



Thomas Conlan, *In Little Need of Divine Intervention: Takezaki Suenaga's Scrolls of the Mongol Invasions of Japan*. Translation with Interpretive Essay

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THE MONGOL INVASIONS SCROLL (*Mōko shūrai ekotoba*) by Takezaki Suenaga is a well-known and an invaluable historical source on the two Mongol invasions in the late thirteenth century. The original is presently in the possession of the Imperial Household Agency, and more than forty copies, mostly from the nineteenth and

twentieth centuries, are known today, suggesting that its importance has long been noted. Thomas Conlan's book, *In Little Need of Divine Intervention*, offers the first full translation of the text in English, with illustrations from the Harvard-Yenching Library copy of the scrolls, plus translations of nearly seventy primary documents related to the invasions.

The book is divided into several parts. First is an introductory essay on the history of the scrolls. The essay begins with a brief biography of Takezaki Suenaga, who was a *gokenin* of the Kamakura bakufu, and places him within the context of the political turmoil of the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Conlan also gives a good, overall summary of the present state of studies on the scrolls, both in the fields of history and art history. The essay provides firm background knowledge, and hence prepares the readers to better understand the historical context. The "Cast of Characters," which follows the essay, is also a helpful addition, not readily available in other reproductions.

The second part consists of the illustrations and translations of the verbal texts. The book is intentionally printed from back to front, so that the reproduced illustrations unfold in Japanese order, from right to left. Although this method of printing is sometimes confusing when reading the essays and translations of documents in English, it certainly makes sense when viewing the scrolls and following the sequence of the illustrations. The author chose to use a reproduction of a late-eighteenth-century copy of the original in the *Fukutekihen* (known as the *Tankaku sōsho* copy). This, in many ways, is a sensible choice. First, it allows the illustrations to be reproduced in full, and, at the same time, keeps the price affordable. The color reproductions are readily available in any of the *emaki* series (Chūō Kōron's *Nihon emaki taisei*, for example), and readers can always refer to those. Second, whether the present scrolls retain the original state of the scrolls has long been debated. As Conlan notes in his introductory essay, there are notable differences between the *Tankaku sōsho* copy and the current reconstruction of the original. For instance, the sequence of the illustrations and texts, according to Conlan, unfolds more logically in the *Tankaku sōsho* copy than does the original. Moreover, there are scenes that are missing or added in the current original, suggesting that substantial revisions were made at the time of restoration (traces of such a revision can be seen in the famous *teppō* [cannonball] scene as well). The book offers great opportunity for the readers to reexamine the current original in light of the reproduction.

Following the reproduction of the scrolls are the translations of primary documents on the Mongol Invasions. Conlan has chosen a wide variety of documents, ranging from a letter concerning the Mongol threat, a mobilization order issued by the Kamakura bakufu, documents on the topics of guard duty, defense, and provisioning, letters written in attempts to verify battle services, and court and bakufu-related documents regarding prayers for victory and peace. Of these, the documents that are of most interest to scholars of religion would be the ones in the final category, "Religion and War." Included in this category are Emperor Kameyama's edict promulgating prayers for peace and a curse against the Mongols; documents on the bakufu's offer-

ings (horses and swords) and funding to shrines in prayers for the destruction of the foreign invaders, and the bakufu's orders to pray for the destruction of foreigners that were conveyed by the *shugo* to the local shrines and temples; and other religious measures taken during the years following the invasions. These documents reveal how importantly religious rituals were viewed in facing the foreign aggression. They also provide great "hints" for topics for further study in the field of the history of religion.

What caught the attention of the reviewer, for instance, was the frequency of bakufu offerings to the Itsukushima Shrine (of the six documents associated with orders from Kamakura to religious institutions, five are directed to the Itsukushima Shrine). Historically, the Itsukushima Shrine has been known for its close relations with the Taira family, as represented by the famous *Heike nōgyō* (the illustrated scrolls offered to the Itsukushima Shrine by the Taira family). Yet, from the documents translated, the Shrine apparently continued to play a symbolic role through the Kamakura period, for the bakufu felt the need to make offerings to the Shrine at this moment of grave national crisis. What significance did the Itsukushima Shrine have? Was it patronized by the Kamakura bakufu, and if so, how? In what ways did it exert political influence over the local and central governments? Certainly, Conlan's choice of documents does not reflect any general consensus. However, there has been so little work done in the English language on the relationship between the Kamakura bakufu and religious institutions, and just about none when it comes to regional shrines, that these are questions that are surely worth investigating.¹ This can also be said of the gods that appear in the last of the translated documents. The gods of Kashii, Hakozaiki, and Kōra shrines mentioned in this document by Emperor Hanazono are local Kyushu gods that gained reputation as subjugators of foreign invaders after the Mongol Invasions. This document provides evidence that some regional shrines in Kyushu gained acceptance by the central powers immediately after the Mongol Invasions.

In the final, interpretive essay, Conlan addresses some long-debated issues concerