at this time, see, Islam 2018.

China, including, among the monks mentioned above, Ennin 円仁 (794–864),[28] Engyō 円行 (799–852), and Eun 恵運 (798–869). Along with relics came the importation of relic rituals (*sharie* 舎利会), relic related texts, hanging scrolls and implements.[29]

The veneration of relics on Japanese soil changed substantially during this time. In the Heian period, relics became a principle icon of worship in Buddhist rituals (Naitō 2001, 255). In this new and more visible role, relics were believed to answer prayers and bring benefits to worshippers. Relics also became equated with "wish-granting-jewels" (Jp. *manihōju* 摩尼宝珠; Skt. *cintāmaṇi*), which further allowed them to absorb the powers attributed to these magical gems. As Naitō points out, the rite *Goshichinichi no mishoho* 後七日御修法 (literally, The Latter Seven Day Rite), conducted by Kūkai within the imperial palace, changed the way that relics were worshipped. It made relics, now placed on the main altar in their reliquaries (or, in small to medium sized *stūpa*, seen as altars themselves), the central focus of various rituals.[30] In this way,

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[28] Ennin, for example, was said to have brought back three-thousand relics from Tang China. On Ennin, see, for instance Teiser 1988, 96–99.

[29] These texts and objects, which proved the legitimacy of these monks' transmissions, were often recorded in catalogues called *shōrai mokuroku* 請来目録—i.e., inventories documenting the origins of the *sūtra*, statues, images, and ritual implements brought back from Tang to the Heian court. Such *shōrai mokuroku* from the Nara era no longer exist, but there are several from the late Heian that record which relics were brought back and by whom. The monks mentioned above were among the eight Japanese Buddhist monks (*nittō hakke* 入唐八家) famously said to have visited Tang. They included: Saicho 最澄 (767–822), Kūkai, Jōgō 常暁 (?–867), Engyō 円行 (852–799), Ennin 円仁 (794–864), Eun 恵運 (798–869), Enchin 円珍, (814–891), and Shuei 宗叡 (809–884). The *shōrai mokuroku* by these eight Heian monks are still mostly accessible, and they include: Saicho's *Denkyō daishi shōrai mokuroku* 伝教大師将来目録, Kūkai's *Goshōrai mokuroku* 御請来目録, Ennin's *Nittō shingu shōgyō mokuroku* 入唐新求聖教目録, Jōgō's *Jōgō ojō shōrai mokuroku* 常暁和尚請来目録, Engyō's *Reiganji ojō shōrai hōmon dōgu tō mokuroku* 霊巌寺和尚請来法門道具等目録, Eun's *Eun Zenji shōrai kyōhō mokuroku* 恵運禅師将来教法目録, Enchin's *Chishōdaiji shōrai mokuroku* 智証大師将来目録, and Shuei's *Shinshosha shōrai hōmon tō mokuroku* 新書写請来法門等目録. On esoteric objects brought from China, specifically those of Kūkai, see Kubo 2010, 6–19.

[30] These are the sorts of relic rites Eison later replicates in the Kamakura era.

relics became the direct object of worship; they were accorded the power to answer people's prayers; and, they were displayed in front of worshippers, rather than buried deep in the inner sanctuaries of pagodas. This change in how relics were fundamentally enshrined altered how relics were, in turn, worshipped. As the central icon in relic ceremonies, relics were now commonly stored in reliquaries small enough to be placed on an altar (Naitō 2001, 254).

In the Kamakura era 鎌倉時代 (1185–1333) relic worship became more complicated, as did the reliquaries in which relics were encased.[31] Buddhism became more accessible, and, in tandem, it was accompanied by an increased concern that the world had entered the final age of the Dharma (i.e., the Buddha's teachings), the age of *mappō* 末法 (Ch. *mofa*).[32] According to this concept, which we will return to in the following pages, the Buddhist teachings and, thus, access to the Pure Land (i.e., the Buddhist Paradise), were soon to be lost. We see references to this decay of Buddhism in the writings of certain monks from this period, such as the Vinaya monk Eison 叡尊 (1201–1290). In a poignant example in the *Shiōdō saishō sōki* 四王堂最勝倉記, written in 1290, Eison expresses his dismay that a beloved Eleven-headed Kannon (Skt. *Avalokiteshvara*)[33] statue has been neglected and that various temple grounds had been converted into farms:

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[31] On relic worship in the Kamakura era, also see Nōtomi 1985.

[32] Sam Morse argues that rock-crystal reliquaries—as seen in connection to Chōgen, Jōkei, and Eison—did not gain wide acceptance until the beginning to the Kamakura period, due to the renewed interest in the historical Buddha and people's salvation in this period of *mappō*. Inserting these reliquaries into a statue, especially of the Buddha Dainichi, thus helped associate "it with the cosmos and with the founder of the Buddhist faith," he explains. Morse 2010, 37.

[33] Jp. *Jūichimen Kannon* 十一面観音.

> North of the capital, there was an Eleven-headed Kannon statue that had been sculpted based on the wishes of Toba tennō 鳥羽天皇 (1103–1156), it was a deeply spiritual statue that Eison thought of often. As time passed and things changed, faith in this turbid world became thin. Temples became farms, and temple fields, which supplied temple resources, became territories of others. Only the statue survived, its shape was not fully intact. There was no one who could repair it, and nowhere to enshrine it. In vain, it stood among the foundation stones [of the temple grounds]. Over sixty times the stars rotated in the sky, and the winter frost fell.[34] The birds cried in sorrow! In recent years people in the country had suffered from illness, and the roads were full of the sick and the dead.[35]

This beautifully written piece expresses the anguish and anxiety that plagued Buddhism during this period. With a melancholic tone, it explains how temples had fallen into ruin to such an extent that their main icons sat in empty fields. Bodies filled the streets. It seemed to many like the world was ending. It is easy to imagine how people might search for answers in such a dark, volatile time. It was in this setting that monks like Eison proposed their own readings of the Vinaya (*Kairitsu* 戒律), and turned away from government funded Buddhist institutions. As scholars have written elsewhere, the socioreligious climate made it increasingly difficult for more sincere monks to cultivate what they saw as proper practice. Eison in particular, the son of a Kōfukuji scholar-priest, genuinely tried to uphold the Vinaya precepts (i.e., the rules that govern the Buddhist community), but eventually became disheartened. This led him to seek self-ordination (*jisei jukai* 自誓受戒) and to start his own practice.[36] Relics, as we will see, were central to this practice.

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[34] More than sixty years passed.

[35] *Shiōdō saishō sōki*, 195. Translation by author.

[36] He performed this in front of a statue of Kannon 観音菩薩 at Tōdaiji 東大寺. This has been written on extensively in English language scholarship. See, for example, Abé 2002; Bowring 2005, 321–322; and, Groner 2001 and 2005.

In the case of Eison, he helped ordain many householders, both men and women, allowing them to receive the Buddhist precepts without leaving their homes (*shukkei* 出家). Throughout his life, he worked assiduously to reestablish the nuns' order as well as the nunnery system, which were greatly underfunded and had fallen into disarray by the late Heian period. Through Eison's ordination ceremonies (*jukai* 受戒) numerous women were able to become nuns.[37] Some entered nunneries, others remained at home. This was part of Eison's larger vision to create a complete *saṅgha*, which, according to the Vinaya, should by definition include both male and female monastics as well as laity.

Although Eison is well-known for his effort to reestablish the nuns' order, other monks from this period also made strong efforts, to various degrees, to include females in their teachings and as their disciples. These monks included, for instance, Myōe 明恵 (1173–1232), Shinran 親鸞 (1173–1263), and Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253).[38] Because many of these monks had

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[37] These included court ladies, concubines, female court attendants and so on. See, for example, *Kameyama Hōō Shinkan* 亀山法皇宸翰, 187.

[38] Each of these monks seemed to be more accepting of female followers, to differing extents, than many of their contemporaries. Myōe was perhaps the most egalitarian, at least in his later years. Several aristocratic and warrior women, who had become widowed in the war of 1221, became Myōe's disciples. This war, the Jōkyū War (*jōkyū no ran* 承久の乱), was fought between the previous emperor in Kyoto, Emperor Go-Toba 後鳥羽天皇 (1180–1239), who wanted to protect Kyoto as well as his power of rulership from the new warrior government, and the Kamakura shogunate. The warfare that ranged from the late Heian into the Kamakura period was primarily based on fights such as these: battles over rulership and political force. These bloody battles left many women without husbands. By this time in Japanese history, inheritance laws often excluded women, since a women's identity was, by this period, based on her husband and his family. (This was in stark contrast to the Heian era, where women could inherit land from their own family line.) By the Kamakura period, women were considered part of their husband's household, thus, upon becoming a widow, one of their best options was to enter the nunhood. This would show loyalty to the husband's line while also granting the woman in question more economic stability, Barbara Ambrose argues. Ambrose expands, "Over the course of the medieval period, widows came to be expected to seek Buddhist renunciation, regardless of whether they were very young or of advanced age," and, by doing this, "they could simultaneously continue to lay claim to support from their husbands' household and maintain a certain level of independence from their parents-in-law" (Ambros 2015, 80–81). Therefore, on a practical level, the increase in widows as well as the change in female inheritance laws might have also attracted women to the growing revival of female renouncers. Lori Meeks and Or Porath point out, however, that to enter these communities, women had to annul their noble status that allowed them social superiority over monks. Meeks 2010, 112–116. Porath 2019, 65.

left their positions as official monks (*kansō* 官僧) at celebrated monasteries, such as Tōdaiji and Daigoji 醍醐寺, they were, Matsuo Kenji 松尾剛次 argues, able to establish new orders that did not rely on government support (Matsuo 1997, 183). As recluse monks (*tonseisō* 遁世僧), they were now unfettered of certain restrictions that official monks observed, and they were permitted to pray for the salvation of people who were otherwise regarded as impure, such as outcasts (lit. "non people," or *hinin* 非人) as well as women (Matsuo 1997, 183).[39] This also gave them license to bestow ordination upon women.[40] In the unique case of Eison, he not only allowed women to become ordained, but he also permitted them to seek advanced esoteric consecration (*denbō kanjō* 伝法灌頂), the highest level of Buddhist ordination.[41] Perhaps as a result of this general trend, along with the revival of various nunneries, numerous relic stories from this period involve lay and monastic women.[42] It is noteworthy that one encounters women in relic narratives to such an extent that women seemed to be just as easily associated with relics in this period's storytelling and Buddhist narratives as men.[43]

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[39] In his article "What is Kamakura New Buddhism?: Official Monks and Reclusive Monks," Matsuo argues that since Kamakura period "reclusive monks," which included the leading priests of the Kamakura period (Myōe, Ippen, and so on), withdrew from officially recognized temples they were thus able to partake in activities that were otherwise considered impure. These included praying for the salvation of women and lepers, conducting funerals, and collecting contributions. Because these monks were not bureaucrats connected to the state, they were also able to establish orders that included secular believers of all genders, ages, and social classes. See: Matsuo 1997.

[40] Matsuo explains that the teachings of monks like Eison were directed at the salvation of all people regardless of gender, age, birth place, social statue, race, or nationality (Matsuo 1997, 184).

[41] See Matsuo 1997, 187.

[42] This revival of nunneries could be seen most in the work of Eison. He and his followers, both male and female, worked to rebuild and to revive over fifteen nunneries, including Hokkeji, Chūgūji 中宮寺, Toyuradera 豊浦寺. See, for example, Abé 2002, 116.

[43] Many of the early Japanese stories about relics from the Asuka period also involve women, especially nuns in these earlier cases.

Various records, chronicles and stories from this period recount relics magically appearing or disappearing, according to their own will, in front of female lay believers, monastics, and household nuns. In many earlier Heian period relic accounts and relic stories, important relics were believed to have increased and decreased depending on the fortune of the realm. This happened, primarily, behind closed doors. The most famous instance were of the Tōji relics, which increased over the centuries in their containers and were periodically counted by the court.[44] These relics were kept in vessels and, over the years, they were taken out and formally counted. Their fluctuations, up or down, were believed to correspond with the fortune of the realm (Ruppert 2000, 275).[45] These valuable relics, brought from China, increased in a controlled environment, regulated by a select few.

This multiplication of relics differs radically from the stories that we will look at in the thirteenth and fourteenth century cases of Hokkeji 法華寺, Saidaiji, Hōryūji 法隆寺, and other important Nanto temples. Instead, in these Kamakura era examples, relics either appeared magically in vast numbers—such as, in the presence of the Hokkeji nuns—or they were called forth by devout monks and nuns through ritual and prayer. There seemed to be an organic, unpredictable aspect to relics appearing, disappearing and multiplying before believers.[46] Coinciding with this, there was a performative and viewership element to these miraculous events that contributed to the power of relic stories.

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[44] These relics were said to have increased from eighty to over four thousand over the years.

[45] Shingon abbots ritually counted the relics and reported the numbers back to the *tennō* 天皇 (or, emperor).

[46] In regards to court control of relics, see Ruppert 2000. In one instance, Ruppert notes that in 1324, Godaigo tennō 後醍醐天皇 (1288–1339) described the Buddha relics of Tōji as "spiritual treasures of the realm and protectors of the imperial family." See Ruppert 2000, 274.

These stories reflected the changes in how relics were worshipped. That is, relic worship was becoming increasingly accessible to laity and monastics, as the proximity of the worshipper's body became closer to that of the Buddha, literally, to the relic.[47] Rather than being hidden under a pagoda, relics were now worshipped in their reliquaries, or they were taken out for rites and placed on a main altar. One example of this is the Dhātu (Jp. *dato*; Ch. *tuodu* 駄都) rite, where relics serve as the main icon (Sekine 1991, 83, 85).[48] In contrast to earlier practices, relics were now often visible in their reliquaries, allowing the gaze of the practitioner to rest on the body of the Buddha.

There was, moreover, a novel element of agency involved in where, when, and in front of whom relics were believed to manifest.[49] This helped link the relics—magically multiplying pebble-like objects—to certain landscapes and personages, which tended to span the entirety of the *saṅgha*. This tendency to multiply, including the times and places in which this happened,

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[47] This is not to say that there are not earlier stories of devotees having close proximity to relics. Rather, here, I mean that the way that relics were generally enshrined and worshipped in temple spaces had shifted. In ninth century China, for instance, there are cases of monks ingesting relics (as well as burning their bodies) as ways of "drawing on the power of the Buddha's body" (Faure 1996, 168; Kieschnick 1995, 75).

[48] In Sanskrit *dhātu* has many meanings, including body, constituent element of the body, primary element of the earth, ashes of the body, and relics. In this instance, it refers to relic. Also see Faure 2004; or, Trenson 2018.

[49] There are earlier stories of relics magically appearing in Japan, although not in the thousands as seen at Hokkeji. One charming eleventh century story, for example, takes place near the eastern gate of Yakushiji 薬師寺 in Nara. In this story a nun who is carrying a heap (*ichigō* 一合) of small beans, marvels as the beans transform into relics (literally, *shari*), after chanting the name of Amitābha Buddha (*Amida* 阿弥陀). See *Shichi daiji junrei shiki* 七大寺巡礼私記, authored by the late Heian era scholar for the Bureau of Education, Ōeno Chikamichi 大江親通 (?–1151).

made manifest a sacred geography that, I argue, was unique to this period.[50] Part of this sacred geography can be accredited to the new proximity of relic-to-worshipper that emerged during this period (i.e., many relics could now be seen within their reliquaries by worshippers). Relics were no longer hidden. This seemed to fundamentally change the way that worshippers interacted with relics, gender dynamics around relics, the control of relics, as well as how, where, and in front of whom relics were believed—or, rather, allowed—to appear. In a word, this shift of the proximity of the relic to the worshipper seemed to facilitate a more versatile, diverse, and differently gendered belief system around relics.[51] An important aspect of this was a given relic's associations with certain spaces, spaces that existed more and more outside of the court.

Temples and temple spaces, like all spaces, carry stories of the past. They often allude to sacred events, which can be linked to given objects or people. In this way, memory can become associated with a place, just as it might an object, person, smell, or sound. To such an end, monasteries, as Kieschnick has affectively shown, have been written about as "repositories of

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[50] In his comprehensive book on relics in India, entitled *Relics of the Buddha*, John Strong writes about what he calls "place relics," such as the footprint relic and the shadow relic of the Buddha. That is, relics of the Buddha that are linked to a given place and to the Buddha's actions in that place (Strong 2004). These are relics, that unlike bodily relics, were made during the Buddha's lifetime. They mark a certain space. The relics that I deal with in the following pages also draw on the concept of place, and, specifically the notion of space in relation to the relics of the Buddha—relics that, in contrast, occurred during his cremation. It is through these bone relics, I argue, that the Buddha is made manifest and that a sacred mapping of space can occur.

[51] In relic stories from Europe's middle ages, it is not uncommon for people to touch, rub, hug or kiss relics, or, even, to hide them in their mouths to conceal them (Schopen 1998, 256). It seems that by touching one's body to a relic, understood as the body of the saint, one could absorb the power of the sacred; they could, in a sense, bind themselves to the sacred. This differs from the notion that I discuss in regards to Japan. Here, it is simply the worshipper's proximity to the relic that creates a new relationship of the worshipper and the sacred. This proximity does not need to involve physically touching, or even holding the relic—it is simply the idea of being in its presence.

memories" and as places of association with events of the past (Kieschnick 2003, 187).[52] We can extend this idea of place as "a memory repository" to the relationship between temple spaces and relics.[53] In this way, memories around relics, as well as their stories and the lives that these stories take on, can shift and be remade through the presence of relics appearing or disappearing at a sacred site, as well as in front of a certain person at that site. That is to say, through *relics*, which often carry a myriad of stories and lineages, a site can take on new associations and can even become sacred, or have its sacredness revived through the beliefs that relics embody.

In this light, relics themselves can act as repositories of memories: they can carry certain associations that are transferred onto the site and its followers. This situation is ideal for people seeking to prove their lineage or right to practice (e.g., newly ordained female monastics in a volatile political and socioreligious period). Although this transfer of power through ownership is a function that relics have embodied since they first appeared in ancient India, the sudden multiplying of relics and the repetition with which this occurred, at a splattering of temple and shrine grounds, seems to have been more unique to stories and histories from this period in Japan.

Similarly, the methods by which one obtained relics had changed. Rather than amassing relics from the continent, as had been common practice from the late Nara into the Heian period,

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[52] For a sixth century example in Luoyang China, see for example, Yang Xuanzhi's 楊衒之 (d. 555) *Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Luoyang* (*Luoyang qielan ji* 洛陽伽藍記). In her dissertation on the Southern Rounded Hall (Nan'endō 南円堂) at Kōfukuji, Yen-Yi Chan similarly argues that the architecture of the building and its icons function as "a locus of memory" for the maintenance of the Fujiwara family as an institution. Chan 2018, iii.

[53] Pierre Alain Mariaux points out that the exchange of an object can create a connection with the past and with, what he refers to as, a "collective memory" of the community that possessed the object (Mariaux 2010). Similarly by exchanging, gifting, or taking relics one can create a sense of continuity in these sacred objects that connect them to their various owners as well as a collective memory of the object.

it became more widespread to gather relics associated with the Tang dynasty 唐代 (618–907)—prestigious relics which had previously been brought to Japan—or to acquired relics that had magically manifested from such precious relics.[54] Whichever means one chose, these relics were thought to have originated in India. We can see this belief made manifest in the teachings and praxis of many celebrated monks from this period, including: Chōgen 重源 (1121–1206), Eison, Jōkei 貞慶 (1155–1213), and Myōe.[55] Relic worship seemed to have thrived at this time from the elite downward due to the belief, or the fear, that achieving individual salvation had become increasingly difficult, and, thus, possessing direct access to the Buddha's body was the best way to obtain the true teachings. Let us turn now to examine the communal anxieties around *mappō*.

III. The Age of the Lost Dharma

From the late Heian into the Kamakura era, many monastics and aristocrats believed that the Buddhist teachings were increasingly unavailable and that the Dharma was in a state of decline (Moerman 2007, 245).[56] Standards of monasteries had become lax and Buddhism, specifically in relation to the court, had become secular in ways that made many pious monks uncomfortable (Bowring 2005, 321).[57] Monks, for instance, were known to marry and some even attended

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[54] Often these self-manifesting relics appeared as a byproduct of one of the Heian era relics brought from Tang.

[55] Relic worship played a big role in Chōgen's writings and religious activities, as seen, for example, in the thirteenth century text by Chōgen, the *Namuamidabutsu sazenshū* 南無阿弥陀仏作善集. See: Tanaka and Tazawa edition 1955.

[56] For an interesting study on the interring of consecrated Buddhist scriptures during this period in order to preserve them for the coming of the future Buddha Maitreya, see, for instance, Moerman 2007.

[57] It was out of such disillusionments, as Buddhism became more mired with secular and political matters, that Hōnen and Shinran created their own brand of popular devotion (Bowring 2005, 321).

drinking parties. In one example in the *Chōmonshū* 聴聞集, a monk named Gakuritsubō (13th c.) liked to drink so much that he only studied doctrine while drunk at night, which would result in sloppy readings of the texts (Groner 2019, 2).[58] Monastic devotion was in a state of decline. This reality was echoed by the belief that Buddhism had reached its final day.[59]

Rather than bringing about the end of Buddhism, however, this led to various schools further developing and to latent features of Buddhism flourishing in new ways (Earhart 2004, 100). One such instance was the revival of the Vinaya and Yogācāra (*Hossō* 法相) teachings. As Buddhism scholar Nōtomi Jōten 納富常天 explains, Śākyamuni worship (*Shaka shinkō* 釈迦信仰) also became increasingly popular as relic worship followed behind it hand-in-hand (Nōtomi 1985, 447). Worshiping the remainders of the Buddha's body brought devotees closer to the Buddha, and to his teachings, in a time when people feared that these teachings might become lost and salvation might be rendered unattainable.[60] Relics filled this role adeptly. They were accorded the same status as the Buddha, and, even if the Buddha was not present in his relics, they continued to govern according to his will. Thus, worshipping the Buddha's relics in a period

[58] This quote comes from the handout of a talk Paul Groner gave at Harvard University on January 18, 2019. See, Groner talk January 18, 2019, 2.

[59] For a historical overview of *mappō*, see Marra 1988.

[60] In her dissertation on Buddhist paintings in Nanto, Anne Morse argues a similar point in regards to statuary. Twelfth century statuary in Japan often references the eighth century, which could, she argues, ensure "a sense of continuity with a time that was perceived to be a more perfect age" and thus the Buddhist teachings could be better preserved (Morse 2009, 3).

of immense uncertainty allowed people to move closer, they believed, to liberation (Trainor 1992, 13–15).[61]

Politically, this period was problematic and unstable. Struggles between rising feudal lords dominated the scene and large temples served as major economic and military forces, further contributing to the unrest of the times (Earhart 2004, 100). The divided nature of rulership was unlike that of the Nara or Heian periods, when art and culture had prospered in times of relative peace (Mass 1992, xiii). In this sense, the term for this period, named after the Kamakura region, where the feudal government was established, is slightly misleading. There was, rather, a dual political system, with the retired tennō (*in* 院) also welding power in Kyoto. For this reason, as much as possible, I try to refer to the specific centuries—the twelfth through fourteenth century—in the following pages and less to the modern specification of the "Kamakura era." Another reason for this preference is that this project is focused on Nanto Buddhism 南都仏教 (or, Buddhism of the "Southern Capital," i.e., of the modern Nara region), not on Buddhist teachings that emerged specifically in the Kamakura region.[62]

Architecturally, during this period, celebrated Nanto temples, such as Saidaiji and Tōshōdaiji, showed an increased production in relic-based-architecture, including: relic *stūpa*, five-tiered-pagodas (*gorintō* 五輪塔), treasure-pagodas (*hōtō* 宝塔), flaming-jewel reliquaries

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[61] Patrick Geary also notes that Christian relics allowed the person to be closer to the given saint after the saint had died. Geary 1990, 152–154.

[62] Nara came to be known as the "Southern Capital," or Nanto, during the Heian period. See, for instance, Morse 2009, iii. On Nanto Buddhism, see Oishio 1995.

(*kaenhōju katachi shari yōki* 火焔宝珠形舎利容器), and so on.[63] Many of these skillfully crafted reliquaries were fashioned from bronze or gold.[64] The art historian Sekine Syun'ichi explains that the gold work produced in Nanto at this time contains some of the highest levels of craftsmanship found in Japan to this day (Sekine 1991, 84). In tandem with the construction of various *stūpa*, there was a growth in the stories about and objects concerning relic worship at temples in the Nara region, especially at powerful temples, such as: Hokkeji, Saidaiji, Murōji, Tōdaiji 東大寺 and the Kasuga-Kōfukuji complex (*Kasuga Kōfukuji gattai* 春日社興福寺合体).[65] At many of these great temples, there were powerful monks that spread their own style of relic worship through their practices and teachings—each offering his own "correct" reading on Buddhism, salvation, and how to avoid the Buddhist hells.

IV. The Big Players of Kamakura Buddhism

Research on celebrated Buddhist masters from this period—such as, Eison, Chōgen, Jokei, and Ippen 一遍上人 (1234–1289)—often offers sympathetic readings on the lives and works of these monks, presenting them as saint-like-figures who strived to revive Buddhism and to help

[63] By Nanto Bukkyō I mean Buddhist and sometimes Buddhist-Shinto practices, movements, and traditions in the Nara region during the Kamakura era. This term can also be used to refer to the temples, statues, sutra, and sermons from this area. See, for instance, *Nihon Bukkyō shi jiten* 1999, 803. As for Saidaiji, this is known as one of the seven major original Nara monasteries. It was first revived by Eison in 1235 and thereafter became the headquarters for the Shingon Ritsu tradition.

[64] Many of the extant reliquaries from this period are associated with important Nanto monks and clearly great resources were put into their making. This emphasis on reliquaries further testifies to the value of relic worship during this time in Nanto.

[65] Tōdaiji and Kōfukuji were two of the most powerful temples in the city. Kōfukuji, which is more central to this study, was founded by the Fujiwara 藤原 clan in the early eighth century, when Nara was the capital. The Grand Shrine of Kasuga 春日大社, the family shrine of the Fujiwara, was also established around this time.

suffering beings, void of political or person motives. Japanese scholarship also tends to reflect sectarian interests, since many scholars in Japan are associated with, or funded by Buddhist traditions. Although these Kamakura figures often did care greatly about the well-being of their followers, they were, like all historical figures, humans with their own agendas and interests. Despite this seemingly obvious point, unpopular stories or alternative views about them have often been ignored, glossed over, or neglected, such as stories of theft, or the misuse of power.

Eison, for instance, is often presented as a saintly figure (literally, as a *bosatsu* 菩薩). In the *Kongō Busshi Eison kanjin gakushōki* 金剛仏子叡尊感身学正記 (hereafter, the *Kanjin gakushōki*), he even refers to himself, and signs his chronicles, with the title *bosatsu*, or bodhisattva.[66] Looking at Eison's writings, I would like to posit that he may have exaggerated his role in relic collection and relic worship beyond what might be considered the unbiased recording of events. Rather, the elite nuns in Eison's order may have actually played a more active role in encouraging Eison to use relics in his practice, and they may have helped him to deepen his relic practices beyond what he, perhaps, could have achieved on his own. This is a point that we will return to in Chapter One.

For now, I would like to point out that these eminent monks did not exist in a vacuum. They were supported by large communities of laymen and women, as well as the nuns and monks who surrounded and assisted them. They did not develop their traditions singlehandedly without the help and influence of those around them. They existed, rather, as a single component

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[66] A bodhisattva is an enlightened being who chooses to remain in this world to help save other sentient beings who are bound to the Buddhist cycle of death and rebirth within the Six Realms (*rokudō* 六道). Also, we should note that Eison's attitude seems to change in his later years. For instance, Paul Groner points out that in Eison's later works, such as in the *Chōmonshū*, he seems to become more reticent and self-reflecting (Groner 2019).

in a more complex social network. As the following chapters will show, there was great overlap in their ownership and exchange of relics, and even within their construction of reliquaries and the aesthetics of those reliquaries.[67] For instance, many reliquaries from this period display influences from various traditions in a single reliquary or reliquary set. In an effort to narrow this down, we will focus, in the following pages, on extant reliquaries related to three specific sites in the Nanto region. These include: Hokkeji, Saidaiji, and Murōji. Each of these temples is distinct and important to relic worship in its own way. I have selected these three sites because, together, they illustrate a wide array of the complexities, oddities, and fascinations that existed around relic worship and relic theft during this period. To such an end, this dissertation examines the stories (*engi* 縁起), chronicles, histories, and objects related to relics at this trinity of sites, as well as the beliefs around them, in an effort to create a more nuanced understanding of relic worship in Nanto. This new and multifaceted nature was, I will argue, distinct to this period.

V. Plan of the Dissertation

My dissertation is divided into three parts.[68] Each focuses on one temple site. An alternative method of structuring the same material would have been to divide this project along the lines of people—such as, the nun Kunyō 空如 (b. 1176) of Hokkeji, Eison of Saidaiji, and Chōgen's

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[67] Many of the extant reliquaries from this period were commissioned by Nara-based temples, and they are strikingly similar in design, material, and shape. Although the iconography or the exact shape and size may differ slightly, there is great overlap in the basic style of many of these reliquaries.

[68] If I were to add another site to this study, it would be Kasuga Taisha. In the future, I hope to include a chapter on this shrine and its fascinating variations in relic worship. There are a number of intricate cabinet reliquaries from the Kamakura period and the Muromachi period 室町時代 (1336–1573) at the Nara National Museum and Tokyo National Museum, which boast Kasuga mandala that the Fujiwara seemed to have used for long-distance worship and were later used by local groups for Kasuga worship.

relationship to the Murōji relics—rather than places. As a result of my research, however, I have decided to integrate these instances of people, places and relics into a framework that prioritizes the landscapes within which the relics were worshipped, enshrined, stolen, gifted, lent out, and written about. Locating place at the center of this study allows us to ask questions about relics as visual objects in relation to these sites, including the beliefs around the relics as well as their functionality. It also allows us to examine the stories and histories around relic worship as it is attributed to particular locations. In regards to materials, I draw on both texts and objects, which, as Melanie Trede points out, "lead lives of their own," but "also intersect and cross-fertilize each other" in revealing ways (Trede 2004, 25).[69] With this in mind, let us turn to the breakdown of the sections of the dissertation.

The first section is focused on nuns and their relics. Specifically, this section of the dissertation discusses relic theft and relic worship in relation to the Shingon Ritsu nuns of Hokkeji.[70] This section is primarily concerned with the role of the nuns and their relic worship,

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[69] On the importance of incorporating visual materials into historical scholarship on Japan, see, for example, Kuroda Hideo 黒田 日出男 (Kuroda 1986).

[70] Many of these stories addressed in this dissertation involve the theft or taking of relics—this is a sub-theme that traces through each chapter. In regards to theft, I am interested in the cultural, social and religious meanings of and beliefs behind the thefts, more than if the thefts actually took place and can be historically verified. That these relics were believed to have been taken, rather than given away or traded, greatly increased their value as coveted objects. This value, and the meaning and belief behind it, mattered more than if the relics were actually stolen. Put differently, the beliefs around these objects held more weight than the history or provenance of the objects themselves.

as well as the religious power that relics allotted the nuns.[71] The Hokkeji temple, which had fallen into disarray by the early thirteenth century, was revived by Eison in the 1240s, due to his belief that a healthy nuns' order was invaluable to the longevity of the Buddhist community (the *saṅgha*), as discussed above. What is little addressed in modern scholarship, however, is the question: what happened with the temple's relics before Eison came to the temple? Although Lori Meek's groundbreaking work on the nunnery has offered new insights into the nunnery and its nuns, my study, in contrast, focuses on the nuns and their relics and how we can use these relics to better understand what was going on at this site, as well as in the general Nanto area, in regards to relic worship.

There is little published on relic worship in relation to nuns in English or Japanese, or in the field of Buddhist studies in general.[72] Preferring stories about monks and their relics, with a few exceptions, scholars in Japan and North America have generally glossed over the power that nuns had apropos to relics and how relics appeared and multiplied in front of female monastics. Part of the reason for this may also be the paucity of sources. It is difficult to locate sources that focus primarily on nuns and relics, another reason there may be so few studies on this topic. Part

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[71] Traditionally scholarship on this topic has focused on the male voices present in these texts, but over the last few decades there has been a move in Japanese studies toward studying texts on women in ancient (*kodai* 古代) and medieval (*chūsei* 中世) religious practices. Scholarship on *kodai* Buddhism tends to focus on elite court nuns in regard to the state and the court, while *chūsei* scholarship tends to look at lay nuns (Matsuo 2004). This reflects trends in female ordination practices during these periods, and the influx of lay nuns that came about during the late Heian into the Kamakura era. On female ordination practices during this time, see, for instance, *Shien Shōnin donin gyōhō kechige ki* 思円上人度人行法結夏記. On the precept ceremonies that Eison performed, see *Kanjin gakushōki*.

[72] Various studies mention nuns and relics, or even fingernail relics, but in English we still lack a study that examines nuns and relics in Japan in detail. In Japanese, Nishiguchi Junko has published ground-breaking research on women and *cintāmaṇi*, while Steven Trenson has an article on relics and court-women in regards to dragon worship and rainmaking at Daigoji 醍醐寺 (Nishiguchi 2006; and, Trenson 2010). In English, Brian Ruppert devotes a very interesting chapter of his book on relics to gender and relics (Ruppert 2000). Each of these studies offers insights into the control that elite women and female monastics had over relics. Building on these shorter articles and chapters, I hope that we make scholarship on women and relics more pervasive and common place.

of this, however, is also due to an old trend to focus on male voices and the narratives that surround male monastics. Although there are presently many scholars working against this trend, it remains a minority and such studies are categorized as "studies about nuns," while studies about monks are still considered "studies about monastics."

To counteract this trend, I have confined my discussion for Chapter One to the better-preserved and better-documented texts and reliquaries associated with Hokkeji or with the nuns or monks who had a relationship to this site. That is, with monastic people, both male and female, who were related to relic worship hereabouts. Given that Hokkeji was an elite nunnery, we should note that these examples might prove to be more spectacular than what one might find at a smaller, more modestly funded nunnery. There are few extant sources about such nunneries, however, making them fairly difficult to study. It is my hope that by looking at relic worship at Hokkeji we might be able to establish, what Cynthia Hahn calls, "a visual rhetoric" that could be used for thinking about future studies focused on smaller nunneries.[73] With this in mind, this section shows that the Hokkeji nuns possessed, controlled, and distributed their own relics. This is important in that these relics, the bones of the Buddha, belonged to the nuns. This implies that the nuns, and perhaps other nuns during this period, were granted more power, ownership, and agency over Buddha relics than has hitherto been acknowledged in scholarship.[74] A larger goal of this section is to re-situate the place of nuns and relics by showing the value of possessing relics

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[73] Hahn writes about this in relation to pilgrim shrines in Jerusalem. Hahn 1997, 1084.

[74] There very little scholarship addressing nuns possessing and overseeing relics in Japan. Studies on this topic, even in South Asian and Central Asian studies, tend to focus on male monastics. One noteworthy exception is the innovative work of Gregory Schopen. Specifically, Schopen's article "The Suppression of Nuns and the Ritual Murder of their Special Dead in Two Buddhist Monastic Texts" (Schopen 1996). In this article, Schopen explains that this group of nuns used their *stūpa*—which contained the relics of an eminent nun and was seen as a living saint in the community—for their livelihood. Thus, destruction of the *stūpa* would be tantamount to killing a monastic within their community. Schopen shows that this idea was supported through legal codes of this period.

during this period and what this implied socially, politically, religiously, and, in particular, in regards to women's history, not just in premodern Japan but also in Japan today—specifically in regards to gender dynamics and agency.[75]

Before delving into the next section, we should note that during China's Tang dynasty and Song dynasty 宋代 (960–1279) new ideas surrounding relic worship came to Japan with the exchange of scholar-monks between the two continents. Along with such shifts, and the advent of the worship of the bones of elite monks and nuns, ideas around what it meant to possess sacred relics changed. One such notion was the belief that the amount of relics one possessed, as well as the mystical powers of those relics, indicated the depth of an individual's enlightenment. In this light, by possessing relics, the Hokkeji nuns—and the nunnery itself, as a grounds where relics, seen as animate objects, chose to appear—could illustrate that they had obtained a certain level of enlightenment and that the nunnery, and its grounds, were a sacred space where relics chose to appear and to remain.[76]

This is important because, according to belief, relics choose to appear in front of select people at given times and places. Such appearances attest not only to the spiritual enlightenment of the person, but also to their ability to attract and maintain the sacred. In such relic stories, if a

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[75] It is general knowledge that Japan is not making progress in gender equality, as exemplified by its ranking of one hundred and twenty one (among one hundred and fifty three countries) in the Global Gender Gap rankings of 2019, conducted by the World Economic Forum (Yamaguchi 2019). In 2020, its rankings have still not changed. Highlighting powerful female voices in medieval Japanese history can help us to question modern concepts of gender inequality in Japan, much of which is justified by the argument that Japan has always been this way. These antiquated notions, as scholars such as Ryuichi Abé have shown, are projections onto the past, rewritings or anachronistic readings of history, that are used to justify modern biases (Abé 2015). Questioning this past, and shedding light on the role that some of these women played, might help to rewrite, and hopefully change, these present biases for the better.

[76] Nakamura says that relics are "living." The character he uses is *sei* 生 (lit., live, life, or living). I prefer the term animate, "alive or having life," as this word can be used to refer to objects in the English language, rather than only to living organisms. Nakamura 2006, 7.

keeper is undeserving, the relic will often leave, or be seduced by a new, more estimable keeper (i.e, a *furta sacra*). With this in mind, the notion that relics chose to appear at Hokkeji, especially in front of its female monastics, shows that the nuns had the ability to attract relics and to entice them to stay. In regards to sacred space, relics appear in and return to sacred places, one could even say that they "decide" which spaces are sacred. Herein, by appearing at Hokkeji, the relics are justifying this as a sacred site—or, put differently, they are making the nunnery into a sacred site. This is similar to what we will see in the following section with Eison.

This leads us to section two. With a focus on Eison's revived temple Saidaiji, this section examines Eison's construction of a sacred geography, based on his teachings and praxis, through his use of relics and relic worship. Specifically, this section looks at relic theft, the construction of narrative around space, and how Eison used these stories—real or fabricated—to create a microcosm of his own teachings linked to his religious and political networks in the Nara region. Art historically, this chapter draws on the Five Reliquary Vases (*Gobyō shariyōki* 五瓶舎利容器), national treasures housed at the Nara National Museum, to better understand what Eison was doing on the ground, not simply what he *said* he was doing in his writings. These vases—which make up an intricate little studied, eleven-piece reliquary set—contain relics from various female courtiers and female monastics, as well as other devotees and Kasuga Grand Shrine. By constructing these vases, encasing relics from a variety of important places and people, Eison was, I argue, constructing—in the space of the reliquaries, when read as a microcosm—a sacred cosmology. This cosmology was representative of the Nara region, and of his practices and teachings hereabouts. At the center of this, Eison situated Hokkeji. One reoccurring question in this section is, how did Eison come across the thousands of precious relics that he enshrined in

these vases? Did he take them? Were they gifts "acquired" through dreams? These are questions that we will explore in the pages below.

For this section of the dissertation, I visited the Nara National Museum on several occasions to photograph their reliquaries and to meet with curators specializing in Buddhist art. As for the relics in the Five Vases, the museum's curator Naitō posits that Eison collected these four thousand plus relics over his lifetime, since he commissioned these exquisite reliquaries in his later years. Given the paucity of information regarding how Eison obtained some of these relics—even though his reception of just a few relics from important courtiers and emperors is often noted in his annuals and chronicles—I contend that, perhaps, he "borrowed" or even stole some of these relics. To make this argument, this section mostly draws on primary sources from the thirteenth century. There has been very little published on the vases in modern Japanese scholarship outside of the work of Naitō and Kawada, and close to nothing in English, making this the first English language study to address the religious and art historical significance of these beautiful and complex national treasures in detail.

The third section of my dissertation continues with the theme of theft, relic worship, and the construction of sacred space in the Nanto region. It turns to the temple Murōji, on Mount Murō 室生山.[77] This temple, known for its relic faith and regarded as a "Mount Kōya for females" during the Edo period 江戸時代 (1603–1868), is a fascinating site for relic worship for various reasons. In the Heian period, Kūkai was said to have buried relics here. These relics,

[77] There are many art historical studies in Japanese on the architecture of Murōji as well as its statuary. There is also various scholarship on Kūkai enshrining the relics on this mountain, after his return from China, and other, somewhat more limited, scholarship about the theft of these relics by Chōgen's disciple in the Kamakura period. There is little to nothing published, however, that looks comprehensively at Murōji and how relic worship was viewed at this site during the twelfth and fourteenth century, in regards to histories and stories around relics, and, specifically, in regards to the objects that surrounded relic worship on this mountain.

which he had brought back from the Tang capital, were believed to trace back to the Buddha Mahavairocana Tathagata (Jp. *Dainichi Nyorai* 大日如来): the buddha from whom the entire universe emanates, and who serves as the central object of devotion for esoteric Buddhism. This made these relics all the more valuable, and, in turn, the power and myths behind them became attributed to Mount Murō.

This mountain had long been regarded as an important site for relic worship, due to its dragon cave, one of the oldest in Japan. Rain prayers were held here for the dragon god, asking him to evoke rainfall for the country and its crops. In the Heian period, those prayers were thought to help alleviate mass drought and famine. Monks came to this site to pray to the dragon god for rain, since dragons are believed to dwell under the sea, where they control the tides and the rains. The relic stories attributed to this mountain led to two famous relic thefts hereabouts in the Kamakura era: one by Chōgen's disciple Kūtai 空諦 (b. 1149) and one by Kakuhibō 覚日房 (13th c.). The extant reliquaries associated with this mountain reflect these earlier stories of Kūkai, dragons, wish-granting-gems, and other such narratives, both fantastical and real.

In regards to reliquaries associated with Mount Murō, there are various "cabinet-style" (*zushi* 厨子) reliquaries, on which little has been published outside of the work of a few Nara National Museum curators. Many of these reliquaries are dated to this period and display the imagery of dragon worship as well as relic worship. Perhaps, the most fascinating Murōji related reliquary is the "Black Lacquered Relic Cabinet" that opens to Kūkai sitting on an open lotus, accompanied by the Dragon King (*Ryūō* 竜王),[78] with Mount Murō and two dragons

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[78] This depiction of the Dragon King shows him as half-man and half-dragon.

behind him. Although this reliquary is explained briefly in a few art history catalogues in Japanese, little has been written on its historical and narrative contexts. Contextualizing the Mount Murō related reliquaries, such as this one, as well as the narratives that surround them, is one of the primary goals of this section.

VI. Defining Terms

I use the term relic, or *shari* 舎利 (Skt. *śarīra*), to refer to bodily relics, the corporeal remains of the Buddha.[79] Put simply, *shari* are the "bones" found in the Buddha's cremation fire.[80] In medieval Japan, corporeal relics often referred to jewel-like-grains that were worshipped as Buddha relics and enshrined in reliquaries, pagodas, and statues (Covaci 2016, 156).[81] John Strong notes that, according to the Pali tradition, nothing was left after the Buddha's body was burned except *shari* (Strong 2004). Although some scholars translate *shari* as "bones," Buddhaghoṣa, the fifth-century Indian Theravada Buddhist commentator and scholar, writes that *shari* were "jasmine buds, washed pearls, and nuggets of gold."[82] These came in three sizes: that of mustard seeds, broken grains of rice, and split green peas. In this way, *shari* seem to have been more like relic-beads, rice grains, or even jewels, than pieces of bones.[83] These crystal-like-shards are the type of relics found in medieval Japanese reliquaries. For simplification, and to

[79] The Sanskrit word *dhātu* is also used to refer to relics, as well as essential parts, elements, and, among other things, secretions. Although this word is used in some Japanese Buddhist texts, *shari*, from the Sanskrit *śarīra*, is the Sanskrit version of the word used in the Japanese texts that I draw upon in the pages below. Thus, I prefer to use the word *shari*, as found in my original and secondary sources. On the word *dhātu*, see Schopen 1988, 530; and, Strong 2004, xvi. On the Tibetan use of this word, see Benard 1988, 35.

[80] Some scholars argue that the Buddha did not ask his followers to worship his remains after he passed, and, thus, relic worship goes against his wishes. See, for example, Kamiya 1994, 355. There were, however, sweet fragrances emitted from the Buddha's body after his cremation, which makes this theory questionable. In short, after the Buddha's cremation, the master's body transformed into two things: relics and a pure fragrance. This sweet smell shows that the Buddha, said to have emitted divine fragrances and the scent of sandalwood during his lifetime, suggests that he approved of the relics being gathered. Following this theme of perfume, the Buddha's relics came to be kept in perfume jars and his *stūpa* were often said to give off fragrance—just like the Buddha had (Schopen 2014, 15).

[81] On Kamakura art and reliquaries, see, for instance, Covaci 2016.

[82] See, for example, Strong 2004.

[83] On the connection between rice grains and relics in Buddhist doctrine, as well as non-canonical beliefs that enhanced the religious value of such rice grains, see Trenson 2018.

avoid confusion, I often use the English term "relic," but, in regards to meaning, I intend the Buddhist concept "*shari*," not the Christian notion for relic which derives from the Latin "relinquere," with the root meaning of "something left over."[84] This distinction is noteworthy in that Buddhist relics are not understood to be remainders of the Buddha but, rather, they are believed to be imbued with the Buddha himself.[85]

Buddhist relics, generally speaking, can be broken into three categories. The first, and the focus of this dissertation, is 1) bodily relics (the bones, teeth, hair, fingernails, and so forth of a buddha, bodhisattva, monk, nun, or other enlightened being).[86] Some of these, such as hair and fingernails, are from the Buddha's lifetime, while others appeared after his cremation. Next, there are 2) contact relics, objects that the buddha used, owned, or with which he was closely associated (such as, his bowls, footprint, robes, bodhi trees, or his staff); and, finally, 3) dharma relics (*sūtra*, dharma verses, *dhāraṇī*, or another written records of the Buddha's oral

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[84] See, for example, Strong 2004, xvi; Collins 1998, 277–278; and Schopen 1998, 256.

[85] The semantics of this has been heavily debated by scholars of Buddhism in North America, who claim that relics are imbued with the essence of the Buddha, or that they denote the Buddha, among other such arguments for how we can understand the presence of the Buddha in his relics. The most accepted opinion seems to be that of Robert Sharf and Gregory Schopen: that the Buddha relics simply are the Buddha. Sharf explains, for instance, that "a relic does not represent, symbolize, or denote a transcendent presence, numinous absence, or anything in between, any ore than the person of the Buddha represented or symbolized the Buddha." Sharf 1999, 78.

[86] Although there are references to the worship of hair and fingernail relics inside of *stūpa* in ancient India, as referenced repeatedly in the travel journals of Faxian and Xuanzang, it was uncommon in Japan to worship parts of the body that were not bone relic. One exception might be the hair. There was a tradition of weaving the hair of donors, understood to be *kechien* 結縁 (karmic bonds), into large mandala tapestries. As for fingernails, there is one riveting case of the Buddhist nun Bunchi 文智 (1619–1697), the eldest daughter of Gomizuno-o tennō 後水尾天皇, who collected her father's nail clippings while he was alive, and then used them to create tablets inscribed with *myōgō* (names of Buddhist deities written as invocations). Several years later, these were placed into a bronze pagoda with the *tennō*'s hair, just as one would enshrine a Buddha relic. For an interesting study on this refer to Fister 2000. On *kechien*, see, for example, Gunji 2018, 101.

teachings).[87] The first category of bodily relic can be broken down further into two varieties, the bones found in the Buddha's cremation ash and jewel-like-crystals also found in his ashes.[88] The latter are the relics that Buddhaghoṣa writes about as "jasmine buds, washed pearls, and nuggets of gold." Such relics are often small, translucent, crystal-like-shards that resemble kernels of rice.

The notion of bodily relics, which appear as jewel-like-nuggets, is the focus of this dissertation. These jewel-like-grains appear as crystal shards, colorful pebbles, or pieces of glass. As discussed above, many of these relics are thought to have come to Japan from China and India, they are believed to have appeared in the Buddha's cremation ash. However, the relics that I address in the following pages were usually not brought from India and China. Although they often split or appeared from a relic from mainland China, the bulk of these relics were unique to Japan: they manifested, appeared, and multiplied at specific sacred sites on the archipelago. In this regard, these relics—the focus of this dissertation—were individual from those of earlier periods of Japanese religious history. Their worship, as we will see, was unique, as well.

With these definitions in mind, let us turn to the first chapter of this dissertation, looking at relic worship, and the possible theft of relics, at the Hokkeji nunnery.

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[87] Christianity also has three main categories of relics, according to Elisabeth Benard. There are, however, no corporeal relics of Jesus Christ, who was believed to have risen three days after his death (Benard 1988, 37–38). These three categories include: corporeal (bodily relics of a holy person), instrumental (objects used by a person, or what are thought of as contact relics in the Buddhist case), and, contact relics relics (a broad definition for anything that came in contact with the dead saint or her tomb—such as lamp oil, cloth, dew, or even moss). During the fifteenth century, corporeal relics, which can further be subdivided into sacred bones (Lt. *sacra ossa*) and bodies of the beatified (Lt. *beatorum corpora*), were assigned values of hierarchy. Within these values, there were levels of distinguished relics (*reliquaie insignes)*—an entire body or large body parts—and non-distinguished relics (Lt. *reliquaie non insignes*), which were further subdivided based on their size and significance. See, for instance, Benard 1988, 37–39.

[88] In regards to bone or hair relics, *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 (Jp. *Hōon jurin*) notes that there are three types of relics (*shari*), which include: bone, hair, and flesh relics. These can further be identified by their color: bone relics are white, hair relics are black, and flesh relics are red. Also see Nishiguchi 2006, 120.

The Hokkeji Nuns: the Worship and Theft of Relics

I. Introduction: Framing the Hokkeji relics

In the thirteenth century, the Shingon Ristu 真言律[89] monk Eison commenced his revival of the Hokkeji nunnery in Nara, after it had fallen into a state of dishevelment over the years.[90] The temple had been overgrown by weeds and had fallen into disarray, as noted in the *Confessions of Lady Nijō*.[91] The *Hokke metsuzaiji engi* 法華滅罪寺縁起 (d. 1304),[92] by the nun Enkyō 円鏡 (14th c.), explains that, by the early Kamakura era, the convent had been destroyed and only the lecture hall remained. Enkyō describes how the spring rains poured down on the Buddhist images in the collapsed halls and the gardens had returned to fields used to cultivate food and cattle.[93] The history of the ruined desolation that Hokkeji experienced and, in turn, the dynamic period of renewal that it underwent starting around 1243 (Ninji 仁治 4), have been well-documented by scholars of Japanese religions such as Hosokawa Ryoichi, Matsuo Kenji, Lori Meeks, and Ōtsuka Jichū 大塚実忠.[94]

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[89] David Quinter explains that Shingon Ritsu, which reflects a dual emphases on Shingon esotericism and the Vinaya school (Ritsu), is a Muromachi period 室町時代 (1336–1573)—specifically, sixteen century—designation used to refer to the tradition that developed from Eison's teachings and his order. Quinter 2015, 9.

[90] From 1245 onward, Hokkeji has been a Shingon Ritsu branch temple (*matsuji* 末寺) of Saidaiji.

[91] See *Towazugatari* とはずがたり, by Gofukakusa'in no Nijō 後深草院二条 (b. 1258).

[92] The *Hokke metsuzaiji engi* (Tales of Hokkeji) concerns the inauguration and the Kamakura era revival of the convent, using the temple's old name. It was recored on the 29th day of the 10th month of Kagen 嘉元 2 (1304), by the Hokkeji nun Enkyō.

[93] Also see Hosokawa 1999, 25–26.

[94] On Ōtsuka Jichū's work on Hokke metsuzai-ji see, Ōtsuka 1968.

What remains to be addressed in more detail is the relationship between the Hokkeji nuns and their relics. Specifically, the phenomena that before Eison arrived at the convent, some of the nuns possessed, controlled, and distributed their own relics. According to the origin tales (*engi* 縁起) and chronicles about these relics, the relics were worshipped, distributed and looked after by the Hokkeji nuns, independent of Eison.

Relic worship, stories about relics, and reliquaries associated with the Hokkeji relics will be the focus of this chapter. In the following pages we will seek to better understand Buddhist relic worship (*shari shinkō*)[95] and the sudden and magical manifestation of relics at this site, as well as how these relics empowered the Hokkeji nuns via ritual practice, legend, and the physical presence of relics, reliquaries, and other sacred containers at this nunnery.[96] The goal of this study is not to discern if these relics and the chronicles concerning them are genuine or false. Rather, it is to examine the stories and histories about these relics, and the individuals who came into contact with them and thus gave them their value. It is these individuals' relationships to these relics, the institutional histories vis-à-vis these relics, and the worship of these relics—whether real or not—that are the subject of this study.

To such an extent, this chapter looks at Kamakura era chronicles, popular narratives, *engi* stories, and relic related objects to start to construct a fuller picture of relic worship during this period, especially in relation to the convent and its nuns. By looking at these reliquaries alongside texts about their enshrined relics and related individuals—whether in historical or in

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[95] On the term *shari*, see, for instance, Davids 1899–1924; Strong 2004, 117; and, Walshe 1987.

[96] By cult, I mean a given religious group centered around the worship of a figure or an object.

narrative form—we can, hopefully, start to uncover the stories that these texts cannot tell on their own, when read in isolation without images. Through these stories and objects, we will see that the nuns (Skt. *bhikṣuṇī*; Jp. *bikuni* 比丘尼) of Hokkeji played a much forgotten, albeit invaluable role in relic possession and relic worship at the convent as well as in "the Southern Capital" of Nanto (as Chapter 2 will show in regards to Eison's relic worship).

Because relics have primarily granted worshippers access to the Buddha at a time when his physical body was increasingly distant, relics can be seen as instruments of power and sources of authority that provide devotees proximity to the Buddha's body and teachings after his *parinirvāṇa*—after his physical presence had left our world. Thus, the amount of relics one possesses and the mystical powers attributed to those relics, are both believed to indicate the level of an individual's enlightenment, or, put differently, of his or her understanding of the Buddhist teachings, i.e., the dharma (*buppō* 仏法) (Horibe 2010).[97] Because of this belief, where, or in front of whom, relics choose to self-manifest is of utmost importance. Their location of manifestation connects a given site or its persons to those relics, to their origin stories, and to the power and authority of their previous owner (even if that owner had wrongfully taken, or stolen, the relics).[98]

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[97] Horibe Aiko 堀邉 阿伊子 argues this specifically in regard to Zen. Horibe points out that such ideas spread to Japan from China in the Tang dynasty and Song dynasty with exchange between the two continents. He explains that, along with this exchange, the connection between Zen and the relics of monks (in the Zen context, in particular) became more important in China. See: Horibe 2010.

[98] This is, in part, why the Ashikaga relied so heavily on relics to prove their authority. They realized that by possessing relics—especially those owned by the Chinese emperors of the past—they could be seen as legitimate.

In the case of Hokkeji, the phenomenon of relics manifesting at this site created a relationship of "religious geography" (*shūkyō chiri* 宗教地理), between the convent and its relic worship, a relationship in which religion and devotion played an active role in regards to relics appearing and remaining at this site.[99] By magically manifesting in vast numbers at the nunnery, the relics reinforced the power of the convent and its elite nuns, in a manner that, I argue, is different from that of the temples inhabited by Eison and his male disciples. These texts illustrate that the relic stories and chronicles about Hokkeji were unique from those of other temples in Nanto, even those within the Vinaya (or, Ritsu) tradition.

If we reflect broadly on relic tales from the Kamakura period, we see that relics, such as the Buddha tooth relic (*butsuge shari* 仏牙舎利) at Engakuji 円覚寺, were believed to have the power to move from one temple to another. Relics had their own will. Keeping this in mind, we know that the self-manifesting relics of Hokkeji were believed to have *chosen* to appear specifically at this site and, perhaps more importantly, before the Hokkeji nuns. This was, according to belief, a conscious decision on the part of the relics.[100] Therefore, these relic stories should not be dismissed as mere tales, or *engi*, in that these stories—some of which are more historical than others—occupied the *imaginaire*, or the mental universe, of the time in which

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[99] How scholars define this field differs slightly. For instance, for Matsui Keisuke 松井圭介, although religious geography is the study of the relationship between religion and environment, environment includes both the natural and the societal. While, Horibe, in contrast, argues that this discourse should be limited only to sacred geography and landscape. Horibe 2010; and, Matsui 2003.

[100] The tooth relic was believed to have flown from Kenchōji 建長寺 in Kyoto, to Engakuji 円覚寺 in Kamakura. On Asakaga Yoshimitsu and Zen, see Ueda Junichi 上田純一 2011.

they were created (Faure 1996).[101] In this way, whether historical or not, these tales offer great insights into beliefs and practices around relic worship from this period.

Let us look for a moment at relic worship and its *imaginaire*: both invaluable aspects of Nanto Buddhism.[102] As noted in the introduction, many of the well-known Buddhist figures active in Nanto used relic worship as part of their teachings and praxis, such as, Chōgen, Jōkei, Myōe, and, later, Ninshō 忍性 (1217–1303). Often these relic practices and their appropriate texts engaged with or constituted as a reference to the sociocultural memories, values, and functions of preexisting texts or relic related practices from the Heian period or the Asuka period.[103] These chronicles and stories are teeming with references to figures well-known for their relic related faith, writings and praxis, such as: Prince Shōtoku, Ganjin, and Kūkai. This was the world in which Eison and his followers lived and practiced. This was also the world in which they collected, gifted and borrowed relics, as well as commissioned the reliquaries into which these relics were placed.

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[101] I have borrowed this notion of the *imaginaire* from Bernard Faure's writings on "the Zen *imaginaire*." In his book, *Visions of Power: Imagining Medieval Japanese Buddhism*, Faure discusses the notion of the *imaginaire*, the imaginary, as the divergence between representation and actual practice. Put differently, this is the opposition between the theoretical statements of a monk or his tradition and actual practice (Faure 1996, 8–13). On the *imaginaire*, see Steven Collins' book the *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities: Utopias of the Pali Imaginaire*. Collins 1998.

[102] Note, although many of these texts use the word 'Buddha relic' (*shari*), from the Heian period onward relics were often conflated with 'wish-granting-jewels' (or, *cintāmaṇi*) on the archipelago. This conflation is especially evident in the *Goyuigō* 御遺告, a tenth century text spuriously attributed to Kūkai. Herein, although the reliquaries that we will discuss in this chapter are labeled 'reliquaries' (*shari yōki* 舎利容器) or 'relic-pagodas' (*shari tō* 舎利塔), many actually contain small gem-like-pebbles, or *cintāmaṇi*, despite the Kamakura era chronicles that mention that *shari*, or Buddha relics, were placed into these reliquaries.

[103] Buddhist masters who followed Zen teachings had used relics even before the Kamakura period to secure their lineages. Post Kamakura, into the Muromachi, we continue to see such practices with the Ashikaga. The Ashikaga used relics, for instance, to "bring peace to Japan" through the Ankokuji 安国寺 temples as well as at the *stūpa* (*rishōtō* 利生塔) that they had built in each province. The Ashikaga were also known for the relic halls, or *shari-den* 舎利殿 (such as that of Rokuonji 鹿苑寺), that they created. On the Ankokuji, see Vallor 2019, 24.

In this light, the reliquaries associated with the Hokkeji relics (such as, the Five Vases of Saidaiji and the Mizu'dono 構殿 Hall of Kairyūōji 海竜王寺), the stories around these containers and architectural reliquaries (or, *stūpa*), and the stories and histories of the relics that they enshrine, each illuminate distinct aspects of relic worship in thirteenth and fourteenth century Japan. In the case of the nunnery, this is likely one of the first examples in which relics in Japan began to magically appear and to disseminate in the thousands.[104] Although we sometimes see relics magically appear later in Eison's life, the Hokkeji relic stories provide detail that is distinct from stories about other temples and their relics. It is clear that Eison took special care to record these sections of his chronicles on Hokkeji—the only sections of his writings that are focused on magically appearing relics. But, why did he take such care to document the Hokkeji relics and for whom? And, if these relics were so important to him and the nuns, then where did they all go? Why are there no records about their shift in location?

To start to answer these questions, let us look at the *Hokkeji shari engi* 法華寺舎利縁起 (lit., "Hokkeji Relic Tales").[105] This *engi*, about the magically manifesting relics of Hokkeji, is distinct in that this is, in all likelihood, the first time that nuns in Japan were granted the power to

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[104] Relics in the Heian court were known to increase and decrease depending on the fortune of the realm. This differed, however, in that, in this case case, relics that already existed multiplied or shrank in a set container. They did not magically appearing in different places around various temple grounds in the hundreds or thousands.

[105] The *Hokkeji shari engi*, was recored by Eison between 1270 and 1290. It is understood to reflect the depth of Eison's relic faith as well as his *Shaka shinkō* (Śākyamuni worship). This *engi* text is grouped among the *Hokkeji engi-rui* 法華寺縁起類 (lit., Genera of the Hokkeji Tales) recorded between the Kamakura era and the Nanbokuchō era 南北朝時代 (1334–1392). These texts are focused on the founding and revival of Hokkeji, the convent's annual functions and events, Eison's activities at the convent, and so on. Other important Hokkeji texts, which Lori Meeks has addressed in detail in her book on the Hokkeji nuns and which do not explicitly deal with relic worship, include: *Hokke metsuzaiji engi* (d. 1304), *Hokkeji kekkkaiki* 法華寺結界記 (1249–1265), and *Hokke metsuzaiji nenjū gyōji* 法華滅罪寺年中行事 (1322). I reference these texts when applicable, but, given that this discussion deals with relic worship, I focus primarily on the *Hokkeji shari engi* and other Eison related texts the deal explicitly with relics.

posses relics and to gift them to other nuns. This was also the first recorded instance in which relics self-multiplied in the hundreds, even the thousands, at a given nunnery or primarily in the presence of female monastics. According to these *engi*, the Hokkeji nuns gifted and exchanged their own relics before Eison came to the convent. It seems, however, that after Eison's arrival, this power became allotted to Eison and his male followers. To what degree were the nuns compliant in this? Or, was this a borrowing or a theft of the convent's relics? Let us explore these questions in more detail below.

II. Relic Tales

Eison and his closest disciples were responsible for the distribution of the Hokkeji relics, as seen in the *Hokkeji shari engi*; *Kongō busshi Eison kanji gakushōki* 金剛佛子叡尊感身學正記 (hereafter, *Kanjin gakushōki*); *Kairyūōji shari kibun* 海竜王寺舎利記文, and other such thirteenth century records and *engi* about the nunnery's relics. There are, however, earlier instances of the Hokkeji nuns possessing their own relics. This phenomenon and the appropriation of the Hokkeji relics is worth further exploration. Accordingly, this section will examine three themes related to the Hokkeji relics: 1) the construction of narratives around the magically appearing relics of Hokkeji; 2) the authority that the nuns had over the possession and oversight of the relics; and, the question 3) where did the Hokkeji relics go?

The Construction of Narrative

The *Hokkeji shari engi* opens by explaining that the princess-turned-Zen-nun Kūnyo 空如 (previously known as Hachijōin no Takakura 八条院の高倉; b. 1176)[106] possessed a Buddha relic she had obtained from the temple Tōji.[107] One day, Kūnyo wanted to test if the relic was real, so she hit the relic repeatedly with a hammer:

> At Nanto's Hokkeji, there were Buddha relics. Repeatedly they would appear and perform unbelievable miracles, broadly they encouraged the faith of the monks and of the secular. Searching for their origins, there was one Zen nun named Kūnyo (her preordination name was Hachijōin no Takakura), who, by nature was said to be nimble and bright. She was young when she became a nun; she studied esoteric and exoteric teachings; she knew [classical] Japanese and Chinese; and, she was admired by all of the wise people of the world. In her later years, she admired the *hongan* and lived in seclusion in Hokkeji, in a peaceful, quiet room.

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[106] Hosokawa Ryōichi explains that in the *Kanji gakushōki*, Eison noted that Kūnyo was a princess. She was the daughter of the consort Takamatsu'in 高松院 (d. 1176), who was a daughter of the retired emperor Toba 後鳥羽上皇 (r. 1183–1198) and sister of Akiko Hachijō'in. Tanaka Takako 田中貴子 speculates that Kūnyo's mother Takamatsu'in, who became the empress of Ninjō, died at thirty-six while giving birth to Kūnyo. Based on the text the *Distribution of the Tooth Relics into the Eight Grains*, stored at Shōju-raikō-ji 聖衆来迎寺, Kūnyo's father was Chōken 澄憲 (1126–1203), the leader of the Agui Lineage of Tendai-school liturgists. Kūnyo was born from an illicit relationship between these two. Tanaka speculates that Kūnyo became a nun after the death of her mistress and material aunt Hachijō-in 八条院 in 1211, who had acted as a mother to her since birth. After becoming a nun, Kūnyo first lived at Shōgutei'in, a Daigoji 醍醐寺 temple convent in lower Daigo 醍醐 (at this time she was known as Lady Daigo and Saga Lady). This convent was temporarily passed to Kūnyo—still called Takakura at this time—by her paternal cousin, Shin'a, the abbess of the convent. It seems that by the Ninji 仁治 period (1240–1243), Kūnyo had moved to Hokkeji, where she spent her last years. It was here that she became known for her zealous faith in relics. And, it was here that she accepted the nun Jizen (Shōkeibō, b. 1187), credited as the founding restorer of Hokkeji, as her disciple. In this way, although Kūnyo was not listed among the first sixteen nuns recorded in the *Hokke metsuzai ji engi*, she was the teacher of the founding elder who was primarily responsible for the restoration of the nunnery. It is interesting, herein, that the first Hokkeji relic, from which all of the Hokkeji relics multiplied and magically appeared, was hers. See Tanaka 1993b; and, Hosokawa 1999b. On the state of the convent of Shōgutei'in in the fourteenth century, see *Towazugatari*, 1976 edition. Also, see, Meeks 2010.

[107] Tōji is well-known for its relic rites used to secure the health of the nation and of the ruling powers, as well as for its relics that Ganjin is said to have brought back from Tang China.

She only accumulated practice and theory. Sometimes she was accompanied at the temple by the elderly *bhikṣuṇī* Jizen, who was originally the Zen nun's disciple. In order to form karmic ties with the 'Meeting to Mediate on the Name of Śākyamuni,'[108] they visited Tōshōdaiji. [There,] she said to Jizen: "I have some thoughts about the relic that I obtained from Tōji. [I want] to test if it is real or fake." She wanted to acquire pure belief. Thus, she put the relic on a rock, took an iron hammer, and struck it thrice. The relic was not damaged, nor was it ruined. On the fifth strike, it broke asunder, as if it were dust. Each broken piece, one by one, emitted light. At this time, the Zen nun wept in grief and repented. She collected the fragments, and, with faith and respect, she did not deviate [from the Dharma].

[Kūnyo] thought of the mother of Shakunen who performed chanting to Amida Buddha, received purification and took the name Shūamida butsu, was living in the temple, and frequently sought requests of relics. The nun's feelings were ernest, honest, and sincere. She offered [Shūamida butsu] one piece of the broken relic.[109] At first it was tiny and difficult to worship, as a result, she mounted it on black paper. After that, gradually, it divided and increased, scattered and became two. The nun's son, who chanted Amida's name from time to time, was named Gyōkyū (13th c.). He frequently requested her relics, yet he did not know why his mother's relics had divided.[110]

南都法華寺在佛舍利。屢現奇異之神變。普催道俗之信心。尋其根源。有一人禪尼。其名曰空如（本號高倉局）。禀天性於敏聰。自少年入佛道。顯密之學。和漢之才。世之所知。人所歎也。老年之後慕本願之昔蹤。隱居法華寺安居房。偏積事理之行業。或時相伴當寺長老慈善比丘尼（本為彼禪尼之弟子）。並釋念比丘尼等。為釋迦念佛結緣。參籠招提寺。其問禪尼云。吾有感得東寺舍利一粒。試決真偽。欲取淨信云々。即安舍利于石上。自執鐵鍾。勵力三打。敢不損斫。及五打之時。碎而如微塵。每其一一碎。皆放光明。于時禪尼悲泣懺悔。拾納細碎。信敬無貳。而釋念母修阿彌陀佛（受齋戒。住當寺）。 頻有求請之志。禪尼感懇誠之切。奉渡彼細碎舍利一粒。初者微細而難拜之。故以黑色紙。雖安置之。後者勢分次第增。剩分散成二粒。然間修阿彌陀佛子息有行窮。年來雖欣求舍利。未能感得即開母所持舍利分散之由。

108 I have borrowed Hosokawa's wording for my translation of the phrase: "Meeting to Mediate on the Name of Śākyamuni." See Hosokawa 1999b.

109 Shūamida butsu's name is not mentioned in this part of the text. Since there is no clear subject, I have added her name based on an explanation of this section offered by Hosokawa. See Hosokawa 1999b, 36.

110 The notion that the mother knows why the relics split but her son does not, shows her level of attainment and attests to her status as the rightful possessor of the relics.

This story introduces the nun Kūnyo and her Tōji relic. Kūnyo wants to test if her relic is real, so she takes it to Tōshōdaiji, where it breaks into many pieces, then emits light. Interestingly, there are many parallels between this story and the *Nihon shoki* (d. 720) relic narrative, of which the author, Eison, was likely aware. In the *Nihon shoki*, Soga no Umako, known for his endorsements of Buddhism, tries to destroy a relic that has magically self-manifested.[111] In this story, one of the first stories recorded about relics in Japan, Umako tests a relic that suddenly appeared during a vegetarian feast—a feast to initiate the first Buddhist nuns in Japan. To test the relic's authenticity, Umako tries to smash the relic with a hammer and then attempts to sink it in water, two approved methods for testing the authenticity of a relic, according to seventh century Chinese text the *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 (lit., "Forest of Gems in the Garden of the Dharma"), by the monk Daoshi 道世 (d. 683).[112] When Umako's relic does not break nor sink, his faith is deepened and he has a Buddhist hall constructed in his home on behalf of the relic (*Nihon shoki*, 68).[113]

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[111] Brian Ruppert points out that this motif is evoked in other relic narratives, as well. It is noteworthy that the first reference to relics in Japanese texts is from a passage in the *Nihon Shoki*, in which three nuns and Shiba Tatto 司馬達等 (also known as Shime Dachito, d.u.), an underling of Soga no Umako, partake in a Buddhist feast, as mentioned in the Introduction. At the feast, the relic appears on the rice bowl of one of the nuns. Thereafter, Dachito offers the relic to Umako, who tries, to no avail, to smash it (*Nihon shoki*, 59; Ruppert 2000, 59; Meeks 2010, 326). The indestructibility of the relic was believed to testify to the relic's sacred powers. Accordingly, Umako's belief in Buddhism was strengthened and he erected a temple in which he enshrined and worshipped the relic, as mentioned above. See, *Nihon shoki*, ed. Toerin Shinnō et al (*NKBT*); and, McCallum 2009, 25.

[112] The Tang period monk Daoshi is also known as Han Xuanyun 翰玄惲. Among other works, he authored texts such as: *Zhujing yaoji* 諸經要集, *Pini taoyao* 毘尼討要, and *Daxiaosheng chanmen guan* 大小乘禪門觀. The *Fuyuan zhulin*, which he completed in 668, is comprised of thematically arranged accounts on various Buddhist issues. It draws from the Buddhist canon as well as other non-Buddhist sources. See, Xiong 2009, 126, 173.

[113] The thirteenth century Shingon text *Kakuzenshō* 覚禅抄, by Kakuzen 覚禅 (1143–?), describes another method for testing the authenticity of a relic: cast it into a blazing fire to see if it transforms into a lotus flower (*renge* 蓮花).

In the *Hokkeji shari engi*, Kūnyo tests her own relic to prove its legitimacy in a strikingly similar manner. We see this in her desire to test the authenticity of the Tōji relic as well as in the manner in which she physically does this, by hitting it repeatedly with a hammer. The *Nihon shoki* story would have likely been familiar to Kūnyo and to Eison, the latter of whom was responsible for recording, or crafting, this story.[114] Such a story is an ideal way to begin a chronicle on magically appearing relics at a nunnery for a number of reasons. First, the *Nihon shoki* story is one of the earliest stories about relics and relic worship in Japan. Second, this story involves the first nuns ordained in Japan, and, it is in front of these nuns that the first relic in Japan chose to self-manifest.[115] Third, this story is about a relic that appeared suddenly out of thin air in front of believers, precisely the type of relic that would hereafter frequently manifest at Hokkeji, as recored in the *Hokkeji shari engi*. And, finally, Umako's choice to enshrine the *Nihon shoki* relic was said to have led to the "beginning of Buddhism" in Japan, according to the *Nihon shoki* (*Nihon shoki*, 68; Deal 1995, 216–217; Ruppert 2000, 59).

As noted above in the *Hokkeji shari engi*, after Kūnyo placed her relic on a rock, took an iron hammer, and struck the relic thrice, the relic then emitted light. The motif of relics emitting light, which differs from the *Nihon shoki* relic story, demonstrates that the relic was real. Since, in this instance, the relic split into pieces, it was not its durability, but rather the light that it

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[114] Naitō suggests that these relic stories were recorded for another motive. In a personal communication, he posited that perhaps these stories were recorded to justify Eison's disciple Ninshō's relic faith. Naitō, personal communication, July 29, 2018.

[115] That the first relic chose to appear in front of these nuns seems to be downplayed in most literature about the *Nihon shoki*. Rather, since the relic is immediately given to Soga no Umako, and because Umako is clearly more powerful than the nuns, most scholars tend to focus on him. It is worth highlighting, however, that although the relic chose to stay with Umako, it did not chose to appear before him, according to belief. This is important, as we will see below, given the agency of relics.

emitted that proved its status as a sacred object. This is similar to the *Shaseki-shū* 沙石集[116] (1283) story "The Matter of the Person Who Wished to Obtain a Buddha Relic" (*Busshari kantoku shitaru hitonokoto* 仏舎利感得シタル人事, hereafter *Busshari kantoku*), in which the monk Shorenbō 生蓮房 from Kawachi no kuni 河内の国[117] receives a relic from a mysterious maiden, who has appeared next to Prince Shōtoku's grave.[118] This relic emits light, proving to Shorenbō that the relic is authentic and that the maiden possessing it is not a normal human. The theme of relics emitting light, as a means of showing their veracity, is similar to the case of the Hokkeji relic emitting light in front of Kūnyo.

According to Nakao Takashi 中 尾堯 it is key in the Kūnyo story that her relic emitted light at Tōshōdaiji, since the temple is known for its *Shaka nenbutsu* 釈迦念仏 statue that miraculously emitted light on numerous occasions. Kūnyo's relic choosing to emit light at this site is not a coincidence, Nakao argues. Another example of light being used to signal miracles, is the relics of Tōdaiji. After the statue of the Great Buddha, the *Daibutsu* 大仏, at Tōdaiji was rebuilt by Chōgen, relics were inserted into the statue's womb (*tainai* 胎内) cavity.[119] Thereafter, light miraculously emitted from the tuft between the Buddha's eyebrows, according to beliefs

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[116] *Shaseki-shū* 沙石集, literally, "Sand and Pebbles Collection."

[117] Kawachi no kuni is in modern-day Osaka Prefecture. For a translation of the full story of *Busshari kantoku shitaru hitonokoto*, see Appendix I.

[118] The *Shaseki-shū* is a ten volume compilation of Buddhist narrative tales (*bukkyō setsuwa* 仏教説話), by the Kamakura era monk Mujū 無住 (1226–1312) that was completed in the late thirteenth century. On the history of this text, see, for example, Buswell and Lopez 2017 edition, 552. Among other books, Mujū also wrote the slightly more humorous compilation of Buddhist tales, the *Zodan-shū* 雑談集 (1305).

[119] On the rebuilding of Tōdaiji and its Daibutsu, see Goodwin 1990 and 1994.

around this statue, Nakamura Kazumoto 中村一基 explains (Nakamura 2006, 7).[120] Such miraculous occurrences of light reinforce the supernatural powers attributed to these relics, just as they do to Kūnyo's relic, and those of the *Shaka nenbutsu* at Tōshōdaiji (Nakao 2001, 122).

The motif of relics emitting light is a common one in relic stories. It can signal auspicious occurrences and prove the authenticity of a relic. One popular Kamakura era tale that illustrates this is the *Busshari kantoku* story mentioned briefly above. This is the story of an uneducated, lustful monk named Shorenbō who wished for many years to obtain a Buddha relic. One day, his desire was realized by the help of a beautiful maiden:

> In Kawachi no kuni there was a monk named Shorenbō. For many years he deeply wished to obtain a "true buddha relic,"[121] so he chanted the "Verse of Homage to the Buddha's Relics"[122] of Fukū Sanzō.[123] And, each day, he threw his body (lit., the five body parts) against the ground in prayer, five-hundred times.[124]

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[120] On Chōgen's rebuilding of the Daibutsu, see Chōgen's *Namuamidabutsu sazenshū* 南無阿弥陀仏作善集, Tanaka and Tazawa edition 1955. Also see, *Nihon Bukkyō shi jiten* 1999, 802.

[121] On the story *Busshari kantoku*, also see, Kobayashi 1993, 3. And, Takahashi 2012, 195–210.

[122] The "Verse of Homage to Buddha's Relics" is translated by Griffith Foulk, as follows: 'With wholehearted reverence we bow to the relics of the true body of the Tathāgata Śākyamuni, who is fully endowed with myriad virtues; to the Dharma body which is the fundamental ground; and to his *stūpa*, which is the whole universe. With deep respect we venerate the one who manifested a body for our sake. Through the sustaining power of the Buddha, which enters us even as we enter it, we verify awakening. By means of the Buddha's spiritual power, we benefit living beings, arouse the thought of awakening, cultivate bodhisattva practice, and together enter perfect peace, the knowledge of the equality of all things. Now let us reverently bow.' 一心頂禮 萬德圓滿。釋迦如來 心身舍利。本地發心 法界塔婆。我等禮敬 以我現身。入我我入 佛加持故。我證菩提 以佛神力。利益衆生 發菩提心。修菩薩行 同入圓寂。平等大智 今將頂禮. See: *Sho ekō shingi shiki* 諸回向清規式 T 2578.81.663b22. Also, see *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism* (DDB), entry by Griffith Foulk.

[123] Fukū, also known as Fukū Kongō 不空金剛, refers to Amoghavajra (705–774), acknowledged as the sixth patriarch of the Shingon lineage. He was one of the most politically powerful monks in Chinese history.

[124] See, for instance, *Rokudojikkyō kyō* 六度集經 (Ch. *Liuduji jing*), No. 0152, attributed to Kō Sōe 康僧會譯 (Ch. Kang Senghui; d. 280), Vol. 3.

> Fourteen to fifteen years thereafter, he went to pray at Prince Shōtoku's grave with particular sincerity. Up from the grave appeared an old monk. The old monk said [to him]: "As for the relic that you wish for, ask this to the person laying next to you." [Shorenbō] looked next to him to see a walking *miko* (Jp. *aruki-miko*) asleep. Tall, with shoulder length hair and [pale] white skin, she was roughly twenty-two or twenty-three years old. There was no one else around. "I wonder if this person has a relic?" He thought. "Excuse me," he said, waking her. He [continued]: "Just now, I have received an oracle. Do you have a relic that you can give me?" he asked. [She replied]: "Go to the Jōdō Hall, and I will give you [a relic]. This matter is easy [for me]." This was beyond his expectations.
>
> They went to the backdoor of the hall. She took a talismanic pouch from her side, and from this she took out a six to seven *sun* (i.e., 18 to 21 inches) tall crystal *stūpa*. Although the light from the lanterns did not reach the backdoor, the area [suddenly] filled with light. The hairs on Shorenbō's body stood on end. She then took ten relics out of the pouch and said: "From among these, choose one." So Shorenbō replied, in prayer: "May the relic that has an affinity to me, show [its] form to me." After this, one relic crawled toward him like a bug. And, she said, "This is it!" Then, she gave it to him. He was so deeply moved, he could not repress his tears.
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> Then, they went back to Shōtoku's grave, where he asked her: "Who on earth are you? Where do you live? And, what is your name?" Earnestly, he [added]: "At dawn, please come to my temple, and we will securely connect our fate." She replied in just a few words: "There is no set place where I live. My name is Jakujō."[125] Then she went to sleep. He [also] dozed off, and, at dawn, he awoke to see that the *miko* had vanished. Greatly surprised, he asked many people, but never found her. When he asked someone, they told him: "In these [past] six or seven days, I saw her form, but where she came from and who she was, I do not know." She must have been a deity who manifested as a human. After this, he prayed [to her] five hundred times.[126]

This story, the *Busshari kantoku*, can help us to better understand the *Hokkeji shari engi* for numerous reasons. First, the relic in this story was gifted to the monk Shorenbō by a female medium. She was the keeper of the relics, and gifting this relic was under her command, not that

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[125] Jakujō means stillness or tranquility. It is often used in a Buddhist context to mean calmness of heart, enlightenment, or *nirvāṇa*.

[126] Translation by author. See Appendix I for full translation with Japanese transcription.

of the old man who appeared near Shōtoku's grave. The choice of the author, the monk Mujū Dōkyō 無住道曉 (or, Ichien Dōkyō; 1227–1312), to depict the deity in a female medium—and his choice not to explain this—shows that readers could, in all likelihood, make the connection that women possessed relics. There was no explanation or justification for the *miko*'s possession of and command over the relics. Second, the deity appeared in front of the grave of Prince Shōtoku, the prince associated historically and mythically with relic worship in ancient Japan. Her manifesting next to the physical remains of this prince attests to her authenticity as a deity and to the veracity of the relics that she oversaw. This implies that women—both human and supernatural—possessing Buddhist relics was likely more common in this period than modern scholarship has hitherto suggested.

Third, and perhaps most interestingly, the language used in this story to talk about the animism of relics is discernibly similar to that of the *Hokkeji shari engi*. According to the *Busshari kantoku*, when the maiden asks Shorenbō to choose a relic, he prays that the relic with an affinity to him "reveal its form." Hereafter, a relic crawls towards him like a bug. The diction of this passage and what it implies about the nature of relics are both significant. As for its diction, the *Hokkeji shari engi* notes that the relics increased and decreased overtime, "creeping and crawling like insects going back into their plate" (*gigikai banchū* 跂跂回盤中).[127] The notion that relics crawl like bugs is identical, suggesting that this was common parlance used to talk about relics. This bolsters the notion that relics are animate, according to believers. They are alive—like bugs they can creep and crawl, show or conceal their form, and appear or disappear.

[127] *Ban* 盤, which translates as plate or dish, refers to the dish in which the relics were kept. To compare this line in the case of the Hokkeji relics see, for instance, *Hokkeji shari engi*, 162.

This emphasis on the volition of relics, as well as their ability to choose their location and their overseers becomes increasingly important when we consider notions of relic possession and relic ownership.

Relics, Nuns and Power

The splitting of the first relic enabled Kūnyo to gift a shard of this relic to the nun Shūamida butsu (13th c.), setting a precedent for the convent's relics to split and multiply in the hundreds and, eventually, in the thousands. Through this gifting of the relic, we know that, according to these *engi*, Kūnyo and Shūamida butsu possessed their own relics independent of Eison.[128] This is particularly interesting if we consider that Kūnyo, who possessed the first Hokkeji relic, is believed to have died before Eison started his revival of Hokkeji, in Kangen 寛元 3 (1245). Kūnyo's probable death date has been calculated by scholars based on a dream that Jizen 慈善 (b. 1187)—Kūnyo's disciple who played a pivotal role in reviving Hokkeji—had in Kenchō 建長 3 (1251). In Jizen's dream, Kūnyo asked her to perform the Memorial Service of the Sixteen Arhats on Kūnyo's behalf. Based on the record of this dream, Hosokawa Ryōichi postulates that Kūnyo died thirteen years prior, in En'ō 延応 1 (1239), since such memorial services are usually held thirteen years after the person's death date.[129] This would have been six years before Eison came to Hokkeji.

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[128] Much like in the *Nihon shoki* story, these relics chose to manifests in the presence of certain ordained nuns, attesting to their sacred powers and, by implication, to their understanding of the Dharma.

[129] Memorial services of this sort are generally held for the souls of the dead thirteen years after the person's death date. Since we know that this dream occurred in Kenchō 3 (1251), this means that Kūnyo would have died in En'ō 1 (1239), roughly twelve to thirteen years later. See, for example, Hosokawa 1999b, 36–37.

In this vein, the first Hokkeji relics belonged to Kūnyo. Although Eison later recorded these accounts about the convent's miraculous relic tales, he was not yet present at the convent when the relics started to multiply. Whence, it follows that Kūnyo is not listed among the first sixteen nuns who took the Great Vow (*taigan* 大願) under Eison, as recorded in the *Hokke metsuzaiji engi* (Hosokawa 1999b, 27).[130] Thus, contrary to what scholars have often assumed, the first Hokkeji relic belonged to the nun Kūnyo, who lived and died at Hokkeji before Eison arrived at the temple. It was from the lineage of this relic that all the Hokkeji relics multiplied and appeared, either as a physical splitting of this relic or as a self-manifesting of new relics in the presence of *this very relic*. Although this might seem like a minor point at first, it shows that the Hokkeji nuns possessed, gifted, and oversaw their own relics independent of the monk Eison and his male disciples. Accordingly, these nuns, I argue, had more power over the relics, and, in turn, over the possession of relics, than we have traditionally accredited to them. Moreover, as stated above, the relics first chose to reside, and to divide, in the presence of these female monastics before Eison and his male followers started their revival of the nunnery.

To date, scholarship on the Hokkeji relics has focused primarily on Eison and the relics of Hokkeiji, rather than on the nuns and the Hokkeiji relics (Groner 2001; Hosokawa 1999; Hosokawa 1999b; Kageyama 1986; Matsuo 2004). In her book *Hokkeji and the Reemergence of Female Monastic Orders in Premodern Japan*, Lori Meeks situates the nuns and their story at the center of her research. Meeks deftly argues throughout her book that there was a multivalent nature to the agency of the elite nuns of Hokkeji. She shows that, although "it is never clear that

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[130] That is, the vow of a Buddha or bodhisattva to save all living beings from suffering and rebirth. Here, it refers to the nuns receiving the Buddhist precepts and vowing to follow the Buddhist path.

the women of Hokkeji consciously resisted or subverted androcentric Buddhist discourse," in certain discursive arenas, they did ignore or "talk past" androcentric teachings, while in others they did not internalize the gender biases presented in Buddhist teachings, contrary to what scholars of Japanese religions have often assumed (Meeks 2010). By building on Meek's work, in an effort to look at the relationship between relics and the Hokkeji nuns, we can, hopefully, start to better understand the agency of thirteenth and fourteenth nuns as well as their relic worship.[131] With this in mind, I would like to inquire why these relics, which seem to have been under the domain of the Hokkeji nuns, came to be, to some extent, under the control of Eison's order. And, furthermore, to question: where are many of these relics presently enshrined, and what are the stories behind their enshrinements?

Aside from the *Hokke metsuzaiji engi* by the nun Enkyō, many of the documents that we look at in this chapter were written by Eison, or penned after his death by his disciples. These documents on Eison and his male monastics shed light on how proactive Eison was in establishing the nuns' order, and in ordaining countless men and women of low and high rank.[132] As mentioned in the introduction, Eison was intent on reestablishing the complete Buddhist community of monks, nuns, novices, and laity (i.e., the *saṅgha*), based on what he saw as the

[131] One of the few studies published in English on relics and nuns in medieval Japan is Ruppert's "Lineage and Gender in the Economy of Relics," in *Jewel in the Ashes: Buddha Relics in Early Medieval Japan* (2000), 192–229. In this chapter on gender and relics, Ruppert discusses the role of lineage in gender around the worship of relics by the imperial house and the powerful Fujiwara family. To such an end, he looks at literary histories as well as diaries concerning women and relics. See Ruppert 2000, 215–220. For an interesting article on women, relics, rainmaking, dragons, and the imperial court in Japanese, see: Trenson 2010, 251–263.

[132] For instance, on 28th day of the 4th month of Ko'an 7 (1285), the concubines and the female attendants of the court went to Jōjūji 浄住寺 where they received the bodhisattva precepts from Eison. Given that part of Eison's teachings included reviving female monastic orders, Eison's chronicles note numerous instances of him bestowing laywomen, court ladies, and so on, with tonsure.

correct practices of the Vinaya.[133] To restore the correct teachings of the Vinaya, Eison believed that he needed to reestablish the nunhood, which had lost power in favor of more male dominant Buddhist practices and training centers in the early Heian period. By possessing relics, and by illustrating, moreover, that nuns had their own relics—understood as invaluable religious objects in Buddhist teachings—Eison could show that his lineage, and that of the nuns, were legitimate.

Herein, Eison's relic faith was intimately linked to his efforts to reestablish the complete *saṅgha*; Relics helped him to lay claim to his distinct lineage of practice and to trace his teachings back to the uncorrupted, if somewhat idealized, Buddhism of ancient India—a time and place in which, as Gregory Schopen has shown, nuns could worship and possess their own relics (Schopen 1996). Similar to how Eison later used relics to legitimize his teachings, Brian Ruppert explains how Buddha relics (i.e., the relics of Śākyamuni) were used by the Shingon school to create lineage in the Heian era:

> Śākyamuni and his relics occupied a prominent place in the religious life of Heian Japan… [C]lerics of the Shingon school (especially those associated with the temple Tōji), in particular, stressed not only Kūkai's importation of Buddha relics and his use of them to pray for rain on behalf of the emperor but also the visualization of those relics as wish-fulfilling jewels and the notion that relics could be combined with other objects to produce such jewels…. [F]rom at least the tenth century on the clerics of the Shingon tradition believed in the efficacy of venerating Śākyamuni's remains as well as the importance of the possession and ritual use of those remains in the production of claims to a unique linage of practice. The relics of Śākyamuni were of particular importance to Shingon as a developing tradition that traced itself to a non-historical Buddha—a Buddha with no remains—in an era that many Buddhists perceived as most distant from the Buddha and his attainments.[134]

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[133] As noted in the introduction, Buddhism in Japan had become corrupt and there was a paucity of qualified Vinaya (or, Ritsu) masters.

[134] This non-historical Buddha refers to Dainichi Nyorai 大日如来.

Although Ruppert discusses this in the context of Heian period relic worship, relics continued to hold a prominent place in the religious life of Japan into the medieval period, as did the importance of the relics that Kūkai had transmitted from China, the communal *imaginaire* around these relics, and their related reliquaries and art objects. Many of these relics maintained the stories that linked them to great Buddhist masters who were associated with relic worship from earlier periods in Japan's religious history. While the efficacy of venerating these remains, and the importance of possessing them for ritual use, remained central to many Kamakura era traditions, relics started to appear in new contexts and in greater quantities during this period. Relics, at this time, were known to have magically manifested, divided, and multiplied at shrines, temples, and even in front of important court figures (such as, the thirteenth-century female courtier Muromachinyo'in 室町女院). In this way, these relics—many of which manifested in Japan, and thus cannot be traced back to India via China—were unique to Japan and to Japanese religious practices. Such relics were not brought back from the continent, rather they were associated with specific sites and people on the archipelago. This novel phenomenon reinforced the devotion of these temples and of their lay followers.[135] In this light, although there was still an emphasis on China, India, and an *imaginaire* of the past, the focus had shifted inward toward Japan, specifically within the Nanto region.

In the case of Hokkeji, self-manifesting relics became associated with the convent and its nuns, as did the miracles that occurred in the presence of these relics. Such miracles attested to the spiritual attainment of the temple's nuns and to the temple itself, strengthening the convent's

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[135] This is similar to the use of relics to create Chan pilgrimage sites in medieval China. See, for instance, Faure 1992.

power as a religious site.[136] The nuns distributed the relics to other shrines and temples, such as its neighboring Vinaya temple Kairyūōji.[137] This allowed the nuns to buttress their temple networks and to spread word of their miraculous relic tales, since relics, which often look like bits of dust or small pieces of glass, are void of meaning without a narrative.[138] In one example of relic miracle tales in the *Hokkeji shari engi*, relics suddenly appeared throughout the temple grounds, deepening the faith of believers:

> Together the nuns venerated and gazed at [the relics], and, in an instant, they watched them divide and scatter. They could not be fully counted (i.e., they were innumerable).

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[136] Stories abound on miracles taking place when relics are present. Many of these tropes are similar to those that occur when a great Buddhist master dies or is cremated. At such times, relics often magically appear at their deaths or cremations. For instance, during the cremation of the monk and famous calligrapher Lanxi Daolong 蘭渓道隆 (Jp. Rankei Dōryū; 1213–1278) of Kenchōji 建長寺, relics of the five sacred colors (*goshoku shari* 五色舎利) appeared, attesting to the monk's enlightenment. According to legend, when the smoke from Lanxi's cremation pyre came into contact with the nearby leaves of a white podocarpus (*maki* 槇) tree, relics of the five colors miraculously formed in the tree. Today, this tree is referred to as "the relic tree" (*shari ju* 舎利樹), in remembrance of this celebrated monk. (This section of the fourteenth century the *Genkō shakusho* 元亨釈書, by Zen abbot Kokan Shiren 虎関師錬, reads as follows: 闍維得五色舎利。其煙觸樹葉。累然皆綴舎利。門人自遠方至者歷數十日。到葬所捜索林木。多得舎利。) Other tropes of miraculous *shari* occurrences often include light emitting from clouds. This light can appear in various colors or can include the five sacred colors. In other instances, sweet fragrances suddenly fill the air, or flocks of birds appear in the sky from nowhere. One such example of this is Eison's death story. According to the text *Saidaiji Eison shōonin sengeka no ki narabi ni heitan doku ki* 西大寺叡尊上人遷化之記并嘆徳記, even though Eison's death ceremony was performed on a clear day when there were no clouds in the sky, the people of Nanto saw purple clouds appear to the west of Saidaiji (i.e., in the direction of the Western Pure Land) and a soft spring wind blew. And, three days after his death, Eison's body still looked as if alive. These supernatural events, and the notion that Eison's body was not corruptible after death, attest that he is an enlightened being (Nakao 2001, 133–135). For more on Eison's relics and his incorruptible body, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation. Also, see *Kanjin gakushōki*. Regarding the cremation of Lanxi, see *Genkō shakusho* 1979, and Horibe 2010.

[137] There is some evidence that the nuns at Hokkeji and the monks at Kairyūōji may have interacted with each other more than we realize. Meeks points out, for example, that Eison was known to have stayed at the monastery Kairyūōji when he gave long lectures, across the road, at Hokkeji. It is also well known that Eison lived at Kairyūōji briefly in his earlier years. The Tōdaiji priest Enshō had also stayed at Kairyūōji when he preformed chants for his mother while she was residing at the nunnery. Meeks 2010, 139.

[138] Relics, unlike Buddhist statues or other icons, cannot stand alone without a story or history accredited to them. Without context, they are merely demoted to a piece of dust. See, for example, Sharf 1999.

> Gyōgū collected all of the [relics].[139] [Eison] was holding his book and was about [to continue] lecturing, but on his book appeared a minute relic, and, in addition, in the courtyard and on the table [relics] appeared everywhere. Accordingly, he ordered the nuns to collect [the relics], so they put them into vessels, which they placed into the temple. This was just the beginning.
>
> After this, one after another, on their own accord, they divided and their count doubled day by day. In all, these miracles and auspicious signs were so numerous that they could not all be recorded. When those of intent faith prayed and intoned, like mist, the [relics] rose from their containers and arrived at those who were happily and earnestly beseeching, just like grains of sand, they appeared in front of their eyes. Following this, the clergy and laity bowed their heads in devotion, and many [of the relics] were provisionally distributed to the urban districts of the capital and to the provinces.[140]
>
> 僧尼相共奉拜見。眼見分散。不可數盡。行窮悉拾納。“奉書”欲講。書上微細舍利一粒出現。其外院中機上處處顯現。即令尼眾悉拾集。納壺安置當寺。是其最初也。其後云云勢分員數逐日倍增。凡厥神變瑞相翰墨難覃。凝信祈念者如霧而出自壺中。至誠欣求者如沙而現於眼前。依之道俗傾皈依之頭。都鄙預分布者多。

This excerpt from the *Hokkeji shari engi* documents a story involving a relic held by the boy Gyōgū 行窮. Gyōgū was the son of the nun Shūamida butsu, the nun who was first gifted a relic by Kūnyo.[141] On this day, Gyōgū arrived at the nunnery and appeared before Eison, during one of the master's visits to the convent. With him, Gyōgū carried a relic that he had borrowed from his mother, a shard of one of the relics that Kūnyo had given her.[142] There, in the presence of Eison and the nuns, Gyōgū's relic magically divided and multiplied. A relic even appeared on the

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[139] See, Nakao 2001.

[140] This excerpt is from the *Hokkeji shari engi*, 159. Translation by author.

[141] On Kūnyo and her relics, see *Hokkeji shari engi*, 159–160.

[142] Doubting the relic's authenticity, Kūnyo had previously tried to shatter the Tōji relic with a hammer. Yet, after it broke and emitted light, her faith in relics was deepened. This relic is one of the shattered pieces of her Tōji relic.

book from which Eison was preaching.[143] Hereafter, the relics doubled in number day by day, and countless miracles occurred.[144] Relics such as these have been called “miracle relics” by some scholars; i.e., relics that carry miracle stories which signal the charisma of the monk or nun who received them, or to whom they were gifted.[145] These relics, as well as their appearance at this site and in front of the nuns, signal that the relics chose to appear here due to the faith and merit of the nuns as well as Eison, who was also present on this day.

Although the story highlights Gyōgū and Eison, we should be mindful that the relic Gyōgū carried was not his. Rather, it belonged to his mother. It was this relic that chose to multiply at the convent in front of the nuns. Relics, as we know, are believed to have their own will. They choose to manifest before pure believers (or, in some instances, to emit light, as seen in the story of Kūnyo). In this way relics attest to the pure faith of the given person, or people, in front of whom they choose to appear. In a similar vein, someone who has achieved a higher level

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[143] The idea of relics appearing in the courtyard while someone is intoning a *sūtra* can also be seen in stories from the late eleventh century. In one such story in the *Honchō ōjōden* 本朝新修往生伝, a monk has been intoning the *Lotus Sutra*, day and night, for over fifteen years. After having sought relics for many years, a relic and a jewel (*jū* 珠) appear in the garden, as he intones the *Lotus Sutra*. He cannot sink the relic in water, nor break it with a hammer, so the relic is deemed authentic. Thus, he enshrines the relic in a Buddha statue where it is worshipped. There is another such story noted in the Heian period text the *Hokke genki* 法華験記—a collection of narratives and biographies of advocates of the *Lotus Sutra*, which includes miraculous tales—about a monk who intones the *Lotus Sutra* for many years. One day, while intoning, his tooth falls out onto the *sūtra*. Looking down, he sees that his tooth has transformed into a relic. He decides to worship the relic, and then, from inside of his mouth, fall two to three more teeth, which also transform into relic grains (*Hokke genki*, 3 vol. story 109). There are many stories of relics magically appearing from the latter half of the eleventh century onward. Although these are stories and tales, some scholars have argued that these widely circulated texts reflect the *imaginarie* of their surroundings as well as of Japanese religions during this time. On the *Hokke genki* as a collection of stories that can be read as a historical text, see Kikuchi 2014. Also, see Kawasaki 2015.

[144] In this vein, perhaps we can conceptualize a relic as a verb, rather than a noun in that a relic is a process, not a fixed element. Relics are said to be constantly changing and in a state of flux.

[145] See, for instance, Strong 2004, 188.

of spiritual attainment can call back a relic. Herein, calling back, possessing or even taking a relic can attest to the attainment and faith of the person in question.

There are various recorded instances of Eison calling back valuable relics. By way of illustration, in Koan 8 (1286), the year Eison received an imperial edict to become chief administrator (*bettō* 別当) of Tennōji 天王寺, he visited the temple Gōchikō'in 五智光院. The *Kameyama hōō shinkan* notes that after he bestowed over seven hundred people with the bodhisattva precepts at Gōchikō'in, he performed a relic rite to call back the temple's lost relics:

> In the 4th month, on the 3rd day, over seven hundred and thirty people received the bodhisattva precepts at Gōchikō'in. The next day, [Eison] suddenly heard that the relics in the Golden Hall had been lost from the 7th month of the previous year. The whole monastery grieved greatly. So the Bodhisattva [Eison] decorated the altar and prayed earnestly, [then] the relics suddenly appeared, emitting light in the hall. At that time, there were auspicious clouds that surrounded the area, and lofty white eagles soared propitiously in the sky. The Bodhisattva [Eison] was exceedingly happy. He ordered one thousand, five hundred monks to start a relic ceremony.[146]
>
> 四月三日。於五智光院授菩薩戒于七百三十餘人。翌日。始聞金堂舍利自去七月失其所在。合山僧衆大憂惱之。菩薩飾壇懇禱。舍利忽現。光明照殿。時有瑞雲繞軒。白鷹翱空之祥。菩薩喜出望外。命僧侶一千五百人。開舍利會。

This passage shows that the Gōchikō'in relics had been lost, but that Eison had the ability to call them back. Although the text does not explain why the relics were lost—perhaps it was a theft, perhaps the temple was negligent and the relics were misplaced, or, perhaps the relics simply chose to leave of their own will—this excerpt illustrates that Eison had the ability to call back the

[146] *Kameyama hōō shinkan*, 189.

relics through prayer.[147] The auspicious quality of this is confirmed by the plethora of miracles that ensued, indicating that the relics chose to appear specifically before Eison. Similar to the *Busshari kantoku* story, the Gōchikō'in relics emitted light in the hall when they appeared, attesting to their sacred nature and to their authenticity as the correct relics.

Relics also chose to magically appear at Hokkeji, albeit in a slightly different manner. As seen above, the Hokkeji relics tended to split, magically multiply, or, seemingly, to suddenly appear out of thin air before the nuns. Herein, these magically manifesting relics attested to the sacredness of the site as well as to the nuns in front of whom they appeared. In the case of Hokkeji, the relics manifested in front of the nuns without being summoned. They simply appeared before them. And, unlike the relics at Gōchikō'in, the Hokkeji relics did not disappear. Rather, they seem to have decided to stay at Hokkeji and in the possession of the nuns. It seems that the relics were only moved or relocated away from the convent when they were lent out to other temples, either for a brief period or permanently. For instance, the *Hokkeji shari engi* notes that after the relic belonging to Gyōgū's mother suddenly divided and scattered in front of the nuns, many of these relics were, later, "provisionally distributed to the urban districts of the capital and to the provinces" (*Hokkeji shari engi*, 159).

This tells us that the nunnery loaned out and distributed its relics. Such a phenomenon raises a myriad of questions. First, why did the nunnery choose to distribute their relics to the

[147] For instance, after the Mount Murō relics were stolen in Kenkyū 建久 2 (1191) by Chōgen's disciple Kūtai, the cloistered emperor Go-Shirakawa 後白河天皇 (1127–1192) summoned Chōgen and Kūtai to testify. With them, they carried thirty relic grains, said to be those of Mount Murō. The bulk of these relics were presented to Go-Shirakawa. Ruppert argues that, although it is unclear if Chōgen conspired in the theft of the relics, Chōgen's ability to openly address this issue helped him improve his relationship with Go-Shirakawa. Ruppert explains that the cloistered emperor was "extremely happy" to receive such a large number of relics, since his health was increasingly poor at this time. Ruppert 2000, 185–187.

urban districts and to the provinces? Did this help them to create political and karmic ties with temples in the periphery, and did this help to strengthen the nunnery's networks? Second, if so, then whose choice was it for the relics to be distributed? And, moreover, if the relics were provisionally distributed (provisionally is defined as *for the time being*), then this implies that the relics should have eventually been returned to Hokkeji, or even ritually called back by Eison as he did with the relics of other temples, such those of Gōchikō'in. But, according to the *engi*, the relics were not returned to Hokkeji. When examining Eison's role in telling these stories about the Hokkeji relics, we might ask: were these relics and their reliquaries taken or given away by Eison and his disciples? And, why has it been so long overlooked that the first Hokkeji relics belonged to Kūnyo? Or, put differently, why did Eison's relic narratives overshadow the voices of the Hokkeji nuns in these stories?

Relics: Stolen, Distributed, or Forgotten?

According to the *Hokkeji shari engi*, the convent's relics increased to over two thousand in the next few decades. The relics were counted and placed into reliquaries stored at Hokkeji by the nuns. Such reliquaries included: gold-copper vases (*kondō hei* 金銅瓶), crystal cylinders (*suishō tō* 水精筒), and Hokkeji's eastern pagoda (*tōtō* 東塔).[148] The *Hokkeji shari engi* explains this counting and storing of the relics, over the span of thirty years, accordingly:[149]

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[148] Although extant crystal cylinders are less common from this period, perhaps because of their delicate material and penchant toward breakage, there are numerous gold-copper reliquaries associated with Eison and various Nanto based Shingon temples.

[149] Note, it was not unusual to annually count relics and to record their numbers.

In the same year [of Kenchō, in 1254], on the 4th day of the 10th month, the relics totaled six hundred and fifty six. They were put into gold-copper vases, which were placed into the *sūtra* storehouse. In the 7th year [1256], on the 22nd day of the 3rd month, seven hundred and thirteen relics were counted.[150] They were moved into crystal cylinders…In Kōchō 2 [1263], on the 22nd day of the intercalary 7th month, ten relics were selected and separated [from the others] and placed into the eastern pagoda.…In the 4th year of the same era [1268], on the 17th day of the 1st month, the relics totaled one thousand. On this day, they were moved and put into their current crystal cylinders.

In the 7th year [1271], on the 20th day of the 1st month, the *saṅgha* together counted the relics and compared the [tabulation], they totaled two thousand and seventy three. All told, this single fragment of a relic had divided and dispersed within the span of thirty years—it amounted to over two thousand relics. During this period, according to the fluctuating circumstances, the number [of relics] had varied over time; sometimes [the relics] creeped and crawled like insects going back into their [original] plate, and sometimes they were dense (i.e., abundant) like [liquid] dripping from the edge of a spoon.[151] Of [all] the strange [occurrences] in this degenerate age, has there [ever] been anything like this?[152]

仍同十月四日。彼此通計六百五十六粒。納金銅瓶。奉安置經藏。同七年三月廿二日。奉計七百十三粒。奉移納水精筒。正嘉元年六月廿四日。奉計七百十一粒。弘長二年閏七月廿二日。取分十粒。奉納東塔…文永二年二月十八日。奉計七百卌六粒。同四年正月十七日。奉算一千粒。此日。奉移入今之水精筒。同七年正月廿日。僧眾尼眾相共奉勘計。二千七十三粒也。凡細碎一粒御舍利。次第分散。未滿三十個年。已及二千餘粒。其間來去隨機。多少依時。或跂跂回盤中。或離離垂匙端。末世之奇特。何事如之乎。

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150 The practice of counting relics was famous in the Tōji tradition during the Heian period, when the relics were counted roughly every twenty years from the mid-tenth century to at least the mid-fourteenth century. Ruppert 2000.

151 It is clear that the number of relics increased and decreased over the years. In another example, in Kenji 1 (1275), the relics were counted several times, because something was amiss when they were counted five years prior, in Bun'ei 7 (1270). In 1275, they now totaled two-thousand and sixty-three. This included five-hundred large relics and one-thousand, five-hundred and sixty-three small relics, according to Eison. See, for instance, the *Hokkeji shari engi*, 159.

152 Translation by author from the *Hokkeji shari engi*, 162. The term "degenerate age," or literally "degenerate world," refers to *mappō* (the last and final stage of Buddhism).

Although this passage shows that the nuns possessed over two thousand relics, which they stored in their temple in reliquaries and various containers, there are no documented reliquaries at this site today, despite the numerous extant reliquaries associated with Eison and his male disciples, such as the Five Vases at Saidaiji (Fig. 2) and the Iron Treasure *stūpa* (*tetsu hōtō* 鉄宝塔) (Fig. 3) in which these vases are kept.[153] According to Eison's biography, as Meeks has noted elsewhere, the Hokkeji nuns 'begged' Eison to write out the *Hokkeji shari engi*, which suggests that the nuns were interested in widely publicizing their "miraculous relic collection" (Meeks 2010, 146). I agree with this assertion and would like to push it a bit further, pointing out that by recording these miraculous tales Eison was also bolstering his own power, as well as that of his relic faith.

As noted above, this was a faith that was central to Eison's tradition, even after his death. In this light, by asserting that the nuns implored him to record their relic tales, Eison is putting himself both in a position of power and of benevolence. Through his writings, Eison is asserting a level of control over the nuns' relics, objects that they possessed even before his arrival, while also calling attention to his own bodhisattva-like-nature to help others. These characteristics are central to his image as a bodhisattva-like-monk.[154] Herein, I would like to pose the question: To what extent were the Hokkeji nuns' relics taken without them receiving the credit that they warranted? And, if these relics were taken, then by whom and why? To what extent were the nuns compliant in this? By asking such questions of these texts and their related reliquaries, I

[153] See Naitō 2001. As we will see below, there are recent findings of objects, including reliquaries and texts, in the Mañjuśrī bodhisattva (*monju bosatsu* 文殊菩薩) statue at Hokkeji. We are yet to open this statue to ascertain the provenance of its relics and reliquaries, so we cannot make conclusive statements about it containing Hokkeji relics. We will address this statue, and the devotional objects that it enshrines, in more detail at the end of this chapter.

[154] On Eison and Ninshō, see, Quinter 2015.

Fig. 2: The Five Reliquary Vases 五瓶舎利容器. Casted in nickel and copper.
Nara National Museum. Property of Saidaiji, Nara. Kamakura era (1284).
Measurements of the vases are circa: height 30 cm and diameter 12 cm.

Fig. 3.
Iron Treasure *stūpa* 鉄宝塔.

Nara National Museum.
Property of Saidaiji, Nara.
Height of stupa 172 cm;
base width 64.9 cm.
Kamakura era (d. 1284).

hope to create a more nuanced understanding of what the Hokkeji nuns in particular, and nuns in Japan in general, were doing vis-à-vis relic worship in thirteenth century Japan.

These relic related tales and records illustrate that the Hokkeji nuns were granted a considerable amount of sacred power through their possession of relics; relics which they oversaw and for which they were, in many ways, responsible. Beyond the power of the nuns, it is worth looking for a moment at the agency of the relics themselves and at their "choice" to manifest before the nuns. As we know, relics are believed to choose their keepers. They come and go according to their own volition.[155] In one passage of the *Hokkeji shari engi*, for instance, Gyōkyū asks his mother, Shūamida butsu, to lend him one of her relics. Despite Shūamida butsu's consent to lend the boy a relic, the relic itself does not wish to stay with Gyōkyū. Instead, it returns at night to his mother, its rightful owner:

> [Gyōkyū] requested one of the divided relics. Earnestly, he hoped that his mother would not hinder his request. In the middle of 1243 [Kangen 1], one relic was given to Gyōkyū. Several months later, when Gyōkyū wanted to pay a visit [to his mother, he discovered] that his vessel was empty—the relic could not be found. Gyōkyū looked up at the sky in horror, he was ashamed by his own clumsiness. He was depressed and sighed at his [karmic] status. [That night,] he dreamt of a house on top of Mount Shigi[156] that was surrounded by a veranda. There were multicolored lights, which he [found] strange, so he asked the people nearby. Each one answered saying, this miraculous light is from the relic harbored by your mother. Hearing these words, he was increasingly filled with shame. At this time, the light transformed into relics that permeated the veranda. His heart filled with joy. When the dream ended, he went directly to his mother's place sobbing and told her the story. Thereupon, his mother instantly revealed the reason why the relic had already returned to her.
>
> Gyōkyū was both happy and sad. Again he begged to borrow the [relic]. His mother replied: "At first when I heard the reason why the relic was lost—because of the oddity

[155] This is still believed in certain Buddhist traditions in Asia today. See, Strong 2004.

[156] Mount Shigi is in modern-day Nara Prefecture.

> that you were [karmically] estranged from it—I borrowed your dream to tell you. Isn't this a worthy thing?" Again, like before, she divide a relic [for him]. At this time, the relic, which was previously lost, naturally appeared in the middle of the plate, and, immediately, at that time he thought to obtain the two relics. More and more, Gyōkyū solidified his faith. During this time, as he single-mindedly practiced diligently, the relic performed a multitude of miracles, scattered into infinite [pieces], and gradually increased up to several hundred shards.[157]
>
> 請分與一粒。懇望之趣依不得止。寛元年中奉渡一粒於行窮訖。而經數月之後。欲拜見之時。只有空器。舍利不見。行窮周章仰天。恥其宿業之拙。深抱愁歎之處。夢見信貴山住房高欄上。有五色之光。怪而問旁人。各個答云。此是汝母所持舍利神光也。聞此言。彌含慚愧之間。彼光悉成舍利充滿欄上。住歡喜之心。夢覺畢。即往母所。泣語上之趣。母即示汝舍利已還來我所之由。行窮悲喜相半。重乞奉請。母報云。乍聞沒失之由。遂怪機緣之疏。倩案夢想之告。匪是直也事與。仍如元亦欲分與一粒。當於此時。前所失之舍利自然現盤中。即同時感得二粒訖。行窮彌致堅固之信。専修勤行之間。神變非一。分散無數。次第倍增及數百粒。

This passage illustrates that Gyōkyū believed that the relic went missing because of his inadequate karmic status, a worry that is confirmed by his mother when they meet. The text explains this several times in different ways, explaining that he was both "ashamed by his own clumsiness" and "depressed by his karmic status." It elaborates that this was why his mother had to enter his dream and tell him that he was karmically estranged from the relic. We learn from her that Gyōkyū's lack of faith led the relic to drift away from him and to return to his mother, its rightful keeper (who, by implication, has strong faith and good karma). This demonstrates that relics choose to appear in front of and stay in the possession of certain individuals, irregardless of to whom they have been gifted or lent. After Gyōkyū comes to visit his mother in tears, he expresses his shame at not having adequate karma or faith to attract the relic to stay. At this point, his mother magically divided one of her relics for him, offering him a second chance. This

[157] *Hokkeji shari engi*, 160–161. Translation by author.

time, Gyōkyū strengthens his faith and practices diligently, and, in return, the relic performs miracles and increases in number for him.

Pedagogically speaking, this passage is endearing. Repeatedly, Gyōkyū, a boy, fails and is ashamed of letting down his mother. The author describes Gyōkyū's feelings of shame twice in this short paragraph: 1) when he first realizes his own clumsiness and lack of good karma; and, 2) when he is told that the light on the veranda is from his mother's relic (the relic that he has gracelessly lost). The story situates him as a child, who earnestly asks to borrow a precious object from his mother and hopes that she will oblige. He then clumsily loses it, and, accordingly, he returns to repent tearfully to his mother. Perhaps we can also read this story, written in a way that the reader sympathizes with the boy, as a didactic piece. It teaches its listener how to care for a relic and what that entails. In regards to the implications of this story, it intimates that the Hokkeji nuns knew how to properly care for their relics, since the relics never disappeared from their possession nor did the relics act mischievously in front of the nuns—as they some times do in relic stories. In turn, this means that the karma of the nuns and of their convent was so that the relics chose to appear, and to remain, at Hokkeji. Unlike in the case of Gyōkyū, who was young and lacked strong faith, the relics had no reason to vanish from the nuns' vessels. This attests to the sacred nature of the nunnery as well as of the nuns themselves. This idea is further reinforced by records explaining the constant recounting of the relics and the relics steadily increasing at the convent over the next few decades.

If we reflect broadly on noteworthy relics stories in Japan, it is not surprising that the nuns of Hokkeji were closely connected to the magical appearance, oversight, and possession of so many relics. The first tale in which relics magically appeared in Japan, for instance, involved a

nun from *Kara no kuni* 加羅の国 ("The Country of Kara"), in the Korean Peninsula, as mentioned above. This is just one of many examples of how females have long been linked to Buddhist relics in Japan.[158] Generally speaking, this link between females and relics can be seen in the following three categories: 1) scripture (e.g., the eleventh chapter, "The Devadatta Chapter," of the *Lotus Sutra* 法華経, about the Dragon Princess 龍女 offering a wish-granting-gem—also understood to be a relic—up to the Buddha);[159] 2) legend (e.g., the eighth to ninth century *Nihon Ryōiki* 日本霊異記 tale of a relic magically appearing on top of the rice bowl of one of the first nuns ordained in Japan);[160] and, 3) practice (e.g., as seen with the relic worship and miniature *stūpa* construction projects of the early female Empresses Suiko 推古天皇 [r. 592–628] and Shōtoku 称徳天皇 [r. 749–758; 764–770]).[161] In this light, it is not uncanny that

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[158] The motif of linking miraculous events to women is commonly seen in short stories throughout Japanese history, such as the Princess Kaguyahime かぐや姫 in the tenth century folktale *Taketori monogatari* 竹取物語 ("The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter"). In this tale, Kaguyahime is said to be so beautiful that she fills every corner of her parents' house with light, relieving her adopted father of sadness and pain just by being near him. She is understood to be a magical being. Keene 1956, 330.

[159] On the Dragon Princess, see, for instance, Abé 2015; Kamens 1993; and, Yoshida 1989.

[160] On Heian era aristocratic women and relic worship, see: *Sanbōe-kotoba* 三宝絵詞 (d. 984), *Konjaku monogatari shū* 今昔物語集 and *Nihon kiryaku* 日本紀略. For a summary of these in English, see Ruppert 2000, 193–198. Another, slightly later, well-known legend involving females and a gem-like-relic is the *Taishokan* 大織冠 ("The Great Woven Crown"). This Muromachi era narrative, which Abe Yasurō 阿部泰郎 asserts is a patchwork of various literary sources, includes numerous powerful females. Melanie Trede points out that each of these female protagonists "is a queen in her own right, issuing, stealing and retrieving the priceless jewel" that is at the center of this tale's narrative (Trede 2004, 58). These three protagonists include: Kōhaku'nyo 紅白女 (Red and White Lady) to who's future husband the relic is to be a gifted, the beautiful dragon princess who steals the relic on a boat traveling from Japan to China, the highly-skilled diver-woman (*ama* 海女) who retrieves the relic from the Dragon Palace at the depths of the sea. In other versions of this story, as seen in the fifteenth century Nō play *Ama* 海女, the diver is reincarnated as the Dragon Princess (*Ryūnyof* 龍女) from the *Lotus Sutra* (a female dragon child known for possessing a relic-like-jewel in Buddhist literature). See Trede 2004. Also, see Abe 1987.

[161] For an interesting discussion on these three categories, see Ambros 2015.

nuns, specifically the elite nuns of Hokkeji, possessed thousands of magically manifesting relics. Eison was likely aware of these celebrated narratives, and other important premodern narratives involving female protagonists and relics, when writing about the Hokkeji nuns and their relics.

III. Unanswered Questions: Reliquaries at Hokkeji

Through recent computerized tomography scans (CT scans) the convent has discovered texts and reliquaries enshrined in its thirteenth century wooden Monju bosatsu 文殊菩薩 (Skt. Mañjuśrī) statue (Fig. 4; Fig. 5).[162] In recent years, scholars of East Asian religions have started to discover that many Buddhist statues from China, Japan, and Korea contain sacred objects that were placed into these statues during their consecration rituals.[163] Such innards include: donor prayers (*zōryū ganmon* 造立願文), copies of *sūtra*, Buddhist prints (*inbutsu* 印仏), small buddha statues (*tainai butsu* 胎内仏), reliquaries, talismanic pouches, cloth in the five colors (*goshiki* 五色), coins or paper money, mirrors, medicine packets, talismans, and so on. Some scholars researching these statues have argued that, rather than looking at statues containing sacred objects as the exception, we should assume that they were the norm. Although modern medical technologies and computers allow us to test these statues in a fairly non-invasive way, there has been some

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[162] In Japanese, the concept of enshrining objects in the inner hollows of Buddhist statues is referred to as *zōnai nōnyūhin* 像内納入品 (lit. "objects stored in the insides of statues"), or sometimes *tainai nounyuuhin* 胎内納入品 ("objects stored in the inner womb"). For a definition of *zōnai nōnyūhin* 像内納入品, see JAANUS (*Japanese Architecture and Art Net Users System*), accessed September 19, 2019. And, for an interesting compilation of images of important medieval *zōnai nōnyūhin* in Japanese, see *Zōnai nōnyūhin: kenkyū shiryō* 2018.

[163] Image consecration rituals mark the final stage of production of an icon, after which the image is understood to be animate and sacred. For instance, see Wang 2016, 14; and, Robson 2014. According to Sam Morse, the practice of putting objects into statues became especially popular in Japan after the invention of joined-block technique in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries (Morse 2010, 33).

Fig. 4: Mañjuśrī bodhisattva statue 文殊菩薩坐像.
Wood with paint. Kamakura era (13th c.). Hokkeji, Nara.

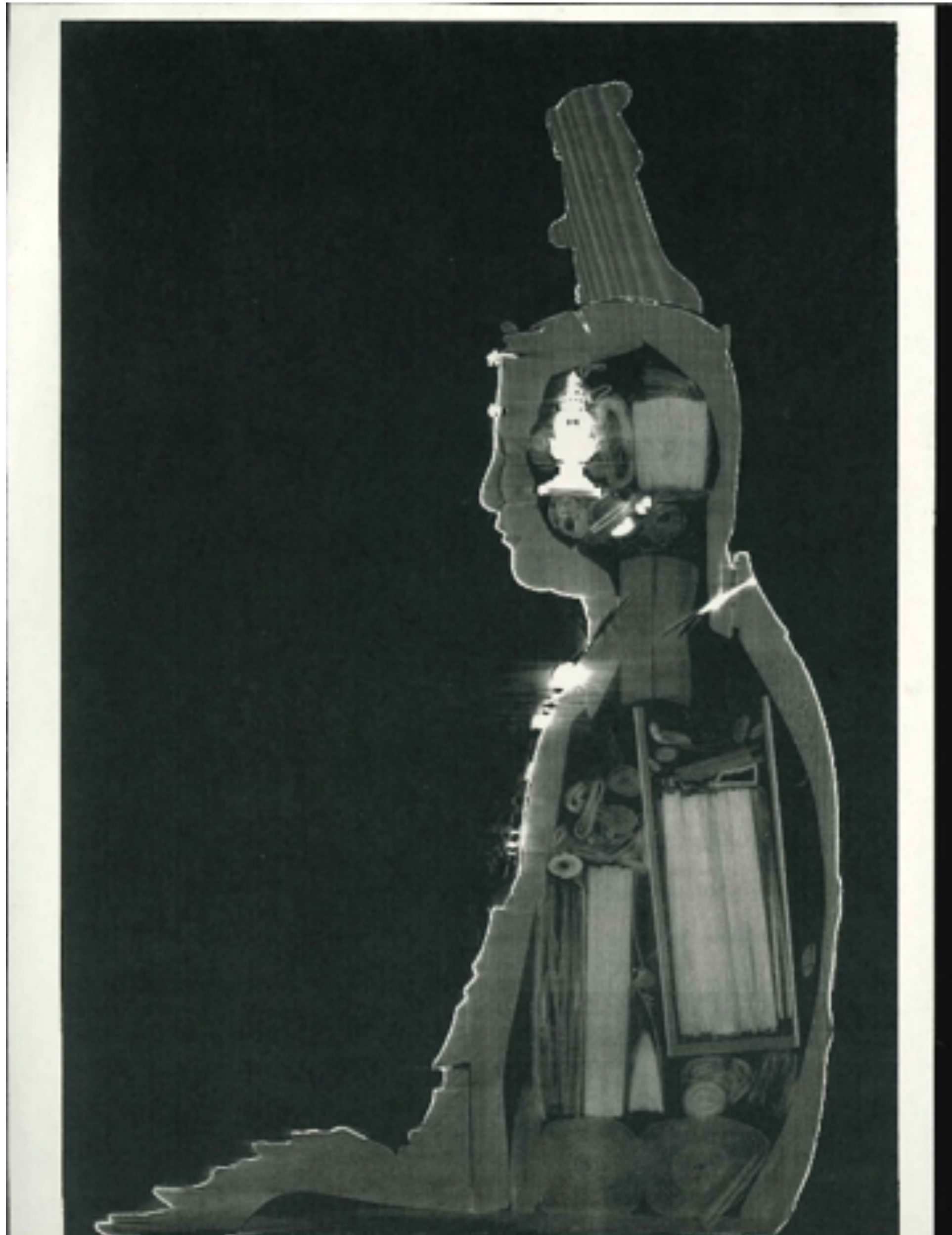

Fig. 5: CT scan of Mañjuśrī statue.
Wood with paint.
Kamakura era. Hokkeji, Nara.

conflict around opening the statues and around what certain monastics deem appropriate for study of their living icons.[164]

In this vein, although Hokkeji recently discovered that there are tens of texts and scrolls, as well as numerous reliquaries in their Mañjuśrī statue, currently, the convent has, understandably, not wanted to open its thirteenth century statue to be examined by scholars.[165] Likely, we will not have access to the statue's internal objects, which are predicted to total over one hundred and eighty pieces, until the temple opens the statue for restoration purposes. Such policies are established to protect the statue and its longevity. Given what we *can* tell from CT scans, there are five reliquaries planted in the statue's head. These reliquaries, constructed in different shapes and sizes, include: a spherical reliquary (likely made of crystal) and a long rectangular reliquary, flanking a large *gorintō* 五輪塔 (five-ringed *stūpa*) (Fig. 6). Under the *gorintō* is a small vial-shaped reliquary and yet a smaller *gorintō* (Fig. 7). All five reliquaries are securely placed in the head's central cavity.

The crystal-ball-shaped-reliquary, which seems to enshrine three relics, resembles the crystal-ball-reliquary inside the three-sided gilt-bronze *gorintō* 金銅三角五輪塔形舎利容器 (d. 1198) associated with the monk Chōgen, at Konomiya shrine 胡宮神社, in Shiga 滋賀 (Fig.

[164] Through CT scans, in the last few decades scholars have discovered that many gilt bronze statues in China, which were thought to contain wood or other material, actually encased the mummies of deceased monks (one of the most recently discovered was that of the monk Liuquan; died c. 1100). A number of newspaper articles have covered this news over the last five to ten years, yet the notion of statues containing objects is not yet common knowledge. On Liuquan, see, Squires 2015.

[165] Iconographically, Mañjuśrī is generally seen sitting in lotus posture, donning a prince's crown and robes. In his right hand he holds a sword, and in his left the stem of a blossoming lotus flower. On top of the lotus is a hand scroll of the *Prajñāpāramitā*, the "Perfection of Wisdom" *sūtra*. See, for example, Buswell and Lopez 2013, 526–527.

8).[166] This crystal-ball acts as a smaller reliquary within this three-sided *gorintō*, while, in the case of the Mañjuśrī statue, the crystal-ball is a reliquary placed into the statue (seen as yet another reliquary). These relics are protected inside of the crystal container, sealed with a thin piece of paper in the case of Konomiya shrine *gorintō*, or what appears to be a small top in the case of Hokkeji's Mañjuśrī statue. The reliquaries are, arguably, just as important as the relics that they contain, since a relic is not gifted nor does it often carry meaning on its own, but, rather, it must be presented in a container (i.e., in a reliquary).[167] The placement of relics into statues, which in the case of the Mañjuśrī statue were placed into its head cavity, became increasingly common in the Kamakura period. Relic worship at this time seemed to be one factor that led to an increase in statuary deposits, a phenomenon seen with the infant Shōtoku statues dating from the late thirteenth through fourteenth centuries in Japan. In regards to the two-year-old Shōtoku statues, and to the phenomenon of placing sacred objects (i.e., relics) into a statue, Ive Covaci explains:

> The intent was to establish a strong parallel between the life of the legendary Japanese prince and the life of the historical Buddha, Śākyamuni.[168] The resurgence of devotion to the historical Buddha, whose corporeal presence in this world is signified by relics, also contributed to an increase in the practice of packing statues with sacred materials. When

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[166] See, for instance, Naitō 2001. The three-sided gilt-bronze *gorintō* are unique in they are three-sided, rather than four-sided. This distinct design is associated with the monk Chōgen. See Nara National Museum 2001, 118, 222.

[167] Although it is hard to come to a decisive conclusion at this point, scans of this statue show that the thin rectangular reliquary and the smaller *gorintō* both hold two relic grains. The small white vial seems to hold four relics. If we include the relics encased in the crystal-ball reliquary, there appear to be a total of eleven relics in this statue.

[168] The infant Shōtoku statues reference the story of the two-year-old prince turning toward the east and putting his hands together in prayer, at which point a relic shard miraculously appeared between his small palms. The Harvard Sedgewick statue mentioned above contains a dried lotus seed stuck between the hands of the statue, representing this miraculous moment.

> relics are deposited within a statue, the image becomes both a reliquary structure and the very body of the Buddha.[169]

Much like the two-year-old Shōtoku statue, the Mañjuśrī statue can also be seen as a reliquary. The presence of relics within this statue draws a parallel to the life of the Buddha, in a world and a time that feared it was increasingly distancing itself from the teachings of the Buddha (during the period of *mappō*). The concept of returning to an age when Buddhism was most "pure," and followed "the correct teachings," was central to the teachings of the Vinaya school and, in turn, to the teachings of Eison. In this sense, it might have been Eison himself who collected the Hokkeji relics placed into this statue, for safe keeping. As seen above, relics and their possession, along with the revival of the nuns' order, were crucial for Eison to link himself and his teachings to those of the historical Buddha.

Despite what we can tell from scans of the Mañjuśrī statue, we are left with a number of unanswered questions about this statue and the relics that it enshrines.[170] There are roughly twelve relics that we know of in this statue, all embedded in reliquaries in the head cavity. The question remains: Are these all Hokkeji relics? And, if so, where are the rest of the relics mentioned in the *Hokkeji shari engi*? Or, if these relics are from other temples, were they gifted

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[169] See, Covaci 2016, 13.

[170] Perhaps the most similar statue to this is Eison's living buddha statue, made on behalf of Eison in Kō'an 弘安 3 (1280). This statue was seen to be a living Buddha, much like Eison who, according to Nakao, had not died but had entered into *nirvāṇa* (Nakao 2001, 135). This statue, much like the Mañjuśrī statue, contains numerous reliquaries and texts. It holds a gold and copper relic stupa, enshrining, what are believed to be, three Śākyamuni tooth relics. This is noted in the *Shari anchijō*「舎利安置状」, the "Document of Enshrined Relics," found in the statue. According to the *Shari anchijō*, one of these relics appeared miraculously at Saidaiji during a period in which the monk Saibutsu 西仏 closed himself in seclusion on Mount Kōya 高野山, during the year Bu'ei 文永 7 (1271).

Fig. 6: Detailed CT scan of the statue's head.

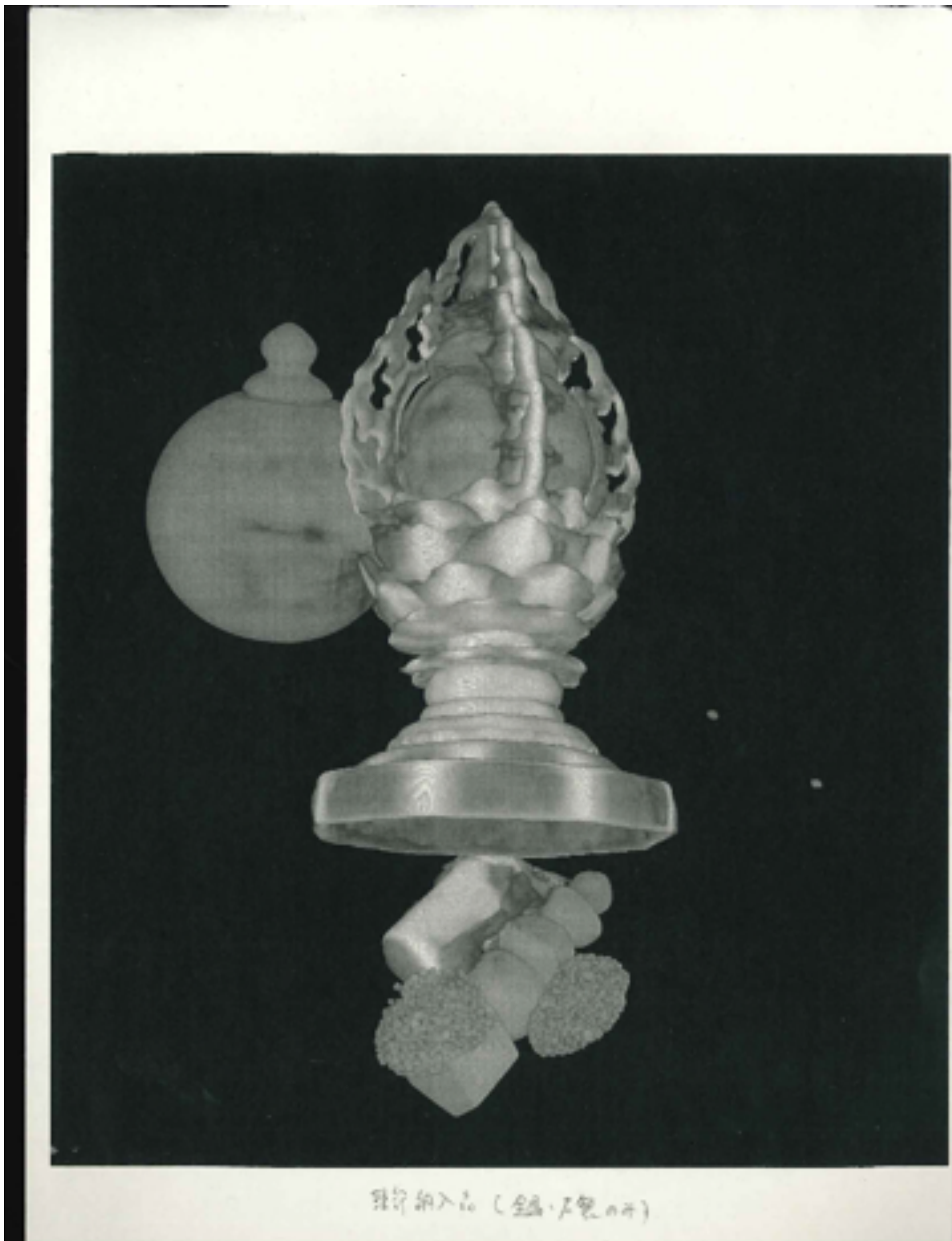

Fig. 7: From left to bottom of image: round crystal reliquary; flaming jewel *gorintō;* relic vial; and, smaller *gorintō.*

Fig. 8: Gilt-bronze three-sided *gorintō* reliquary. Rock crystal (with three *shari* under black ink on paper), with bronze dais and *stūpa*. Konomiya shrine*,* Shiga Prefecture*.* Kamakura era (1198). *Gorintō* measures: 38.7 cm, width 16.5 cm.

to Hokkeji and by whom? This last question is an interesting possibility that would raise further queries about temple networks and the exchange of relics in medieval Japan. In an attempt to answer such questions, and to create a more nuanced understanding of relic worship and the nunhood in thirteenth century Japan, we will look in the next chapter at relic worship in regards to the reliquaries commissioned by Eison's temple Saidaiji. Specifically, this chapter will propose that the Five Vases of Saidaiji and their relics can be read as a microcosm of Nanto and of Eison's relic faith—at the center of which sat Hokkeji.

IV. Concluding Thoughts

In closing, this chapter has begun to conceptualize how Eison and his disciples wrote about the Hokkeji relics as well as the Hokkeji nuns' relationships to their relics. In such writings, relics magically manifested for one of the first times in vast numbers on the archipelago, specifically in the presence of these elite nuns. Although relics existed at other sites associated with Eison, the *engi* discussed above create a unique image of the self-manifesting relics that were controlled, counted and overseen by the Hokkeji nuns. These relics, which were looked after, distributed, and gifted *by* as well as *to* the nuns, afforded them power and protection through ritual and narrative, as well as through the very relics themselves—sacred objects meant to be enshrined and worshipped at this specific temple site.

By examining aspects of these texts and their related reliquaries, we have started to problematize why there are no known extant reliquaries or relics at Hokkeji, despite the

chronicles and stories noting that there were thousands of relics hereabouts. To such an end, I have argued that perhaps Eison borrowed or took some of these relics to benefit his own tradition—an idea that we will explore in more depth in the following chapter. Although there is still much to be done, I anticipate that the relationship between the nuns and their relics, as well as the potential theft or "borrowing" of these relics, can illuminate aspects of Japanese religious culture and gender history that have hitherto been understudied. Many questions remain to be answered, yet I hope that this discussion will start to bring some of these inquiries to the forefront as we begin to take these skeletons out of the closet to examine them. Let us now turn to the bones enshrined in the Saidaiji reliquaries.

Stolen or Borrowed Relics: Eison and the Five Vases

This chapter uses the Five Relic Vases of Saidaiji as a case study to examine the complexity of Eison's relic faith over his lifetime. These vases have received relatively scant attention in scholarship in any language. The vases, however, provide a means for thinking about Eison's relic faith, and the sacred landscape that he created through this faith via relic theft, lending, and the general implications that such transfers (or, translations) brought about. The question of the social significance of the theft of relics—as well as the symbolic capital that these exchanges generated—is central to this chapter.[171] Through this question, we can explore and move closer to answering the inquires raised in the previous chapter about the Hokkeji relics, the relationship that Eison had to these relics, and what Eison might have done with the convent's relics and why. Inquires such as: what happened to the Hokkeji relics? Why are there none enshrined in Hokkeji today, as far as we know? And, who took the nunnery's relics and why?

Accordingly, this chapter moves from relic theft on a global level; to relic theft in Japan; and, finally, to Eison's theft or borrowing of the relics in the Five Vases, apexing with the central vase containing hundreds of Hokkeji relics. The chapter concludes by examining Eison's relic faith independent of Hokkeji, and how his faith developed and transformed through interactions with nuns and their relics. Eison's ability to summon relics, accordingly, seems to have become more prominent throughout his life. By looking at relic theft across cultures, moreover, this chapter seeks to gain a better understanding of, and lay the ground work for, what was happening in Japan at this time, as well as in the world vis-à-vis relic worship in regards to the political,

[171] Through these relics, Eison seemed to have been constructing a microcosm of his relic networks, which we can read, I argue, through the Five Vases.

social, and religious situations of this period. As a caveat, I do not intend to compare and contrast these traditions and their faiths—they are distinct and individual cases. Instead, I use these examples to show how relics and relic theft served polyvalent functions across the world, not just limited to the Japanese archipelago. After looking at these observations of relic worship across traditions, we will shift to a historical analysis specific to Eison's understanding and construction of relic worship. Let us turn now to a brief introduction of relic theft across the medieval world.

I. Introduction: The Theft of Relics

Eison's appropriation of the Hokkeji relics, as discussed in Chapter One, can be studied in a comparative context in the Buddhist and Christian cases. Like in other Buddhist and Christian communities, the sacred theft (i.e., *furta sacra*) of relics played a significant role in determining who oversaw and was given credit for relics in Japan.[172] Such thefts carried social capital. As in the rest of the medieval world, relic theft in Japan was not uncommon. Stories of theft were used to reinforce and to prove the validity of a given relic, its pedigree and history. Rather than lessen the power of the relic's new possessor, these stories enhanced the authority of the relic and, in turn, the thief. This tension, between the appeal of relics and the human manipulation of relics can be seen in relic stories throughout Buddhist traditions. Although many of these stories of

[172] The theft of relics is a repeated theme in Asian Buddhist stories and histories. On the subject of relic theft in Sri Lanka, for instance, see Kevin Trainor 1997, 117–118. In this work, Trainor shows that in Theravāda Buddhist sources the focus is on the movement of relics from nonhuman domains to human ones and vice versa. These sources are not interested in the actual transfer of relics between people. Rather, such accounts, he explains, emphasize the participation of nonhuman acts and supernormal occurrences (Trainor 1997).

theft are mythical, many are also believed to be true by monastics and devotees alike.[173] One such example, which we will discuss in more detail below, is the story of the Buddha's tooth relics. In East Asian versions of this story, these relics undergo various natural and supernatural thefts. The relics, first stolen by demons, are then retrieved by Skanda (Jp. *Idaten* 韋駄天; Ch. *Wei Tuo* 韋馱). Later, Skanda takes one of the relics himself, then gifts this relic to the patriarch of the Vinaya school Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667). This last transfer takes place in a nocturnal vision (Shinohara 1988, 212–214). After undergoing various transfers in these heavenly and demonic realms, the relic, moves from a mythical space to an earthly one. That this happened in a dream-like-vision, also helps the relic to move from India to China, linking it both to its mythical origin story in India and to a great Vinaya master in China (Strong 2004, 187).

Scholars of medieval Europe have noted the complexity of stories involving the stealing or taking of a sacred object, which often suggests that the object itself accepts this fate. Some scholars have referred to this as a seduction, while others have compared it to a kidnapping of the saint (through his or her bodily remains).[174] In the case of a seduction, the relic, according to belief, is lured by the thief to a new location. The logic behind this shift in ownership (or, sacred seduction) is that the relic was previously in unworthy hands, or that the relic's former possessor

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[173] For a Thai version of this story, see Leksuskhum 2000, 180. In one version of this story Droṇa steals the Buddha tooth relics in his turban, and the god Indra flies down from heaven to take the relics for himself. According to a Pali version of this story, Droṇa actually steals three tooth relics, which he places, one by one, into his turban, between his toes, and into his clothing. In this story, the relics are then taken again by Indra, the Nāga king, and a person from Gandhāra. We will discuss this more in Chapter Three. See, for instance: Trainor 1997, 132; Li 1996, 209; Strong 2004, 120–121.

[174] See, for instance, Geary 1990 and Brown 1981.

was less deserving than its new one.[175] As a result, the saint herself wanted her body, or relics, to be transferred to someone who could properly venerate them (Andrea 2012).[176] In many of these instances, the monks and clerics who performed these thefts established themselves in the community or church housing the sacred remains, often staying there for years and becoming part of the establishment. Then, at the right moment, they would abscond with the precious relic, and return to their own cloister, where they were enthusiastically welcomed (Andrea 2012). Such cases show that great efforts, even years of people's lives, were put into obtaining relics, further attesting to the importance of relics in the eyes of the church and its followers. These transfers were not uncommon in the medieval Christian tradition—while other such relic transfers occurred through gifting, selling, inheritance, theft, treachery, murder, and even war.

Stolen Relics: The World Over

Over the last thirty years, there has been a renewed interest in relic theft in modern scholarship, especially within medieval studies. Although most of these studies focus on Christian sources, certain scholars, such as Mimi Hanaoka and Paul Walker, also address the theft of relics in Islam.[177] Hanaoka explains that, as in the Christian cases of relic theft, the Islamic tradition of taking, plundering, or recapturing relics was seen as an assertion of power and legitimacy

[175] I try to avoid the word "owner" when talking about relics, since relics are understood as animate objects that can come and go as they please. In this sense, relics are kept by people, they choose to dwell with certain people and in certain spaces.

[176] In the European case, the theft of relics became a flourishing trade in the ninth through twelfth centuries. On the theft and sale of relics, see Andrea 2012.

[177] See, for instance, Walker 2003 and Hanaoka 2016.

(Hanaoka 2016, 173). Persian sources mentioning the theft of relics talk about these acts taking place in connection to pious dreams, the lives of holy figures, shrine visitations, or other sacred spaces.[178]

In one Persian story, the ruler Marwān II (r. 744–750) possessed the contact relics of the Prophet. Fearing that his enemy, the Abū Muslim army, might try to abscond with his precious relics, Marwān II ordered his most trusted servant to bury the relics, in this case contact relics—the staff and the cloak of the Prophet—in the desert sands (Hanaoka 2016, 201). To prevent his enemies from finding where the relics were buried, he ordered the beheading of his servant's daughter, who had accompanied her father to hide the relics. Next, his men took the servant captive, planning to kill him, but he managed to save his own life by pointing out that if he were killed, the location of the relics would be forever lost. This bloody story of treachery and deceit shows the value of these sacred objects. These relics were used to assert legitimacy and rulership, as well as to prove, or to justify, the winner of this political rivalry.[179] In this case, by surfacing with the relics Marwān II could assert his power and right to rulership, Hanaoka expounds (Hanaoka 2016). That these relics were lusted after, vied for and hidden away—similar to what we will see later in Eison's case—only enhances their power and allure as sacred objects.

As for the theft of Christian relics in medieval Europe, much has been published on this topic since Patrick Geary's book *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages*. In this groundbreaking work, Geary focuses on the social and cultural contexts of relic theft and the

[178] This is especially noteworthy in that this is exactly the context in which we see relics and their theft appear in relic stories in Japan, and, specifically, in the Eison related stories that we will examine below.

[179] In Kamakura Japan, the Shogunate famously vied over the Buddha's tooth relic, which was seen to grant legitimacy.

significance of sacred thefts from the ninth through the eleventh century.[180] By looking at stories and histories about sacred relics and plundered tombs, he demonstrates that, in the Latin West, merchants and thieves frequently stole relics to sell them to eager ecclesiastics and to the ruling elite. Many scholars working on relics in both European and non-European traditions have built on Geary's work, such as Hanaoka, showing that there were relic networks, thefts of relics, and power-dynamics structured around relics throughout much of the medieval world. In such cases of theft, some thieves were professional relic dealers, while others were believed to have stolen relics out of piousness. Some relics were bought from unscrupulous clerics, while others were taken outright from churches.

Regardless of the context, such relics were often sold alongside other stolen goods in areas that reflected the tastes of that region's rulership and religious traditions (Geary 1990, 52, 69). For instance, the Carolingians bought relics of Roman and Italian martyrs, while Anglo-Saxon kings bought relics of saints from Brittany and Normandy (Geary 1990, 52). This concept that rulers or religious figures sought out relics from a given provenance—often a provenance that connected them to the religious legacy of a specific person or saint, who would further their political or religious aims—can be seen in East Asia, as well. This raises questions about the fabrication of stories around relics and to which saints they were accredited, depending on where they were sold, borrowed, or stolen.[181]

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[180] Also noteworthy is the work of Peter Brown, who writes about the cult of saints in the West from the third to the sixth centuries. Brown 1981. Also, see Robson 2018.

[181] Caroline Bynum and Paula Gerson explain that relics were just as important in Byzantium as in the Latin West, and that relics as well as reliquaries were probably the most valuable treasure brought back from Constantinople after the Fourth Crusade (13th c). Bynum and Gerson 1997, 4.

In the Latin West, the height of the relic trade came during a period in which the political and social systems in this part of the world were disintegrating, and cities were struggling for autonomy and dominance. Having the bones, or body, of an important saint in the main church of one's city was a reliable way to make a claim to legitimacy and to secure one's religious and political power—both of which were intimately linked (Geary 1990, 107; Bynum and Gerson 1997, 4). Because relics, or more accurately the belief behind them as loci of power, were such valuable religious objects, many duplicates of dubious provenance surfaced. In like manner, corpses were accredited to saints, and relics appeared out of thin air. Due to the exorbitant value of relics, thieves went to great efforts to obtain sacred bodies and bones, at times replacing more coveted remains with considerably less valuable ones.[182]

In one such story, the body of Saint Mark the Evangelist (b. circa 5 AD) was stolen from Alexandria by the Venetians. According to the *Translation Sancti Marci*, two Venetian merchants sailed to Alexandria in 828, to retrieve the marble columns and tablets from the churches that the "Saracens" planned to raze. In place of these churches, they would construct a palace.[183] After arriving in Alexandria, and talking to the church custodians where Saint Mark was enshrined, the Venetians struck a deal. Two local monks agreed that they could remove the body for safekeeping. The church was to be destroyed, so it was in their interest to protect the saint's full-body-relic, as well.

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[182] Bodies of saints were known to have been produced in the alps of Northern Italy during this period. See, for example, Geary 1990, 20.

[183] The term Saracens was used to refer to Arabs or Muslims especially during the Crusades.

According to legend, in the depths of night, the Venetians took the body and replaced it with that of Saint Claudia (d.u.). The new body gave off a fragrant odor, which spread throughout the city and attracted curious visitors to the saint's tomb.[184] Since the body had been replaced, however, no one noticed that it was that of another saint. Back on the ship, the Venetians hid the body of Saint Mark under a pile of cabbage and pork (in hopes of repulsing Muslim boarder guards, according to the tale). This event is depicted in mosaics in Saint Mark's Basilica in Venice, today. As planned, the Venetians were able to sail safely home with their loot (Geary 1990, 114).[185] Like many relic thefts that occurred in medieval Japan, this physical exchange of Saint Mark's body can be seen to represent a more abstract transfer of power within the Eastern Mediterranean. It illustrates a shift in power from the Byzantine Empire to the Venetian Republic. That this was done with a sacred body (i.e., a full-body-relic)—just as it might be done with a bone relic—secures this transfer of power.[186]

Through this transfer (or translation, in the words of Geary) of the relics of Saint Mark, Venice accomplished what she had set out to do: she "achieved superiority over the towns of the

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[184] Before the seventh century, Roman law had prohibited the disruption of a sacred tomb or corpse. It was thought that touching or moving a sacred corpse could incite unfavorable events upon the living. In one instance, when the tomb of Saint Lawrence was opened, everyone who saw the saint was believed to have died within ten days; as a result, even a piece of cloth that came into contact with the sacred dead had to be consecrated by the church (Benard 1988, 39). Although this likely added an extra level of protection for sacred and culturally valuable corpses, there was the possibly of tomb toxins, as well, such as those emitted from the ancient pharaohs' tombs in Egypt, which, some modern scientists have argued, led to the myth of the "mummy's curse." Such scientists argue that this was caused by mould spores, which, in certain cases, can prove to be toxic. These spores are circulated when fresh air is blown into a space—such as when a tomb is opened after a thousand years. Other modern scientists and medics have pointed out that perhaps these toxins were even placed in graves to protect the Egyptian dead from being disturbed by potential grave robbers. In either case, it could actually prove physically harmful to the living to open a tomb. See, for example, Harrison 2017.

[185] This moment is depicted in Tintoretto's 1562–1566 painting *Stealing of the Body of Saint Mark* (It. *Trafugamento del corpo di San Marco*), housed today in the Gallerie dell'Accademia, in Venice.

[186] This draws certain parallels to the passing of the Dharma robe in the Zen/Chan tradition. Being transmitted the robe—similar to possessing or stealing the relic, or corpse, of a saint—shows the transfer of power from one set of hands to another.

northern coast of the Adriatic, and independence from her Byzantine 'masters,'" Geary explains (Geary 1990, 115). These translations, similar to the ones seen in the Japanese case, were not just 'ritual kidnappings' of saints—they were symbolic for shifts in power and legitimacy. They indicated who had the right to possess such a coveted object, or, put differently, who was in power at that moment. Once transferred to their new location, the context of a relic changed depending on the agenda, and the faith, of its new keeper. As Geary explains, for a stolen relic to be venerated:

> [A] new symbolic function had to be assigned [to it]—a function that had its origin in the fabric of the society in which it was to be venerated. Thus the symbolic value of a new or rediscovered relic was only a reflection of the values assigned by the society that honored it. Any change in the nature, force, or direction of its cult had to come entirely from the society itself and not from the dialectic between old signs contained in the relic and the new significance given to these signs.[187]

In a similar light, relics in medieval Japan were also assigned new symbolic functions when relocated to novel spaces. These new functions reflected the values of the people enshrining the relics, as well as the teachings of given groups in relation to the sites themselves. As we will see below, the Shogunate Ashikaga Yoshimitsu 足利義満 (1358–1408) and the stolen relic of Engakuji, is one example of this in Japan. Through these narratives, relics linked given places, people, and communities to the Buddha, and to the greater world of Buddhism in general (Strong 2004). In this sense, relics acted as tools to establish the power and to organize the existence of specific social groups, allowing them to change the dialectic of a given relic, reassigning its old signs new significance. Within such groups, relics, like other sacred objects, helped to create

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[187] Geary 1990, 7.

identity, as well as to foster political protection, economic stability, dominance, social integration, and even exclusion. In a word, they created symbolic access to the sacred. While, in the case of theft, or the exchange of a relic, a new value was generated, a value that shifted across time and space.[188] It is this *exchange* that was, and is, the source of the mutual value assigned to the object.

In the Japanese context, the theft of relics contributed to a social exchange that had previously existed primarily around the exchange of relics within court circles and smaller religious groups. Relics helped these communities not only to prove their legitimacy, but also to link themselves to specific places and people, both real and imaged, of the past (i.e., Prince Shōtoku, Kūkai, Nāgajñāna, and Dainichi Nyorai) and the present on the three continents: Japan, China, and India. As Jules Prown explains, "objects of the past are the only historical occurrences that continue to exist in the present. They provide an opportunity by which we encounter the past at first hand; we have direct sensory experience of surviving historical events" (Prown 2001, 73). Similarly, Buddhist relics, much like the corpses of Christian martyrs, can serve to express a narrative of the past and the present through a single material body. These are tangible objects that one can hold. They are believed to provide access to other worldly powers, which serve as the focus of a complex range of human behaviors including enshrinement, ritual, and theft (Trainor 1992, 2).[189]

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[188] I have borrowed the idea of the shifting value generated through the exchange of an object from Arun Appadurai. According to Appadurai, this change is the source of value that sets the parameters of utility and scarcity, not the other way around. See Appadurai 1986, 4. Also, see Simmel 1978.

[189] See, for instance, Trainor 1992, 1–2. Here, Trainor compares the Sri Lankan case to the Christian case, as mentioned by Patrick Geary. Also, see Geary 1990, 370–395.

Hence, as Katherine Verdery has pointed out, the dead were (and are) used by the living for political and religious motives to rewrite history, reshape and compress time, and to bring the past into the present through a given body or corpse. As a result, great effort has been put into transfiguring skeletons or relics into martyrs, who speak for the living and can change, alter, or airbrush history (Verdery 1999). When writing about dead bodies that are not formally sacralized, Verdery explains:

> Dead people come with a curriculum vitae or résumé—several possible résumés, depending on which aspect of their life is being considered. They lend themselves to analogy with *other people's* résumés. That is, they encourage identification with their life story, from several possible vantage points. Their complexity makes it fairly easy to discern different sets of emphasis, extract different stories, and thus rewrite history. Dead bodies have another great advantage as symbols: they don't talk much on their own (though they did once).[190] Words can be put into their mouths—often quiet ambiguous words—or their own actual words can be ambiguated by quoting them out of context. It is thus easier to rewrite history with dead people than with other kinds of symbols that are speechless.[191]

Similarly, relics acquire meaning from people's beliefs in their origins and stories. As with corpses, the significance of relics comes from how people think about them, as well as the stories attributed to them. These stories, and the beliefs behind them, often become more important than the factual provenance of the relics themselves.

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[190] Verdery explains that dead bodies, like relics, are meaningful not in themselves but in their culturally established relations. Verdery 1999, 28.

[191] Verdery 1999, 28–29.

Japan: Sacred Thefts

In Japan, as in the Christian cases mentioned above, it is believed that relics chose (or, choose) to go with their thief to a new location, or that relics perform this act according to their own will, following a dream, vision, or other sacred omen. If relics were lusted after, vied for or hidden away this only enhanced their power and attractiveness. The theft of relics, as noted by Hanaoka, is often connected to a pious dream, a holy figure, or visits to sacred spaces (Hanaoka 2016). These sorts of otherworldly mental and physical places seem to facilitate and to justify the transfer of noteworthy relics from one person—or, a place—to another. Often, this person or site will stand for, or symbolize, a given political body, a religious tradition, or some other powerful entity greater than the individual.

One such, slightly later, example is that of the Shogunate Yoshimitsu. Infamously, Yoshimitsu stole a Buddha tooth relic from the Zen temple Engakuji in Kamakura, in the fourteenth century.[192] Prior to this, the tooth relic had transferred hands several times in Japan between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and before coming to Japan it had been stolen numerous times in India, as well. After Japan's Ōnin War 応仁の乱 war (1467–1477), the relic disappeared completely.[193] Before launching fully into this story, we should note that there are only a small handful of Buddha tooth relics in Japan. Because of their rare status, their stories and ownership tend to be assigned greater significance than normal bodily relics, which number

[192] See Nishiyama 2007, also see Nishiyama 2016.

[193] On stories and records about this relic, see: *Butsugeshari engi* 仏牙舎利縁起, *Shōzokuin butsugeshari no ki* 正続院仏牙舎利之記, and *Mannen shōzokuin butsuge shari ki* 万年山正続院仏牙舎利記. For modern scholarship on the history of tooth relics in Japan, see, Ōtani 2014, as well as Nōtomi 1985, 447–448.

in the thousands.[194] With this in mind, this particular tooth relic was brought to Japan in the thirteenth century under the auspices of the Shogunate Minamoto no Sanetomo 源実朝 (1192–1219). According to the "Abbreviated Record of the Buddha's Tooth Relic" (*Butsuge shari ryakuki* 仏牙舎利略記), Sanetomo had planned to visit Song China to retrieve the relic himself, based on a reoccurring dream that he had between 1211 and 1216 (Nishiyama 2016, 207–208).[195] In 1216, one of the characters in his dream, the Northern Song artisan Chin Genkei 陳元卿 (13 c.; Ch. *Chen Yuanqing*), came to Kamakura to meet him. Chin had helped rebuild Todaiji, where he had worked closely with Chōgen. Upon meeting Sanetomo, Chin explained: "In the past, you were an elder (*chōrō* 長老) on Aśoka Mountain (Jp. *Aikuō-san* 阿育王山; Ch. *Ayuwang-shang*) in China, during the Song Dynasty. At that time, you were my student (*deshi* 弟子)."[196]

He continued, informing Sanetomo that he should come to China to pray on this sacred mountain—regarded as an important pilgrimage site for Japanese monks, such as Chōgen—due to Sanetomo's karmic connections to this site in a past life (Collcutt 1996, 77). This encounter inspired Sanetomo to make a pilgrimage to China, so he asked Chin to construct a ship on his behalf. Upon launching the ship two years later in 1218, however, it sunk into the sand before it

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[194] Tooth relics are often given a different status and treated distinctly from ordinary *shari* or bone relics. Teeth are identifiable bones that often maintain their tooth-like shape, unlike *shari*. Strong points out, moreover, that teeth are the only bones on the living body that are commonly visible, while the person is alive. Strong 2004, 180.

[195] In her work on Myōe, Michaela Mross explains that dreams and rituals can "serve as a substitute" to visualize a journey, or, as George Tanabe explains, "as a means for encounter." In this sense, perhaps we can see Sanetomo's dream of visiting China as a substitute journey to retrieve the relics himself. See Mross 2016, 95; Tanabe 1992, 72.

[196] This is especially interesting given that Aikuō san was very important to Chōgen and his relic faith. He first went to this mountain in 1167 to worship at the relic *stūpa*, where the relics emitted light before him—attesting to a miraculous occurrence. Years later, when rebuilding Todaiji, Chōgen was said to have traveled back to China to retrieve excess materials there that he used to build the temple's Relic Hall (*Shari den* 舎利殿).

could even leave the harbor of Yuiga 由比ガ, near modern-day Kamakura. It remained stranded on the beach, where it eventually rotted away.[197] Due to this inauspicious omen, Sanetomo did not travel to China; instead, he sent an envoy in his place.[198] The envoy brought back the celebrated tooth relic, a relic said to have belonged to the patriarch Daoxuan, as mentioned briefly above, which Sanetomo placed into the mortuary temple, Shōchōju'in 勝長寿院, of his grandfather Minamoto Yoshitomo 源義朝 (1123–1160).[199] Later, Sanetomo transferred the relic to his own temple, Daijiji 大慈寺.[200]

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[197] There are no clear records of Chen's whereabouts after this incident.

[198] It was common for courtiers to send envoy's in their place to perform pilgrimages or retreats. Since the act was being performed on behalf of the given courtier, he or she still received the karmic merit. See, for example, Makura no sōshi 枕の草紙 (*The Pillow Book*).

[199] His father was Minamoto Yoritomo, founder of the Bakufu. Shōchōju'in was renamed by Yoritomo on behalf of the soul of Minamoto Yoshitomo (d. 1160), who was prematurely killed in the Heiji Rebellion (*Heiji no ran* 平治の乱) (Collcutt 1996, 114). Yoritomo, said to be a completely merciless man, had strong religious faith and was haunted for much of his life by unrestful spirits (*onryō* 怨霊). Many of these were the spirits of people he had killed in battle. As a warrior with uncommon organizational powers, he also "performed Buddhist and local rites everyday, and depended on diviners to advise when his army should attack," Richard Bowring explains (Bowring 2005, 267; Morton 1994, 69). On his person, Yoritomo often carried a Buddhist rosary (*juzu* 念珠) and, in his topknot, he kept a silver Kannon 観音 statuette. His personal writings reveal that the Kannon statue had a particularly sentimental meaning to him, as it had appeared to his childhood wet-nurse in a dream in his boyhood. According to one story, Yoritomo even pardoned an enemy warrior when he learned that the man read the *Lotus Sutra* daily, just as Yoritomo had since the death of his father in 1160. Considering Yoritomo's profession of his deep faith, it is perhaps unsurprising that his son sought out this tooth relic, one of the few Buddha tooth relics in Japan. On Yoritomo's faith, see, Collcutt 1996 and Bowring 2005. Also, see *Azuma Kagami* 吾妻鏡, edition Gomi, Hongō, and Nishita 2015. On Yoritomo's political history, see Morton 1994, 65–69.

[200] Sanetomo may have felt entitled to this relic because of this dream, in which, Strong argues, Sanetomo saw himself as a reincarnation of Daoxuan. As we know, Daoxuan was famously gifted a tooth relic by the bodhisattva Skanda. Thus, claiming to be a reincarnation of Daoxuan, Sanetomo could justify his right to the tooth relic, which had belonged to him in a past life.

After this, the relic was taken by the regent Hōjō Tokimune 北条時宗 (1251–1284) and placed into his Kamakura temple Engakuji.[201] According to one less academic account, recored by Iso Mutsu 陸奥イソ (b. 1867), this transfer was said to have been justified by a divine oracle decreeing that Engakuji was the most auspicious place to enshrine this relic (Mutsu 1955, 130). At Engakuji, the relic was enshrined in the temple's Relic Hall (*Shariden* 舎利殿), where it became the focus of various state-sponsored relic rites. This hall, now regarded as a national treasure, has one of the first *shariden* constructed in Japan.[202] Fitting in style with the relic it enshrined, taken from Nōninji 能仁寺 in Tang China, this relic hall is constructed in the architectural "Tang manner" (*kara-yō* 唐様): a common architectural style for Zen temples in the Kamakura period.[203] It was accredited a unique status as the only Relic Hall of its type in Kamakura at this time. This status was owed to the precious tooth relic that it enshrined. Without this relic, the hall could not have existed, nor could these relic rites have been performed here, such as those conducted by the Chinese Chan monk Daikyū Shiyōnen 大休正念 (1215–1289). In this sense, the relic attracted not only devotees but also powerful religious and political figures to this site. It physically shifted power away from Sanetomo.

Popular stories about this relic also drew attention to the hall. One of these accounts includes the tooth relic being brought to Kyoto, then returning to Engakuji on its own accord,

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[201] For a summary of this story, see, for instance, Nishiyama 2007, 132.

[202] According to Nakamura, this shift from pagodas (*butsutō* 仏塔) to *shariden* seemed to have taken place around the time of Ganjin (8th c). Nakamura 2006, 5.

[203] See, for example, Mutsu 1918.

explains Aiko Horibe 堀邉 阿伊子 (Horibe 2010). Such stories about this relic helped not only to establish authority, but also to create political boundaries.[204] By the turn of the twentieth century, some of these stories were even published in English, as seen in the work of Iso Mitsu. Stories recorded in the popular publication *Kamakura: Fact and Legend* show that these narratives circulated in modern-day Japan, as well. This literature offers a glimpse into the temporal *imaginarie* that surrounded this relic for centuries. In regards to the Engakuji tooth relic, Mutsu explains:

> Numerous are the legends regarding its miraculous intervention, and the blessings obtained when the aid of heaven was invoked at this [relic] shrine during natural calamities of all descriptions: tempests, plague, famine, floods, conflagrations, earthquakes, wars—not only internal strife, but even invasions from foreign nations, for it is said that at the time of the Mongolian attack the aid of the Almighty was invoked and favorable omens obtained through the occult powers of the relic.[205]

Mutsu's popular publication, dated to the turn of the century, reflects the stories and beliefs around this relic that continued to circulate and develop from the thirteenth century onwards. These stories helped the tooth relic to be held in even higher regard as well as to keep the beliefs around it alive. The *imaginarie*, or the belief, behind these legends helped, in part, to give the relic its power. Without these stories, the relic was just a piece of bone, or a bit of dust.

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[204] Regarding the use of relics to establish political boundaries in the medieval West, see Bynum and Gerson 1997, 4.

[205] Mutsu 1955, 130–131.

The spread of beliefs related to relic legends elevated the status of relic worship in medieval Japan (Horibe 2010).[206] Stories about relic theft, as well as about relics flying to new locations, or moving in a dream, from (India to) China and Japan, enhanced the importance of relics in the Kamakura era and at given sites, in particular. The exchange of scholar monks between Japan and China in the Tang and Song dynasties, also led to new beliefs developing around relics in Japan. One such notion was the idea that the amount of relics one possessed, as well as the mystical powers of those relics, indicated the depths of a person's enlightenment. This idea is reinforced by the belief that relics select their possessors, as shown in Chapter One (Nishiwaki 1990). These mystical powers of relics included miracles, as we have seen, such as: emitting light or sweet fragrances, magically disappearing and reappearing, and, flying to new locations or changing owners in a dream. Relics could also indicate one's ability and legitimacy to rule. Perhaps this is why there are so many versions of what happened to the Daoxuan tooth relic: whether it ended up in Japan, or if it remains in China to this day.[207]

By the fourteenth century, Yoshimitsu wanted personal access to the tooth relic of Aikuō san, which, by now, had become a significant relic for Zen Buddhism. Consequently, Yoshimitsu came to Kamakura and absconded with the relic, taking it back to Kyoto. In Kyoto, Yoshimitsu

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[206] Another example of this at Engakuji are the numerous pagodas in the sacred valley next to the temple. Horibe surmises that the choice to build these relic pagodas in the deepest part of the temple's valley was, likely, influenced by important figures affiliated with the temple, such as Mugaku Sogen 無学祖元 (1226–1286), Musō Soseki 夢窓疎石 (1257–1351), and Hōjō Tokimune. One such example of this is referred to as the "Kegon pagoda" (*kegon tō* 華厳塔), a pagoda built in the deepest and most sacred part of the valley. This pagoda enshrined three *shari* grains and a *kāṣāya* 袈裟, or monk's robe, from China, both of which further denote the pagoda's sacred quality, according to Horibe. Horibe 2010.

[207] Strong points out that there are at least five different claims to where this tooth relic ended up in the Kamakura period. Rather than debating if these stories are true or false, I argue that this serves to highlight how important this relic was to believers as well as to rulership. Strong 2004, 190.

placed the relic in his own temples, Shōkokuji 相国寺 and Hōdōji 宝幢寺 (modern-day Rokuō'in 鹿王院). Symbolically, through this act, Yoshimitsu was moving the capital from Kamakura back to Kyoto, given that, as we have seen in other cases, the tooth relic and the stories around it were viewed as symbols of the legitimacy and authority of the warrior-class government (*buke seiken* 武家政権). This is exactly what the relic helped him to accomplish, according to Nishiyama Mika 西山美香. The relic, which came to Japan along with Zen Buddhism, had become a prized possession of the Bakufu 幕府. Possessing this relic attested to their right of rulership, around which they harbored insecurities in regards to high culture, as their sophistication was, arguably, subordinate to that of the Heian court (Nishiyama 2007, 132; Payne 1998, 11).[208]

Moreover, because the tooth relic was originally housed on Aśoka mountain (Aikuō san), named after King Aśoka (d. 232 BC) and located in Zhejiang Province 浙江省, the relic associated its various owners with the first Buddhist ruler of India, Aśoka, as well as with the

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[208] The concept of turning to the past to show one's right to rulership, or to prove one's sophistication, can also be seen with the material culture of the tea ceremony (*chanoyu* 茶の湯). For instance, it was not until the seventeenth century that the tradition of drawing on the refined aesthetics of the Heian nobility, and its nostalgic overtones of an idealized past, became a distinguishing feature of tea taste, Patricia Ebrey explains (Ebrey 2008, 60). Wealthy merchants and daimyō, who sought to identify themselves with the cultivated traditions they represented, sought out objects of refinement to display in tea alcoves, such as court poetry and sections of literary classics—like *the Tale of Genji* and *the Tales of Ise*—to reflected the courtly elegance of the Heian period court (Ebrey 2008, 63). An architectural example of this can be seen in some of the stunning tea rooms of the Katsura Imperial Villa 桂離宮, owned by the Hachijō no miya 八条宮 family line.

Chinese emperors who had worshipped this relic for over a thousand years.[209] The reliquary at this site, we should note, is believed to be included in the eighty-four thousand reliquaries founded by Aśoka: most of which are in India, but several are said to be in China (Faure 1996, 160). Possessing a tooth relic from this mountain, so thoroughly associated with Aśoka, during this politically captious period allowed its owners (such as, Yoshimitsu) to model themselves after Aśoka, the ideal Buddhist ruler (Skt. *Cakravartin*) upon whom many emperors and empresses had fashioned their rulership.[210] In the case of Yoshimitsu, this gave legitimacy to him as a ruler, much like the body of Saint Mark had offered legitimacy and political support to the Venetian Court.[211] The exchange of this precious relic represented an abstract transfer of power back to Kyoto, during a time of divided imperial linages that often gave rise to violent debates, and even murder, over questions of legitimacy (Stavros and Toshima 2018, 129). In response, Matthew Stavros and Toshima Yoshiyuki 冨島義幸 point out that medieval rulers, such as

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[209] This site, famous for relic worship, was visited by numerous Chinese emperors from the fifth century onward to guarantee the prosperity of their reign. Emperors who patronized relic worship at this site, include Emperor An of Jin 晋安帝 (382–419) of the Eastern Jin 东晋代 (317–420), Emperor Wendi 文帝 (407–453) of the Southern Dynasty 南朝 (420–589), Emperor Xuanzong 宣宗 (810–859) of the Tang Dynasty, and Emperors Zhenzong 真宗 (968–1022) and Shenzong 神宗 (1048–1085) of the Song Dynasty. Japanese scholar-monks who studied in China, such as Chōgen, Dōgen, and Eisai 栄西 (1141–1215) made a point of visiting this relic site. Chōgen visited this mountain a few times during his studies in China and claimed to have encountered miracles here on two occasions. Generally speaking, rulers have frequently used relics to reinforce or legitimize their power. This can be seen in various religious traditions throughout the world. In the case of India, for example, the Portuguese colonial state (at the center of which was Goa) linked its prosperity to the corporal qualities of the corpse of Saint Francis Xavier (1506–1552) and to the miracles that it was said to have engendered (Gupta 2014, 15). See: Gupta 2014. And, on Chōgen see: Kobayashi 1965. Also, see Nakao 1983, 163–168.

[210] This comparison to Aśoka is also interesting in that Aśoka famously converted to Buddhism, as he stood on a bloody battlefield, laden with the corpses and dismembered body parts of soldiers. This macabre scene led, it is said, to his conversion. Clearly, his fear of what would transpire in the afterlife may have played a role in this decision. Bearing this in mind, it is not surprising that the elite warrior class might have wanted to pen their own stories in such a light.

[211] In a sense, the possessor gave the relic meaning, just as the relic afforded the possessor authority. Much like an art object, or art collection, a relic loses its meaning when it loses its personal owner (Benjamin 1978, 67).

Yoshimitsu, engaged in rites and rituals that helped sanctify their legitimacy by using Buddhist terms; as part of this, "they surrounded themselves with temple-palace complexes, mandala, dharma wheels, pagodas, and other Indian symbols of sacred rulership" (Stavros and Toshima 2018, 129). These symbols, including the tooth relic, were of great socioreligious value because they allowed these rulers to link themselves to Buddhist kingship of the past and thus realize transcendental influence.[212]

The fact that the tooth relic was stolen, not gifted or traded, only reinforced Yoshimitsu's legitimacy. Passing this relic from person to person, even, or especially, if stolen, can be seen as symbolic of passing political power within the warrior class of this time, Nishiyama explains (Nishiyama 2007). In regards to theft, as Hanaoka points out in her work on medieval Islam, relics became more desirable if they were forced away from their communities, rather than transferred through a legitimate gifting or purchasing (Hanaoka 2016, 256).[213] To such an extent, the theft of relics could be used to disguise the rightful purchase of a relic, since a theft motivated by piety would be recognized as more prestigious—and, thus more sacred—than a rightful exchange or purchase.

Yoshimitsu's theft fits a similar pattern. Stealing the relic and placing it in his temple allowed him to establish an authority of rulership linked to the past emperors of China as well as

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[212] Buddhist imaginings of ancient India in East Asia were not unusual, as seen in the work of John Kieschnick and Meir Shahar. In *India in the Chinese Imagination: Myth, Religion, and Thought*, Kieschnick and Shahar examine India's impact on what they call the "medieval Chinese creative imagination," as well as Chinese imaginings of India, through religion, literature, and other social forms. See, Kieschnick and Shahar 2014. On Korean monks in Chinese Buddhist imaginary, see Vermeersch 2018. Regarding Buddhist kingship, for example, see Stavros and Toshima 2018.

[213] See, for example, Hanaoka 2016.

to Aśoka.[214] Strong explains that such a move made it so India no longer need to be visited since the Buddha, internalized through his relics, came to be more than enough:

> …[M]iraculously appearing relics, whether brought by a divinity or spontaneously coming into being in a place, call to mind the transport or transferral to East Asia of an India that has become abstract and of a Buddha who has become internalized. Indeed, once a temple or monk or ruler "has" the Buddha in the form of a relic, India itself need no longer be visited; in fact, India as the homeland of the Buddha and the Dharma need no longer exist.…The gradual disappearance of Buddhism in India and the difficulties of making a journey there probably also contributed to this sentiment (Strong 2004, 189).

Herein, possessing this tooth relic allowed Yoshimitsu to argue for his legitimacy. It helped him justify the move of the court back to Kyoto. This was also due, in part, to the notion that temples housing relics were recognized as sacred spaces (*sei iki* 聖域) and that such a valuable relic, like the relic from Aikuō san, would only chose to remain in a place deserving of it. In Chang'an the tooth relic had been worshipped by emperors and great monks, thus, in Japan it would need to be accredited a similar status for it to remain there.[215] In this sense, relics deemed which spaces were sacred, by their very existence in those spaces. For instance, owing to their possession of

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[214] Aside from being the first Buddhist ruler of India, Aśoka created 84,000 *stūpa* throughout India to spread the Buddhist law.

[215] When visiting Aikuō san, Ennin notes that various monasteries offered all kinds of foods, medicines, fruits, flowers, and incense to the Buddha's tooth relic and that the relic was the the object of adoration by all the famous monks in the city (Reischauer 1955, 300–301; Chen 1973, 266–267).

relics, some temples achieved more recognition and higher rates of pilgrimage, or land became acknowledged as sacred spaces on which to build temples.[216]

Consequently, the worship of relics and their theft could dictate or alter how a religious space is viewed and understood. Relics could change how people interacted with a given space. They could even help shift rulership, justify the moving of the capital, or the revival of a given site. In this light, relics were valuable symbolic capital that could heavily influence religion, the understanding of or beliefs around a given space, and, thus, the construction and justification of networks, legitimacy, and power. Buddha relics could, in a word, bring value to a person, place, or tradition that was perhaps otherwise overlooked, ignored, or nonexistent.

II. Eison, Stolen Relics, and Legitimacy

Eison's relic worship was no exception. He too used relics as symbolic capital. He wielded relics to bring about and to consolidate religious and political change, to spread his teachings from the court to the people, and to solidify his religious and political networks.[217] If we look closely at

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[216] It is well known that temples are often constructed in spaces that are accredited with sacred stories. Often, after the site has been deemed worthy, a temple can be constructed there. The order can, of course, also be reversed: a temple can be constructed and then a founding story can be fabricated to justify its location. Given the animated nature of relics, as well as their value as sacred objects, relics manifesting at a site, or choosing to remain at a given site, are sound ways to create, or to justify, a sacred landscape. This can be seen, for instance, with the contact relic, the Dharma robe, of the Sixth Chan Patriarch Huineng 六祖惠能大師 (638–713). According to legend, Huineng wished to wash his robe and alms bowl but there was no water, so he drove his walking staff into the ground causing a spring to appear. Today, when this spring dries up in Southern China, the robe is brought to this spot at which point water, it is said, wells up. In this sense, it is the robe, a contact relic, that enacts miracles at this site and makes the location sacred. See Faure 1992, 174.

[217] For basic information about Eison, see Ojima 1999, 58. In regards to Eison's relic faith in particular, see Naitō 2004, 74–110. On Eison's thought and practice, see Matsuo 2004; Matsuo 1996; and, Nakao 1983.

his chronicles, we find that some of the reliquaries associated with Eison contain traces of stolen or borrowed relics that were subsequently assigned new value(s) by Eison and his followers.[218] Sekine Syun'ichi points out, for instance, that the origins behind many of Eison's relics are unclear (Sekine 1991, 86).

In some stories, Eison called back stolen relics, while in others relics suddenly appeared before him or they were gifted to him by human or heavenly mediums. In his biography *Kanjin gakushōki*, Eison mentions relics repeatedly after he moves to Saidaiji in 1238: starting with his creation of the eight-sided five-storied stone *stūpa* (*hakkaku gojū sekitō* 八角五重石塔) at Saidaiji, and ending with Eison's final act of placing relics into the golden pagoda of Kairyūōji.[219] A few years prior, while sleeping at Saidaiji in 1235, Eison dreamt of a female deity (*tennyo* 天女) bestowing *cintāmaṇi* (*nyoi hōju* 如意宝珠), or wish-granting-jewels, upon him. This dream involving a female medium, as noted in the seventeenth century text *Saidai chokushi Kōshō Bosatsu gyōjitsu nenpu* 西大勅謚興正菩薩行實年譜 (hereafter, *Gyōjitsu nenpu*), seems to have been his first recorded interaction with *cintāmaṇi*, which are often conflated with relics. Thereafter, he seemed to become increasingly interested in the power of such sacred objects.[220]

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[218] This concept of gifting or exchanging relics was not unusual during this period. For instance, Myōe was famously given relics by Jōkei. Relics, which, due to a dream, Myōe thought that he had received from the Kasuga deity—a story that we will discuss more in Chapter Three. See, for instance, Mross 2016, 94; and, Kawada 1989.

[219] We know that Eison previously had relics enshrined under this pagoda. See Sekine 1991, 84.

[220] See *Gyōjitsu nenpu*, 119. We should note that this text was recored by Jikō 慈光 (17th c.) a few hundred years later, from 1688–1703. Thus, although it presents a number of interesting instances of Eison and his relic faith, we must keep in mind that there many have been certain biases around writing this text.

These instances of relic transfers and their repeated occurrences, as noted in his chronicles and records, illustrate the importance of relics, and relic worship, in Eison's life narrative as well as in the construction of his tradition. Similar to the Christian context discussed by Verdery, Eison and his disciples made use of the ambiguous quality of relics to assign them newfangled significance. Like in the cases examined above, Eison used the narratives around relics to make the past immediately present through the concreteness of relics as sacred objects—objects that appear to transcend the social constructs of time and space (Verdery 1999; Durkheim 1912). This was especially important given the fear of *mappō* and the need to revive the teachings of the Buddha (part and parcel of which entailed the worship of his remains). Relics physically offered visual proof of the body of the Buddha, often perceived to be the Buddha himself, and, herein, a promise of salvation.[221]

In one such instance of relic theft, relics were stolen from Horyūji in Ko'an 弘安 7 (1285). Eison was invited to the temple to summon back the relics.[222] Yet, after Eison conducted a rite to call them back, it remains unclear if he returned the stolen relics to Horyūji. According to the *Kameyama Hōō Shinkan* 龜山法皇宸翰, after the relics were taken from Horyūji, Eison chanted *dhāraṇī* and said three days of prayer for the safe return of the relics—specifically, the 'Venerable Buddha Relics' (*namabutsu shari* 南無佛舍利), believed to have belonged to Prince

[221] Over the last few decades, there has been much debate in modern North American scholarship as to how relics should be understood. Scholars have debated heavily over these two questions: Do they represent or signify the Buddha? Or, are they the Buddha himself? Sharf, for instance, has argued that "a relic did not represent, symbolize, or denote a transcendent presence, numinous absence, or anything in between, any more than the person of the Buddha represented or symbolized the Buddha" (Sharf 1999, 78). Schopen argues, moreover, that a relic, or that which is within a *stūpa*, was understood to be alive, in the case of ancient India (Schopen 1998).

[222] On relic rites at Horyūji in the Kamakura period, see Fuji 1984.

Shōtoku six hundred years prior. On Eison's third day of prayer, the relics magically appeared before him:[223]

> In the 7th month, on the 28th day [of Kōan 7, i.e., 1285], the 'Venerable Buddha Relics' of Horyūji were stolen. The sorrow of the temple monks was without limits. They looked all over, but there was no trace [of them]. Thus, they went and told the Bodhisattva [Eison]. For three days, he conducted rites, said *dhāraṇī* and prayers, then, suddenly, they appeared before him. He went to the palace and held an opening ceremony, providing the offerings for this. Subsequently, he lectured on the *Ancient Teaching of the Sutra of Bhrama's Net.* When the sermon ended, over two thousand two hundred people received the precepts.
>
> On the 2nd day of the 9th month, both the Iron *Stūpa* and the Five Vases of Saidaiji were completed. [Eison] placed the relics [into them], performing an eye-opening ceremony as an offering. I [the author] searched all of the old records, and found the complete history of this *stūpa* and the vases. As for the Iron *Stūpa*, the Bodhisattva [Eison] ordered the metalworker Fujiwara Muneyasu (d.u.) to use the military tools of his ancestor Lord Kiso Yoshinaka (1154–1184) [to construct this]. It took six-hundred and ninety-six days to complete the Iron *Stūpa*. [Eison had Muneyasu] melt the great sword of Lord Yoshinaka for the foot of the *stūpa*, in hopes of somewhat diminishing the karma that [Yoshinaka] had accumulated from killing.[224]
>
> 七月廿六日。法隆寺南無佛舍利為賊盜去。寺僧哀慕不已。東奔西走。尋而無跡。來白菩薩。菩薩三日修法。斂目咒禱。忽然現前。即就上宮皇院開法會。而伸其供養矣。因請講談梵網古跡記。講説已訖。受菩薩戒者一千二百餘人。九月二日。西大寺鐵塔并五瓶鑄造已成。即安舍利。大開法會。以供養之。余搜索舊記委尋斯塔瓶舍利本末之由緒。鐵塔者。菩薩命冶工藤原宗安以先祖木曾義仲公所著用之武具而經六百九十六日所鑄成之。又以義仲公所常執持之大刀打附其塔底下。意欲令少滅生平之殺業也。

According to this story, the monks of Horyūji, the Nara temple founded by Prince Shōtoku in the seventh century, were full of sorrow that their 'Venerable Buddha Relics' had vanished. Since the temple's grounds are sacred (*seichi* 聖地), the relics and their relation to the site, as well as their

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[223] Regarding Shōtoku worship in Japan's middle period, see, for example, Takada 1977.

[224] Translation by author. See *Kameyama hōō shinkan*, 187. On this text, also see Naitō 2004, 103.

previous owner, Shōtoku, made them that much more valuable to the monks, Nakamura explains (Nakamura 2006, 4).[225] According to the *Ikaru koji benran* 斑鳩古事便覧, the 'Venerable Buddha Relics' (*namabutsu shari*) had first appeared between the infant Shōtoku's hands, when, at two years old, he had faced east, clasped his hands in prayer and uttered words of homage to the Buddha (*Ikaru koji benran*, 159).[226] Having lost these important relics, the monks sought Eison's help. Eison brought back the relics through the power of his prayer and *dhāraṇī*.

The relics were not immediately returned to Horyūji, however. Based on this section of the *Kameyama hōō shinkan* it is unclear if they were later returned, or if they were instead enshrined within this *stūpa* constructed, in part, to lessen the negative karma of Eison's ancestor, Lord Yoshinaka. It is noteworthy that by melting the sword of his ancestor to use its metal for this reliquary, Eison had, likely, hoped to lessen the lord's negative karma and, thus, to lessen his chances of falling into the hells. As seen in the writings of Yoshimitsu there was, albeit slightly later, a significant concern during the Kamakura era among members of the warrior class that they would fall into the Buddhist hells for all the killing that they had done in their lifetimes.[227] Perhaps Eison wanted to prevent his ancestor Lord Yoshinaka from encountering such a fate.

Returning to the Horyūji story, this passage illustrates a few significant points. First, that stories about relic theft were not uncommon during this period, as seen above in the story of Yoshimitsu and the Engakuji relics. The noteworthy aspect of this story seems not have been that

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[225] On the notion of Horyūji as a sacred site, and how this influences the sacred power accredited to its relics, see Nakamura 2006.

[226] For an artistic representation of this event, in the form of a child statue, see Rosenfield 1968–1969, 56.

[227] This was a bloody period, where even cousins were known to kill each other over their desire to ascend the throne.

the relics were stolen from Horyūji, but rather that they were called back. There is no description of how or when they were stolen, rather, the text focuses on Eison summoning the relics back through prayer. Given that there are other examples throughout Eison's writings of him calling back stolen relics (such as in the case of Gōchiko'in), seems not to have been an unusual occurrence for this time. It is, instead, prosaically described alongside Eison's other practices and temple visits that took place in the 1280s. Second, through this first incident of theft, the relics became divorced from their previous milieu and temporarily disconnected from the temple at which they were enshrined. After the dust settled, these liminal objects became *rediscovered objects* that could, ostensibly, be assigned new symbolic values.

Third, it is significant that Eison called back the relics to Horyūji. The importance of this site, as well as the sacred quality of the temple's grounds, seemed to contribute to the sacredness of the relics. Moreover, that Eison had the ability to call the relics back to Horyūji, relics believed to have belonged to Prince Shōtoku, who was well-known, historically and mythically, for his veneration of relics, seems to link, or even to equate, Eison with the prince. Since, as we know, it is believed that relics choose their location and possessor, by successfully calling back the *namabutsu shari*, Eison is thus identifying himself—and, by implication, his faith and legitimacy—with that of the prince.[228]

Just as we saw in the case of *futra sacra*, the notion that relics can choose their owners and locations is common throughout Buddhist stories. For instance, in Chapter One, we analyzed

[228] It is also noteworthy that this temple was seen as a sacred site, or sacred grounds (*sei chi*), and herein these relics were sacred in their relation to this site as well as to their previous owner—Prince Shōtoku. On the notion of Horyūji as a sacred site, and how this influences the sacred power accredited to its relics, see Nakamura 2006, 4.

the case of Gyōkyū, the son of Shūamida butsu, who asked to borrow relics from his mother. In this story, the relics, once "borrowed," magically disappeared in the night and returned to their rightful owner, the nun Shūamida butsu. Gyōkyū was confused as to what had happened, but came to understand the event through a dream, which is recorded in the *Hokkeji shari engi*. It was only after this that Gyōkyū recognized that the relics had left him and why this had transpired. The medium of the dream also informs the reader that the relics had chosen to leave Gyōkyū for his mother. In this way it becomes blurred if the relics transferred locations and owners in the dream itself or, rather, in the waking world.[229] To justify why the relic chose to leave, the *engi* explains that Gyōkyū's faith and practice was not yet strong enough for him to attract the relics to stay. The relics, rather, chose a more enlightened keeper: his mother.

In a similar fashion, by calling back the relics, Eison is demonstrating that his faith and practice are refined enough to attract the relics of Prince Shōtoku. This is a task that the Horyūji monks cannot perform single-handedly. In this way, it is Eison, not the temple of Horyūji, or even its monks, that are able to allure the relics to return. This incident demonstrates that Eison's faith is on par with that of Shōtoku, given that relics, as we know, signal the charisma of the monk or nun who received them, or to whom they were gifted. However, did Eison always possess such powers?

If we look at Eison's interactions with relics, the Hokkeji nuns and their relics, as well as the relics that Eison obtained over his lifetime, we see that Eison's ability to summon

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[229] Dreams are often used as ways of conveying or transferring relics. For instance, during a thirteen day retreat at Zenkōji 善光寺 (Nagano Prefecture 長野県), Chōgen dreamt that the temple's main Buddha icon, the Zenkōji nyorai 善光寺如来, gifted him a golden relic (Nakao 2001, 118).

considerable quantities of relics grew stronger over the years, and, along with this, his relationship to relics became more pronounced.[230] It seems that through his interactions with relics, Eison established a new sacred geography, connecting certain places and people, at the center of which he situated his teachings, praxis, and the belief that there was a need for a complete *saṅgha*.[231] Although his biography is replete with examples of him receiving, gifting, or even summoning relics, his interactions with relics seemed to become more pronounced after he revived Hokkeji and spent more time with the nuns and their relics.[232]

Eison's shift in attitude, later in life, can be seen in the *Chōmonshū*—a collection of fragments of sermons from the end of Eison's life. This text, Paul Groner points out, shows Eison as less guarded in his later days, in comparison to his earlier writings, such as the *Kanjin gakushōki* (Groner 2019). To this end, Eison's statements in the two texts sometimes differ, Groner explains. For instance, in his earlier works Eison is more self promoting and often refers to himself as a bodhisattva (*bosatsu* 菩薩);[233] Nakao argues that Eison even presented himself as a buddha, a buddha in this world (*shōshin butsu* 生身仏) (Nakao 2001, 122).[234]

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[230] According to Nakao, Eison's relic faith shows certain similarities to that of Chōgen, but Eison's relic faith is unique for the way that relics emerge suddenly, or how relics well up (*busshari yūshutsu* 仏舎利湧出) in his presence (Nakao 2001, 120).

[231] This is very similar to the type of authority people created by using relics in medieval Europe, as seen with the body of Saint Mark. Or, as seen with the bodies of many revolutionary leaders in Eastern Europe, which were exhumed and enshrined for worship after the fall of the Communist Party in the late 1980s. See, Verdery 1999.

[232] In earlier examples, relics would suddenly appear in Eison's presence, often at a sacred location or before a sacred icon, yet these were rarely in vast numbers. For example, in 1249, Eison enshrined the famous "Shaka Nyorai Transmitted from the Three Counties" 三国伝来の釈迦如来像 into the Four Kings Hall of Seiryōji 清凉寺 (Kyoto Prefecture), and, miraculously, relics suddenly appeared in the rooms of two monks (Nakao 2001, 120).

[233] As seen in the above passage about the Shōtoku relics.

[234] *Shōshin butsu* is the notion of an earthly buddha, one who is born into this world with an impure human body.

Building on Groner's point regarding Eison's change in diction, which reflected a change in how he depicted himself, I argue that Eison's relationship with relics shifted (i.e., it became more secure) in his later years. With time, it seems that relics and relic worship became increasingly important to Eison and his practice, as he interacted more and more with the Hokkeji nuns and their relics. As his proximity to the Hokkeji relics increased, his ability to summon relics seemed to become more pronounced. We see examples of this in the *Gyōjitsu nenpu* as well as the *Kanjin gakushōki*, both of which frequently mention relics. Eison's devotion to relic worship, along with his ability to spread his faith through relics, culminates in his final act of placing Hokkeji relics into the Kairyūōji pagoda. Relic worship seemed to become progressively more ingrained in his teachings and practices, as he came to rely increasingly on relics, specifically those of Hokkeji, to create a network of sacred geography in Nanto.

Eison's faith in the Hokkeji relics can be seen in a memorial service (*kuyō* 供養) that Eison conducted in 1271, in which he amassed relics from Saidaiji and two thousand relics from Hokkeji. Once the service was completed, and the Hokkeji relics were taken off the altar and put away, two relics appeared on the lid of the incense box (Naitō 2016, 84). Hereafter, relics continued to appear, eventually totaling five thousand. Eison took these miraculously appearing relics to be an expression of Empress Komyō's intentions. Of these five thousand relics, three thousand were kept at Saidaiji, one thousand were given to Eison's disciple Ninshō, one hundred were given to various people, and the remaining nine hundred to a thousand were placed into one of the Five Vases of Saidaiji (Naitō 2016, 84). In this way, the Saidaiji relics enshrined in the Five Vases, as well as those belonging to Ninshō, all trace back to the miraculous relics of

Hokkeji. If we trace this relic lineage even further, these relics originated from the Tōji relic of Kunyō, and, as Naitō points out, this relic was among those brought back from Tang by Kūkai (Naitō 2016, 84). To better understand this, let us look more closely at the Five Vases, the relics that they enshrine, and the sacred cosmology that they embody.

The Five Vases of Saidaiji combine thousands of relics from sites and people important to Eison's faith and networks. This often cited, but scantly studied, eleven piece reliquary set is a national treasure in Japan. Little has been published on it in Japanese scholarship, however, outside of the work of the Nara National Museum curator Naitō Sakae, along with other, shorter, catalogue entries by the museum. It is virtually unstudied in English language scholarship. These visually stunning and iconographically complex reliquaries can, I argue, be seen to encompass the complexity and development of Eison's relic faith over his lifetime. Physically, these reliquaries offer new ways of understanding Eison's relic faith, when studied alongside manuscripts from this period. As Prown explains in his writings on material culture, we can discover things in objects "that differ from, complement, supplement, or contradict what can be learned from more traditional literary and behavioral sources" (Prown 2001, 72). Accordingly, in the following pages, I examine the stories and chronicles that document the gifting, theft, and magical appearance of these relics and how this, in turn, allowed Eison to create a sacred geography, a microcosm representative of his lifework and teachings, through the physicality of the Five Vases.[235] At the center of this, I conclude, sat Hokkeji.

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[235] Here, I have translated *bin* 瓶, a word commonly translated as "bottles," into "vases." Vases is more accurate for the shape of the vessels, which Hosokawa refers to as vials or bottles. Hosokawa 1999, 322, note 24.

III. The Five Vases: Construction

The relics enshrined in the Five Vases were collected at various points in Eison's life and each pair of reliquaries draw on a different aspect of Eison's relic faith: a faith that changed and evolved over the years.[236] Most of these relics were believed to have magically appeared, much like the Hokkeji relics, at some point during his lifetime. Given the great care that was put into making the Five Vases, the level of detail they exhibit, and the variety of relics they contain, we can, I argue, understand the vases as an encapsulation of Eison's relic worship.[237] They are, in a sense, a time capsule of time and place, which comprises Eison's relic faith in a single reliquary set. This set is comprised of eleven pieces, one encased within the next: the five-foot tall Iron *Stūpa*, the Five Vases, and, the innermost layer, the Flaming-Jewel Reliquaries. In describing the commissioning of the Five Vases and the magical appearance of the relics that they enshrine, the *Kameyama hōō shinkan* explains:

> As for the Five Vases, [Eison] ordered the great Tang Dynasty craftsman Rikutairyō to craft them. When the *stūpa* and the vases were complete, relics from Hokkeiji, Nimuro'in, Muromachi'nyo'in (1228–1300),[238] and Kasuga Grand Shrine [were placed into them]. Outside of this, the followers of the Bodhisattva [Eison] also acquired relics,

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[236] On the Five Vases, also see Naitō 2010, 142–146.

[237] I would like to acknowledge that there is, of course, no one response to a given object, and certainly not to a reliquary, which often embodies layers of meaning. As Caroline Bynum and Paula Gerson explain in regards to the complexity of reliquaries as visual objects, "people see according to where they are socially and politically and religiously positioned" (Bynum and Gerson 1997, 5). Moreover, even with this in mind, one's "response to reliquaries is also multiple because the object itself is multi-layered… it is both container and contents." In this light, I realize that there can be many readings for the Five Vases, and that I am biased to some extent by the society and time in which I live, but I offer the following reading of these reliquaries based on various primary texts about their origins as well as like reliquaries from this period. See: Bynum and Gerson 1997, 5.

[238] Here, Muromachi'nyo'in seems to refer to the first imperial daughter of Gohorikawa tennō 後堀河天皇 (r. 1221–1232). Muromachi'nyo'in entered the Buddhist path at nineteen-years-old. According to Ōtani Yuka 大谷由香 the relic of Muromachi'nyo'in is but one of the three Buddha tooth relics (*butsugen* 仏牙) in Japan, which makes it even more valuable. See Ōtani 2014; and, *Saidaiji Eison denki shusei* 西大寺叡尊伝記集成 1956.

among other things. These were placed into the Five Vases, which were put into the Iron *Stūpa*. It was said that in the central vase there were five hundred relics; in the eastern vase there were seven hundred relics; in the southern vase there were forty six relics; in the western vase there were one thousand four hundred relics; and, in the northern vase there were two thousand eight hundred and one relics. In total, there were five thousand four hundred and forty seven relics.[239]

五瓶者。命大唐工匠陸太令鑄造之。塔瓶已成。法華寺湧出舍利。二室院出現舍利。室町女院寄附舍利。春日神社感得舍利。其外菩薩從來所持念之佛舍利等悉納五瓶。以安鐵塔。謂中瓶五百粒。東瓶七百粒。南瓶四十六粒。西瓶一千四百粒。北瓶二千八百一粒。總數之則五千四百四十七粒。

According to this passage, the relics from Hokkeji, Kasuga Taisha 春日大社, the female courtiers Muromachi'nyo'in (b. 1228) and Nimuro'in 二室院 (13th c.), as well as Eison's disciples were all put into the Five Vases. These relics were accumulated over Eison's lifetime and placed into the vases once completed, during the last decade of Eison's life in 1284. To better understand this, let us look at each vase, its significance, and the story behind its relics.

The Relics Inside

The relics are nested in small reliquaries that modern scholars have labeled according to their design: Gold-Bronze Flaming-Jewel Reliquaries (*kidōkaen hōjūkei shariyoki* 金銅火焔寶珠形舎利容器; hereafter, Flaming-Jewel Reliquaries). One Flaming-Jewel Reliquary is placed into each of the Five Vases. The *Kameyama hōō shinkan* breaks down the origins of the relics that they

[239] Translated by the author. For the original text, see *Kameyama Hōō Shinkan*, 187.

enshrine, the directions of each vase, and the total number of relics placed into each of the Flaming-Jeweled Reliquary as follows:

I. Chart of Five Vases

Relic Origins	*Vase Direction*	*Number of Relics*
Hokkeiji	central	five-hundred relics
Nimuro'in	eastern	seven-hundred relics
Muromachi'nyo'in	southern	forty-six relics
Kasuga	western	one-thousand and four-hundred relics
Followers of Eison	northern	two-thousand, eight-hundred and one relics

As noted by the *Kameyama hōō shinkan*, each vase enshrines a Flaming-Jewel Reliquary housing hundreds to thousands of relics from a single site. In turn, each vase—and its relics—denote one of the five directions that make up the cosmos, linking the relics of each site to a given direction. The central vase, if we accept these numbers, holds five-hundred Hokkeji relics. This vase, the central, tallest, and most prominent reliquary, enshrines the most complex and detailed Flaming-Jewel Reliquary. The relics in the other Flaming-Jewel Reliquaries sit inside their own lotus cups, each securely placed under a flaming jewel crystal ball. Every cup is painted a different color. The cup inside of the central vase, in contrast, lacks a distinct color. Instead, it contains seven small metal rings.[240] Each ring holds relics of various sizes, shapes, and colors. The rings, which can be understood as pods of a lotus flower, present the relics as lotus

[240] The color of the given cup varies depending on the direction associated with the vase.

Fig. 9. Relics inside of “lotus seed” rings. Detail of Flaming Jewel Reliquary inside central vase. Photo by author. Height of reliquary: 15 cm.

seeds (i.e., as seeds of the Dharma) (Fig. 9). Although Eison did collect the five-thousand plus relics in the Five Vases over his lifetime, it is unclear if the relics were all gifts: a few of them were gifted to him in nighttime visions, and how Eison obtained the Hokkeji relics remains unclear. Did some of these individuals give Eison relics to create karmic connections to him and his teachings, or did Eison appropriate some of these relics himself?

In the case of the Muromachi’nyo’in relics, Eison received these relics from Muromachi’nyo’in herself, referred to here as Empress Muromachi 室町皇后, in the autumn of 1288 (or, Ko’an 10), according to *Jōjūji butsuge shari okibun* 浄住寺佛牙舍利置文.[241] This

[241] *Jōjūji butsuge shari okibun*, 192. Eison was eighty-seven years old at this time.

text, focusing on the Jōjūji tooth relic, notes that this relic had previously belonged to the monk Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667) in China (*Jōjūji butsuge shari okibun*, 192). Before being given to Muromachi'nyo'in, it was transferred between various tennō, as well as courtly and monastic figures. The text further explains that Muromachi'nyo'in gave this relic to Eison, so that he could protect and worship it. This tooth relic, one of the few tooth relics extant in Japan today, is thus an important relic in Japanese religious history. To understand its value, let us look at the long string of stories that follow this relic, starting in ancient India.

According to the fourteenth-century historical epic the *Taiheiki* 太平記 (Chronicle of Great Peace), before the Buddha entered *nirvāṇa*, he instructed the bodhisattva Skanda (i.e., *Idaten*) to protect the Dharma as well as his relics.[242] After the Buddha's extinction, his relics were stolen, as mentioned above, and Skanda had to retrieve them from evil spirits.[243] Among these relics was the precious tooth relic. The tooth relic was eventually given to Daoxuan in a nighttime vision, and it later ended up in Japan. This was the relic that Eison was given by Muromachi'nyo'in, according to Eison's records.

Although there are various traditions in Japan and China that claim to possess this relic today, and many of their relic origin stories are very similar, housing this important tooth relic would link Eison not only to the distribution of the Buddha's relics, when they were famously distributed to the Eight Kings, but also to Daoxuan, the patriarch of the Vinaya school—a figure

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[242] This is interesting, given that, according to other stories, Buddha actually asked that his relics not be worshipped after his *nirvāṇa*. On the *Taiheiki*, see, for example, Nagazumi Yasuaki's 永積安明 edition. *Taiheiki* 1984.

[243] There is also a Nō play based on this story, in which relics are stolen from a monk traveling to Izumo 出雲, entitled *Shari* (Relic). In this story, Idaten also retrieves relics from a demon who has stanched them from the monk. See Strong and Strong 1995.

of great importance to the religious tradition that Eison sought to revive.[244] Such beliefs around the Muromachi'nyo'in tooth relic made it even more desirable. It is fitting, herein, that this tooth relic, worshipped by numerous Chinese emperors, would belong to a princess-turned-nun, the first born daughter of Gohorikawa tennō 後堀河天皇 (1212–1234).[245] As noted in the *Jōjūji butsuge shari okibun*, after Eison received this relic from Muromachi'nyo'in, he enshrined it in Jōjūji 浄住寺 (*Jōjūji butsuge shari okibun*, 192).[246] This relic is likely one of the Muromachi'nyo'in relics enshrined in the southern vase.

As for the Nimuro'in relics, in the eastern vase, these were said to have appeared in the middle of the night at Saidaiji. In the 5th day of the 4th month of 1249, a Śākyamuni Buddha statue had been carved and an eye ceremony was conducted on its behalf, making this an auspicious occasion. On the night of this ceremony, a spirit entered (*nyūgyo* 入御) Saidaiji.[247] Not knowing this had happened, a Hokkeji nun dreamt of the event (*Kanjin gakushōki,* 22).[248] Eight days later, the temple had a golden relic cabinet (i.e., a *zushi*) made, and, in the next month it was placed into the Four Kings' Hall 四王堂, at Saidaiji. There it was worshipped. That night,

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[244] The Senryūji tooth relic is attributed a very similar story. It was also said to have been stolen after the Buddha's cremation, retrieved and later transferred to Daoxuan in the night by Bishamonten's 毘沙門天 child Nata 那吒 at Saimyōji 西明寺, in Kyoto. See *Nehankyōgobun* 涅槃経後分, *Sōkōsōden* 宋高僧伝, and Ōtani 2014.

[245] Muromachi'nyo'in entered the nunhood at nineteen years old. Eison, moreover, was also gifted relics by her father's palace just seven years before, in 1270 (Bun'e 7).

[246] Eison founded this temple. The central icon (*honzōn* 本尊) for this temple is noteworthy: it is a Nyoirin Kannon 如意輪観音 (Skt. *Cintāmaṇicakra*), or *Cintāmaṇicakra* statue. This Kannon is always seen holding a *cintāmaṇi* (wish-granting-gem)—a precious gem that became conflated with relics from the medieval period onwards.

[247] See *Kanjin gakushōki*, 22.

[248] The text notes that this was a "true bhikṣuṇī" (*shin bikuni* 比丘尼).

according to the *Kanjin gakushōki*, the relics of Nimuro'in mysteriously appeared at Saidaiji, in the monks' sleeping quarters (*Kanjin gakushōki* 22). It seems that the relics appeared here due to the newly-made relic cabinet—this sacred container, in which the relics could be properly worshipped, had attracted them to the temple. Moreover, since this was a magical nighttime transfer of relics, Eison could justify keeping the relics. It is also noteworthy that many of Eison's entries from this year pertain to female practitioners and to the nunhood, specifically to that of Hokkeji. Earlier in the month, for instance, as we know, a deity visited Saidaiji, and, simultaneously, a Hokkeji nun dreamt of this. Just a few months prior, Eison had also visited Hokkeji, where he bestowed the precepts upon twelve Great Bhikṣu nuns (*Dai bikuni* 大比丘尼).[249]

The Kasuga relics were also transferred in a dream. These relics are enshrined in the western vase. As noted in the *Gyōjitsu nenpu*, Eison obtained hundreds of relics from the Kasuga deity (*Kasuga myōjin* 春日明神) in a dream, in 1241 (*Gyōjitsu nenpu*, 121).[250] One night in the 7th month, Eison dreamt that the Kasuga deity spoke to him. Then, on his *sūtra* table, hundreds of relics appeared. The relics emitted light, illustrating that they were, indeed, true Kasuga relics (*Gyōjitsu nenpu*, 121). As we have seen with Gyōkū and Daoxuan, dreams are a common medium to transfer relics, or, rather, to *justify* the transfer of relics. As Hanaoka explains the theft of relics is often connected to pious dreams or sacred figures (Hanaoka 2016). This instance includes both. Herein, although there is never mention of the relics being stolen, it is implied

[249] Again, see *Kanjin gakushōki*, 22.

[250] The dream took place in the 7th month of 1241 (i.e., the second year of Ninji 仁治).

Fig. 10. Lacquer Relic Cabinet. Lacquer and paint on wood. Kōsanji, Kyoto. Kamakura era (13th c.).

through this transfer taking place in the dream realm. The reception of relics in a dream symbolically secures this transfer of power which is given here by the Kasuga kami (seen as a manifestation of the Buddha). Monks such as Jōkei and Myōe were responsible for promoting this concept that the Kasuga deity[251] was a manifestation (*suijaku* 垂迹) of Śākyamuni Buddha in his original form (*honji* 本地)—a theory that created a coupling between Kasuga worship (*Kasuga shinkō* 春日信仰) and Śākyamuni worship (*Shaka shinkō*) in the late Kamakura era.[252]

In another story, Jōkei gifts a Kasuga relic to Myōe. However, Myōe dreams that he has received this relic from the Kasuga deity through a dream. Therefore, the relics becomes exalted as a gift from the deity, rather than from Jōkei. This Kasuga relic is believed to be enshrined today in the thirteenth century Lacquer Relic Cabinet (*Urushinuri shari zushi* 漆塗舎利厨子), housed at Kōsanji 高山寺, in Kyoto (Fig. 10). The relic's sacred, rather than mundane,

[251] Specifically, the deity of the first shrine of Kasuga 春日社一宮—.

[252] According to this idea, the Kasuga kami of the first shrine is a manifestation of Śākyamuni.

transmission enhances the power attributed to this relic and to the reliquary that encases it. In a sense, it was through the dream realm that Myōe was able to communicate with this deity, and that he was granted access to the invisible world of the kami.[253] Eison similarly implies, as noted a few centuries later in the *Gyōjitsu nenpu*, that he received Kasuga relics through a dream transfer directly from the Kasuga deity. Since this is believed to be the will of the kami, Eison can indisputably maintain his right to keep and enshrine the Kasuga relics for his own use.

As for the Hokkeji relics in the central vase, which we will discuss in more detail below, the *Hokkeji shari engi* and other Eison related texts do not document the nuns giving relics to Eison.[254] Instead, they describe Eison borrowing relics from the nuns on numerous occasions to enshrine them in, or to distribute them to other temples, or to use them for Eison's own rituals, as described above in the relic rite held in 1271.[255] This might help us to answer some of the

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[253] Faure points out that the Zen monk Keizan Jōkin 瑩山紹瑾 (1268–1325) and Myōe both cultivated their gifts of dreaming and visions, in which they frequently communicated with "transcendent beings." In the Kamakura period, Faure goes on, many Buddhist practitioners believed that dreams were "real," or that they provided some access to the real, or the future, just as Myōe believed. This was interpreted in different ways by different Buddhist masters. For instance, Dōgen wrote in his *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼蔵: "Just as the profound Dharma of all the Buddhas is transmitted only from one Buddha to another, everything in dreams and the waking world derives from ultimate reality. In waking as in dreams we find the initial thought of the awakening, practice, awakening itself, and Nirvāṇa. Dreams and waking are ultimate reality. One is not better or worse than the other." In this sense, for Dōgen, waking and dreaming were the same. This is a concept that we see many of his contemporaries echo, as well, such as the Chinese Chan monk Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089–1163), who, albeit more extreme, argued the entire universe is but a dream. Translation of *Shōbōgenzō* by Faure, see: Faure 1996, 118-121. Also, see *Shōbōgenzō* T 82.2582: 162c.

[254] I cannot find any older record of this, or mention of this in modern scholarship, to date.

[255] It is noteworthy that when relics are presented as a gift, they are usually gifted in a container, a wrapping, or a reliquary. In this way, the wrapping or container grants the relic its meaning, informing the viewer where the relic was from (which temple or shrine) or to whom it belonged. Although a relic is by definition an invaluable sacred object, it is the reliquary enshrining the relic that signifies that this relic is worthy of veneration. As, Joy Hendry points out, other sacred objects, such as amulets (*ofuda* お札) and talismans (*omamori* お守り) are handled in similar ways (Hendry 1996, 289). The wrapping for these objects often take up more volume than the object itself, and it can become difficult to distinguish between the wrapper and the wrapping, Hendry explains. See Hendry 1996, 288–304. Reliquaries are, in this sense, also a wrapper in that a reliquary is made to encase relics. This can be a very elaborate production, and sometimes there are only a few pebbles or stones inside of very ornate, iconographically complex, or costly reliquaries. In some instances, the reliquary is all that remains—the relics themselves have been lost or have disappeared.

questions from Chapter One: why were so many of the Hokkeji relics enshrined elsewhere? And, where are the Hokkeji relics? By placing all of these relics into a single reliquary set, Eison is, in a sense, linking these reliquaries and his relic faith to specific people and places (Naitō 2010, 148).[256] He is also taking these relics out of circulation. We will return to such questions regarding Hokkeji below, but, for now, I would like to take a moment to note the unusual grouping of relics that we find in the Five Vases.

This amalgamation of relics—originating from temples, shrines and courtiers—shows that relic worship during this time was perhaps less sectarian than scholars have often assumed. As seen above, relics from Kasuga Shrine were put into reliquaries, such as the Lacquer Relic Cabinet at Kōsan-ji. This synthesis between buddha worship and kami worship is further reinforced by the iconography found on numerous relic cabinets dating from the Kamakura period into the Muromachi period 室町時代 (1336–1573). For example, various reliquaries from these periods depict images from buddhist teachings and contain Buddha relics, while also flaunting one of three of the more common Kasuga *maṇḍala*. These three styles include: Kasuga landscape *maṇḍala* (*Kasuga miya mandara* 春日宮曼荼羅), mandalic deer images (*Kasuga shika mandara* 春日鹿曼荼羅), or *maṇḍala* of kami and their Buddhist counterparts (*Honji suijaku mandara* 本地垂迹曼荼羅).[257] In these cases, the Kasuga *maṇḍala* is usually front and

[256] On these reliquaries, see Naitō 2001. Naitō explains that the bronze-jeweled reliquary was likely used in the *kinrin bucchō-hō* 金輪佛頂法 rite (Gold Ring Buddha Peak Rite), to help sentient-beings during the time of *mappō*. See, Naitō 2001, 105.

[257] On Kasuga *maṇḍala*, see Ten Grotenhuis 1999, 142–162.

center, it is the focus of the reliquary, while the doors, or other peripheral aspects of the reliquary, often boast a variety of Buddhist iconography.

A captivating example of this is the Muromachi period Four-Sided Relic Cabinet, the *Shihō-den shariden* 四方殿舎利殿 (d. 1492), at Noman'in 能満院, in Nara (Fig. 11).[258] Though structurally unique, the context and complexity of this four-sided cabinet are perhaps one of the best extant comparisons from this period to help us conceptualize the iconography of and relics enshrined in the Five Vases. This four-sided cabinet will be our next point of inquiry.

The Four-Sided Relic Cabinet

Each side of the Four-Sided Relic Cabinet illustrates a type of relic worship that was popular in Nanto during this time. This can be seen in Figure 12, from left to right, as follows: 1) a flaming jewel triad on an open lotus; 2) the Kasuga deer with a golden mirror on its back, containing traces (*suijaku*) of the five Kasuga kami, in their original form (*honji*) as buddhas and bodhisattvas;[259] 3) a *stūpa* embossed *Daihannya-kyō* 大般若 (Skt. *Mahāprajñāpāramitā sūtra*), straddled by two dragons (only one of which remains);[260] and, 4) a five-ringed pagoda (*gorintō*)

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[258] On this relic cabinet, see Kawada 1972.

[259] The deer is a reference to Kasuga's founding myth, in which the deity Takemikazuchi 建御雷, of "Deer Island" or Kashima 鹿島 (in modern-day Ibaraki Prefecture 茨城県), travels to Kasuga on the back of a white deer. See Tyler 1992, 55; and, Ten Grotenhuis 1999, 158. The notion that the Kasuga kami were avatars of buddhas, one of which was Śākyamuni, was a concept developed by Jōkei. As a result of the prevalence of Śākyamuni worship at this site, Kasuga became linked to relic worship, as well. In the typical fashion of Kasuga deer *maṇḍala*, the mirror is crowded by the branches of a *sakai* tree 榊 (*Cleyera Japonica*). On Kasuga, see Grapard 1992.

[260] One of the two dragons has been lost.

Fig. 11. *Shihō-den shariden* at Nōman'in, Nara. Muromachi era (1492). Wood, polychrome paint, gilt bronze, and lacquer. Height 38.4 cm.

Fig. 12. Detail of the four sides of the *Shihō-den shariden* and its doors.

with a crystal-glass window, covering each of its five levels (Fig. 12). Each side of this reliquary is believed to enshrine hundreds to thousands of relics.[261]

As far as I know, the only detailed scholarship on this reliquary is an article by Kawada Sadamu, entitled "The Transmission of Jinson's Four-Sided Relic Cabinet at Noman'in of Hase Temple" (*Hasedera Noman'in ni tsutawaru Jinson no shihōden shariden* 長谷寺能満院に伝わる尋尊の四方殿舎利殿).[262] In this article, Kawada elucidates that in Bunmyō 文明 14 (1483), the Hōssō 法相 monk Jinson 尋尊 (1430–1508), the temple head (*inju* 院主) of Daijōin 大乗院, obtained five thousand three hundred and thirty eight Tōji relics. Jinson had this relic cabinet created to enshrine and protect these relics, according to his "Chronicle of Miscellaneous Affairs of Daijōin," the *Daijōin jisha zōjiki* 大乗院寺社雑事記 (Kawada 1972). In the *Daijōin jisha zōjiki*, Jinson details how many relics were deposited into each side of the cabinet as well as the origins of these relics (Fig. 13). He explains that one thousand three hundred relics were placed into the flaming jewel triad (five hundred in each of the lower two jewels and three hundred into the upper jewel); two hundred relics were inserted into the *gorintō*'s earth level (i.e., the square level, or *chirin* 地輪); and the remaining two thousand five hundred relics were split between the Kasuga and *Daihannya-kyō* sides of the reliquary (Kawada 1972, 41). In all, it took fifteen years

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[261] The motif of the two dragons flying toward the body of the Buddha, in this case a *sūtra* (his speech relic), resembles the iconography of the *Manihōju maṇḍala* 摩尼宝珠曼陀羅.

[262] There are other shorter Nara National Museum catalogue entries on this relic cabinet, as well, and a few publications on Jinson's writings. On Jinson's writings, see Kameda 1936; and, Suzuki 1983.

of Jinson's life to complete this reliquary (Kawada 1972, 36).[263] It also required considerable resources.

Jinson was a noteworthy monk. With a longstanding connection to Kōfukuji, he belonged to a prominent family. As the son of the court noble and celebrated scholar Ichijō Kaneyoshi 一条兼良 (1402–1481), Jinson entered Daijōin, a sub-temple (*tacchū* 塔頭) of Kōfukuji, at the age of nine. At Daijōin, Jinson worked his way up to a top ranked monk (*dai sōjō* 大僧正), and, from 1455 to 1459, he served as the abbot (*bettō* 別当) of Kōfukuji. It was at Daijōin that he started his chronicle of affairs, the *Daijōin jisha zōjiki*, which spanned from the mid-fifteenth to the early sixteenth century and included matters of the Kōfukuji-Kasuga complex as well as Daijōin (Taniguchi 2008, 49). In sight of this, it is not surprising that the Four-Sided Relic Cabinet includes Kasuga-related iconography and relics from Kōfukuji. With this in mind, let us pause for a moment to break down the iconography, and the relics' origins, in each side of the cabinet. Accordingly, the following chart outlines, as noted in the *Daijōin jisha zōjiki*, the iconography of each side of the reliquary, the origins of that side's relics, and the sentient beings painted on its double doors. The four groupings below correspond with the order of the sides, as seen in Figure 12:

[263] His diary is focused primarily around Kasuga and Kōfukuji related events that transpired in the fifteenth century.

II. Chart of Four Sided Relic Cabinet[264]

(Side One)	(Side Two)
Three flaming jewels	Kasuga deer and mirror
Ganjin's relics from Tōshōdaiji	Relics from Kōfukuji's Shio'in 四恩院
Shingon patriarchs	Ten kings

(Side Three)	(Side Four)
Twin dragons with banner	*Gorintō*
Kūkai's relics from Tōji[265]	Xuanzang's relics[266]
Sixteen benevolent deities	Hōsso patriarchs

From this chart, we can see that Jinson sought relics from a variety of important figures linked to relic worship. These relics spanned across the three continents: Japan, China, and India. Through the use of relics, the cabinet displays a diversity of Buddhist teachings poplar in Japan during this time, from Shingon, to Kasuga and Hōsso. Specifically, it depicts types of relic worship active in Nanto at this time, implying that they could coexist in one frame of worship (Fig. 14). In light of the varied iconography of and faiths represented by this relic cabinet, perhaps it is less surprising that the Five Relic Vases of Saidaiji enshrine relics from a motley of times, people, and places in a single reliquary set. Though this amalgamation may seem odd, it is not unusual for reliquaries from this period.

[264] For more on the iconography of this cabinet, see: Shimizu 2008, 45.

[265] On the Tōji relics, see, for example, Hashimoto 1990.

[266] The relics of Xuanzang were thought to have been brought directly from India to China by Xuanzang himself. This is in contrasts to those of Kūkai and Ganjin, which were brought to Japan from Tang China.

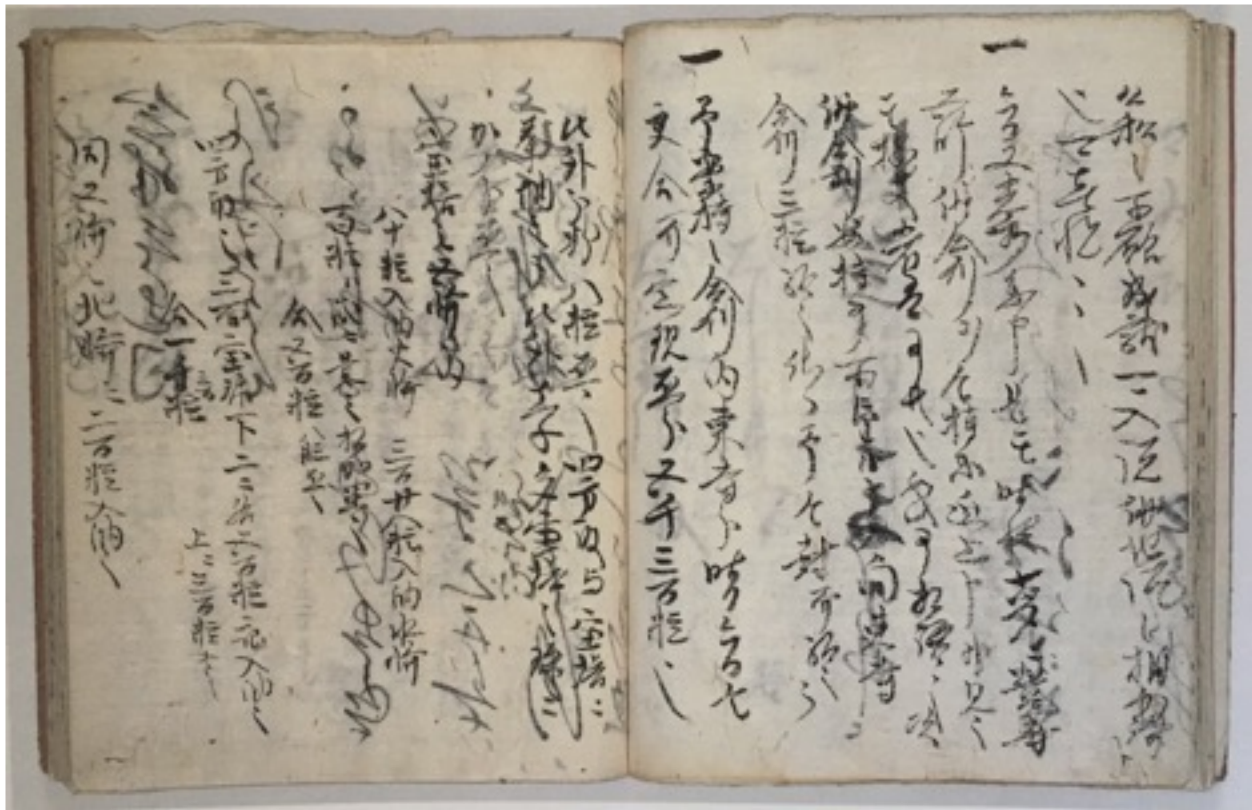

Fig. 13. Jinson's "Chronicle of Miscellaneous Affairs of Daijōin", the *Daijōinjisha zōjiki* 大乗院寺社雑事記, National Archives, Muromachi period (15th c.), ink on paper.

Another case and point is Chōgen, who often combined relics from various sites into a single reliquary. One example of this is the *gorintō* of Komiya Shrine, mentioned in Chapter One. This reliquary enshrines a second smaller reliquary made of crystal, which encases relics from seven places and peoples, including Tōdaiji's Great Buddha Hall (*Daibutsu den* 大仏殿), Tōji, Tōshōdaiji, and so on.[267] Chōgen enshrined this *gorintō* in the Great Buddha Hall, and, later, borrowed the innermost crystal reliquary to perform a *sharikō* 舎利講 (Nakao 2001, 116). This *gorintō*, as well as other reliquaries attributed to Chōgen, illustrate that there seemed to be a

267 For an interesting discussion on this, see Nakao 2001, 116.

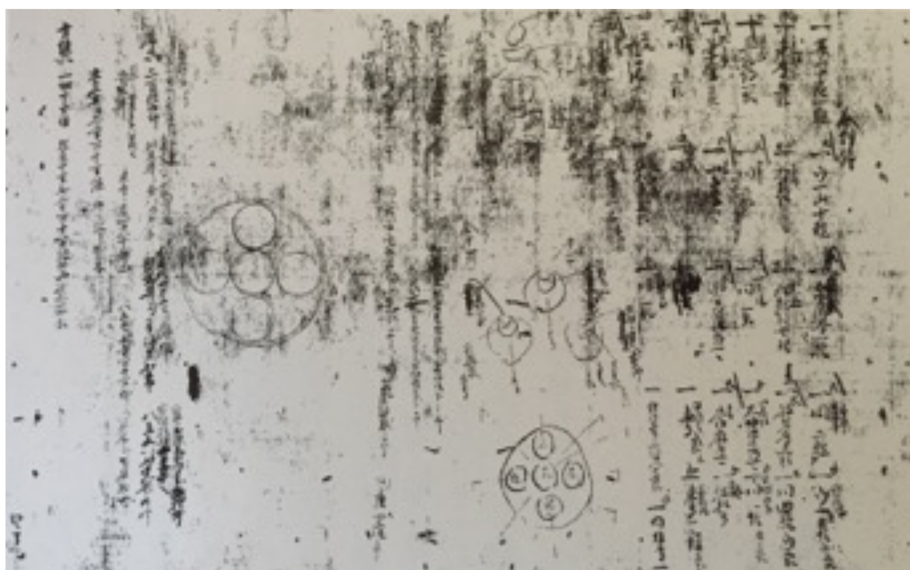

Fig. 14. Notes from Jinson's *Daijōinjisha zōjiki*, in which he draws the sides of the reliquary. Visible at the center left and bottom of this image are the five *honji* of Kasuga, and at the center right are the three flaming jewels. Dated 1478.

proclivity to combine relics from various sites in a single reliquary. Perhaps this was to amalgamate the power that these relics held based on their provenance and origin stories.

As for the Four-Sided Relic Cabinet, this unique and visually compelling cabinet displays a synthesis of teachings and traditions active in Nanto at this time. The concept of combining thousands of relics, from a small handful of temples and people, into a single reliquary is similar to the construction of the Five Vases. Unlike the Chōgen example, however, Eison enshrined relics from a splattering of elite sites and people, both male and female, including a Ritsu nunnery, a Shinto shrine, a princess, a court lady, and his own disciples all in the same set of vases.[268] These vases represented the five directions (*gohō* 五方)—i.e., everything in the world. The varied origins of these relics seem to attest to the multifaceted nature of Eison's relic worship and teachings, as well as to the sacred landscape that this, metaphorically, allowed him to construct. Such a move was less unusual than it at first appears, and, perhaps, it is worth using this to reexamine, and reconsider, our way of thinking about relic worship during this period. In

[268] On relic worship at the Ise Grand Shrine 伊勢神宮, see Ruppert 2002.

recent years scholars have discovered that many Kamakura era statues enshrine objects from different temples and people in one statue, so why should a reliquary not enshrine relics from a smattering of sites, peoples, and traditions, as well?

In regards to the West, early-medieval shrines displaying relics and images often depict more than one saint (Hahn 1997, 1079). Similarly early-medieval ritual and liturgy, also often chose not to focus on a single saint. Rituals, instead, were, in the words of Cynthia Hahn, a celebration of unity and community. In this way, "a group of saints through their community constructed a City of God but also a sacred geography of loyalties on earth" (Hahn 1997, 1080–1081). Perhaps we could benefit from this understanding when thinking about how various traditions or sites were some times displayed together in a single reliquary in the Japanese case, implying that the people commissioning these reliquaries were creating a sacred geography—a geography specific to that area—that was condensed into a single visual space, a reliquary. In the case of the Five Vases, this multitude of sacred geographies, somewhat like a time capsule, is compressed into the Five Vases, encased neatly in a *stūpa*. This multitude of relic faiths further illustrates the complexity and inclusivity of Eison's, and even of Hokkeji's, relic networks. It raises the question of *why* the Hokkeji relics occupy the central and most visually complex vase, arguably, the most important of the Five Vases. In this light, these reliquaries seem to be just as much about place, power, and networks, as anything else. To better understand this, let us look at the iconography of the vases.

Fig. 15. ‘Garlic-head-shaped’ lotus. Photo by author.

Iconography of the Vases

The body of each vase is made in a plump lobed vase style, allowing for a Flaming-Jewel Reliquary to be nested within it. In contrast, the neck of each vase is thin, creating an hourglass affect. The neck tapers down toward the round pomegranate-shaped body of the vase. Balanced on the mouth of each vase is a delicately crafted half-opened lotus flower, shaped in the ‘garlic head’ (*santō* 蒜頭) style (Fig. 15).[269] The lotus flowers seem, at a glance, to be lids. This is, however, an optical illusion. It is the first optical illusion of the reliquary set. The lotuses are not detachable, and, moreover, the Flaming-Jewel Reliquaries inside are too plump to fit through the

[269] This shape is commonly seen with porcelain vases in China.

Fig. 16. Removing the flaming-jewel reliquary inside the central vase. Photo by author.

necks of the vases. Rather, the upper third of each vase twists open, so the reliquary inside can be removed (like opening a Russian doll to remove the smaller doll within) (Fig. 16). This style of encasing one reliquary within the next, specifically a box within a box, came into vogue in Japan, J. Edward Kidder Jr. explains, in the latter half of the seventh century, after Japanese scholar monks started traveling directly to China (Kidder 1992, 224). The Five Vases take after this Chinese-style of placing one reliquary within the next.[270]

[270] Kidder expands that it is conceivable that the smallest containers of these sets were left unopened out of "respect for the relics." In the case of the Five Vases, this is certainly the case, with the exception of the vase containing the Hokkeji relics. See Kidder 1992, 224. For a famous case of the encasing of the Buddha's finger bone relic, placed in one box after another, see Sharf 2011.

As for the neck of each vase, they are draped with a thick, colorful cord. The colors of the cords comprise the five colors (*goshiki* 五色), each of which correlates with one of the five directions. Specifically, the eastern cord is green, the southern cord is yellow, the central cord is white, the northern cord is navy-blue, and the western cord is red.[271] Chinese characters are brushed, moreover, in black ink on the bottoms of the vases, or the Flaming-Jewel Reliquaries. The characters label the colors on the inside of the lotus cup of the Flaming-Jewel Reliquaries—the cup containing the relics.

Interestingly, these colors are distinct from the colors of the threads that drape the vases, the latter of which are associated with the five directions. Below is a chart summarizing: 1) the relic vases and their associated directions; the characters written on the bottom of each vase; and, the colors of the five cords, as well as, 2) the color inside of the Flaming-Jewel Reliquary cups; along with the characters written on the bottom of the Flaming-Jewel Reliquaries (when present).

[271] In summary, the five directions and their colors can be broken down as follows: center - white (yellow and brown); east - green (blue and green); south - yellow; north - navy (black and purple); and, west - red (white and crimson). Note: In parenthesis I have given variants for the colors associated with each direction according to the five primary colors and the five compound colors. See, for instance, DDB.

Chart III: Iconography of Vases and Their Associated Colors -

Vases and Directions	*Corresponding Colors*
north	
vase reliquary	*kuro* 黒 (lit., “black”) written on bottom of vase
	navy-blue cord
flaming-jewel reliquary	black lotus cup
	—
east	
vase reliquary	—
	green cord
flaming jewel reliquary	russet (red-brown) lotus cup
	aka アカ (lit., “red”) written on bottom of reliquary
center	
vase reliquary	—
	white cord
flaming-jewel reliquary	(contains seven circular-metal-rings, no distinctive cup color)
	—
west	
vase reliquary	*ao* 青 (lit., “blue” or “azure”) written on bottom of vase
	red cord
flaming-jewel reliquary	sky-blue lotus cup
	murasaki ムラサキ (lit., “purple”) written on bottom of reliquary
south	
vase reliquary	*ki* 黄 (lit., “yellow”) written on bottom of vase
	yellow cord
flaming-jewel reliquary	gold-yellow lotus cup
	shiro? 白 (lit. “white”) written on bottom of reliquary[272]

Looking at this chart, we can see that many of the Flaming-Jewel Reliquaries, as well as their vases, are brushed with a character that informs the viewer of the color inside the reliquary’s

[272] This character is faded. Abe Yasuro and Nara Museum curator Shimizu Ken think it might say *shiro*.

lotus cup. That is, the cup holding the relics. It seems that the color written on the bottom of the vase, or the Flaming-Jewel Reliquary, consistently denotes the color of the lotus cup enshrining the relics. For instance, the northern vase is black (*kuro* 黒), the eastern vase is red (*aka* アカ), the central vases has no color (only rings), the western vase is blue (*ao* 青), and the southern vase is yellow (*ki* 黄).[273] That these colors were noted on the very reliquaries themselves shows that the color of the cup and its significance were of great importance to whoever labeled them.

As for the lotus cups, they are each attached to a second cup, which is turned upside down. The first upward facing cup is sealed off by a compressed-crystal-plate window. Only in the case of the central Hokkeji vase can this window manually be opened, so that, on special occasions, the relics can be removed.[274] This implies that it was important for Eison, who commissioned these vases, to have access to the Hokkeji relics. Interestingly, he did not do this with any of the relics from the other Five Vases. Rather, the relics in the other vases cannot be accessed without breaking the exquisite, sacred, Flaming-Jewel Reliquary in which they are encased. These relics were meant to be worshipped and kept permanently in their reliquaries. This is similar to other examples of Flaming-Jewel Reliquaries from this period, which also enshrine relics inside of the very reliquary itself. Enshrined in the central vase, there seemed to be something unique about the intention behind the Hokkeji relics. These relics are meant to be accessible, but to a select few. What special relationship does the ability to access these relics,

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[273] Interestingly, the western and southern vases are unique in that they have characters painted on the bottom of both the vase and of the flaming jewel reliquary. The bottom of the eastern flaming jewel reliquary, which says *murasaki* ムラサキ, may be denoting the color in-between the blue of the reliquary's lotus cup and the red of its cord. Combining these colors is also how purple pigment is made. In the Heian period, for example, cinnabar red (*shu* 朱) was mixed with indigo (*ai* 藍) to make purple. See *JAANUS* "murasaki 紫," accessed February 28, 2020.

[274] There is a small latch on the crystal window that allows one to open it.

Fig. 17. Lotus bulb, central vase. Engraved with precious flower motif. Photo by author.

and only these relics, imply about the Hokkeji relics and the vases? And, why are these relics seemingly more important to extract—likely, for ritual—than the relics in the reliquaries that surround them? Were they seen as somehow more religiously, or culturally, valuable to Eison?[275] Put simply, how can we understand the Hokkeji reliquary's unique construction, and why its relics seemed to have had a different function and use? Let us continue to reflect on this question as we look more closely at the iconography of the vases, starting with their lids.

The bulb-shaped-lotus lids of each vase differ slightly. Although the specific meanings behind their motifs in relation to the five directions remains unclear, there is much to say about

[275] Note: By culturally valuable, I mean that they appeared at Hokkeji and before the nuns. These relics seemed to have been distinct from the many relics that Eison collected over his lifetime. As we know from stories of theft, whether relics were stolen or taken, would not lessen their cultural prestige and the value assigned to them.

their iconography. Each lotus petal, for example, of the central vase's lid is engraved with a gold plated, precious flower motif (*hōsō gemon* 宝相華文) shaped like open flower petals (Fig. 17). As for the other vases, the petal engravings each differ slightly, making them an impressive quintet. The lids of the eastern and western vases both boast raised line engravings. These two diverge only in color: the lid of the eastern vase is dark blue-brown (*aoi kasshoku* 青褐色), while the lid of the western vase is crimson-copper (*shudō* 朱銅).

In contrast, the lid of the northern vase is covered in black paint and engraved with a gold-plated coral motif. The lotus petals on the lid of the southern vase, which contains, perhaps, the most captivating lotus lid of the Five Vases, are embossed with a triad of silver-plated *cintāmaṇi*. A delicate wisp of incense smoke trails up from this triad toward the invisible sky (Fig. 18). The colors of the lotus cups and the colors of each vase's cord are conscious constructions. Iconographically and conceptually, they represent the five directions and the five colors (i.e., the Buddhist cosmos). In regards to sets of five, a number grouping that appears often in Buddhist ideology, it is significant that the lid's petals on the southern vase are engraved with *cintāmaṇi*, while those of the northern vase are engraved with coral.

Naitō hypothesizes that this iconography might denote the five jewels (*gohō* 五宝), each of which stand for one of the five directions.[276] In the case of the *gohō*, the south is represented by *cintāmaṇi*, while the north is represented by the eight treasures (lit., this vase shows one of the

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[276] According to Charles Muller, there are several ways to understand the breakdown of the five treasures. According to one interpretation, the treasures consist of gold (*kin* 金), silver (*gin* 銀), pearls (*shinju* 真珠), cowrie shells (*sango* 珊瑚), and rubies (*kohaku* 琉珀). In another interpretation, they can be understood as coral, crystal, gold, silver, and cowries; or, alternatively as gold, silver, pearls, coral, and amber. See, for instance, DDB.

Fig. 18. Embossed bronze lotus with a triad of silver-plated *cintāmaṇi* and incense smoke wisp trailing upward (top of southern vase). Photo by author.

eight treasures, coral, or *zapō* 雑宝). This could, Naitō asserts, help explain the iconographic and theoretical breakdown of the vases (Naitō 2010). In this light, the vases—like the relics that they enshrine—can be read to represent various elements of Buddhist cosmology. They create, I posit, a spiritual geography that encompasses the reach of Eison's praxis and teachings across Nanto, as well as Nanto's larger Buddhist cosmology and praxis.

What is Inside?

Nested inside of the vases are five smaller Flaming-Jewel Reliquaries. It is unclear to scholars if these bronze-jeweled reliquaries were made to be nested this way, or if they were arranged this way later (Nakao 2001). It is not uncommon to find reliquaries nested one within another, so this may have been the original intention. This cannot be determined, however. Many reliquaries—e.g., the Iron *Stūpa* into which the Five Vases were placed—are designed in the shape of a *stūpa*, thus sharing the form of the very structure in which they are encased.[277] In the example of the Saidaiji vases, the Russian-doll-like encasing of reliquaries, one within the next, makes the Five Vases both reliquaries and reliquary containers.[278] The Flaming-Jewel Reliquaries and Five Vases are an interesting case in that, taken as a set, they embody layers of iconography and meaning. Placed one inside another, they are sealed off in an iron reliquary. In this way, reliquaries as containers can be used, Pamela Gupta points out, to contain or to alter one's interaction with a given saint's (or, a buddha's) relics (Gupta 2004).[279]

Put differently, reliquaries can serve as "a mediation between relics and audience," they dictate how the viewer can interact with the relics, while, simultaneously carrying a message about the meaning, authenticity and significance of the given relics (Hahn 2010, 9). Accordingly, a reliquary, by design, can allow or limit a viewer's access to a relic—i.e., the viewer's relationship with a relic can depend heavily on how the person who commissioned the reliquary

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[277] See, for instance, Brown 2006.

[278] In her analysis of the reliquary as a container, Pamela Gupta points out that reliquaries can be used to contain or to alter one's interaction with a saint's relics; accordingly, a reliquary can allow or limit a viewer's access to a given relic. See: Gupta 2004.

[279] Tombs or shrines enshrining a sacred body or relics, can also be seen as reliquaries in a sense. See Hahn 1997.

Fig. 19. Flaming Jewel Reliquary, at Kairyūōji.
Kamakura era (d. 1290).

intended the viewer, or devotee, to interact with the relic and the message that they hoped to convey (Gupta 2004).

Another reliquary, similar to the Saidaiji examples, is the Flaming-Jewel Reliquary at Kairyūōji (Fig. 19). It is not surprising that the reliquaries of Saidaiji and Kairyūōji are similar, given that Eison played a hand in reviving both Shingon Ritsu temples and lent relics to Kairyūōji. There was, moreover, a close relationship between these two temples and Hokkeji, which was—and, still is—across the street from Kairyūōji. The design of the Kairyūōji reliquary as well as the Saidaiji reliquary are fairly similar: both boast a flaming-jewel (lit., crystal ball, surrounded by bronze and gold), balanced on top of a double-lotus-pedestal (Kawada 1989, 6). The Saidaiji Flaming Jewel Reliquaries differ slightly, however, in that their crystal-ball is raised, rather than nested in the lotus cup. A crystal window also seals off the mouth of the lotus cup, inside of which are safely nested numerous clear and colored relic shards. This is the second optical illusion of the reliquary set. In the case of most flaming-jewel reliquaries from this period, including those of Kairyūōji and other examples from Saidaiji, the relics are consistently placed directly inside the flaming-jewel crystal ball, making

the relics fully visible to the viewer.[280] Looking at these reliquaries, the viewer's eye is immediately directed to the relics inside the crystal-ball, which are often comprised of different sizes, colors, textures, and shapes. These relics often look like pieces of glass or, at times, colorful pebbles.

The Saidaiji Flaming-Jewel Reliquaries are unique, however, in that the relics that they enshrine cannot easily be seen. Rather, the relics are concealed safely inside of their respective lotus cups. They are only visible if one stands directly above the reliquary. Few people would have had such access to these reliquaries. Only those granted direct access—close enough to touch the reliquaries and to be allowed to, or watch someone else, open the vases—could view the relics inside.[281] This was, moreover, a multistep process: one had to take each vase out of the Iron Pagoda, open the vase in a specific way, and gently remove the Flaming-Jewel Reliquary inside. Only then, when peering over this last, inner most level of reliquary, would the relics be visible.

Let us pause here for a moment to consider the ritual function of these reliquaries, a function which is very similar to that of Buddhist icons. In both cases, the relic—and, the icon—

[280] The practice of enshrining relics in a flaming-jewel crystal ball can be seen with other flaming jewel reliquaries at Saidaiji, such as the Bronze-Gold Flaming Jewel Shaped Reliquary from the Muromachi period (d. 1414) as well as the Bronze-Gold Flaming Jewel Shaped Reliquary from the Nanbokuchō era (d. 1335). Both housed at Saidaiji.

[281] This also applied to the modern viewing of these reliquaries, albeit in the context of the museum space. On the occasions that these reliquaries have been publicly displayed at the Nara National Museum, often the smaller flaming jewel reliquaries will be taken out of the vases that enshrine them. Despite this, it is still hard, if not virtually impossible, to see the relics inside their reliquaries behind the museum case. Even after studying these reliquaries through texts and seeing them on exhibit at the museum, I was unable to see the relics concealed inside of them until my private viewing of these objects, when the curators opened them in front of me. Thus, even a modern viewer is often restricted in her interaction with these reliquaries and their relics, until given a private viewing. In many ways, this makes these reliquaries unique from many other reliquaries from this period. Usually one can look at such reliquaries and immediately see the relics that they enshrine. This raises the question: why was there a need to conceal these relics so well? And, from whom was Eison hiding them?

function as the living buddha.[282] And, the higher one's standing within the monastic community, the closer she or he could sit, or stand, to the given image or reliquary (i.e., to the Buddha himself). This was the case with central icons in Japan, as in other parts of the religious world.[283] Samuel Morse explains, in his work on the ritual space of image halls in medieval Japan, that one's proximity to the object on the main altar, as well as to the altar itself, is dictated by one's social status within the monastic (or, by extension the political) community (Morse 1995). In this vein, Morse elucidates:

> Below and immediately in front of the altar is the ritual dais from which the main celebrant conducts the service. Frequently auxiliary images flank the main image, and the participating members of the monastic community sit in ranks behind and to the sides in the ambulatory or chapels. This arrangement, repeated at temples of all sects throughout Japan, establishes clear hierarchies—between the images themselves, the image and the celebrant, and the celebrant and the attending monks.[284]

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[282] The concept that Buddhist icons are living can be seen in Chinese Buddhist writings, as well. In one Song Dynasty example, from the *Records in Proclamation of Manifestations* 宣驗記, attributed to Liu Yiqing 劉義慶, an outlaw shots a Buddha statue in the face. Hereafter, blood flows down the statue and from its mouth comes a loud noise, like the roar of thunder. These life-like attributes show that the statue was seen as alive. See Li 2020, 187.

[283] This concept of limiting a devotee's sight of the sacred can be seen throughout the world. Hahn explains, for instance, that only the lucky few had the privilege to circulate in the crypt of Saint Germain. There are many such instances through the Christian world, in which relics or images are only taken out for a specific ritual or feast day. Lay persons in the Carolingian era (800–880), Hahn explains, were granted access to the glory of these sacred tombs only through holes in the ground, referred to as "small windows" (Lt. *fenestella*). Thus, rather than having a partial, fixed vision of the sacred, laity had to recall the transcendent through memory. Hahn 1997, 1101–1105.

[284] For this passages, see Morse 1995, 18. Morse elaborates that there was a signifiant shift in the layout of Buddhist temples and how they displayed icons to be worshipped and viewed by devotees during the Nara period. See Morse 1995, 21–23.

As Morse describes, the closer one is to the main image, or, in our case to the relics, the closer one is to the Buddha and, thus, the higher one's standing is within the monastic community.[285] As for the specific act of enshrining relics in the Five Vases, this was perhaps an effort to physically protect the relics and to preserve their power, making them visible to only a select few.[286] The concealed nature of these relics, and the effort put into protecting them from those unfamiliar with them, further suggests that these relics were a great source of power that were in danger of being taken.

One version of this reliquary type is the "Esoteric Meditation Reliquaries" (*Mikkan hōjū shariyōki* 密観寶珠舎利容器; hereafter, *Mikkan hōjū*). In the case of a *Mikkan hōjū* reliquary type, a *vajra* (lit., thunderbolt) usually connects the two bronze lotuses that form the body of this reliquary. On top of this sits a crystal ball enclosing precious relics.[287] Similar to the Flaming-Jewel Reliquary examined above at Kairyūōji, the relics can be seen clearly by the viewer. Other

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[285] This is still seen throughout Asia today, such as in Thailand with the changing of the clothes of the Emerald Buddha. During this ritual, the king of Thailand climbs up the steps onto the platform where the Buddha is enshrined, then bathes the statue in water. This holy water is then mixed with a large amount of ordinary water. The new holy water mixture is then poured into a conch shell, and the king sprinkles some of this on his own head, and thereafter on the heads of the royal family by rank, then on some of the officers present. It is clear from this rite that the higher one's rank the more proximity he or she has to this holy water, which has touched the body of the Emerald Buddha. See Tambiah 1985, 338.

[286] Relics were concealed within statues for similar reasons. On the notion of concealing images or icons in Japan to grant them more power, see for instance, Scheid and Teeuwen 2006.

[287] In these reliquary types, the *vajra* is commonly five pronged, but it can also have one or three prongs. For examples of this, see Naitō 2010, 98–140. In his book *Shari shōgon bijutsu no kenkyū* 舎利荘厳美術の研究, Naitō explains that there are fifteen extant Kamakura era *Esoteric Visualization Shaped Reliquaries* (*mikkan-hōju kei shari yōki* 密観宝珠形舎利容器). Each differs slightly, as does their iconography and use. Despite their name, a nomenclature given to them by modern scholars, they were likely not used in visualization rites. Naitō notes that many of the tops and bottoms of the reliquary cabinets (*shari zushi* 舎利厨子) of this variety are removable, which indicates that they could be stored away. Thus, this design shows, Naitō goes on, that these reliquaries were likely not left on display fear that they might be stolen. They could have also been made this way, he hypothesizes, so that they could be paraded around in festivals. Personal correspondence July 29, 2018.

examples of this style include the "Bronze-Gold Flaming Jewel Reliquary" at the Tokyo National Museum 東京国立博物館 as well as a reliquary by this same name in the Saidaiji storehouse.[288]

The majority of the *Mikkan hōjū* reliquaries date from the late Kamakura period into the Muromachi period, and they are located in Shingon Ritsu temples throughout the Nara region. Their similarities in design are likely rooted in their connection to Tōshōdaiji 唐招提寺 and the temple's style of commissioning reliquaries from this time. This reliquary style also likely influenced Eison's construction of the Flaming Jewel Reliquaries, Naitō posits.[289]

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[288] Although it is said that Kameyama tennō 龜山天皇 (r. 1259–1274) had relics placed into the Saidaiji reliquary, modern scholarship has shown that this reliquary dates to the early Nanbokuchō era 南北朝 (1325). Even though this reliquary was made three to four years after Eison's death, it still reflects Eison's ideology of relic worship. Visually speaking, this esoteric reliquary type, *mikkan hōjū shariyōki*, is commonly made up of two lotuses connected by a *vajra*, on top of which is placed a crystal-ball encasing relics. In these cases, the *vajra* commonly has five prongs. It can also have one or three prongs. For examples of this reliquary type, see Naitō 2010, 98–140.

[289] This is based on an interview with Naitō at Nara National Museum on July 29, 2018. Naitō further explains that these reliquaries are likely all similar because of the following two reasons: 1.) they tend to be related to Shingon teachings, and 2.) almost all of them are related to a certain high ranking monk from Daigoji. This monk made these reliquaries at Toshidaiji, and must have showed them to Eison and his followers. The three sided *gorintō* famously commissioned by Chōgen is one example of a reliquary influenced by the Daigoji style, since Chōgen also studied at Daigoji, Naitō asserts. Shingon teachings, moreover, were especially strong in the Nara region at this time, as seen with Kasuga relic shrines displaying Fudō Myōō 不動明王 and Aizen Myōō 愛染明王 on their doors.

IV. The Central Vase: Eison and the Hokkeji Relics

As for the relics inside of the Saidaiji reliquaries, the *Kameyama hōō shinkan* explains, as examined above, that Eison took relics from Hokkeji, Kasuga Shrine, and other such locations, and enshrined them in the Five Vases.[290] By doing this, he was effectively taking these relics out of circulation, similar to the act of placing relics into the Monju statue at Hokkeji, as explained in Chapter One. Above I have detailed how Eison obtained these various relics, with the exception of the Hokkeji relics. Let us turn now to the question: how did Eison obtain hundreds of Hokkeji relics?

There seem to be, as mentioned above, no references to the Hokkeji nuns giving relics to Eison. There are, however, various instances of Eison lending out the nunnery's relics to other temples or using them in relic rituals. In one such example, noted in the *Kairyūōji shari kibun*, Eison allowed for some of the Hokkeji relics to be placed into the newly constructed golden pagoda of Kairyūōji to offer protection to the temple. After these relics were lent—or, perhaps more accurately, permanently, given—to Kairyūōji, the Hokkeji nuns recounted their relics, an act preformed by the nuns on ritual occasions or when the relics were transported to new locations for ritual use or distribution. This allowed the nuns to check the number of relics and to confirm that none had been lost. According to this section of the *Kairyūōji shari kibun*:

[290] As noted above, the *honji* of the kami of the first Kasuga shrine is Śākyamuni. As a result, we see many Kasuga related reliquaries as well as Kasuga related relic worship during the medieval period. For instance, in 1116, a relic that had been brought back from Tang by Ganjin was placed into the Kasuga pagoda. See Kageyama 1986, 90.

In the 8th month, on the 1st day, [Eison] went to Kairyūōji. There was a new golden pagoda, where thirty seven relics from Hokkeji were enshrined to protect the temple. As a result, the Hokkeji relics were counted. The record about this said: In Shōō 3 [1291], in the 8th month, on the 1st day, a location was picked for the new Mizuo'dono [hall] at Kairyūōji. The enshrined relics were counted and they totaled thirty seven. There were two thousand and twenty relics in all. In Kō'an 4 [1282], the relics were [again] counted, and it was said that they totaled two thousand and forty. Presently, they had increased by seventeen.[291]

八月朔日。屆海龍王寺。新營金塔而分法華寺舍利三十七粒。奉安置之。以為寺鎮。因又數法華寺舍利。其記曰。正應三年八月一日，海龍王寺新結構殿。三十七粒員數以採定之。奉請之後勘計之處。二千二十粒也。弘安四年勘計之時者二千四十粒云云。今十七粒增也。

Although we do not know of any reliquaries at Hokkeji—outside of the possible Hokkeji relics placed in the temple's Monju statue, thus, making this very statue into a reliquary—many of the nunnery's relics can be found elsewhere. Some are enshrined in the Five Vases, while others are enclosed in the reliquaries or architectural reliquaries (i.e., *stūpa*) of other monasteries in the Nanto area (e.g., the *stūpa* at Kairyūōji). This exchange of relics created a network between the nunnery and other temples. In the case of Kairyūōji, for instance, this exchange allowed the temple to house relics associated with Hokkeji, while providing the nunnery a platform to publicize itself as a sacred site where relics magically appear and choose to remain, attested to through the act of distribution. Moreover, according to the *Kairyūōji shari kibun*, the Hokkeji relics increased after the temple gave or lent relics to Kairyūōji, showing that this exchange was fortuitous. Eison helped to facilitate this, which enhanced the power of Hokkeji as well as

[291] Translated by author from the *Kairyūōji shari kibun*, 196.

Kairyūōji, both important Nanto Ritsu sites known for possessing and enshrining relics. This, likely, helped fortify the relationship between these two sites, Eison, and his relic worship.

As noted in the *Hokkeji shari engi* and in the *Kanjin gakushōki*, Hokkeji loaned and distributed relics to other temples outside of Kairyūōji. The lending of relics to other temples seems to have started after Eison came to Hokkeji. In the *Hokkeji shari engi*, for instance, the nun Jitsua 實阿 (13th c.) had a vision in which the late Empress Kōmyō 光明皇后 (701–760), the founder of Hokkeji, spoke to Jitsua in the depths of night, when everyone else was asleep and only the ill Jitsua lay awake. The invisible body of the Empress appeared in front of Jitsua, and, in a "voice of clarity and peace," explained her discontent that the relics had been lent out. She elucidated that, as a result, she was missing one of her eyes:

> I use relics and the *Mahāprajñā pāramitā sūtra* to act as my two eyes.[292] As for the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā sūtra*, since the nun Jōamida butsu copied [this text], my desire is satisfied [i.e., I have one of my eyes]. As for the relics, I have used expedient means (Skt. *upāya*) to command that they are placed in this temple, but [now] you allow them to be distributed in all the directions. This is against my wishes [i.e, the relics, my second eye, are amiss].[293]
>
> 吾以舍利並大般若為兩眼。大般若者。尼成阿彌陀佛既致其營。於舍利者。我以方便令安置當寺而任雅意分佈諸方。大背我意云々。

This passage is noteworthy in that the late empress is telling Jitsua that the relics are fundamental to her ability to see, and thus to her ability to provide for and to protect the nunnery. It is

[292] This text is referred to here by its shortened title, *Daihannya-kyō* 大般若經.

[293] Translation by author. For the original text, see *Hokkeji shari engi*, 161. This passage is noteworthy in that it highlights that something seems to have been off in regards to the nuns and their relics. That they wanted full oversight of the relics, but that their control over the relics had shifted for some reason, seemingly, against their will.

significant that the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā sūtra* is paired here with the eye of empress Kōmyō (lit., the empress of light), and, by extension with the eye of the Buddha. We should also note that the female bodhisattva *Prajñā*, personified as the Mother of All Buddhas (*butsumo* 仏母), is called the "Queen of Light." Her full name in Japanese is "Buddha Eye, Buddha Mother," or *Butsugen butsumo* 仏眼仏母 (Skt. *Buddhalocanā*). The text seems to be creating a direct association between Kōmyō and *Prajñā*. It is not a coincidence that the Queen of Light's eyes are comprised both of *prajñā* (wisdom) and *shari* (relics),[294] and, that this connection to the female bodhisattva *Prajñā*, Empress Kōmyō, and the relics is used to justify the Hokkeji nuns need to oversee their own relics.[295]

This example further highlights that the empress did not wish for the temple's relics to be lent out or distributed. This disrupted the longevity of the temple. Following the empress' wishes, when Jitsua *did* ask the temples where the relics had been distributed to return the relics, her near-death-illness was miraculously, instantaneously cured. Her prompt healing can be seen as a miracle spurred by the return of the relics to the convent and by the dead empress' desires being satiated. Eison may have come to wield tremendous spiritual power over the Hokkeji relics, but he still had to obey the wishes of Kōmyō. Despite his declared status as a "bodhisattva," he was, it seems, not except from her wrath. This further highlights that the relics belonged to the nuns and to the founder of the nunnery, Kōmyō. Eison did not ultimately have the power to lend out or to take the nuns' relics, nor to disobey the empress. In a word, this passage shows that the

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[294] *Shari* are often seen as synonymous to *cintāmaṇi* and are closely linked to the notion of and the goddess *prajñā*.

[295] On this connection, see, for instance Hexon 1993.

placement of the relics at the nunnery, literally and figuratively, were invaluable to the livelihood of the nuns independent of Eison.

By placing five hundred Hokkeji relics into the central vase, Eison was taking them out of circulation. Sealed away in a Flaming-Jeweled Reliquary, placed in a vase, inserted in an Iron *Stūpa*, the relics could not easily be accessed, taken, or returned to their rightful owners, nor to Kōmyō. The reliquaries, as we have seen, were, moreover, designed with several optical illusions, which could further deter someone not intimately familiar with their workings from opening them.[296] Closed inside of the vases, it became significantly harder for the relics to be removed and, thus, returned to the nunnery—or, put differently, significantly harder to follow the wishes of Empress Kōmyō and to return her second eye.

As seen in other passages of the *Kanjin gakushōki*, it was not unusual for Eison to borrow relics from the convent. In one example, Eison borrowed the nunnery's relics for a seven-day relic offering at Saidaiji. Although Eison had his own relics, he drew heavily on the Hokkeji relics. As part of this seven-day relic offering, Eison placed relics from Saidaiji and Hokkeji on a single altar, as noted in the *Kanjin gakushōki*. On the *kechien* 結縁 (lit. "forming karmic connections") day of the service, the Hokkeji nuns were invited to attend the ceremony and to perform a ritual counting of the relics. As the keepers of the relics, the nuns played a central role in this rite; it was their job to check that the relics were properly accounted for and returned to the nunnery (*Kanjin gakushōki*, 37; Meeks 2010, 147). Similar to the Kairyuōji case, the nuns

[296] Perhaps, by placing these relics into a reliquary that could be opened and accessed by a select few, Eison was ensuring his own access to the relics during his later years—a time when entry to the Pure Land, and accumulated positive karma, would matter most.

were to keep track of the relics: if the relics increased or decreased, they would be the first to know. The nuns were thus in charge of their relics, Eison had merely borrowed them. He was not given the responsibility or the privilege to count the relics after they were returned to the convent—they were not, ultimately, his.

Eison's relationship to relics seems to have changed, however, by the time he commissioned the Five Vases. For, in the central vase, Eison now enshrined five hundred Hokkeji relics. Perhaps, he was taking these relics out of circulation by placing them into these reliquaries, so that others could not access them without his consent. He did this by encasing them in these reliquaries, which contained several optical illusions, thus making it difficult for someone unfamiliar with the reliquaries to access, or even view, the relics.

V. Eison's Personal Relic Faith

Although Eison seemed to have a special fascination with the Hokkeji relics, Eison possessed his own relics. Eison, as we know, was deeply interested in reestablishing the nuns' order, and, as part and parcel of this, he used relics, reliquaries, and relic tales to spread his as well as the nuns' relic faith. He is known to have received relics from nuns outside of Hokkeji as well as from females in the court, who wished to establish karmic merit through his teachings.[297] In this

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[297] For instance, in 1279 (Kō'an 2) Eison received relics from the Kamakura Zen nun Jōamida-butsu 浄阿彌陀佛. She had visited him to ask about the essence of the Dharma, and, during her visit, gifted him a set of the *Tripiṭaka* as well as Buddha relics, according to the *Bonmōkyō koshakuki bugyō monshū kankō batsubun* 梵網古迹記輔行文集刊行跋文, 170. This is a text, Charles Muller explains that Eison wrote, because he and Kakujō 覺盛 (1194–1249) held very different positions about the full reception of the precepts. Eison wrote ten fascicles of the *Bonmōkyō koshakuki buko bunshu* 梵網古迹記輔行文集 to explain his position on this matter. See Muller 2012, 56.

period of *mappō*, the possession of relics allowed Buddhist masters to argue that their teachings and traditions were most aligned with the teachings and the body of Śākyamuni. This could, Naitō asserts, help explain the iconographic and theoretical breakdown of the vases. Similar to the western churches that vied for relics in the middle ages, possessing relics in Japan showed that the teachings and faith of a given Buddhist master drew on an authentic Buddhism of the past.

In a period when people feared that the world was ending, this was invaluable. Herein, chronicles and histories about Eison's life are replete with stories in which Eison was given relics of noteworthy provenance by figures of authority (e.g., rulers, lords, monks, and nuns). Perhaps more importantly, all of these relics were believed to have come from China or India, and each carried with it a culturally valuable pedigree. Through these relics, bodies of the buddha, Eison could associate his teachings and praxis with people and places who were, often, otherwise physically and temporally unaccessible to him—from abroad as well as Japan. The physicality of these objects made these places and people present, both abstractly and concretely, in a way that texts could not.

In one such example, in the 4th month of Kenji 2 (1276) the retired tennō (or, *in* 院) Kameyama 亀山天皇 (r. 1260–1274) invited Eison to the imperial palace. To encourage Eison to give a Dharma talk, he gifted Eison five Buddha relics, each of noteworthy provenance. According to the record of this event, the first of these relics was retrieved from the mythical Dragon Palace (*ryūgū* 龍宮) by Fujiwara Hidesato 藤原秀郷 (10th c.).[298] The second relic was

[298] For biographical information on Fujiwara no Hidesato, see *Japan Encyclopedia* 2002, 202.

brought back from Tang China by Kūkai, then placed into Tōji. The third relic was a Tōshōdaiji relic that Ganjin obtained in Tang. And, the remaining two relics were presumably from the superintendent South Indian-scholar monk Bodhisena (*Baramon sōjō* 婆羅門僧正, 704–760).[299] Inheriting these relics from the retired tennō allowed Eison to link himself, through his writing as well as his possession of these relics, to some of the great Heian era figures accredited with bringing relic rituals to the Japanese court from the continent.[300]

In Bun'ei 7 (1271), Eison constructed a five-foot-tall pagoda into which he placed five more relics that Ganjin had brought back from Tang. Eison had received these relics from Horikawa Gosho 堀川御所 (i.e., Horikawa's palace), as noted in the *Hokkeji shari engi*:

> In the 3rd month, [Eison] lectured on the *Brahmajāla Sūtra* (Jp. *Bosatsu-kai-kyō*; lit., "Bodhisattva Precept Sutra") at Kyōkōji.[301] He then had a five-foot [lit., five *shaku*] tall golden pagoda as well as lapis lazuli jeweled vases constructed. Into the [vases] he put

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[299] Bodhisena came to Japan in 736. Following the monk Gyōgi's 行基 (668–749) recommendation, he presided over the eye-opening ceremony of the Great Buddha 大仏 of Tōdaiji 東大寺 in 752. Gyōgi also helped with the building of the great Vairocana (*Dainichi Nyorai* 大日如來) statue at Tōdaiji, and he was later appointed the temple's supreme priest (*daisōjō* 大僧正). See, Buswell and Lopez 2013, 340; Keene and Tanabe, et al. 2010.

[300] The pedigree of Kūkai's relics are explained in part in the 10th scroll, *Datohō kesshō matsu* 駄都法決鈔末, of the late Kamakura era text *Hishōkuketsu* 秘鈔口決, by Kakuzei 覚済 (1227–1303). The specific lineage mentioned above is from a passage entitled *On the Matter of Lineage Transmission of Cintāmaṇi* (*Hōju shōjō no koto* 宝珠相承事), explaining that: "The Iron *Stūpa* [of Southern India] was transmitted from master to disciple. In other words, [from] Dainichi to Kongōsatta (Vajrasattva), to Ryūmyō, to Ryūchi, to Kongō-chi, to Keika, and [finally] to Kūkai [lit., Kōbō]. It is profoundly secret, it is profoundly secret. The Buddhist relics were transmitted in this way." 然鉄塔相伝也。即大日。金薩。龍猛。龍智。金智。不空。恵果。弘法也。最秘最秘。仏舎利相承如此。See *Datohō kesshō matsu* 駄都法決鈔末.

[301] Kyōkōji is in modern-day Osaka.

five Buddha relics that Ganjin had brought back, which had been bestowed upon [Eison] by Horikawa Gosho.[302] These relics were used to permanently protect the temple.[303]

三月。 講菩薩戒經於教興寺。又命造立五尺金塔及瑠璃寶瓶。而安置於曾自掘川御所所賜之鑒真將來佛舍利五粒。以永為寺鎮矣。

This passage focuses primarily on the erection of the golden *stūpa* and the jeweled vases placed into it. This is similar to an earlier passage in the *Hokkeji shari engi*, in which the nuns place their magically appearing relics into lapis lazuli vessels. In this case, however, these relics did not magically appear, rather they were gifted to Eison by Horikawa Gosho. These relics had not appeared in Japan, rather they had been transmitted from China by Ganjin. In this way, Eison is drawing on the relic faith of Ganjin, and building on the authenticity of these relics and their lineage, much as he did with the Five Vases.

The following year, in 1272, the ailing Kameyama tennō asked Eison to visit the court to preform a relic ceremony on Kameyama's behalf. The tennō had contracted a minor illness, according to the *Daijō nyūdō shōbatsubun* 大乗入道章跋文. Complying with the tennō's wishes, Eison decorated the altar of a *stūpa*, placed a relic at its center and made offerings on behalf of Kameyama:

On the 7th day in the beginning of the 8th year of the sixty-year cycle, when Eison was seventy-one years old, he preformed a prayer tablet rite. Up to now, the tennō had deterred changing the designation of the imperial reign for upward of thirty years. He had always practiced the bodhisattva precepts and had never been indolent. Presently, he had

[302] It was actually the daughter of Konoe Motomichi 近衛 基通 (1160–1233) who summoned Eison to the palace, Hosokawa Ryōichi explains. She called him to her dwelling place in Kitakōjike 北小路家 Horikawa-den 堀川殿. Here, she gave him the relics that she possessed, believed to be relics that Ganjin had brought back from China. See: Hosokawa 1999, 327, Note 8.

[303] *Hokkeji shari engi*, 162.

> contracted a minor illness, so he ordered a disciple to practice on his behalf. For this reason, in the 2nd month, [Eison] again decorated the altar inside of a *stūpa* and placed a relic at its center. Then, he diligently performed the rite and made offerings. On the final day, after he had completed the seven days and seven nights [of the rite] relics suddenly appeared, like jewels, on the altar. There were over four thousand of them. [Eison] found this miraculous. He placed these treasures into bottles in order to protect the precious [objects].[304]
>
> 八年辛未 。菩薩七十一歳。年始七個日。祝禱行法。自延應改元。以至今歳。三十餘年。菩薩自必修之。未嘗懈焉。今茲偶嬰微恙。令徒修之。故二月再飾壇場於塔中。安置舍利於中央。勤修行法。奉供養之。七晝夜既滿之日。設利羅如珠者。忽現于壇上。亡慮四千餘顆。菩薩奇之。貯以寶缾。為鎮刹之珍矣。

Similar to earlier stories in the *Hokkeji shari engi*, relics suddenly appeared in front of Eison in the thousands, multiplying from a single relic. Unlike in the case of the Hokkeji relics, however, the magical materialization of relics occurred during a ritual that Eison performed to call forth the relics. This incident is distinct. These relics did not manifest of their own will. Eison, rather, called them forth. Although Eison was given various important relics throughout the years, it seems that his ability to call forth thousands of relics was a ritual power that he developed later in life. Perhaps, one could even attribute this change in his relationship with relics to the relationship that he built with the Hokkeji nuns, including his proximity to them and their magically manifesting relics. From this, Eison seemed to have gained a more mature ability to call forth relics, which, in turn, allowed him to pray for the tennō and offer him solace, as exemplified through the appearance of this vast number of relics. It is noteworthy that this is an ability, or, rather, a skill, that he did not have before his liaison with the Hokkeji nuns, their nunnery and relics. Accordingly, we see that relic worship became more and more important to

[304] Translation by author from the *Hokkeji shari engi*, 163.

Eison over his lifetime, and, in tandem, his ability to make relics self-manifest seemed to become stronger.

Eison's Death-Story and Relics

Eison's relationship to relics culminated with his death story. A few days after visiting Kairyūōji, where he had placed Hokkeji relics into the new golden pagoda, Eison started to show signs of a minor illness. Thereafter, he refused to eat, wanting, he said, to rid himself of "this polluted body" (i.e., of the thirty-two loathsome constituent parts of the body). He grew weaker and weaker.[305] His health rapidly deteriorated. Hearing of his fragile state, monks, officials, and laymen came in droves to visit him. They kept him company day and night, and, according to the *Kairyūōji shari kibun*, he received each of them without weariness.[306] By the 14th day of the month, the retired tennō Go-Uda 後宇多院 (r. 1274–1287) issued an imperial edict for the former Akio of Hōki 親顯 伯耆 (Earl of Akio) to visit the master. Seven days later, Kameyama

[305] Eison's desire to rid himself of the body is based on the Buddhist view that the body consists of only hair, nails, teeth, spleen, stomach, feces, bile, phlegm, pus blood, sweat, fat, saliva, urine and other loathsome things. The body is a polluted thing made up of unattractive constituents.

[306] Here, the text lists a number of Eison's disciples as well as attendants, who came to show their respects to the master. See, *Kairyūōji shari kibun*, 196.

tennō, who had bestowed great affection upon Eison over the years, sent doctors, along with politicians, to examine the master's illness.[307]

By the 23rd of the month, Eison's end was near. The retainer of Gokoku'in 護國院 performed a lecture on the *Lotus Sutra*'s "Chapter on the Longevity of the Tathāgata"[308] on behalf of Eison's soul. This chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* focuses on the historical Buddha's *parinirvāṇa* (i.e., *nirvāṇa* without remainder). It explains that the Buddha did not die, he merely left this world. Performing this chapter on behalf of Eison implies that he too will take a similar route. Following this lecture on the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*, the monks crowded Gokoku'in's Four Kings Hall (*Shiō'dō* 四王堂) to listen to a second lecture, this time on the *Golden Light Sutra* (Skt. *Suvarṇaprabhāsa sūtra*; Jp. *Konkōmyō-kyō* 金光明経). They then prayed for Eison's recovery in front of the central icon.

The following day, Eison's body was washed, his hair was cleaned, and he was given fresh robes in preparation for the next world. That morning, he performed the *Six Kinds of Mindfulness Rite* (Skt. *ṣaḍ anusmṛtayaḥ*; Jp. *rokunenbō* 六念法) and so on, as usual.[309] Then just after his morning meal, he passed into *nirvāṇa*, as explained in the *Kairyūōji shari kibun*:

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[307] He sent, for instance, the *Shōben* of the Right (*ushōben* 右少弁) and Fujiwara Mitsuyasu 藤原光泰 (b. 1254). Kameyama and Eison had a close relationship. According to the *Kanjin gakushōki*, Eison became the precept teacher of Kameyama in 1279, when the monk was seventy-nine years old. Kameyama also bestowed great affection on Eison over the years. Before asking Eison to become his teacher, for instance, Kameyama had called on him to perform rites on his behalf and had requested Eison to attend to his father, Gosaga tennō 後嵯峨天皇 (1220–1272). See: *Bonmōkyō koshakuki bugyō monshū kankō batsubun* 170.

[308] See, Burton 1993.

[309] On this rite, see, for instance, *Maka shikan* 摩訶止觀 T 1911.46.129c27.

> After breakfast, he sat in lotus posture and entered into meditation. At this time, purple clouds arose above the temple. Laymen and monks alike panicked and rushed to the temple. When they heard that the bodhisattva [Eison] was passing into *nirvāṇa*, they were surprised and praised this as marvelous. They put their hands together at their foreheads in reverence and chanted to the buddha Eison.[310]
>
> 齋罷跏趺入觀。時有紫雲現于寺上。道俗見者慌忙奔至。聞菩薩將示寂。始駭然稱異。合掌加額。唱南無思圓佛。

This passage illustrates that Eison was believed to be an enlightened being. Rather than dying a human death, he entered into a state of deep meditation. This is further attested to by the purple clouds that appeared above the temple—marking this as an auspicious event.[311] The monks who came to see Eison "pass into *nirvāṇa*," as the text explains, praised this as marvelous and prayed in reverence. This is narrated much like the Buddha's death story. When the Buddha passed into *parinirvāṇa*, the sentient beings closest to him did not cry. They understood—as is explained in the "Chapter on the Longevity of the Tathāgata" in the *Lotus Sutra*—that he had not died, rather, he had simply left the present world (*gense* 現世). This is depicted in hanging scrolls of the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*, such as the fourteenth century "Death of the Historical Buddha" (*Nehanzu* 涅槃図) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York (Fig. 20).

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[310] Shien 思圓, or Shien 思円, are names for Eison. *Shien butsu* 思圓佛 refers to Eison as a buddha. This is based on my own translation from *Kairyūōji shari kibun* 197.

[311] The belief in miraculous colors and clouds appearing after an auspicious death, can also be seen in Tibetan practices as well, albeit in the case of rainbows. According to the biography of the fourth Dagyab Lama, if a rainbow appears after a person's death, this is a sign that the person has obtained the first phase of *sādhana* (or, meditation practice). While if relics are found in the ashes, then the person has attained the stage above this—the final stage of completion (*saṃprajanya-krama*). Bernard 1988, 37. This belief in a miraculous occurrence in the sky used to confirm the authenticity of an event and the primacy of an experience, is often denoted in Christian writings, as well. Examples include the appearance of a star in the sky, as seen in Bethlehem, Qalat Seman in Syria, and elsewhere (Hahn 1997, 1085).

Fig. 20. Death of the Historical Buddha (*Nehanzu* 涅槃図). Kamakura era (14th c). Hanging scroll. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.

In this *Nehanzu*, literally "Nirvana Illustration," the monks and bodhisattvas closest to the Buddha are praying in reverence or offering alms to the Buddha. The further out one's eye moves from the Buddha, the more anguished and grief stricken the levels of sentient beings (humans, animals, guardian deities, and so on) become. There are animals squirming on their backs in anguish at the Buddha's passing. The grief of the people, animals, and deities in these outer layers, as well as their physical distance from the Buddha, reflect their remoteness from enlightenment and their misunderstanding of what is transpiring. The Buddha is not dead. There

is no death to grieve. Rather, he is leaving the muck of this world and entering *nirvāṇa*. The *Nehanzu* shows that those who understand this truth are not grief stricken. Rather, they are calm and composed.

Interestingly, Eison is also referred to as a buddha (*Shien buddha* 思圓佛) in this passage of the *Kanjin gakushōki*. He is presented in a similar fashion. People come to pray in awe after his passing, they do not treat it as a normal death. On the contrary, he is an enlightened being, who has passed from our human world to the ultimate goal, *nirvāṇa*. This is further reinforced by the miraculous events that occur on his cremation day. A passage in the *Saidaiji Eison shōnin senge no ki heitan dokuki* 西大寺叡尊上人遷化之記并嘆徳記 (hereafter, *Saidaiji Eison shōnin*) explains that although Eison's death ceremony was performed on a clear and cloudless day, similar to the day on which he died, the people of Nanto discerned that purple clouds appeared to the west of Saidaiji (i.e., in the direction of the Western Pure Land).[312] A soft spring wind blew.[313] Three days after Eison's passing, the *Saidaiji Eison shonin* notes that his body looked as if alive. He had looked weak and ill at the end of life, yet now his face was full and fresh. Music was heard. Auspicious flowers appeared. These all denote that Eison had died a proper death, and, more importantly, that Eison's body was incorruptible (Nakao 2001, 149). He was an enlightened being.

After Eison's cremation, it rained. The monks started to collect his bones, but the bones suddenly changed into the five colors and *shari* miraculously appeared (Nakao 2001, 133–135).

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[312] This document is acknowledged as Saidaiji's record of Eison's death. See Hosokawa and Sango 2002–2003, 201.

[313] Hosokawa describes the funeral in detail, during which twenty-two of Eison's disciples carried the palanquin holding his body. They departed from the western clerical quarters of Saidaiji, ending at a crematory to the west of Imonoike pond. Hosokawa and Sango 2002–2003, 201.

Above the pile of cremation ash, bloomed red flowers, which, then shriveled away. As the monks collected the bones, auspicious flowers again manifested and a sweet fragrance enveloped the area. A nun present reported a faint rain, perhaps a Dharma shower of sweet nectar (Nakao 2001). Such stories about Eison's cremation exemplify that he was believed to be an enlightened master, or, at least, he was presented this way after his death. Such narratives of miraculous manifestations can also be read as narratives of power. They are, as Raoul Birnbaum explains, "assertions that the place and persons are highlighted precisely because they are powerful, however humble they otherwise might appear" (Birnbaum 2004, 196).[314] These supernatural phenomena create a certain vocabulary of power, they testify to the presence of the inherent power of an extraordinary individual (Birnbaum 2004, 196).

By nature of recording these miracle narratives, whether real or not, the authors, Eison's disciples, sought to show that Eison was an enlightened saint. He had entered into a deep state of meditation, attested to by both the peacefulness of his face and the miracles that ensued. His death was not human. After three days, his body had failed to decay, a symbol of his victory over the corrupting body.[315] Similar to the Buddha's cremation, Eison's *shari* were reportedly found in his cremation ash. In life and death, Eison was presented as an enlightened being—as a bodhisattva, and, later, as a buddha. His faith in the Buddha's relics, and their constant proximity to his person, are central to the persona that he sought to construct, and to the posthumous image that continued to be constructed on his behalf.

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[314] Birnbaum describes this in regards to spectacular manifestations of light in the Wutai Mountains 五台山 (Jp. *Godaisan*) of China, he then expands his discussion to explain the presence of sudden fragrances, invisible bells and chimes, radiant lights, and so on in Buddhist stories. See Birnbaum 2004.

[315] On the incorruptible female body, see Bynum 1987, 211.

Even in his moment of death, true (*shōshin* 正真) relics appeared, and Eison's bones changed into the five colors—the same five colors seen in the Five Vases.[316] In this case, however, Eison's relics were enshrined in the Buddha Hall (*butsudō* 仏堂) and some of his bones were placed, Nakao explains, into white treasure bottles (Nakao 2001). The relics were treated like precious objects, much like the relics that Eison had enshrined from Hokkeji and other temples, during his lifetime. These were the relics that he had placed into temple halls, miniature *stūpa*, or treasure bottles (e.g., the lapis lazuli bottles mentioned in the *Hokkeji shari engi*). The rest of Eison's bones were buried at his cremation site, over which was erected a five-ringed *stūpa* (*gorintō*), a common grave marker. It seems, herein, that relic worship was invaluable to Eison both during his life and after.

Relics and their reliquaries, of which the Five Vases are just one example, contributed to the self-narrative that Eison worked, quite skillfully, to construct. His possession of various important relics helped to contribute to Eison's persona as a figure closely tied to the workings of the state, but who also cared greatly, "with the benevolence of a bodhisattva," about the salvation of the local people, male and female, as well as the rich and the poor. Eison exerted his life-energy to revive what he saw to be the Buddha's correct teachings. Just as he presented himself as a bodhisattva in life, he presented himself as a buddha in death. Procuring and collecting relics from various temples, shrines, male and female courtiers, as well as from numerous tennō, seemed to bolster his claim to these possessions. His close relationship to Hokkeji, to the

[316] Some arguments have been made for the enshrinement of relics as a "second burial," which emphasize purity, regeneration and permanence, rather than pollution (Bloch and Parry 1982, 11). In a later instance, as seen in the case of Zen funerals in the Tokugawa period 徳川時代 (1603–1867), Dunkan Williams explains that the body is "purified through the ritual intercession of the living, which transformed the polluted body into a venerated ancestor" (Williams 2008, 230; Williams 2009, 47).

princess Muromachi'nyo'in, and to Kasuga helped him in his mission, as well. Such relationships allowed him to construct a place in religious history—a place that the Five Vases can be seen to physically epitomize through what is literally the body of the buddha.

VI. Concluding Notes

This chapter has sought to illustrate that relic theft—and the use of relics to assert legitimacy—was prominent across the medieval world, including in Japan. Eison in particular used relics to confer authority upon his tradition. His writings are replete with references to relics, and his ability to summon relics grew over his lifetime. Although the Hokkeji nuns likely had more relics than Eison in the beginning of his interactions with the nuns, he benefited from their magical relics and through this was able to both assert authority over some of the nuns' relics, through the Five Vases, as well as to multiply his own relics.

Overall, the Five Vases can be read as an encapsulation of the complexity of Eison's relic faith and of the sacred geography that the vases allowed him to construct, both symbolically and literally. The vases contain relics from various places and people from Eison's lifetime and demonstrate the complexity of his relationships and networks in the Nanto region in relation to his tradition and relic worship. He obtained these relics from people of diverse backgrounds, deities, as well as a variety of sites over many years. Yet, the vases form the illusion that these relics are compressed into one visual space—a single reliquary set. The stability of this, its "rhetoric of sanctity," joins the past with the present, and, thus, offers an illusion that nothing throughout time has changed (Hahn 1997, 1105).[317] The diverse origins of these relics can also

[317] I have borrowed this idea from Hahn's explanation of the paradox that issues from the very nature of holy places. Hahn 1997.

be read as a compression of space. They are from an amalgamation of sites that make up Eison's relic faith and illustrate the reaches of his teachings across Nanto.

In this chapter, I have presented an image of the sacred landscape that Eison created through the Five Vases and raised the question, where did Eison get all of these relics? Were they borrowed or, perhaps, even stolen? Part of this chapter is focused on the significance of the relics in the central vase, the five-hundred Hokkeji relics, which make a full circle to some of the questions asked in Chapter One. This chapter, Chapter Two, has also presented a detailed study of the Five Vases, which have hitherto been unaddressed in English language scholarship. Nevertheless, the questions raised in this chapter warrant further scholarship. In these pages, I have sought to sketch out some of the reasons why the vases were constructed on behalf of Saidaiji, as well as Eison's relationship to the vases, their Flaming Jewel Reliquaries, and the relics that they contain. Other themes from this chapter include sacred theft, the symbolic function of the transfer of relics, how Eison obtained various relics, and how he used his own spiritual powers to call back given relics. These stories illustrate more widespread beliefs around relics, their original sites, origin tales, gender dynamics, and cultural values.

In a word, this chapter has explored how the Five Vases played into the narrative of Eison's life, the tradition and image that he sought, and successfully did, construct, and the landscape within which this all existed, concretely and abstractly. As a microcosm of a larger landscape, with distinct and varied characteristics, the vases encapsulate a series of networks. They condense a motley of geographies into one, by means of the architectural space of a single reliquary set.[318] The stories that these reliquaries tell—as objects, when looked at alongside texts

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[318] I have borrowed some of this wording from Hahn (Hahn 1997).

—as well as the questions around the significance of the reliquaries, contribute to our knowledge of Eison's teachings, social standing, and faith, through the texts and objects that he commissioned and employed on behalf of his tradition. In the instance of the Five Vases, as well as the Four-Sided Relic Cabinet, we see that relic worship at this time was less sectarian than scholars have often assumed. Both of these iconographically complex reliquaries combine relic worship from various temples and shrines. They display iconography and contain relics from a variety of teachings. This collage-like-amalgamation of sites, relics, and iconography combined within a single reliquary set further communicates the consequence of relic exchange, relic networks, and even the theft of relics in medieval Japan.

With this in mind, let us build now on Eison's brand of relic worship, and look at how this influenced other temples in Nanto. In the following chapter, Murōji will provide an interesting example of how this style of relic worship and reliquary making influenced the relic faith on this mountain in the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries, but, also, how this mountain had its own style of relic worship that was distinct to this site and the narratives that were embedded within its landscape, those of dragons, jewels, and relic theft.

Muroji: Perched on a Sacred Mountain of Jewels

Focusing on Murōji, this chapter takes as its main point of inquiry the reliquaries of Murōji, in relationship to the landscape of and myth making at this site. In the following pages, we will start to contextualize the reliquaries from Japan's medieval period that depict the site's landscape as well as the reliquaries commissioned for the temple, through related texts and manuscripts. These reliquaries date from the twelfth through fourteenth century, and, due to the paucity of extant reliquaries from Mount Murō, a few examples span into the fifteenth century, as well. As the third, and last, section of this dissertation this chapter spans a slightly later period. Central to my inquiry in the following pages are the questions: How can we understand the Murōji reliquaries? What are these reliquaries visually depicting, and what are the stories behind them? And, what can these objects—and their related texts—tell us about relic worship and sacred theft (i.e., *futra sacra*) on the mountain in the medieval period?

The history of the temple, its architecture, and statuary are of less interest in this study. These have already been written about extensively in Japanese scholarship.[319] While in North American scholarship, Sherry Fowler has published a handful of well-regarded writings on the temple's art and dragon caves.[320] For instance, in her book *Muroji: Rearranging Art and History at a Japanese Buddhist Temple*, Fowler traces the history of Murōji through the temple's art and architecture, explaining how the temple changed religious affiliations over the centuries; the rebuilding of the temple; and, the statuary in the temple's Golden Hall 金堂. Continuing along

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[319] For instance, on the art history of the temple see, Ōta Hirotarō et al. 1976. On its architecture, see Fukuyama 1935. As for a historical study on the temple see, for instance, Tsuji 1957, 1970, and 1979. Also, see, for instance, Washizuka 1991. On the statues in the temple's Golden Hall, see Kanamori, 1939.

[320] As Fowler points out there are several dragon caves in the Murō area with distinct names, but it is unclear if there are several dragons in these caves, or just one, because Japanese language rarely uses the plural form. Fowler 2005, 213, note 4.

the path that Fowler has foraged, my study focuses, like other chapters of this dissertation, on relics and relic worship, through the medium of reliquaries and texts, at this site. Rather than looking at the temple's architecture or statuary, on which there is already a vast landscape of scholarship, this study endeavors to reveal what texts and objects can tell us about relic worship at Murōji. There is very little published in English or Japanese scholarship that looks specifically at relic worship at this site.

To such an end, this chapter examines myth making, dragon worship, and theft stories in relation to Mount Murō as well as its temple, Murōji, in regards to relics and beliefs around relics in Japan's middle period. It presents an understanding, or, rather, a few understandings, of the cosmology of the landscape as well as the narratives that lay under its skin in relation to relic and wish-granting-jewel (Jp. *manihōju* 摩尼宝珠; Skt. *cintāmaṇi*) worship—concepts that became synonymous in the Heian period.[321] The topography of the mountainous landscape, which later came to be seen as a Mount Kōya 高野山 for women, has long been regarded as sacred, as seen in old maps of the mountain and its surrounding area, believed to form the shape of several dragons (Fig. 21).[322]

Sitting among a group of inactive volcanos, Mount Murō consists of eight peaks, central to which is Shōjin Peak 精進峰—the peak on which many Buddhist stories and histories about

[321] There are many ways to refer to *cintāmaṇi* in Japanese texts, from *nyoihōju* 如意宝珠 to *manihōju* 摩尼宝珠. For simplification, and to appeal to scholars outside of Japanese studies, I prefer to use the Sanskrit word *cintāmaṇi*.

[322] On the history of Murō-san as a Kōya-san for women, see, for example, Fowler. Sherry Fowler traces the history of the mountain's association with women—and the notion that women were welcome on this mountain and not Mount Kōya—to before the eighteenth century. Fowler 1997, 63–64; *Nihon Bukkyō shi jiten* 1999, 1010. On visual materials related to this mountain as a "Kōya san for women," see Tokyo National Museum 1999. Regarding the history and belief systems around this map of the mountain, see Sasaki 2015, 187.

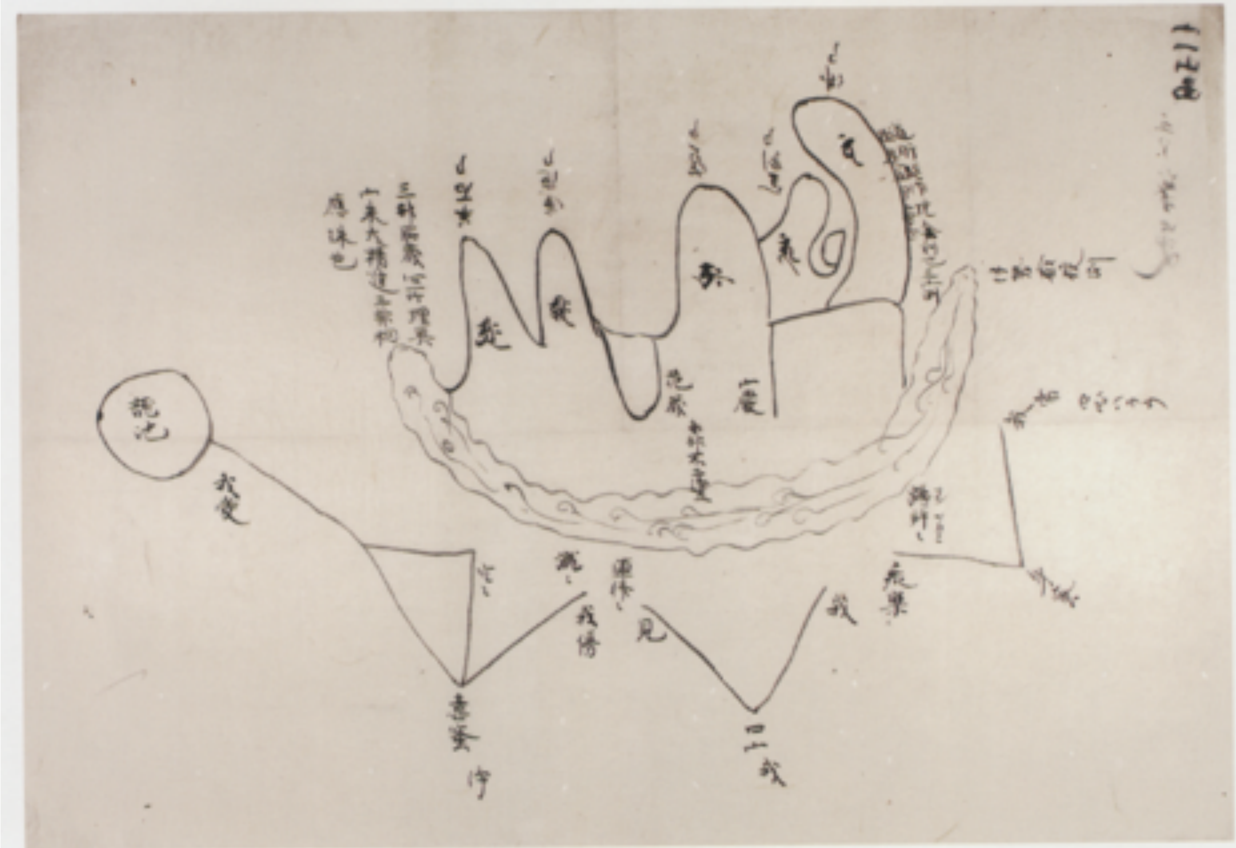

Fig. 21: Map of Mount Murō and the surrounding topography.
The peaks form the shape of dragons. Ink on paper. Kamakura era (14th c).
From Shōmyōji, in Kanazawa. Height 28.2 cm, width 41.2 cm.

the mountain are based (Fowler 1997, 10). The mountain has had a connection to dragons and rainmaking, and thus, to relics, since at least the ninth century.[323] Moving into the Kamakura period, as this landscape and the stories behind it were influenced by this period's relic worship, the myths and the beliefs around the Mount Murō relics developed and changed—a trend reflected in the Mount Murō reliquaries from this time.

As discussed in Chapter Two, relics often carry a story, or multiple stories, and when a relic is enshrined for veneration, these stories become more prominent (Collins 1998, 241). As material objects, they bring to mind, and invite reflection upon, an entire narrative that is upheld and recognized by a certain community (Strong 2004, 7). In this sense, a single relic, or a story around a relic, can evoke various pasts, real or fictional, associated with a given relic and its site of origin—in this case, Murōji. By studying the relics and reliquaries of Murōji, we can reflect on the histories, myths, and communal beliefs around these relics and the narratives that they embody. It was through their mobility and worship that these relics and their stories disseminated Murōji relic faith, bringing the legacy of such legends, and their power, to whomever worshipped them (Brown 1981). In the following pages, I argue that these reliquaries embody various understandings of Murōji relic worship, which allowed the myths of these relics and their reliquaries to be further propagated and to take on new meaning (Strong 2004). Before delving into such mythical stories, let us briefly examine the institutional history of this temple.

[323] Both the *Nihon kiryaku* 日本紀略 and the *Kojidan* 古事談 mention monks entering the mountain's dragon caves to pray for rainfall. This is also explained in the *Kakuzenshō* 覚禅鈔, a thirteenth century text, by the eminent Shingon monk Kakuzen 覚禅 (1143–c. 1213).

A Brief Institutional History

Today, Murōji follows Shingon teachings. It was, however, first created as a sub-temple of Kōfukuji, the great Fujiwara clan temple that, along with Kasuga, forms a shrine-temple complex. Murōji maintained its status as a Kōfukuji sub-temple until the end of the seventeenth century.[324] Until this time, and for over four-hundred years, Kōfukuji monks took annual summer retreats to the mountain to pray for the security of the realm (Fowler 2005, 63). Over the centuries, Murōji maintained its links to the Kōfukuji-Kasuga complex, and, along with this, Buddhist and Shinto syncretic (i.e., *honji suijaku*) practices have long been practiced at this site.[325] For example, one explanation scholars have offered for the five sculptures of buddhas and bodhisattvas at Murōji is that they may be the *honji*, the original form, of the Kasuga kami.[326] As the centuries pealed away, Murōji witnessed various Buddhist affiliations from Hossō 法相 to Shingon, as a plurality of religious praxis were implemented on the mountain (Fowler 2005, 3).[327]

This plurality of teachings was, as scholars have shown, not uncommon at premodern temples. Owing to the plethora of materials on Murōji, especially in relation to relic worship, this site is a particularly useful case for studying the non-sectarian nature of relic worship that existed hereabouts—like at many Nanto temples and shrines from this period—a concept that we began

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[324] Fowler explains how the temple was released from this rank in 1698. Fowler 2005, 65.

[325] This term is often used to refer to a theory in which kami are treated as incarnations of Buddhist deities. Here, I use this term, however, to emphasize that there was not a strict separation of Buddhist and Shinto beliefs before the early Meiji period, as many modern scholars have shown. See for example, Tyler 1989, 227.

[326] Although the current statues in the temple's Main Hall might have been moved and renamed over the years, they are currently understood to be Śākyamuni, Yakushi 薬師, Jizō, Eleven-headed-Kannon, and Monju. See, for instance, Fowler 2001.

[327] The temple was declared Shingon in 1700 and maintains this affiliation today.

to address in Chapter Two. Accordingly, this chapter will look at relic worship on Mount Murō briefly in relation to its sacred geography, then use this as a framework to examine: dragon worship (including dragon *maṇḍala* and dragon related relic cabinets) and myth making in regards to Kūkai and relics. Let us turn now to the framework for this chapter: the sacred geography of the mountain space.

I. Framework: The Sacred Geography of Localities

Before delving into our materials, we should note that much of this chapter examines the mountain of Murō in tandem with its temple. The temple is much indebted to the mountain on which it was built and numerous stories, which came to include the temple, focus primarily on the mountain. Thus, I confine my discussion to texts and visual materials related to relic worship at both, as the two are often interchangeable.

Accordingly, we will examine the characteristics that form what Cynthia Hahn has called the "visual rhetoric of sanctity" that is compressed in a given sacred space (Hahn 1997, 1079). As Hahn explains, in the medieval Christian context, certain spaces were constructed through a group of saints that created "a sacred geography of localities on earth" (Hahn 1997, 1081); while, in our discussion, relics (i.e., bodies of the Buddha) contribute directly to the sacred geography of Mount Murō. That is, their meaning at this site is unique in regards to specific beliefs, stories, and histories that are compressed into a specific space. As seen in the above map (Figure 21), this mountainous geography was long considered sacred before relics were buried at this location and, likely, precisely, because of this sacred nature, relics were interred here. The presence of relics hereabouts, thus, further confirms the sacred nature of the landscape. It was, as we will see,

through this sacred topography that worshippers could interact with the Murōji relics: praying to them, stealing them, or receiving them through sacred transmission. The landscape facilitated the worshipper's proximity to, and interaction with, the relics, it also allowed for the transmission of relics and the passing down of their legends.

These relics were generally worshiped inside their stone pagoda on the mountain. Through their presence within this specific geography, they "invited intimacy" and "proximity" in a way that necessitated them being close to the worshipper (Hahn 1997, 1081). In this way, the relics, through their stories and the visual rhetoric of sanctity, attracted pilgrims to the mountain. There was a need for the body of the worshipper to be close to that of the Buddha (i.e., the relic). Kieshnick explains that relics, like sacred icons, "allowed the ordinary person to experience Buddhism in a manner that was at once powerful and intimate," they "rendered the religious tangible and proximate" (Kieshnick 2003, 24). Such rhetoric was discursively put forward through architecture and space, making the relics of a specific site, such as Mount Murō, more valuable through their existence at this site due to the stories and narratives that fasten them to their landscape.[328] This led to various thefts of relics, because believers wanted to be close to the relics—understood as loci of the Buddha's salvific powers.

As seen in previous chapters, the ownership of relics could prove the legitimacy of a given teacher or a certain site, even, or especially, if these relics were stolen or transferred in a vision or dream. There was a desire to be close to relics both for their sacred qualities, as well as the power that they bestowed upon their possessor, allowing them to draw political or religious boundaries and assert authority, as seen in the Latin West. As we will discuss below, with smaller

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[328] I have borrowed the notion that "the rhetoric of the holy was put forward discursively, using architecture and space," from Hahn's discussion on the construction of sanctity in early medieval shrines (Hahn 1997, 1081).

reliquaries encasing Mount Murō relics, or simply depicting the mountain's landscape, the novel style of relic worship that arose during the Kamakura era allowed worshippers new access and physical proximity to relics. In this way, the body of the worshipper was closer and more intimate to the body of the Buddha, than previous styles of relic worship had often permitted. This change in relic worship was necessary in part, as we have seen in other chapters, due to the anxieties that *mappō* wreaked upon people's minds. Worshipping relics in a particular landscape, specifically a landscape in which they had been enshrined for hundreds of years, lent these objects a seemingly unchanged, salvific nature. Put differently, because the mountain seemed to remain unchanged in the communal *imaginare*, the relics enshrined here took on a similar quality. To better understand the centuries of myths attributed to this mountain and its relics, let us first look at the role dragon worship played on the mountain, and how this set the groundwork for certain relic practices and beliefs that ripened here in the medieval period.

II. Dragons and their Jewels

Due, in part, to the sacred landscape of the eight mountains and three caves, which make up the surrounding area, there have long been stories of dragon worship told about this site. Inside the mountain's caves, according to belief, dragon spirits dwell. As Fowler explains, "the landscape of Mt. Murō reveals physical evidence for the existence of the dragon in the form of several caves believed to be the openings to the abode of the powerful dragon spirit" (Fowler 1997, 148). The belief in the dragon spirit at this site, and the concept that dragons control the tides and the

rains, led to centuries of rain prayers being performed here, especially during periods of drought and famine.[329]

According to the tenth century text the *Ben'ichisan nenbun dosha sōjō* 宀一山年分度者奏状, since at least the eighth century, the mountain was used for rainmaking prayers.[330] And, by the late Heian, it was one of the most important sites for rain prayers in all of Japan.[331] Later, during periods of drought in the thirteenth century, Kōfukuji sent their monks here for summer prayer retreats (Washizuka 1991, 182; Tsuji 1979, 164; Fowler 1997, 148).[332] Rainmaking at this site, linked to the mountain's relationship to dragons, eventually led to the mountain's association with relics and wish-granting-jewels, or *cintāmaṇi* (objects that became conflated with relics in medieval Japan).[333] To better understand this, let us look more closely at dragons and the beliefs around them.

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[329] Rainfall was closely tied to annual harvest, the breadbasket for life in agrarian Japan. Although cosmological understandings of the origins of drought differ across areas, periods, and social strata, the notion that natural disasters appeared as an expression of the displeasure of the supernatural—whether that be the Heavens in the Confucian case, or the buddhas in the Buddhist case—was a commonly held belief in premodern Japan, China, and Korea. In Chosŏn Korea (1392–1897), for instance, the state developed a class of ritual codes devoted to preventing and alleviating disaster. These rituals were believed to help calm the displeasure of the gods or to appease angry spirits, believed to be the impetus for climate change and natural disasters. Interestingly, in modern-day Ladkha, just beyond the Himalaya at the northern tip of India, ice *stūpa* have been made to irrigate water into villages in the spring and summer months, providing crops water during periods of dryness. This is a new, and literal, use of the *stūpa* to bring water to fields and to allow for plentiful harvest. On Korea, see Kim 2010, and Karlsson 2007. On rainmaking and relic rituals in Japan see, Takei 1984. And, on Ladkha, see Kumar-Rao 2020.

[330] The *Ben'ichizan nenbun dosha sōjō*, completed in 937, dates the earliest rainmaking prayer offerings here to 781. See Ōta 1976.

[331] The other two sites were Kibune Shrine in Kyoto, and Niyūkawami Shrine in Nara. See, Fowler 2005, 21.

[332] According to the *Kojidan,* the Murōji Dragon King, Zentatsu Ryūō 善達竜王 (also known as, Zennyo Ryūō 善如竜王), previously dwelled in Sarusawa Pond 猿沢池 by Kasuga. After a palace attendant drowned herself in the pond, however, the dragon fled to a pond in the Kasuga hills. After someone threw yet another body into this pond, the dragon fled again to a cave on Mount Murō. See: Tyler 1990, 150.

[333] One such instance can be seen in the twelfth century Heian record *Fusō Ryakki* 扶桑略記. This text, complied by the Tendai monk Kōen 皇圓 (12th c.), tells of an eighth century Vietnamese monk named Buttetsu 仏哲 (d.u.), who visits the dragon king's palace in search of *cintamāni*.

Dragons are important creatures in Buddhist literature. Serpent-like-beings that dwell in the mountains or in bodies of water, they may have evolved from the *nāga*: a serpent with a rich history in Indian mythology.[334] *Nāga*, beings connected to rain and forces of fertility, are guardians of jewels (i.e., *cintāmaṇi*) and treasures.[335] They control the rains and the tides.[336] Because they suffer from the Five Decays (*gosui* 五衰; or, *gosui sō* 五衰相) and Three Heats (*san netsu* 三熱), and due to their level of birth in the Six Realms (*rokudō* 六道), they cannot, however, gain liberation from *saṃsāra* (i.e., the cycle of rebirth) in this lifetime.[337] They must be reborn in another life, in human form, to escape this cycle.[338] This phenomenon often leads to stories of relic theft, because possessing the Buddha's relics will help bring dragons closer to the

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[334] Monier Williams defines *nāga* as a snake, especially the spectacle-snake or cobra cappella. Or, as a fabulous serpent-demon with a human face and the tail of a serpent. See Williams 1872. On the *nāga* in Buddhism, also see Bloss 1973. On representations of *nāga* in ancient India, specifically in Madhya Pradesh, see Shaw 2004. In regards to dragons dwelling in rivers and waters, see *Shibun ritsu* 四分律 No. 1428, Vol. 3. And, Trenson 2010 and 2016.

[335] According to certain Thai Buddhist beliefs, it is the cat, not the dragon, that brings coolness and rain. Tamhiah explains that cats have been used in rainmaking rituals in rural Thailand, in which the cat is exposed to the sun, or simply washed in water. Both of these techniques are thought to attract rainfall. Tambiah 1985, 185.

[336] On the Dragon King under the sea in Chinese paintings and scriptures, see Berger and Weidner 1994.

[337] The Five Signs of Decay occur when the life of a celestial being (*tennin* 天人) is ending. Because these beings live free of afflictions, they do not have reason to try to escape *saṃsāra* (i.e., the cycle of rebirth). As a result of their past karma, they will be reborn in one of the lesser of the six realms, something that they can only understand in their last moments. The Five Decays, as noted in the *Daihan nehankyō* 大般涅槃経 (Skt. *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*) and the *Abhidharma-kośa*, include when celestial beings first experience: their robes becoming soiled (*ejō kōji* 衣裳垢膩), the flower garland on their head starts to wilt (*zujō kai* 頭上華萎), their body starts to stink (*shintai jūwai* 身体臭穢), they begin to sweat under their arms (*ekige kanru* 腋下汗流), and they lose their natural god-like-calm (*eraku bonza* 不樂本座). See Trede 2004, 33, note 21. And, DDB "*gosui* 五衰." As for the Three Heats, these are the three sufferings of a dragon or dragon-king. They included: having one's body burned by hot wind and sand, losing one's garments in the fierce winds, and being attacked by the legendary *garuḍa* bird (*Karura* 迦楼羅). See Nakamura 2002, 397; *Shibun ritsu* No. 1428, Vol. 22, and DDB "*san netsu* 三熱."

[338] The *Konjaku monogatari shū* 今昔物語集 (circa 12th c.) contains a tale of a woman consumed by lust for a handsome young monk. After he leaves her with a false promise to return, she waits for him in vain. Realizing that he has lied, she eventually dies and is reborn as a snake. Reborn in serpent form, she comes to find him and sets ablaze the temple bell under which he is hiding. Then, he too is reborn as a serpent. It is only through the power of the *Lotus Sutra* that a monk is able to free them from their serpent bodies, and to help them be reborn in the Buddhist Pure Lands. See *Konjaku monogatari shū* 14:3. For an English translation, see, Shirane 2007, 542–545.

Buddha's teachings and thus alleviate their suffering.[339] As a result, Buddhist literature across Asia is teeming with stories of dragons coveting or stealing relics.

One such story is noted in the *Thūpavaṃasa*. In this Sri Lankan narrative, the *nāga*-King, who dwells under the sea, manages to obtain the precious relics enshrined in the town of Rāmagrāma, on the banks of the Ganges.[340] According to the *Thūpavaṃasa*, these relics were washed to sea in a flood, after which the *nāga* rescued and enshrined them in their kingdom. Here, they were worshipped with copious offerings (Trainor 1992, 11). Washed away by the tides —which, as we know, are controlled by the *nāga*—this transfer was, likely, spurred by the *nāga* themselves. As the probable fountainhead for the flood, the serpents refused, once discovered, to return the relics, and the *nāga*-King even cached them in his cousin's stomach. That the relics were washed away by the Ganges can also be viewed as negligence on behalf of the monks of Rāmagrāma, raising the question, were the relics acting of their own accord, seeking out a keeper who could properly venerate them? And, if so, then had the relics, seen as the Buddha himself, been properly cared for in Rāmagrāma before this transfer took place?

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[339] This is very similar to the role that relics play for devotees, as seen in the previous chapters. The only caveat is that one can become enlightened only when born into the human realm. This is why Buddhist writings repeatedly warn practitioners to follow the Dharma now, before it is too late (i.e., before they are reborn in a new, often lesser, form). This is part of the debate around whether the Dragon Princess can be an enlightened being, since she is not human as well as female (not to mention, a child)—all of these are seen as strikes against her and signs that her past karma led her to this low rebirth. Ryuichi Abé argues, however, that this misguided belief came about due to a misreading of the Chinese Buddhist commentaries. This, in turn, led to a perverse understanding in medieval Japan, a notion which carries into the present, that women are intrinsically defiled (as seen by their "Five Obstructions"), and, thus, that women are denied Buddhahood. They must first be reborn as (or, in some cases, transform into) men. Abé affectively shows that this view did not exist in earlier texts, and that this discriminatory discourse—as seen in theories like *henjō nanshi ryūnyo jōbutsu*—seems to have been developed by monks in Japan during this time. It is further noteworthy that although this concept became mainstream, there were eminent scholar-monks who opposed this idea, like Jōkei and Dōgen. See Abé 2015.

[340] Rāmagrāma is in the Parasi District of modern-day Nepal.

Wanting to retrieve the relics, the monks entreated a teenage novice monk named Soṇuttara, who possessed the "sixfold higher knowledge" (Skt. *chalabhiñña*), to locate them.[341] This higher knowledge included the ability of supernatural sight, permitting him to see the location of the relics at all times.[342] Although the *nāga*-King had been lavishly honoring the relics under the sea, as he had hoped they would save him "from a woeful state and [to] be reborn in heaven," Soṇuttara explained to him that *nāga* cannot, because of their birth, properly worship Buddha relics (Trainor 1992, 13).[343] Failing to properly worship the relics, allotted the status of the Buddha, was tantamount to dishonoring the Buddha himself. Soṇuttara expands on this in verse, adding that the *nāga* do not, karmically, deserve the Buddha relics because of their past karma:

> "None of you, O *nāga*, has realized the truth,
> Surely it is proper to bring the relics to a place where the truth is realized.
> Tathāgatas are born for liberation from *samsāra*'s suffering,
> This was the Buddha's intent, therefore we shall take the relics."[344]

Through this verse, Soṇuttara justifies why the relics should not be guarded by the *nāga*, who have not realized the Dharma (i.e., the Buddhist teachings). In other words, the relics should not be enshrined in the Dragon Kingdom. This is similar to the stories we encountered in Chapter Two, in which the theft of relics is vindicated by the new possessor being more deserving. Rather

[341] It is said that the Buddha had predicted that this man, then a Brahman named Nanduttara, would later retrieve his relics.

[342] The sixfold higher knowledge, or the six supernatural abilities, is a type of paranormal perception that the Buddha and some of his disciples had achieved. It is equivalent to enlightenment. Trainor 1992, 12.

[343] For a painting of the *nāga* venerating the *stūpa* of Rāmagrāma, see Bautze-Picron 2018, 37.

[344] I have borrowed this translation from Trainor 1992, 13–14. Also, see Strong 2004, 167.

than discerning a value judgement around theft, if the new keeper can properly venerate the relics, than the relics belong to her. This is justified, Soṇuttara argues, by that person's (or creature's) past karmic seeds. Herein, this contributes to the belief that relics are imbued with the power to move according to their own will and that they chose their keeper; or, put differently, that relics "participate" in the act of being taken or transferred (Trainor 1992, 15; Geary 1990; Hahn 2010, 294).[345] Relics can, conversely, disappear if not properly worshipped.[346] Keeping in mind the relationship that dragons have to relics and *cintāmaṇi*, let us turn now to examine representations of dragons and relics in Buddhist art, specifically in *maṇḍala*.

III. Maṇḍalic Dragons

In both scrolls and reliquaries, dragons are often depicted approaching relics either peacefully, as guardians, or stealthy, as thieves. Many stories about dragons and relics, or *cintāmaṇi*, involve relics that were stolen, or clandestinely taken. There are, moreover, ample examples of dragons reverently worshipping relics or *cintāmaṇi* in the Dragon Palace, as well as dragons emerging from the sea or the clouds to worship *cintāmaṇi* on Vulture Peak.[347] Examples can be seen painted on hanging scrolls, lacquered on the tops of boxes, and etched into the metalwork of reliquaries.

In religious art from this period, dragons often appear in sets of two, and, iconography, they often bare resemblance to the *Manihōju maṇḍala*. One famous example of this is the

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[345] Such a concept is linked to the belief that relics are animate and enact miracles, they cause supernatural events to occur (Keishnick 2003, 25-29).

[346] Trainor explains that this is still believed in Sri Lanka today.

[347] This is a pivotal mountain in the *Lotus Sutra* and perhaps the most noteworthy mountain in Buddhist literature. The Buddha and his disciples often visited this peak, where the Buddha gave various important sermons.

Fig. 22. *Manihōju maṇḍala under sketch.* Ninnaji 仁和寺, Kyoto. Kamakura era (13th c). Unmounted. Ink on paper. Height 78.1 cm, width 46.9 cm.

Manihōju maṇḍala. One famous example of this is the *Manihōju maṇḍala illustration* (*Manihōju mandara* 摩尼宝珠曼荼羅), seen to the left, at Ninanji 仁和寺, in Kyoto—a site known for its rainmaking rites (Fig. 22).[348] This style of *maṇḍala* is typically comprised of twin dragons (*sōryū* 双竜) flying toward a triad of flaming *cintāmaṇi* enshrined in a treasure pagoda, as seen here. This particular *Manihōju maṇḍala illustration* is unique as it is an underdrawing or, alternatively, a pedantic drawing, depicting two of the Eight Great Dragon Kings (*hachi dairyūō* 八大龍王), Nanda 難陀 and Upananda 跋難陀. If ones counts the dragon heads, however, there are a total of eight dragons, accounting for the Eight Great Dragon Kings in the *Lotus Sutra*.

[348] This image is likely an instructional painting. Ninnaji is known for possessing many instructional paintings (or, iconographic drawings). Artists would have looked at such drawings as models for their own work. In a sense, didactic drawings are closer to textual sources than the finished painting, because the semifinished drawing shows handwritten notations that often carry conceptual and textual meanings meant to be conveyed to the artist. In this example, these notations include writing on the clouds, as well as on the right middle pillar, and *bonji* 梵字 (i.e., Siddhaṃ characters) on the three flaming jewels at the center of the image. None of these were obvious to the viewer after the image was complete, as seen in other versions of this *maṇḍala*. The *bonji* are especially interesting in this case, since they seem to exist in a grey space between iconographic instruction and religious significance.

Fig. 23. *Manihōju maṇḍala.* Tokyo National Museum. Kamakura era (14th c). Hanging scroll. Ink and colors on silk. Height 78.1 cm, width 46.9 cm.

Murōji also houses its own well-preserved, completed *Manihoju maṇḍala* 摩尼宝珠曼陀羅 (literally, *cintāmaṇi maṇḍala*) from the sixteenth century, which is very similar to the Tokyo National Museum *maṇḍala* depicted to the left (Fig. 23).[349] Like the underdrawing described above, these *Manihoju maṇḍala* both depict two dragons emerging from the sea, soaring toward a treasure palace, in the middle of which are enshrined three flaming jewels (i.e., *cintāmaṇi*), understood as the body of the Buddha. Again, the dragon heads total eight.[350] According to Kawada, this iconography is noted in the *Daiunkyō kiu danhō* 大雲経祈雨壇法 ("Altar Rite for Rain Prayers Using the Vast Cloud *Sūtra*"),[351] translated into Chinese by the translator-monk Fukū Kongō (i.e., Amoghavajra) in the eight century (Kawada 1980, 51).[352]

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[349] Similar examples dating to the Kamakura era can be found at the Tokyo National Museum, Hasedera 長谷寺, and Mimurotoji 三室戸寺 in Uji 宇治. For a discussion on this *maṇḍala* type, see Kawada 1980, 50.

[350] The *hachi dairyūō* include: Nanda (*Nanda*), Upananda (*Batsu nanda* 跋難陀), Sāgara (*Shagara* 沙伽羅), Vāsuki (*Washukitsu* 和修吉), Takṣaka (*Tokushaka* 德叉迦), Anavatapta (*Anabadatta* 阿那婆達多), Manasvin (*Manashi* 摩那斯), and Utpalaka (*Uhatsura* 優婆羅). For a literary reference to the *hachi dairyūō*, see, the Noh play, "the Kasuga Dragon God," or *Kasuga ryūjin* 春日竜神. See: Tyler 1992.

[351] On rain making prayers from the seventh century, see *Fayuan Zhulin* T 2122.53.269c2.

[352] Fukū Kongō (705–774) translated many *sūtra* that he had brought back from India and Sri Lanka. See, for instance, Reider 2016, 244.

Some scholars argue that this *maṇḍala* style is based on the *sūtra* entitled *Nyoihōju tenrin himitsu genshin jōbutsu kinrin juō kyō* 如意宝珠転輪秘密現身成仏金輪呪王経 (hereafter, *Nyoihōju tenrin*), also translated by Fukū. In the fourth section of the *Nyoihōju tenrin*, a two storied *cintāmaṇi* palace emerges from the sea. This is the Dragon Palace where the body of the scriptures and the Buddha (i.e., relics, or *cintāmaṇi*) are enshrined. According to this story, the Dragon King Nanda is accompanied by his brother, the rainmaker Upananda, as seen in Figure 22, while they soar outside the palace. The brothers are guarding the ancient Indian kingdom of Magadha (*Magada* 摩竭陀), ruled by the Vedic kings, as noted in the *Genealogy of Śākyamuni* (*Shaka fu* 釋迦譜). Although scholars usually attribute this *maṇḍala* type to the *Nyoihōju tenrin*, Naitō is skeptical. He argues, rather, that this text was likely a Kamakura era fabrication, used by the Tōmitsu school 唐密 to textually establish its *Nyoirin hōju* 如意輪宝珠 ritual (Naitō 2010). This would imply that the Shingon tradition at Murōji may have also used the *Manihoju maṇḍala* for such *Nyoirin hōju* rites. Although it remains difficult to date the *Nyoihōju tenrin*, this text, whether written before or after the *maṇḍala* were first made, explains the visual narrative of the *maṇḍala* as well as how they were used in these rites.

In our case, it is noteworthy that this *maṇḍala* was used at Mount Murō. Since rain prayers were performed on this mountain for centuries, this suggests that the *maṇḍala* may have been used in rainmaking rites on the mountain. In the following section, we will continue to examine this link to dragons and relics through extant Mount Murō reliquaries.

IV. Relic Cabinets, Twin Serpents, and Kūkai

If we look at reliquaries from this period, there are various examples displaying the twin dragon motif. One such case is the *Mikkan hōju gansōshari zushi* 密観宝珠嵌装舎利厨子 (hereafter, *Gansōshari zushi*) (Fig. 24). This relic cabinet (*shari zushi*), from the storehouse of Hanya-dera 般若寺 in Nara, depicts two bronze dragons flying toward a flaming *cintāmaṇi*, similar to the dragon side of the Four Sided Relic Cabinet. The *Gansōshari zushi*, which was found in the top of a thirteen-tiered *stūpa* after a sixteenth century earthquake, depicts two dragons flying toward a flaming jewel. Iconographically, this cabinet bears similarities to the *Manihoju maṇḍala* examined above. This cabinet is also similar in design, Kawada points out, to the lid of the twelfth century *Heikenō kyō* 平家納経 *sūtra* box from Itsukushima Shrine 厳島神社, in Hiroshima Prefecture: the shrine associated with the sister of the Dragon Princess (Fig. 25).[353] The inlayed bronze work on this lid depicts two thin-bodied dragons gazing up at the *gorintō* above them. The *gorintō* floats on curlicue cloud wisps. While, in the case of the *Gansōshari zushi*, the cabinet's relics are enshrined in a flaming *cintāmaṇi*, supported by a three-pronged *vajra* (*sanku sho* 三鈷杵), delicately balancing a lotus pedestal.

Kawada hypothesizes that both pieces reference the "Devadatta Chapter" (*Daibadattabon* 提婆達多品) of the *Lotus Sutra* in which the Dragon Princess, an eight year old dragon girl,

[353] This *sūtra* box was sponsored by Taira no Kiyomori 平 清盛 (1118–1181) in 1164. For an interesting study in English on this *sūtra* box, see Abé 2015. Also, see Glassman 2018.

Fig. 24. *Mikkan hōju gansōshari zushi*, at Hanyaji, Nara.
Lacquer on wood, gilt bronze, rock crystal, blue paint, and pebble-like-relic shards.
Kamakura era (13th c). Height 28.9 cm.

Fig. 25. Lid of the *Heikenō kyō sūtra* box showing two dragons.
Itsukushima Shrine, Hiroshima. Heian period (12th c).

transforms into a buddha (*ryūnyo jōbutsu* 龍女成仏).[354] Although it is difficult to prove Kawada's theory, stories about dragons (and *nāga*) often involve female sentient beings as well as jewels (which, as discussed in Chapter Two, are linked to *Prajñā*, the female bodhisattva of wisdom). Dragons are also associated with forces of fertility. This is reinforced by the dragon's ability to evoke rain, connected to (re)birth and harvest.[355]

Let us return to the belief around dragons dwelling on Mount Murō, a motif that seems to have extended to beliefs around Kūkai and the mountain, as well. One explanation that Kawada offers for the origin of this iconography of dragons emerging from the sea, or in some cases the clouds, as seen in the *Heikenō kyō* frontispiece, is a box that Kūkai brought back from Tang bearing a similar design. The lacquer work on this box, which the monk placed into Tōji, subtly depicts the head of a golden dragon emerging from the ocean waves. Whether this was the impetuous for the double dragon motif one cannot say, however, it is an interesting hypothesis that would help explain why the dragon design became so widespread in the Kamakura era—a period that drew heavily on the artistic imagery of the Heian period, especially in regards to Nanto relic worship.

Another reliquary depicting Kūkai and twin dragons is the fifteenth-century *Kuro urushi shari zushi* 黒漆舎利厨子 ("Black Lacquer Relic Shrine"), at the Fujita Museum 藤田美術館,

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[354] On the concept of *ryūnyo jōbutsu* see, for instance, Yoshida 1989. On the Dragon Princess, see Abé 2015; and, Kamens 1993. The premise of the Dragon Princess story, which has been written about elsewhere in great detail, is that the dragon girl offers up a *cintāmaṇi* to the Buddha, which he swiftly accepts. Hereafter, she transforms into a man, then a buddha. Many scholars have argued that her transformation into a man was necessary before she could become a Buddha, but Abé refutes this idea, arguing that she had already proved her attainment by offering the *cintāmaṇi* up to the Buddha, which he had confirmed by swiftly accepting the jewel. This exchange is symbolically testifies to her enlightenment. See: *Hokke-kyō* 法華経 No. 0262, Kumārajīva, Vol. 9.

[355] Outside of the connection between relics and *Prajñā-pāramitā* (i.e., the mother of all buddhas, or *butsumo* 仏母), relics are also conflated with rice grains in certain Buddhist doctrines from the medieval period. Trenson explains that rice grains were not only connected to relics or jewels, but also to religious concepts related to the reproduction of life and perpetuating the existence of living creatures. See: Trenson 2018, 270.

in Osaka (Fig. 26). This reliquary reflects the artistic style of the Southern Capital's painting atelier (i.e., the Nanto e dokoro 南都絵所), Shimizu Ken 清水 健 explains. The Nanto e dokoro was known, Shimizu expounds, for its "pure colors," "rich decorative effects," and for painting Nanto-based temple and shrine landscapes, such as Kasuga Shrine (Shimizu 2019, 242).[356] As for the cabinet itself, its first set of double doors open to the Bodhisattva Jizo 地蔵菩薩 (Skt. *Kṣitigarbha*) and the Buddha Amida 阿弥陀仏 (Skt. *Amitābha*), who both stand on white clouds as they swoop down to welcome the dying up to the Pure Lands. Upon opening the innermost doors of the relic shrine, one is greeted by paintings of the wisdom kings Aizen Myōō (Skt. *Rāgarāja*) and Fudō Myōō (Skt. *Acala*), sitting on their royal thrones.[357] With all four doors open, the inner most panel, depicting Kūkai with mountains at his back, becomes fully visible (Nara National Museum 2001, 220). Above the mountain range, one spots two supple-bodied dragons soaring agilely upward toward a golden *cintāmaṇi*.

Most scholars agree that this is Mount Murō in the background, given that the central icon is Kūkai. Herein, this can be seen as a reference to Kūkai having buried *cintāmaṇi*-relics on the mountain, as based on the *Goyuigō* 御遺告 (Shimizu 2019, 243). This could, however, other scholars have pointed out, also be the Kasuga landscape, making this Mount Mikasa. In an entry on this reliquary, in a catalogue for a Nara Museum exhibition on art from the Fujita Museum,

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[356] On the Nanto painting ateliers, see JANNUS, "Nanto-edokoro 南都絵所," accessed June 11, 2020.

[357] Specifically, the doors boast Jizo bodhisattva 地蔵菩薩 (on the viewer's right side) and Amida Nyorai 阿弥陀如来 (on the viewer's left side), while the inner doors are painted with two of the four guardian deities—Aizen (left), and Fudō (right) perched on their kingly daises. Aizen and Fudō often appear together as guardian figures on the doors of relic cabinets dating from the eleventh to twelfth century onwards. Trenson argues that there might have been a precursor to this in India. He also notes that there might have been a connection between Acala (Fudō) and the deity Takki-rāja, who was likely a precursor for Aizen. See Trenson 2018, 120. Also, see, JAANUS, "Aizen Myouou 愛染明王," accessed January 29, 2020.

Fig. 26. Black Lacquered Relic Cabinet (*Kuroshitsu sharizushi* 黒漆舎利厨子), Muromachi period (15th c). Fujita Museum, Osaka. Lacquer on wood with polychrome paint, gilt bronze, and gold leafing. Height 32.3 cm.

Shimizu goes as far as to label this relic cabinet a "Kasuga cabinet" (*Kasuga zushi* 春日厨子), further complicating the question of the cabinet's iconography (Shimizu 2019, 242). Given the shape of the mountains, and in sight of Kūkai with the dragons behind him, I argue that this landscape links the cabinet to Mount Murō. Here, I align myself with earlier publications by the Nara National Museum and the work of Kawada, which assert that this is, indeed, Mount Murō (Nara National Museum 2001, 220; Kawada 1989, 57).

On the cabinet's central panel are painted twin dragons. Although smaller in composition, they are similar in shape and form to those referenced above. They fly upwards toward a *cintāmaṇi* above the mountain peak. Their focus is not on Kūkai, who holds a five-tiered reliquary (*gorintō*) in one hand and a sword in the other, an iconography that likely comes from the *Asamayama engi shosetsu* 朝熊山縁起所説 (Shimizu 2019, 243). Nor is their focus on the Dragon King accompanying Kūkai and holding a shallow dish of three flaming *cintāmaṇi*. Depicted here in human form, the king dons the robes and hat of a Chinese court-scholar.[358] This common *Ryūō* iconography is seen in *Rain Prayer Sutra Maṇḍala* (*Shōukyō mandara* 請雨経曼荼羅), in which three dragon kings are often depicted in the foreground.[359]

This twin dragon motif, in which two dragons seem to float upward toward a relic, or *cintāmaṇi*, can be seen in various reliquaries from this period. A few instances include the Hannyaji 般若寺 Esoteric Visualization *Cintāmaṇi* Relic Cabinet (*Mikkan hōju gansōshari zushi* 密観宝珠嵌装舎利厨子), the Nōman'in Four Sided Relic Cabinet (*Shihōden sharizushi*),

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[358] *Ryūō* tends to be depicted with a snake head and human body, or just completely in human form.

[359] This second *maṇḍala* style can also be referred to as *Shōuhō mandara* 請雨法曼荼羅 (Rain Prayer Ritual *Maṇḍala*).

Fig. 27. *Mikkan hōju gansōshari zushi*, Tōji Kanchi'in storehouse, Kyoto. Muromachi era. Height 27.6 cm.

mentioned in Chapter Two, the Tōji Kanchi'in 東寺観智院 Esoteric Visualization *Cintāmaṇi* Relic Cabinet (*Mikkan hōju gansōshari zushi*) (Fig. 27), and, among others, the Fukujōjuji 福成就寺 Flaming-Jewel Relic Cabinet (*Kaen hōju gansōshari zushi* 火焔宝珠嵌装舎利厨子). In most of these examples the dragons face the central icon, understood as Dainichi Buddha. Dainichi is often represented by a triad of flaming jewels, or a five-tired *stūpa* (i.e., a *gorintō*).[360] In instances in which the central icon is a triad of jewels, twin dragons are often seen flying toward the jewels, balanced on a lotus flower.

This iconography of a triad of flaming jewels, or *cintāmaṇi*, is a motif found in the fourteenth century manuscript the *Tōchōdaiji* 東長大事 (c. 1327).[361] The *Tōchōdaiji*, said to be the oral transmission (*kuden* 口伝) of Dōjun 道順 (d. 1321), noted down by Monkan 文観 (1278–1357), is, likely, just authored by Monkan himself. This text explains the iconographical, ritual, and doctrinal meanings of the twin dragons soaring toward a central icon, as seen in the

[360] The five levels of the *gorintō* each represent one of the five elements, which comprise the samaya (s*anmaiya* 三昧耶) body of Dainichi, as well as all phenomena in the universe.

[361] A partial version of this text has been published by the Nara National Museum. See Nara National Museum 2001, 165–170.

Fig. 28. *Tōchōdaiji.* Iconographic image. Ink on paper. Late Kamakuraera (1327). Jigenji 慈眼寺, Nara.

iconographical image below (Fig. 28).[362] Taken from the "Three Deity Combinatory Rite" (*Sanzon gōgyō hō* 三尊合行法), found in earlier Chinese *sūtra*, and, later, in Japan in the *Goyuigō*, the iconographic images in the *Tōchōdaiji* explain this rite, which usually consists of one central icon and two flanking icons: either twin dragons, two Myōō (i.e., Aizen and Fudō), or sometimes all four (Dolce 2008).[363] (In the case of the Black Lacquered Relic Cabinet, we see all four, for instance.) As seen in the Tōji example above, along with Figure 28, the central icon is usually a relic or blazing wish-granting-jewel (i.e., a *gorintō*, or flaming *cintāmaṇi*). In the *Tōchōdaiji*, this can also take the form of Kūkai, or a child-Kūkai (at age five or twelve).[364]

The iconography of the ritual detailed in this text, through word and image, can be seen in other fourteenth century manuscripts. These images, and their explanations, overlap greatly with the sorts of reliquaries produced in the Nanto area in the late Kamakura and into the

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[362] The celebrated, but controversial, esoteric monk Monkan entered Saidaiji at a young age, where he served as a disciple of Shinkū of the Saidaiji lineage. Later, Monkan received esoteric Dharma transmission from Dōjun of Daigoji, and, in 1335, he became the head monk of Tōji, while simultaneously serving as the abbot of Kongōbuji on Mount Kōya. Quinter 180.

[363] This rite is found in earlier Chinese *sūtra*, such as the *Bodai shinron* 菩提心論 and *Yugikyō* 瑜祇経. On the *Yugikyō*, see for instance, Kagiwada 2015.

[364] Similarly, the *Nyoirin hōju* rite, of Daigoji sanbō'in ryū 醍醐寺三宝院流, features Fudō and Aizen as the two principle icons, with Nyoirin Kannon, or *cintāmaṇi* as the central icon. At times, this can also serve as Kūkai. See Shimizu 2019, 243.

Muromachi period, often forming rare combinations of bodhisattvas and buddhas particular to Nanto relic faith (Shimizu 2019, 243). Another version of this manuscript, entitled the *Goyuigō daishi* 御遺告大事 ("Great Matters of the *Goyuigō*"), emphasizing the rites in connection to the *Goyugō*,[365] contains an iconographic image of Kūkai at age five or six, sitting on an eight-petal lotus (Fig. 29). This motif, taken from the *Goyuigō*, Lucia Dolce explains, is similar in composition to the image of Kūkai sitting on a lotus pedestal painted on the Fujita Museum's Black Lacquered Relic Cabinet (Fig. 26; Dolce 2008).

In this cabinet, Kūkai, now a grown monk, grasps a sword, and, instead of a Dharma wheel, a five-tiered-*stūpa* rests in his left hand. In exactly the same configuration as the relic cabinet, there is a sun-disk (*nichi-rin* 日輪) and moon-disk (*gechi-rin* 月輪) above him, and, twin dragons flying upward, on swirling clouds, toward a *cintāmaṇi*.[366] According to the *Goyuigō daishi*, these three spheres—the sun, moon, and jewel—are further associated with the three types of enlightened mind (*bodaishin* 菩提心).[367] The sun-disk, specifically, is associated with the Womb World *maṇḍala* (*Taizōkai mandara* 胎蔵界曼荼羅), symbolizing the body (*shin* 身), speech (*gon* 言), and mind (*shin* 心) of Dainichi Buddha, while the moon-disk is associated with the Diamond World *maṇḍala* (*Kongōkai mandara* 金剛界曼荼羅), symbolizing the wisdom

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[365] In the last two decades, Abe Yasuro, Lucia Dolce, and Nobunaga Iyanaga have all published articles on these Monkan texts.

[366] As for the sun's disc, this is the exterior of the sun palace that belongs to the sun god—or, sun god—Sūrya (*Nichiten* 日天). The palace is said to circulate around Mt. Sumeru (or, Sumisen 須弥山), the center of the world in Buddhist cosmology. See DDB "*Nichi-rin*."

[367] This term, *bodaishin*, refers to the "awakened mind" that aims for Buddhahood. Literally, it translates as the bodhisattva heart/mind.

of Dainichi and the active aspects of the cosmos.[368] The red section of the *cintāmaṇi*, moreover, conveys the unity (*funisei* 不二性) between the practitioner and the bodhisattva intention (Dolce 2008, 61).

By connecting the practitioner and her practice to the legend of Kūkai burying *cintāmaṇi*-relics on Mount Murō (as recorded in the third article of the *Goyuigō*), the *Goyuigō daishi* is reinterpreting this legend, Lucia Dolce argues, while it is, simultaneously, also considering the efficacy and meaning of esoteric practice (Dolce 2008, 61). Iconographically, as mentioned above, this image is similar to the Black Lacquered Relic Cabinet, as is Figure 30, yet another Kūkai related image from the *Goyuigō daishi.* This iconographic image, taken from the *Tōchōdaiji*, shows Kūkai sitting on his monk's dais with dragons ascending behind him (Fig. 30). Although Mount Murō does not appear in the background, as it does with the relic cabinet, the myth of the twin dragons and *cintāmaṇi* reference Kūkai's activities on the mountain, as detailed in the *Goyuigō*.

With this in mind, if we look again at the Black Lacquered Relic Cabinet, this reliquary comes alive with references to relics, both in relation to Kūkai and to Mount Murō. Central to the cabinet is Kūkai, said to have buried relics on the mountain, and in his left hand is the five-tiered reliquary (*gorintō*) of Murōji, a reference to the reliquary deposited under Murō's stone pagoda. This is the reliquary that Chōgen's disciple, the Song monk Kūtai (b. 1149), will later smash with a hammer, in a stormy story of theft and insanity that we will discuss more below.[369] This motif of Kūkai holding a *gorintō* in his left hand, in reference to Dainichi Buddha, can be seen in other

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[368] The Diamond World *maṇḍala* can also be called the moon *maṇḍala*, or *gechirin maṇḍala* 月輪曼荼羅.

[369] For more relic cabinets depicting Kūkai, see Appendix 2.

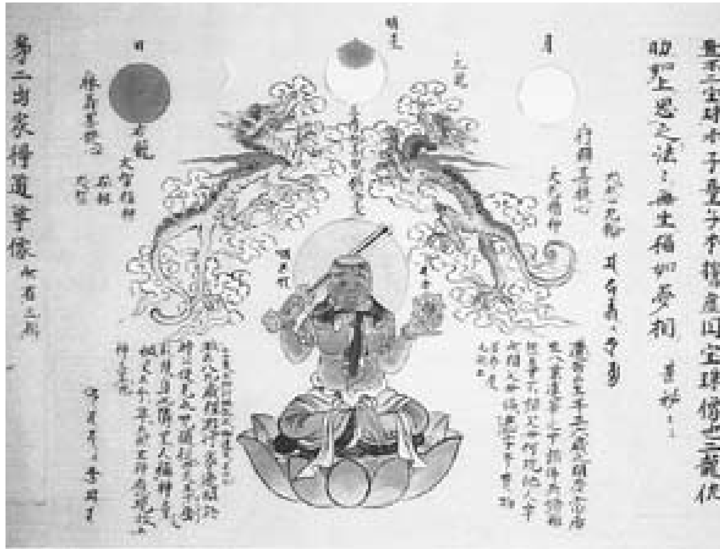

Fig. 29. Image of Kūkai as a child. From the *Goyuigō daishi.* Kamakura era (14th c).

Fig. 30. *Tōchōdaiji*. Image of Kūkai, with twin dragons soaring toward a red and white *cintāmaṇi* in background. Kamakura era (1327).

Fig. 31. *Hōtō gansō shari zushi*, private collection, black lacquer on wood, with paint. Muromachi period, 14th to 15th century.

reliquaries from this period as well, such as, the *Hōtō gansō shari zushi* 宝塔嵌装舎利厨子 (hereafter, *Hōtō gansō*), housed in a private collection (Fig. 31). Painted on the *Hōtō gansō* we find a now familiar depiction of Kūkai sitting on a lotus pedestal, from which trail golden cloud wisps, with a halo-like-sun-disk (*nichi-rin*) emanating behind him. In the center of the cabinet sits a pagoda, holding various relics. The golden turtle, carrying the pagoda on his back, mimics the Golden Turtle Pagoda (*kinki sharitō* 金亀舎利塔) at Tōshōdaiji, which dates to the twelfth

Fig. 32. Front doors of *Hōtō gansō* relic cabinet. Gold paint on wood with lacquer.

century.[370] Two gold-painted-flaming-jewels, enshrining even more relics, hover in the air above the *Hōtō gansō* turtle.[371]

As for the doors of the shrine, Nagai Hiroyuki explains that the right door can be read as the Two Worlds *maṇḍala* (*Ryōkai mandara* 両界曼荼羅), while the left door can be read as Mount Mikasa of Kasuga, with the five *honji* of the Kasuga *kami* hovering above Fudō, the wrathful Wisdom King (Nagai 2008, 57). This connection to Kasuga is further reenforced by the outer doors of the cabinet, which display two deer and layers of weeping wisteria, or *fuji* 藤 flowers, which denote the Fujiwara 藤原 family (Fig. 32).[372] As for the deer, they reference the shrine's founding myth.[373] This connection to Kasuga is interesting if we consider Shimizu's argument presented above, which would, in theory, link both this cabinet

[370] Other temples have since made Golden Turtle Pagodas, such as that of Tōdaiji constructed in 1411, and that of Hesedera made in 1842. These were modeled after the Tōshōdaiji version, which is still used in relic rites today. Nara National Museum 2001, 202.

[371] According to the thirteenth century text *Bunei kunen Kakuhibō hachi benichisan goto* 文永九年 覚日房八宀一山事, a text explaining one of the thefts of the Mount Murō relic-jewels, Kūkai's teacher, Keika 惠果 (Ch. Huiguo; 746–805), regularly transcribed the *Lotus Sutra* on behalf of his mother. With crystal ends at the tips of his scrolls, he would, it is said, place these *sūtra* transcriptions near the Golden Turtle Pagoda. The pagoda was said to enshrine 84,000 relics, viewed as an auspicious number in relic worship since this is the number of *stūpa* Aśoka was believed to have constructed across India. See *Bunei kunen Kakuhibō hachi benichisan goto*.

[372] Kasuga was the family shrine of the Fujiwara.

[373] As mentioned in Chapter Two, in the shine's founding myth, the deity Takemikazuchi travels to Kasuga on the back of a flying deer (Tyler, 1992, 55; Ten Grotenhuis 1999, 158). Takemikazuchi then selects this site as the location of the shrine. On this history of Kasuga and its cult, see Grapard 1992.

and the Black Lacquered Relic Cabinet, along with Kūkai and his relic worship, to Kasuga Shrine. Yet, based on stories around Kūkai and Mount Murō, the Black Lacquered Relic Cabinet likely depicts Mount Murō, rather than Mount Mikasa, for various mythical and historical reasons linked to the stories and narratives around this mountain. Let us take a moment to examine these stories.

V. Myth Making on the Mountain

Perhaps the most famous story associated with the mountain is that of Kūkai burying relics here. Upon his return from Chang'an in 806, Kūkai brought back myriad items, including, Buddhist statuary, paintings, implements, scrolls, and, among other things, eighty Buddha relics. He had received these relics from his teacher, Keika 惠果 (746–805), and they represented a long line of transmission that linked various eminent Buddhist masters across the three continents.[374] Returning to Japan, Kūkai decided to bury these relics on Mount Murō hoping to protect the people of Japan. The veracity of this story is questionable but, as a result, the Murōji relics are believed to have been brought from Tang China and to reflect the esoteric transmission of master to disciple, starting with the Buddha Dainichi—the central buddha of esoteric Buddhism—and ending with the high monk Kūkai. The following section will look at this story and the transmission of the relics in relation to the mountain.

[374] Kūkai received eighty *shari* from Keika, according to the *Kōbōdaishi shōraimokuroku* 弘法大師請来目録.

Kūkai and the Murō Relics

The pedigree of the Mount Murō relics, central to Kūkai's transmission of the esoteric teachings in Japan, is explained in the tenth-scroll of the *Datohō ketsushō matsu* 駄都法决抄末, found in the late Kamakura era text the *Hishōkuketsu* 秘鈔口決. This text was authored by Kakuzei 覚済 (1227–1303), the head priest (*zasu* 座主) of Daigoji 醍醐寺. In the *Datohō ketsushō matsu*, there is a passage entitled "The Matter of Lineage Transmission of the *Cintāmaṇi*" (*Hōju sōshō no koto* 宝珠相承事), in which Kakuzei explains that the Murō relics were transmitted, starting with the Buddha, down a longline of eminent monks, from India to Japan:

> Now understanding that Dainichi Nyorai (Skt. Mahāvairocana) had said this was [identical] to the transmission of the Iron *Stūpa*. Therefore, Esoteric [Buddhism] will flourish for aeons, and followers will increase and expand.[375] This must not be revealed. End of letter.[376]
>
> When speaking of the transmission of the *cintāmaṇi* to the disciples, the matter of this transmission previous to the Great Teacher (Skt. *upâdhyāya*) was not mentioned. This is why the Great Teacher Keika bestowed his oral transmission at this time. Before the Great Teacher, nothing was said pertaining to the transmission. There are eighty Buddha relics, among which is a golden relic. Originally, they were kept by the *ācārya*, or high monk, Kongōchi (Skt. Vajrabodhi; 671–741) of South India, who transmitted them to the *ācārya* Fukū (Skt. Amoghavajra). Fukū (lit., Kongōsanzō) then transmitted them to the *ācārya* Keika (lit., Seiryū). The High Priest Keika transmitted them to Kūkai. This is the official stamp of the Dharma transmission, and the refuge for the myriad living things. Kongōchi [thus] transmitted the matter of the enlightened mind (lit., the mirror). Before Kongōchi, what was this like? Generally speaking, no one knows. Nevertheless, the Iron Stūpa [of South India] was transmitted from Dainichi Buddha, to the bodhisattva Kongōsatta (Skt. Vajrasattva), to Ryūmyō (Skt. Nāgajñāna; 150–250), to Ryūchi (Skt. Nāgabodhi), to Kongōchi (Skt. Vajrabodhi; 671–741), to Fukū, to Keika, and [finally] to

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[375] This sentence is taken from the *Goyuigō*, posthumously attributed to Kūkai. Using the same characters, the *Goyuigō* reads: 是以蜜教劫榮末徒博延. See *Goyuigō* No. 2431, Kūkai compilation, T 2431.77.0413c23.

[376] Literally this says "*Ana-kashiko ana-kashiko*"—a word, repeated twice here, which is used to end a letter.

Kūkai (lit., Kōbō). It is profoundly secret. Thus was the transmission of the Buddha relics.

今案之。大日如来所説云云。是則鉄塔相伝。是以密教劫栄末徒博延。 輙不可示。穴賢穴賢。門徒相承宝珠相伝。大師以前相伝不云事。大師恵果御口決任自今作故。大師以前相承無也。仏舎利八十粒就中金色舎利一粒。本是金剛智阿闍梨従南天竺国持来。伝付大広智阿闍梨。広智三蔵又伝与青龍阿闍梨。青龍和尚又伝賜空海。斯伝法之印信万生之帰依者也。[377] 金(剛)智相伝之事明鏡也。金剛智三蔵以前如何。普通無知人。然鉄塔相伝也。即大日。金薩。龍猛。龍智。金智。不空。恵果。弘法也。最秘最秘。仏舎利相承如此。

In the *Hōju sōshō no koto*, Kakuzei argues that Dainichi Buddha's words were seen as identical to the transmission of the Iron Stupa of Southern India. He goes on to link this, in turn, to the transmission of the *cintāmaṇi*-relics. These eighty relics are a direct reference to the relics that Kūkai brought back from Tang and buried on Mount Murō, including a unique golden relic. The transmission of these relics, the text explains, is equivalent to "the official stamp of" the Dharma transmission, i.e., to transmitting the Buddha's teachings. Having moved across Asia to Japan, these relics were enshrined on Mount Murō and in Tōji, by Kūkai. Here, around seven hundred years later, the transmission ended. By including the Mount Murō relics in this lineage, the text implies that the relics enshrined on Mount Murō were those passed down from the Buddha himself to a long list of eminent monks, spanning the three continents, in the very same way as the esoteric teachings:

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[377] The section that reads "eighty buddha relics" 仏舎利八十粒 to "refuge for the myriad living things" 万生之歸依者也 is also found in other Shingon texts, including: the *Shingon fuhō sanyōshō* 真言付法纂要抄 and *Goshōrai mokuroku* 御請来目録. See: *Shingon fuhō sanyōshō* No. 2433, Vol. 77; and, *Goshōrai mokuroku* No. 2161, Vol. 55. A similar passage can also be found in the eighth book of the lower volumes, scroll 207 of the *Gunsho Ruijū* 続群書類従. See *Gunsho Ruijū*, 531.

The transmission of Mount Murō's man-made *cintāmaṇi* (lit., *nōsa no ju*) is identical to the matter of the transmission of the relics.[378] However, learning the fundamentals of Dharma practice is identical to the secret concentration ritual (Skt. *abhiṣeka*). Officially, this was not transmitted to Kongōchi, but to Ryūchi, who was transmitted the essence of the crux of learning.

Thus, Kongōchi was excluded from the record of transmission of the single absolute realm of existence (Skt. *dharmadhātu*) of *sūrya* [lit., the sun god].[379] Since it was not transmitted to Kongōchi and Nāgabodhi, perhaps because time did not suffice, this is why it was not transmitted to Fukū. This transmission of the single *dharmadhātu* is identical to the transmission of the *cintāmaṇi*.

亠一山能作珠舎利相承同事也。但此法修行肝心習給事。秘密灌頂同事。正金智不伝給。龍智相伝付極肝心習伝給也。仍一法界スリャ金智除相承被記也。金剛智龍智伝給不至時故不空不伝御歟。彼一法界相承即宝珠相承也。

Here the text explains that the transmission of Mount Murō's man-made *cintāmaṇi* is the same as the transmission of the relics. Man-made *cintāmaṇi*, it is noteworthy, were made using various materials, including actual relic shards (Fig. 33). The text then explains that the *cintāmaṇi* transmission is also the same as the transmission of the single absolute realm of existence (i.e., *dharmadhātu*) of the sun god, something not transmitted to certain Shingon patriarchs for an unknown reason. In this way, the Mount Murō relics are synonymous to these various categories of Shingon Dharma transmission.

Along with the Tōji relics, the Murōji relics (or, *nōsa no ju* relics) are some of the most important relics in Japanese history from the Heian period onwards. As a result, various thefts

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[378] This transmission is also mentioned in the *Hishō mondō* 祕鈔問答, by the Shingon scholar-monk Raiyu 頼瑜 (1226–1304). *Hishō mondō* No. 2536, Vol. 79. On Raiyu, see Andreeva 2019, 64.

[379] *Sūrya* (written originally here in Siddhāṃ characters, pronounced *si rya*) refers to the sun, or sun god. This god could also be plural, thus referring to the sun gods. In medieval Japan, the sun was also associated with the Diamond Realm. As for the single *dharmadhātu*, this is the single absolute realm of existence, the locus for the inclusion and production of all dharmas. See DDB.

Fig. 33. Man-made *cintāmaṇi* (lit., *nōsasei ju* 能作生珠). Found in wooden *gorintō* 木製五輪塔. Kamakura era (1282). Shōkaiji 性海寺, Aichi 愛知.[380]

transpired on the mountain, and the stolen Murōji relics passed through a linage of transmission. This will be our focus below.

VI. Relic Theft on the Mountain

The most famous theft story of the Murō relics involves the Song monk Kūtai, a disciple of Chōgen, who stole tens of relics from Mount Murō in 1191. Once caught, he pleaded insanity and was, eventually, forced to return the relics. Versions of this story are recorded in various twelfth century diaries and historical chronicles: including in the journals of Fujiwara no Teika 藤原定家 (1162–1241), the *Meigetsuki* 明月記, and Kujō Kanezane 九条兼実 (1149–1207), the *Gyōkuyō* 玉葉; as well as, in the historical chronicle *Azuma Kagami* 吾妻鏡. According to the *Gyōkuyō*, in the depths of night, Kūtai smashed the Murōji reliquary and stole tens of relics. This incident, said to have occurred as thunder raged down on the mountain, is summarized in the Kanazawa Bunko 金沢文庫 version of the *Shari sōden engi* 舎利相伝縁起 as follows:

> As for the relics mentioned above, the Great Patriarch Kōbō Daishi enshrined them in Yamato's Mount Murō to save the wicked and deluded, and to [help] them achieve the fruits of enlightenment during *mappō*. Some were stored in a boulder-filled-cave, while

[380] Although I do not have the measurement of this man-made *cintāmaṇi* we can assume that it would be fairly small considering that it was found in this *stūpa* that measured 48.5 centimeters. Along with the *cintāmaṇi*, other votive offers were found in the *stūpa* as well, including twill-weave silk and paper votive offers. See Naitō 2001, 248.

> some were placed in a vine-filled-cave. A seven tiered stone pagoda was constructed for the [relics] to be placed into. Several relic grains were enshrined [here].
>
> Although over four hundred years passed, and the *stūpa* became old, there were a billion new believers! At this time in Nanto, there was a monk named Kūtai. He was so enamored with [the *stūpa*] that he stole [its relics]. With bold force he took an iron mallet and broke the northern side of the [pagoda's] earth level. Quickly, he took numerous relics and kept them. After this, months and years passed, and, likely, others inquired after the relics.
>
> 右件舎利者。 高祖弘法大師為済濁悪之迷徒。興末世之福田。於大和州室生山所奉安置舎利。或蔵巖窟之中。或安蘿洞之底。其内建立七層石塔。奉籠数粒舎利。従尓以降。四百余歳之制底雖古。百千万人之信敬尚新者乎。爰中比南都有僧名曰縛若空諦。渇仰恋慕之余。奪鉄鎚之猛勢。破地輪之北面。即取多舎利。以為自所持。其後雖送歳月。敢無尋求之輩。

The *Shari sōden engi* reiterates the legend, as noted in the *Goyuigō*, that Kūkai buried the *cintāmaṇi*-relics on the mountain to help save the people of Japan.[381] It goes on to explain, in sum, that, a few centuries later, another monk, Kūtai of Nanto, coveted these relics for himself. Using a mallet, he broke the square level ("earth level") of the *gorintō*, or pagoda, in which they were enshrined. He then took tends of relics and escaped. This story became well-known among court and Buddhist circles, and, thereafter, a legal case transpired to get the relics back. Rather than this story deterring future transfers of the Murō relics, however, it only seemed to inspire more and to add to the value of these relics.

Some eighty-years later, for example, a monk named Kakuhibō 覚日房 (13th c.) visited Mount Murō to worship the relics. This story is particular, because, although he came across the broken pagoda and heard of the Kūtai incident, Kakuhibō still discovered relics in the pagoda. In

[381] Note, the *Goyuigō* is said to have been written by Kūkai, but was actually created a century after his death. As for *cintāmaṇi*, these are seen as synonymous with relics, thus, this seems not to be a problem in texts, such as the *Benichi'san ki* 宀一山記, which detail Kūkai burying wish-granting-jewels on the mountain peak.

practice, this is odd given that the pagoda had laid vandalized, in a state of ruin cause by Kūtai, for over eighty years. In sight of this, how can we explain Kakuhibō discovering these new relics in the Murō pagoda? Did Kūtai not take *all* of the relics? And, did other thieves not return to this spot, over the decades, to see if there were still relics precious here to be stolen? The latter would be unlikely, given the sacred nature of the Murō relics. And, even if this had been the case, the Murō monks would have wanted to safeguard their relics elsewhere, in a more secure place. Thus, based on what we know about relic transfers and relics choosing to appear and disappear before certain people and at given locations, this sudden appearance of relics might, more likely, be read as "the will" of the relics. Put differently, the Buddha relics *chose* to manifest before Kakuhibō.[382] This incident, which can be attributed to the monk's strong relic faith, can thus be read as a *futra sacra*, further legitimizing and increasing the appeal of the Murō relics.[383] This story, found in the fourteenth century text the *Murōzan oshari sōden engi* 室生山舎利相伝縁起 (hereafter, *Oshari sōden engi*), by the monk Sōmyō 宗明 (13th c.), explains how this event transpired:

> On the 21st day of the 3rd month of 1273 (Bun'ei 9), the monk Kakuhibō (original name Shinō) from the land of Kai, Kūchibō from Kaidan'in, and Ichirenbō from Shōman'in, along with over ten other companions, visited Mount Murō to pray to the relics in the stone pagoda. At this time, Kakuhibō heard of the previous incident of Kūtai, and went to

[382] Although relics are not viewed as animate objects, there is a power that is believed to be present in them. This is distinct, however, from animism. Rather, it is more of a belief that they have the ability to evoke events to happen, they have certain power, often referred to as the power of the Buddha himself. In this way, they can act, perform miracles, and so on. Regarding "animism" in Western scholarship on religion, see Kieshnick 2003, 24–26, and on "animism" in Chinese Buddhism, see Kieshnick 2003, 27–29.

[383] Fowler notes that by focussing on the theft of relics at this site, this story enhances the desirability of the relics. And, that although there seem to be repercussions for stealing them, it hints, she argues, that they may still be worth this risk. Fowler 1997, 24.

> investigate the ravaged hole. Fortunately, he acquired [there] a bronze cylinder that measured two *cun* (inches) tall and one *cun* (inch) wide.
>
> 然文永九年壬申三月廿一日己尅甲斐国僧覚日房実名信応戒壇院空智房。勝(満)院一蓮坊。其外同行十余輩参詣室生山。礼拝舍利石塔。時覚日房聞空諦(之)往事。捜摧破之穴。幸得銅筒。高二寸広一寸。

The *engi* explains that, upon opening the bronze cylinder, where the relics were enshrined, Kakuhibō felt that his prayers had been answered:

> He was pleased that his prayers had been answered. He was happy to have come empty, and returned full. Submitting to joy, he wept. Both sleeves became moist. Returning with swelling hope, wholeheartedly, he opened the lid and bowed down in prayer, finding that [the reliquary] was full of relics. Among the various grains, he clandestinely removed seven, showing them to two of his companions. These were Kūchibō and Ichirenbō, who earnestly asked for the white-gold-relic to be divided, [thus he gave] one grain to each of them. Three relics remained [for him].
>
> 悦感応道交之時至。感虚往実帰之喜事。随喜之涙湿雙袂。帰依之思凝一心。開蓋投拝。舍利満中矣。数粒之中。榆出七粒。示等輩二人彼空智房。一蓮房。同志懇望之間。白金二粒各与両人。所残三粒。

This passage from the *Murōzan oshari sōden engi* implies that Kakuhibō received these relics due to his strong faith. His prayers were finally answered by the Buddha, and he was rewarded with relics. This is similar to the story of "The Matter of the Person Who Wished to Obtain a Buddha Relic," as discussed in Chapter One. As you may remember, in this first story the monk Shorenbō had, similarly, prayed for many years to obtain a relic. Due to his strong faith, he traveled to the grave of Prince Shōtoku, where a mysterious maiden gifted him a relic. Shorenbō, like Kakuhibō, had taken this to be a result of his strong faith. In a similar fashion, Kakuhibō had gone to Mount Murō to pray to the famous relics enshrined there, and then, thinking that they

had been stolen, he went to investigate. Having discovered relics on the mountain, he too attributed this to the Buddha having answered his prayers (*kannō dō kyō* 感應道交). In both of these stories, the role of place is central to the reception of relics. Only when the two monks make a pilgrimage to their respective sites do relics reveal themselves. Moreover, unlike the Kūtai story, Shorenbō does not return the relics. Rather, this is presented as a sacred transmission, an idea reinforced by the transmission of relics that follows, as the *Oshari sōden engi* explains, from master to disciple:

> Intending to hold onto them himself, he stealthily concealed the remaining relics in his bosom, not wanting other to know. The two [monks] spoke to each other, saying that when Kūtei had taken the relics, thunder had suddenly erupted.[384] They were fearful that this would happen this time, as well. They had not finished speaking, when [suddenly], clouds arose in the blue sky, and a thunderbolt shook heaven and earth.
>
> Thus, his companions were terrified and they fled for home. Then, Kakuhibō went down to Kanto to transmit [the relics] to the monk Hōyu, who was in the abbot chambers of Muryōju'in. He also mentioned that, at that time, there were many strange supernatural [occurrences], as noted in other records. Although the relics were hidden in secret, they were transmitted to Shomyō.
>
> Kenji 2 (1277), 9th month, 3rd day.
>
> （所殘三粒）者以擬自分。其余數粒者密隠懐中。不肯教他見。彼二人相語云。先空諦取舎利。當時霹靂忽発。恐今亦如此。言未訖。応時青天雲起。霹靂動天地。同侶作恐怖。忽速迯帰畢。然彼覚日房關東下向之時。相傳于無量壽院方丈法尒上人耳。云以前云當時奇異神変多之。別紙記之矣。此御舎利之内。雖為秘藏。相傳于信性房宗明奉渡之畢。
>
> 建治二年 丙子 九月三日

[384] This is likely referring to Kūchibō and Ichirenbō, the two monks present with Kakuhibō, when he stole the relics.

The relics, held in deep earnest for many years, were transmitted from Myōnin to Kenna.
Ko'an 3 (1281), Zodiac of the Ram, 12th month, 24th day the *Śramaṇa* Shōmyō

然此御舍利之內，依多年之懇棘不淺。明忍房釼阿奉渡之畢。

弘安三年 庚辰 三月廿一日　沙門宗明[385]

The relics, within which one can sense the [power] of practice of eight thousand [monks], were transmitted to the nun Nijōnin.

Einin 3 (1296), Zodiac of the Ram, 12th month, 24th day the *Śramaṇa* Kenna

然此御舍利之內，一粒感八千枚之練行。奉授尼乘忍畢。

永仁三年 乙末 十二月廿四日　沙門釼阿

Much like the *Hōju sōjō no koto* example in which Kūkai is transmitted the relics, the *Oshari sōden engi* explains that these relics were transmitted from master to disciple: Kakuhibō transmitted them to Hōyu, who then transmitted them to Sokuze 即是 (13th c.), who transmitted them to Sōmyō 宗明 (13th c.), who transmitted them to Kenna 釼阿 (1261–1338), who, finally, transmitted them to the nun Nijōnin 尼乗忍 (14th c). The monk Kenna, about whom the most is known, wrote about this transmission in his "Personal Observations of the *Shaku maka enron*" (*Shaku maka enron shigen bun* 釈摩訶衍論私見聞).[386] Let us look, for a moment, at Kenna's biography and his deep admiration for the Murōji relics.

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[385] In the *Murōzan oshari sōden engi* 室生山御舎利相伝縁起 version of this text (dated to 1302), Sōmyō signs his name "the bodhisattva Sōmyō" (*busshi Somyō* 佛子宗明). The two texts are very similar, with slight variations in certain characters and the last few sentences of the texts. See *Murōzan oshari sōden engi*, in *DNBZ.* For a summary of this text and its authorship, see *Nihon Bukkyō shi jiten* 1010, 1999.

[386] See Kanazawa bunko archives. Also, see Fukushima 1998, in *Kamakura ibun kenkyū*. As for the *Shaku maka enron*, this important Shingon text is an annotated version of the *Daijōkishinron* 大乗起信論, by Nāgārjuna.

Fig. 33. Aizen myōō seated statue. Paint on wood, joined block construction. Kamakura period (1247), commissioned by Eison. Saidaiji, Nara. Height 31.8.

Kenna, the chief priest (*jūshōku* 住持) of Shōmyōji 称名寺, in Kanazawa Prefecture, was well-studied. He possessed deep knowledge of Tōmitsu, Tendai, Kairitsu, Kegon 華厳, Song dynasty Zen 宋朝禅, Shinto, as well as Indian Śabdavidyā (*Shōmyō* 声明), the "science of sound," as related to chanting Buddhist hymns. In eastern Japan, Kenna's temple, Shōmyōji, was respected for its leading role in promoting Tōmitsu, and, after Saidaiji's revival, the temple became the center for Saidaiji-ryū 西大寺流 (i.e., Saidaiji teachings) in eastern Japan, according to Nodomi (Nodomi 1985, 450). Along with this, Shōmyōji became heavily influenced by Eison's style of relic worship. This included worship of his Aizen Myōō statue 愛染明王坐像 (Fig. 33), gold bronze treasure pagodas (*kondō sōhōkyō indō* 金銅装宝箇印塔), manuscripts, and various ancient texts related to Eison's brand of relic worship as detailed in Chapter Two (Nodomi 1985, 450). In this environment, Kenna quickly developed an interest in relics, and became especially absorbed in the transmission of the Mount Murō relics.

In 1304, his interest enticed him to climb the mountain, where he prayed to its stone pagoda. The *Shari anchi ki* 舎利安置記, from which some characters have faded, explains that

this was the moment when Kenna was transmitted the Murō relics in a bamboo box. Some scholars think this is similar to how Kenna later transmitted the relics to the nun Nijōnin. In a letter entitled *Sōjō jidai* 相承次第, to the elder (*chōrō* 長老) of Shōmyōji (i.e., Kenna), Nijōnin explains that she visited Mount Murō, fifteen years later, in 1319. Although there is a paucity of materials about this nun, it is thought that she was very close to the powerful Kanazawa Hōjō family 金沢北条氏.

Likely, it was when she visited the mountain to pray to its relics, Nodomi argues, that she received the relics through transmission. Nodomi posits that, since Kakuhibō, Kenna, and Nijōnin all seemed to have received the relics in this fashion, and that this is likely how the relics were transmitted to the rest of the monks who inherited them, as well (Nodomi 1985). It seems that physically coming to the mountain to pray before the stone pagoda allowed for a transfer of the relics from one disciple to the next. Put differently, through the worshipper's proximity to the Buddha relics, as well as their deep faith, the relics could be transferred to a new monastic, regardless of their gender. These transmissions can be seen, Nodomi concludes, as a symbol of two individual's noteworthy relationship as Dharma friends (*hōyū* 法友), or as master and disciple (Nodomi 1985).

Before moving on, I would like to note that Eison's Aizen worship, as well as his relic faith, seemed to influence the reliquaries commissioned at Kenna's Shōmyōji as well as his faith in the Murōji relics. One example of this is the seated Maitreya (*Miroku bosatsu* 弥勒菩薩) statue cabinet at Komyō'in 光明院, a sub-temple of Shōmyōji. This piece, presently housed in

Kanazawa Bunko storage, dates to the Heian period. Relics were not inserted into the cabinet, however, until the Kamakura era, transforming it, at this time, into a reliquary.[387] Visually speaking, the doors of the relic cabinet open to Maitreya, adorned in the fashion of a prince-like-bodhisattva. Over Maitreya's left shoulder is draped a golden robe, complimenting the lavish jewelry that adorns him (Fig. 34). His face is plump and pale, reflecting Heian period aesthetics. Above his upper lip is traced a thin mustache that swirls down on both sides his mouth in the Gandhāran style. His hands rest in meditation (Skt. *dhyāna*) mudrā (Fig. 35).

In recent years, curators have located a small cavern in the bottom of this statue, which they have dated to the Kamakura era (Kanazawa bunko 2011, 60). Inside of this cavern were found two small packages of relics wrapped in fibrous white paper (*washi* 和紙) (Fig. 36). The papers are label according to the origins of their relics: *Tōji Oshari* 東寺御舎利 (the honorific relics of Tōji), and *Benichi-san* 宀一山 (the previous name for Mount Murō). Put succinctly, the first set of relics is from Tōji and the second set is from Mount Murō. Unwrapping these small squares of *washi*, one finds four petite crystal-like-relics nested in each of them (Fig. 37; Fig. 38). Interestingly, both sets of relics can be linked to Kūkai, reflecting Shōmyōji's Shingon faith, but also, possibly illustrating Kenna's deep interest in the Murōji relics, since these relics were not inserted into the statue until the Kamakura period, when Kenna was head priest of the temple. Although we do not know who was responsible for inserting the relics into the Maitreya statue, this example illustrates that there was a strong relic faith at this temple, which, as Nodomi argues, was, in all likelihood, heavily influenced by Eison's style of relic worship. There are,

[387] Although the statue is a Heian era construction, its paint, halo, and cavern date to the Kamakura era. The statue's dais dates to the early modern period. See Kanazawa bunko 2011, 60.

moreover, very few extant examples of Mount Murō relics, making this an important cultural object and a rare example.

This cabinet is also unique in that it combines relics from various sites. Although there are numerous instances of Kamakura era reliquaries that achieve this—as discussed in Chapter Two, in the instance of the Five Vases—it is uncommon to see the packaging, in which the relics are encased, labeled in this manner. This illustrates that the provenance of these relics were of utmost importance and their records were not to be lost. Since, as noted in the *Shari sōden engi*, the record for the transmission of the Murōji relic ended with Nijōnin, perhaps it was she who asked that the relics be deposited into the cabinet to protect them. An added incentive for this might have been to keep the relics at Shōmyōji, thus preventing them from being stolen, or transferred, once again. Finally, it is noteworthy, in regards to nuns and relic possession in the Kamakura era, that the Murō relics, which were believed to have been transmitted from Dainichi Buddha down to Kūkai, ended their transmission with a fourteenth century nun.

In regards to reliquary-style-statues in recent years, scholars have shown that the trend of enshrining objects inside of statues, or statuettes, increased in the late Heian and into the Kamakura period, apexing in the late Kamakura. There are many examples of this from the Nanto and Kinai 機内 regions, according to research conducted by Kanazawa bunko, but we are left with few extant instances from Mount Murō, despite the popularity of these relics, the myths about them, and their numerous thefts (Kanazawa bunko 2011, 5–6). We can hope, however, that as more statues are scanned and studied with modern technologies, curators and scholars may

Fig. 34. Maitreya statue cabinet, Komyō'in 光明院, in Kanazawa. Heian period statue; Kamakura period cabinet and paint. Wood, gold paint, colored paint, *kirikane* 截金 (decorative technique). Height of cabinet: 25 cm.

Fig. 35. Maitreya statue in *dhyāna mudrā.* Colored and gold paint on wood.

Fig. 36. The removal of two small paper packages, holding a total of eight relic shards, from the bottom of the statue.

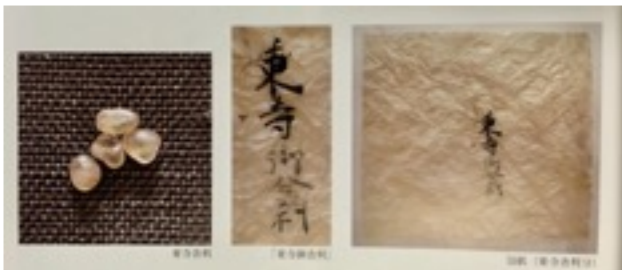

Fig. 37. From left to right: four Tōji *shari* grains, detail of the paper labeled *Tōji Oshari* 東寺御舎利 (the honorific *shari* of Tōji), and a full image of the paper in which the relics were wrapped.

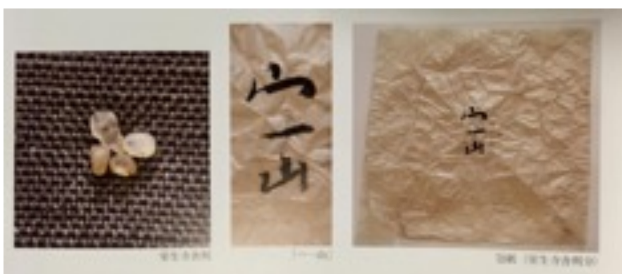

Fig. 38. Similar layout as above. Relics are, however, from Mount Murō, as noted on the paper labeled *Benichi-san* 宀一山 (i.e., Mount Murō).

encounter more cases like this, and, thus, more Murō relics, and their reliquaries, will become available for examination in future studies.

VII. Concluding Thoughts

This chapter has sought to offer a glimpse into the extant Murōji reliquaries from the medieval period, explaining them via the related texts and art objects that survive from the Kamakura and Heian periods. By reflecting on the stories and legends told about relics on this mountain and its temple—through dragons, Kūkai, legends and stories of relic theft and transmission—we can start to better conceptualize the Mount Murō reliquaries in relation to this site and its history, both real and fictional.

Throughout this chapter, I have sought to elucidate that Murōji is located within a landscape long regarded as sacred, a landscape harboring mystical dragons and jewels. It was on this mountain that Kūkai chose to bury the esoteric relics. These were transmitted from the Buddha himself, further contributing to beliefs around this site and making it an important location for relic worship from Kūkai's to Kenna's time. Kūkai's relationship to the Murō relics, which he brought back from China, is displayed through various reliquaries from the Kamakura into the Muromachi era. One example of this, as examined above, is the Black Lacquered Relic Cabinet from the Fujita Museum, depicting Kūkai, various relic related iconography, twin dragons and the Murō mountains in the background. Textually, this chapter also drew on the *Tōchōdaiji*, a thirteenth century manuscript, to ground these images and their iconography

through the written word. As for the mountain's relationship to dragons—and, in turn, relics, *cintāmaṇi*, and rainmaking—this dynamic is depicted in a plethora of visual materials from the medieval period, including: hanging scrolls, *maṇḍala*, reliquary cabinets, and so on. The mountain's sacred connection to Kūkai, and its status as a landscape in which dragons dwell and guard relics, as seen in many of the visual materials examined above, led to various relic thefts transpiring on the mountain from the twelfth to thirteenth century.

Thereafter, these relics became part of a second lineage of transmission that ended with Kenna, and, ultimately, the nun Ninjōnin. Kenna's deep interest in relics, as seen above, was likely influenced by Eison's brand of relic worship—examined in depth in earlier chapters of this dissertation. Once the relics were transmitted to Ninjōnin it remains unclear what became of them. Ninjōnin did, however, have a close relationship to Kenna's temple, Komyō'in in Kanazawa, and wrote letters to Kenna there about the Murō relics in particular. Moreover, since the Mount Murō relics in the Maitreya statue cabinet date to this period, this may offer one explanation for where these relics, stolen by Kakuhibō in the thirteenth century, might have been concealed. As seen in Chapter One, Hokkeji's Mañjuśrī statue also held various reliquaries in its head-cavity. In this way, relics were often placed into statues as a way of securing them, and preventing future relic thefts. This also seems to be the case with the Maitreya statuette. Such enshrinements, truncated—or, rather, completed—the transmission of relics, just as Kūkai had done by burying these relics on Mount Murō. This practice of statue enshrinement was, as we have seen, common practice in the Kamakura era.

In all, this chapter has sought to present an understanding, or rather, multiple understandings, of the complexity of relic worship on Mount Murō from the twelfth through fourteenth century. Much of this existed in relation to earlier histories and legends about the mountain and the historical figures connected to this mountain. I have sought, specifically, to connect many of these relic stories to the mountain itself. It was through this "visual rhetoric of sanctity" in a given sacred space that the relics and their stories created a sacred geography, in which relics were worshipped and coveted. Through the relics enshrined in this landscape, devotees were able to "experience Buddhism in a manner that was at once powerful and intimate, without the immediate intervention of learned intermediaries explaining what should be felt, what should be understood" (Kieschinick 2003, 24). Instead, the devotee's relationship with the relics was intimate, it invited proximity to the body, through the worshipper's mere presence on the mountain (Hahn 1997, 1081).

Many of these stories about the landscape can also be read visually through the extant, and often quite eclectic, reliquaries created during this period, and slightly thereafter, which are displayed today in museums and collections throughout Japan. Now gazed at from behind museum cases, rather than placed on altars for rituals, modern viewers interact with these reliquaries in a very different way. Presently, studying the stories behind these reliquaries can, therefore, tell us a great deal about the multidimensional nature of relic worship from this period and help us to better understand the intentions and use behind these objects in their time and place. In a word, by studying the various thefts, transmissions, and legends regarding the mountain's sacred Buddha bones, we can better place these objects, and their histories, within the landscape of medieval Japanese religious culture.

Conclusion: Nanto Relic Worship

This dissertation has sought to offer new insights into the field of religion and Japanese studies by contextualizing relics within the backdrop of historical, social, and gender studies in medieval Japan. Through material objects and texts, it has shown that relic worship during this period was a complex enterprise that often combined the traditions of various temples, nunneries, and shrines. This is a concept that I would like to term "Nanto Relic Worship," given that it was particular, in many ways, to the Nanto area during the medieval period. Accordingly, much of this dissertation is inspired by the question: how can we understand medieval Japanese reliquaries within the greater landscape of Nanto religions? The previous pages have sought to illuminate many of the particularities of relic worship during this period, by focusing on three Nanto sites taken here as case studies. Using these examples, we have examined extant reliquaries connected to relic worship at these three locations. Many of these reliquaries, whether they take the form of wooden cabinets or bronze vases, are national treasures housed at the Nara National Museum. As for the relics they enshrine, some of these were gifted or traded, while others were stolen or transferred through the medium of dreams.

One of the larger goals of this dissertation is to bring meaning to the stories, histories, and beliefs behind these medieval reliquaries and, therein, to contextualize them in the socioreligious context in which they were made. Many of these reliquaries tell stories of theft, the gifting or transferring of relics, or simply convey a variety of religious teachings. Most of them have not been written about in Western languages. Little, moreover, has been published on them in Japanese. One of the goals of this dissertation has been to bring meaning to these objects by studying the texts that exist about them. Through the study of reliquaries, I have tried to paint a

more complex and comprehensive picture of the beliefs around relic worship from this period, as well as their myths and artistic creation. Relic worship also existed during this period in relation to Shintō shrines and nunneries. The power that nuns had over relics, as well as how they interacted with the relics they controlled and distributed, is a major theme of this dissertation, as well.

Hokkeji and its Nuns

In regards to nuns, this dissertation has highlighted that medieval nuns wielded more power over relics than is often shown in modern scholarship. Certain Hokkeji nuns actually possessed, controlled, and distributed their own relics. According to the origin tales and chronicles about these relics, they were worshipped, distributed and looked after by the nuns themselves. The nuns also distributed and lent relics to other temples as a means of creating networks and strengthening their connections. This is noteworthy given that possessing relics is symbolic of one's power, religious attainment, and prestige. It is believed, as we have seen in the previous pages, such as in Gyōkyū's dream, that relics only remain with those worthy of them. In other words, relics choose their keepers. Thus, the possession of relics is believed to attest to a person's spiritual enlightenment. Therefore, it is not a trivial matter that nuns possessed their own relics in medieval Japan. This phenomenon shows, rather, the nuns' potential promise for salvation, raising their prestige as female monastics in the eyes of their communities, followers, and believers. It helps these nuns to establish and justify their level of spiritual attainment, reinforces and strengthens their need to revive given nunneries, and bolsters the spiritual power of the nuns who underwent ordination at this time.

Certain high monks during this period believed that nuns were central to the rival of "the correct teachings of Buddhism." In other words, nuns were necessary to complete and strengthen the Buddhist community. Buddhism during this period, as we have seen, had become fairly corrupt. It was, according to belief, the latter day of the Buddhist teachings (i.e., *mappō*). This led to a desire to revive more traditional schools of Buddhist thought. Part and parcel of this was, according to monks such as Eison, to revive the nunhood. Thus, although the nunhood had become stronger, it was still reestablishing itself, since, for decades prior, many nunneries had been neglected and fallen into decay. Harboring important Buddhist relics, in this case relics from Tōji, was one way for nuns to show their spiritual power, to bring validity to their teachings, and to create and deepen their Dharma networks.

In a more general sense, it is my hope that such research—as well as previous work about nuns and women in the field of Japanese religions, such as studies by Barbara Ambros, Lori Meeks, Barbara Ruch, Hosokawa Ryōichi, and others—can help us to reconsider how female monastics in medieval Japan are written and talked about by modern scholars. By reconsidering the place of powerful female monastics in premodern scholarship, I hope that we can, in turn, raise the level of understanding around gender equality in modern-day Japan. This could, in theory, help us to rethink current understandings of women's history and the place of women in Japanese religious traditions. In recent years, Japan has continually ranked the lowest among developed countries in their national gender rankings. Reanalyzing the place of women within the country's history, and disproving some of the long-held beliefs about the place of females in Japanese religions, literature, and society can help us start to reshape modern gender dynamics, and the assumptions that these dynamics continue to generate on the archipelago. Various

scholars in modern-day Japan continue to draw on Japan's founding myth to argue that women, by nature, are soiled. These histories have been used to justify current gender biases and to create an image that the historical understanding of the place of women, and the lack of women in positions of power in modern-day Japan (i.e., as CEOs or executives), has continued, unbroken, in this way for centuries. This dissertation has challenged this assumption through the prism of religious studies and relic worship.

Saidaiji's Five Vases

In chapter two, I have shown how Eison prioritized the relics of Hokkeji in his creation of the Five Vases. He put considerable resources into making the vases, which contain relics he collected over his lifetime. Here, although he collected, was gifted, and took relics from various courtiers and monastics, he placed the Hokkeji relics into the central and most prominent reliquary in the set. These were also the only accessible relics (they could be removed), implying that he wanted access to them, likely for ritual purposes. Eison wrote about using the Hokkeji relics in rituals, and these relics, in particular, played a key role in his religious practice. In this sense, hundreds of Hokkeji relics were placed in a more prominent and use oriented position, than the relics in the other four vases. Thus, I have argued, the vases can be viewed as representative of the reaches of Eison's teachings and style of Nanto Buddhism. In this sense, they can be read as a microcosm of his religious teachings in this area. Central to these teachings was the nunhood, represented through the Hokkeji relics—powerful sacred objects that belonged to and appeared in the presence of these elite female monastics. Given the agency of relics to choose their possessors and locations, these specific relics can be seen to embody the sacred

quality and spiritual attainment of the nuns. In a word, the relics selected the nuns. This desire to prioritize the nuns' relics, by putting them in the central vase (also the most elaborate and tallest of the vases) as well as making them accessible for ritual, can be explained through Eison's deep-held desire to reestablish the Buddhist *saṅgha*. This was necessary, he believed, for Buddhism to flourish and to return to its full strength. A large part of this was to re-establish an active nunhood.

Accordingly, Eison worked diligently to ordain hundreds of women across various social strata, as noted in his chronicles. Some of these women became high ranking nuns who lived in elite temples like Hokkeji, while some became household nuns who stayed home while renouncing the world. Eison also helped revive numerous nunneries. Properly ordained nuns were *needed*, he believed, to create a healthy Buddhist order: to return to the traditional Buddhist teachings of Japan's past. We can see this belief expressed visually through the reliquaries that Eison commissioned and through his writings about the Hokkeji relics. In his writings, Eison also noted when Zen nuns, court ladies, and other female devotees gifted him relics to support his cause. Through such gifts, these women helped support his tradition, while also allowing for him to argue its importance via relics—objects whose histories of transmission, theft, and gifting were often related to, and derived their meaning from, the grander socioreligious and political landscape of this time.

As we have seen, it was not unusual for relics to be transferred in a dream. Nor, was it unusual for them to be stolen, or to shift hands. The transfer of a relic through a dream actually empowered the story behind a given relic. Such dream transfers were rarely questioned, since they did not occur in the waking world. Examples of this include relics being transferred in

dreams to Gyōkyū, Daoxuan, Minamoto no Sanetomo, Myōe, and other Buddhist monastics. Dreams in this period were viewed as powerful, and, as Bernard Faure points out, they were often, according to monks such as Myōe and Dōgen, seen as equivalent to, or sometimes more telling than, reality (Faure 1996, 118–121). Even Eison's first encounter with relics took place in a dream: he had dreamt that a female deity bestowed a wish-granting-gem upon him. In a similar vein, it is unclear who gifted Eison many of the relics in the Five Relic Vases. Most of these relics, his writings explain, were presented to him in dreams or dream-like-encounters. In the case of the Nimuro'in relics, for instance, the court lady's relics were said to have appeared at Saidaiji in the middle of the night. According to this story, a spirit entered the temple on the night of an eye-opening ceremony for a newly completed statue—an incident that a Hokkeji nun, as recorded in Eison's chronicles, was informed of in her dream. In this sense, the Nimuro'in relics, now enshrined in one of the Five Vases, were transferred through the medium of a dream, a phenomenon confirmed by this second dream.

The Kasuga relics, enshrined in one of the Five Vases, were also transferred through a dream. This is noted in the *Gyōjitsu nenpu*. According to this record, Eison dreamt that he obtained hundreds of relics from the main Kasuga deity (*Kasuga myōjin* 春日明神) in 1241. The Kasuga deity spoke to him in the depths of the night, then, suddenly, hundreds of relics appeared on his *sūtra* table. The relics emitted light, showing that they were true Kasuga relics (*Gyōjitsu nenpu*, 121). Dreams, as we have seen, were a common medium to transfer relics, or, rather, to *justify* the transfer of relics. If one obtained relics through an unknown or illicit means, having dreamt of receiving these relics would be one way to justify their theft. As Mimi Hanaoka explains, the theft of relics is often connected to pious dreams or sacred figures (Hanaoka 2016).

Such stories, as discussed above, enhanced the authority of the relic and, in turn, of its new owner. Many of these narratives emphasize the grey space between the appeal of relics and the human manipulation of relics. This case of the Kasuga relics includes both: a dream-like-transfer of relics and a sacred figure (i.e., the Kasuga deity). This further enhances the power of these relics, deeming their new keeper worthy. Although it is never said that the relics were stolen, this is implied through the transfer of relics that occurred in the dream realm. The reception of relics through a dream symbolically secures this transfer of power which, in the case of Kasuga, is conveyed through the Kasuga deity (i.e., believed to be a manifestation of the historical Buddha).

As we have seen in the previous pages, it was not unusual in this period for relics to transfer hands through dreams or sacred theft. Since, as we know, relics choose their location and keeper, they perform these acts according to their own will, often following dreams, visions, or sacred omens. This often creates a liminal space between what is deemed a theft and what is overlooked simply as an exchange that took place in a dream. As for the latter, we have seen numerous examples of dream-like-transfers from this period, including, most famously, Jōkei giving a Kasuga relic to Myōe. Thereafter, Myōe claimed that this relic had been gifted to him by the Kasuga deity in a dream. Belief that this was a sacred transfer—i.e., that the relics were gifted by the deity—further enhanced the power of the relic.

In a sense, it was through the dream realm that Myōe was able to communicate with the Kasuga deity. Dreams granted him access to the invisible world of the kami. This invisible communication, whether real or fictional, could be physically attested to through the relic. The relic, thus, verified Myōe's spiritual encounter. In this instance, the transfer of this relic had actually taken place through a gifting from monk to monk, which was, in retrospect, presented as

a dream transfer. We see this use of dreams to transfer relics in other instances as well in which relics were stolen, as seen in the case of Sanetomo and the Engakuji relic from Tang China. Such transfers, which took place through dreams and theft, were not uncommon in medieval Japan, or throughout the greater medieval world. These sacred transfers of relics, or full-body-relics, often helped legitimize rulers and religious figures, as seen with the body of Saint Mark, which offered political support to the Venetian Court at a critical historical moment in the Latin West.[388]

As we have seen, Japan was similar in this regard. Eison, and other religious and political figures from the Kamakura era, commonly sought out relics to prove their positions of power. We see this continue into the Muromachi period with the Shogunate, a concept that can be seen through the reliquaries and architectural reliquaries that still exist from this time. In such instances, relics served as invaluable symbolic capital. Through their presence, believed to be the Buddha himself, they helped to bring about and engender religious change, spread teachings or political agendas, and solidify networks that were strengthened through the physical exchange of sacred objects (i.e., relics). In regards to Eison, in particular, it is unclear from his chronicles how he obtained many of his relics, as some Japanese scholars have pointed out.

In addition to this point of theft, or sacred transfer, another central theme in this second chapter was that relics from a variety of traditions can be enshrined and worshipped in a single reliquary. An example of this is the Four Sided Relic Cabinet, examined above, that enshrines relics from various religious traditions. It shows a diversity of teachings poplar at this time, from Shingon, to Kasuga and Hōsso, as documented in Jinson's *Chronicle of Miscellaneous Affairs of*

[388] Perhaps a comparable example today would be, if a running elect could promise a vaccine, a magic pill, that would cure cancer or even coronavirus. In a similar fashion, Buddha relics promised to offer solace in a period of great anxiety, in a time when people feared the Buddha teachings would be lost forever; the government was run by the warrior class; and famine, war, and plague were not uncommon. Having a sacred object, or in our day a magical pill, to cure these aliments would make a political or religious figure greatly attractive to the suffering populace.

Daijōin. This relic cabinet depicts styles of relic worship active in Nanto at this time. Physically it shows, through the reliquary itself, that these traditions could exist in one frame of worship, at least, in this instance, according to the erudite monk Jinson, who commissioned this reliquary cabinet. Jinson, who was well studied and highly regarded for his religious knowledge within the Buddhist community, spent fifteen years commissioning this iconographically complex piece.

Thus, in light of the varied iconography of and the faiths represented by this relic cabinet, perhaps it is less surprising that the Five Relic Vases of Saidaiji enshrine relics from a motley of times, people, and places in a single reliquary set. Here, I would like to posit that there was likely more overlap within the relic worship of various traditions from this period than scholars have often argued. Most modern scholarship on relics in Japan looks at relics and relic worship from the writings, chronicles, and other historical documents of a single Buddhist tradition (such as, Zen relic worship, for instance). I would like to challenge this view, using the objects we have studied thus far as evidence. Many of these reliquaries, as we have seen, were commissioned to combine relics or iconography from various traditions or religious sites. They are not representative of a single Buddhist school of thought. Rather, they combine various Buddhist and Shintō traditions. In this sense, they show, through the objects themselves, that relic worship was not limited to one tradition, just as modern scholars have shown that Buddhist temples and monks often combined various traditions, practices, and texts—a phenomenon that was not seen as conflicting.

The relationship between relic worship and shrines is also noteworthy. Little has been written on this topic in modern scholarship. I would like to research this topic further, specifically in regards to Kasuga, for future renditions of this manuscript. In English language

scholarship, Brian Ruppert has published an article on relic worship at Ise Shrine 伊勢神宮, the imperial shrine linked to the three regalia of the court (one of which is a jewel, which can, he shows, be conflated with a relic).[389] This shrine is, however, an outlier in many ways, given that it is the imperial shrine of Japan. Looking at relic worship in relation to Kasuga, herein, would help illuminate the little discussed topic of relic worship at or in relation to shrines in medieval Japan. It would also contribute to the field by bringing meaning to, and better contextualizing, the reliquary cabinets from this era related to Kasuga and Kasuga relic worship.

Murōji: Jewels and Dragons

The final chapter of my dissertation looks at Murōji. This chapter is arranged around the medieval reliquaries that exist in relation to this site from the twelfth through the fourteenth century. Much of this can be explained in relation to earlier stories and legends about this mountain, as well as to the religious figures who factor into its history. Accordingly, this chapter seeks to historicizes these reliquaries through extant texts from this period, by reflecting on the stories, legends, and histories told about this mountain—many of which, both fictional and real, pertain to dragons, wish-granting-jewels, Kūkai, or relic theft and transmission.

Historically, this mountain and its temple have long been important to practices of relic worship and rain-inducing-relic rites. In Japan's middle period, like in much of the medieval world, the power to evoke rain, end famines, and, thus, curb death was of utmost importance to the rulers as well as to the common people. The people often turned to temples or shrines, the

[389] As explained elsewhere in this dissertation, wish-granting-jewels became conflated with relics in medieval Japanese religious practices.

main religious networks of the time, for physical and spiritual support as well as guidance. In this case, the landscapes of these sites were often regarded as sacred. It the case of Murōji, the mountain on which the temple sat harbored dragons, who guarded and coveted relics/jewels and who lived in the mountain's caves. From inside of these caves, according to belief, the dragons controlled the rains and the tides. Over the centuries, this landscape became laden with stories of relic theft and transmission, which occurred here due, in part, to the spiritual significance of the landscape itself. This produced, I argue, a "visual rhetoric of sanctity" in the given space, in which relics and their stories created and reinforced a certain sacred geography. These relic stories existed in relation to the landscape. It was the site itself, in many ways, that gave these relics their power. Through this landscape, herein, devotees could experience an intimacy to the Murō relics, which invited proximity to the body, through the worshipper's physical presence on the mountain. Many of these stories can be studied and revealed through the iconography of the reliquary itself.

Today, reliquaries are often kept in museums, creating a distance between the worshipper, the reliquary, and the relic. This differed from the intimacy that a worshipper might have felt in relation to relics in the past: as seen with worshippers coming to the mountain to worship the Murō relics, or stealing them in the depths of the night as thunder and lightning crashed down on the mountain in menace. In these stories, the presence of the devotee at the site itself often engendered relic-related miracles. If we accept relics as animate, then these miracles were, according to belief, spurred by the devotee visiting this sacred location and by the belief in the power of these relics.

This concept of the importance of a relic's proximity to the body is a notion that I have referred to throughout this dissertation. The way that relics were enshrined during the twelfth through fourteenth century, and into the fifteenth century in many cases, brought about a certain proximity to the body of the Buddha and the body of the worshipper. This differed from the distant relic rituals performed in the Heian court, in which people were arranged according to social hierarchy, with the most elite person closest to the relics. In these later instances, in contrast, much as we see in the case of Mount Murō, male and female monastics came to the mountain to receive transmissions of the Murō relics. Monks even broke the *stūpa* in which the relics were enshrined to steal its precious relics. These relics were not hidden away in the court, nor were they protected behind sterile glass cases in museums. In these instances, rather, devotees could approach the reliquary in which the relics were enshrined, while the relics themselves could enact miracles and choose to go with given devotees through Dharma transmissions or sacred thefts. These stories, and the beliefs around them, can be told through the reliquaries that exist from this time.

There is still much to learn about relic worship in relation to Mount Murō. This section has sought to open such discussions by examining many of the mountain's extant reliquaries and by using these sacred objects, most of which are valuable national treasures, to ask questions about relic worship in Japan's medieval period and, thus, to re-situate our understanding of the religious landscape of this time.

Future Chapter: Kasuga and Relics

In the future, I will write an additional chapter on Kasuga relic worship. The Nara National Museum houses numerous well-preserved Kasuga reliquaries from the Kamakura and Muromachi periods. These reliquaries are related to Kasuga worship, or display iconography related to Kasuga Shrine. Although reliquaries depicting shrine related relic worship may seem atypical, this phenomenon appears less surprising if we consider that Kasuga was under the domain of the Fujiwara family, and that, along with Kōfukuji, it was part of an important shrine-temple complex.

This phenomenon illustrates, moreover, that relic worship existed at—as well as, in relation to—shrines in medieval Japan. Many extant reliquaries from this period reinforce this concept. In order to turn this dissertation into a manuscript, I will include a chapter on relic worship at Kasuga, which will, much like the Murōji chapter, revolve around the shrine's extant reliquaries, historical documents, chronicles, court diaries, as well as popular stories. Some of these Kasuga reliquaries are from the shrine itself, while others were commissioned and venerated by smaller religious groups that performed long-distance worship of Kasuga. These smaller religious groups used such cabinets to evoke the power of the shrine and the Kasuga deities, through the medium of relic worship. As we know from previous chapters, Kasuga worship (*Kasuga shinkō*) and Śākyamuni worship (*Shaka shinkō*) became coupled in the late Kamakura era, thanks to the teachings of monks such as Jōkei and Myōe. Specifically, these two monks promoted the concept that the main Kasuga deity was a manifestation (*suijaku*) of Śākyamuni Buddha in his original form (*honji*). As a result, worshipping the bones of Śākyamuni Buddha at or in relation to Kasuga was seen as tantamount to worshipping the deity of the first

shrine of Kasuga—the main and central deity of the shrine. This belief can be seen in the reliquaries that exist from this period. Many of these reliquaries are wooden cabinets that open to paintings of the shrine's founding myth (i.e., depicting its sacred deer), or the Kasuga landscape. Writing an additional chapter on relic worship at Kasuga Shrine, as well as the shrine's extant reliquaries, would augment my argument pertaining to the eclectic nature of relic worship during this period and to relic worship at shrines. Perhaps most importantly, this would also allow us to better historicize these relics and their reliquaries—many of which are valuable cultural objects on which nothing has been published—in relation to this important medieval temple-shrine complex.

Concluding Comments

A larger goal of this dissertation has been to illustrate, through the prism of reliquaries, that relic worship in medieval Japan is more multifaceted and complex than has been previously argued in Western scholarship. These sacred objects, when accompanied by texts, have many stories to tell about relic worship, religion, belief, story telling, the place of female monastics, and even the communal anxieties from this period. All of these matters are worthy of further study. This dissertation has only just broken the ice. The complexity of relic related beliefs can be read through the objects themselves as well as their extensive iconography, which tend to combine religious teachings from shrines, temples, nunneries, as well as the geography itself. One goal of this study has been to show a less court-centric, slightly more peripheral, perspective of relic worship from this time, and to illuminate how eclectic, multidimensional, and unconventional Nanto relic worship was within the wider landscape of medieval Japanese religions.

In regards to medieval Europe, Cynthia Hahn has discussed how groups of saints—in our case, deities and buddhas—can construct "a sacred geography" on earth. This concept can be used to consider medieval Japanese reliquaries such as the Four Sided Relic Cabinet, and other reliquaries from this period, which combine various relic-related beliefs. In such cases, by condensing relics from several traditions into one visual space (e.g., a reliquary cabinet), the monks commissioning these pieces were conceptually combining these beliefs, teachings, and systems of thought in a single medium. This illustrates that these beliefs could coexist and be worshipped within the frame of one reliquary. Although scholars have, in recent years, shown that premodern Japan was less sectarian than scholars of East Asia had previous believed, studies on relics, in Japanese and Western languages, have remained fairly divided along sectarian lines. I have made an effort to avoid such trends in this study. Rather, I argue that, like many temples and religious teachings in medieval Japan, relic worship during this period often combined numerous schools of thought. Paintings or bronze work depicting the worship of kami, buddhas, as well as Indian and Chinese patriarchs could, for instance, all exist in a single reliquary.

As for relic theft, this dissertation has shown that encasing relics in a statue or reliquary is a way of ending the transmission of specific relics and of securing that they will not be stolen again. The phenomenon of placing relics and other sacred objects into statues became quite popular in the Kamakura era, as scholars of East Asia have shown in recent research on statue enshrinement in China, Korea, and Japan.[390] In Chapter One of this dissertation, we saw this in regards to the Mañjuśrī statue at Hokkeji: a medieval statue with five reliquaries enshrined in its

[390] The idea of placing relics into statues likely dates back to ancient India. Ghandara Buddha statues, for example, have been found with relics in the *ūrṇā* (i.e., the concave circular dot between the Buddha's eyebrows). Thus, placing relics into statues was not new to the Kamakura period. This practice did, however, flourish at this time in Japan. There are many statues from this period that contain relics, scrolls, small statues, and so on.

head cavity. Placing these reliquaries into the head of the statue secures that they cannot be stolen, gifted or moved, in a way that simply placing them into a reliquary would not. Similarly, in Chapter Two, we saw that numerous relics which Eison obtained over his lifetime were placed into an eleven-piece reliquary set made with various optical illusions. In regards to these relics, Eison received hundreds to thousands of relics in his dreams—i.e., translations, which are, possibly, actual thefts—while, as for the Hokkeji relics, there remains no clear historical account for this transfer from these elite nuns to Eison. In the case of the relics in the Five Vases, these relics are all kept inside of three layers of reliquaries (the five foot *stūpa*, their vases, and finally the flaming jewel reliquaries). These layers of enshrinement prevent future movement of these relics, ending their transmission with the Vinaya master Eison. The optical illusions that Eison had created within the innermost layers of these reliquaries, moreover, makes it hard to steal the relics that they harbor, unless one is intimately familiar with the reliquaries and their complex construction. In this way, Eison secured that future thefts would not occur.

As for the Murō relics, these were infamously stolen from the mountain on numerous occasions. A small handful of these relics were enshrined in the Maitreya statue cabinet, at Komyō'in. These relics were placed into this statue-cabinet in the Kamakura period. The exact date is unknown. Such relics transferred hands various times leading up to this enshrinement, thus placing them in this statue would have assured that such transfers were truncated. Herein, this Kamakura era trend to place relics into statues served a double function: it connected the statue to the historical Buddha, through his relics, making the statue itself into a reliquary, but it also protected the relics from future thefts and secured them within the eyes of worshippers. Given the importance of relics in religious traditions across Asia, the medieval belief in *mappō*

(i.e., the end of the Buddha's teachings), and the revival of various older Buddhist traditions at this time (including, the nunhood), it is not surprising that relics were allotted such high esteem among devotees, nor is it surprising that such relics were often coveted, stolen, traded, and gifted in dreams.

In conclusion, this dissertation has sought to create a more nuanced understanding of relic worship in medieval Japan, by looking at the reliquaries that still exist from this period, specifically in relation to these three religious sites in Nanto. I hope that this study will inspire future scholarship on reliquaries from the Nanto area, including scholarship looking at stories around relic worship and instances of relic theft from this time. As we have seen, relic worship and its developments during this period were complex and multifaceted, but also fascinating and, in many ways, eclectic. The objects, stories, historical documents, and art that exist from this time depict relics and their worship in a very different light then in other periods of Japan's long history. There is, herein, still much to be studied on this topic. Moreover, in regards to nuns and their possession of relics there still remains a gap in scholarship. Although I have highlighted this in regards to Japan's medieval period, there is very little published on this topic in Japanese religious history. This is a topic that I have started to bring to light in the pages above. There is, however, still much to be done. It is my hope that this material might inspire future studies on nuns and relic worship, in order to further advance this area of study, but, more importantly, to help us gain a deeper understanding of the lives of female monastics in medieval Japan, and, in particular, within the larger historical backdrop of Japan's religions and thought from the past to the present.

Appendix I

"The Matter of the Person who Wished to Obtain a Buddha Relic"[391]

Busshari kantoku shitaru hitonokoto 仏舎利感得シタル人事 (source: *Shaseki-shū* 沙石集)

In Kawachi no kuni there was a monk named Shorenbō. For many years he deeply wished to obtain a "true buddha relic,"[392] and so he chanted the "Verse of Homage to the Buddha's relics" of Fukū Sanzō. And, each day he threw his body (lit., five body parts) against the ground in prayer, five hundred times. Fourteen to fifteen years thereafter, he went to pray at Prince Shōtoku's grave with particular sincerity. From [Shōtoku's] grave appeared an old monk. And, the old monk said [to him]: "As for the *shari* that you wish for, ask this to the person laying next to you." [Shorenbō] looked next to him to see a "walking miko" (Jp. *aruki-miko*) asleep. Tall, with shoulder length hair and white skin, she was roughly twenty-two or twenty-three years old. There was no one else around. "I wonder if this person has a *shari*?" He thought. "Excuse me," he said, waking her. He [continued]: "Just now, I have received this oracle. Do you have a *shari* that you can give me?" he asked. [She replied]: "Go to the Jōdō Hall, and I will give you [a *shari*]. This matter is easy [for me]." This was beyond his expectation.

They went to the backdoor of the hall. She took a talismanic pouch from her side, and from this she took out a six to seven *sun* (i.e., 18 to 21 inches) crystal *stūpa*. Although the light from the [hall's] lanterns did not reach the backdoor, the area was [suddenly] filled with light. The hairs on Shorenbō's body stood on end. Then, she took ten *shari* out of the pouch, and she said: "From among these, choose one." So Shorenbō replied, in prayer: "May the *shari* that has an affinity to me, show [its] form to me." After this, one *shari* crawled toward him like a bug. And, she said, "This is it!" Then, she gave it to him. Deeply moved, he could not repress his tears.

Then, they went back to Shōtoku's grave, where he asked her: "Who on earth are you? Where do you live? And, what is your name?" [Then,] earnestly, he said: "At dawn, please come to my temple (lit., shokubō), and we will securely connect our fate." She replied in just a few words: "There is no set place that I live. My name is Jakujō." And then she went to sleep. He [also] dozed off, and, at dawn, he awoke to see that the *miko* had vanished. Greatly surprised, and he asked many people, but never found her. When he asked someone, they told him: "In these [past] six or seven days, I saw her form, but

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[391] Translation by author.

[392] On the story *Busshari kantoku*, see, Kobayashi 1993, 3; and, Takahashi 2012, 195–210.

where she came from and who she was, I do not know.” She must have been a deity manifested as a human. After this, he prayed [to her] five hundred times.

河内ノ國ニ。生蓮トイフ入道有ケリ。年來真トノ佛舎利感得ノ志深クシテ。不空参藏ノ。一心頂礼ノ舍利礼ノ文ヲ唱テ。毎日五百返。五躰ヲ投地ニ礼拜ヲシテ祈念シケリ。十四五年ノ後。太子ノ御廟ニ詣デヽ。殊ニ精誠ヲ至テ祈請シケル示現ニ。御廟窟ヨリ。老僧一人出テ。汝ガ所望スル。佛舍利ハ。ソノカタハラナル者ニコヘト。仰ラルヽト見テ。ウチオドロキテ。カタハラヲ見レバ。アルキミコノ髮肩ニカヽリテ。色白クタケタカキガ。齢二十二三計ナルガ臥タル外人ナシ。是シモ御舍利持奉ランヤト思ナガラ。ヤヽトオドロカシテ。只今カヽル示現ヲ蒙テカク申也。御舍利ヤ持給ヘル。渡給テンヤト云ヘバ。淨土堂ヘオハせ。渡奉ラン。安キ事ナリトイフ。思ハスニ覚テツレテ。堂ノ後戸ヘユキヌ。脇ニカケタリケル守ノ袋ヨリ。水精ノ塔ノ六七寸バカリナルヲ取イダせリ。燈ノ光モ不及。御戸ヘ光明カヽヤキケリ。先身毛立テ覚也。御舍利十粒計出シ奉テ。此中ニ一粒ヱリテ取給ヘト云ヘバ我ニ有縁ノ御舍利御坐サバ。其相ヲ示シ給ヘトテ。掌ヲ合せテ。祈念シケレバ。御舍利。一粒虫ノハフ様ニ。ハヒヨリ給ヒケリ。コレコソトテ渡奉ヌ。感涙オサヘガタカリケリ。御廟ノ御前ヘ歸テ。抑イカナル人ニテ御坐ゾ。住所ハイヅクゾ。御名ハナニト申スゾ。夜明ナバ宿坊ヘ御坐せ。能々申シ契ト。懇ニカタラヒケレバ。サシテ住所ハナシ。名ヲバ寂靜トコソ申トテ。返事スクナニテ。ウチヤスミケリ。チトマドロミテ。アケボノニ見ケレバ。此ミコ見ヘズ。アサマシク覚テ。アマ子クタヅ子ケレドモ。ツイニナカリケリ。人ニトヒケレバ。此七八日見ヘツレドモ。イヅクヨリ來リ。イカナル者トモシラズトゾ答ヘケル。變化ノ人ニコソ。サテ其後モ礼シ付テ。五百返ノ礼拜。

Appendix II

Notes on Additional Reliquaries

Various relic cabinets depicting Kūkai remains from the medieval period. Often, he is depicted in the right most panel. One such example is the “Flaming Jewel Relic Cabinet” (*Kaenhōju gansō shari zushi* 火焔宝珠嵌装舎利厨子), in a private collection, as shown below, of Kūkai paired with Prince Shōtoku at two years old (Fig. 39). These double doors reference the relic faiths of these two figures and the province of their relics: Kūkai’s relics were brought back from Tang China, while those of Shōtoku were found between the infant’s hands. Similar to the other relic cabinets examined in Chapter Three, twin dragons soar above the flaming jewel to protect it.This jewel serves a double purpose in that it is shaped like a cintamani, but also encases the reliquary’s relics behind a crystal window.

Fig. 39. *Kaenhōju gansō shari zushi*. Private Collection.
Black lacquer, paint, and girl copper. Nanbokuchō period 南北朝時代, 14th century.

An interesting comparison to this is the “Wish Granting Jewel Mandala Cabinet” (*manihōju mandara makie zushi* 摩尼宝珠曼陀羅蒔絵厨子), which also depicts Kūkai and Shōtoku in a similar layout, this time inside the box itself (Fig. 40). The outside of the cabinet box, in contrast, continues with the theme of twin dragons rising out of the sea toward the flaming jewels in the “Hall of Wish-Granting-Jewels” (*manihōju den* 摩尼宝珠殿). Similar to the hanging mandala scrolls in Chapter Three, the box depicts a stunning golden *Manihoju mandala* (Fig. 41).

Fig. 40. Inside of “Wish Granting Jewel Mandala Cabinet.” Kūkai and infant Shōtoku are painted in gold lacquer and red paint in the bottom right panel of the cabinet. Private Collection, Nanbokuchō to Muromachi period, 14th-15th century.

Fig. 41. Outside of the cabinet-box. Twin dragons rise up out of the sea, in the *Manihoju mandala* style, towards the hall of wish-granting-jewels (*manihōju den* 摩尼宝珠殿).

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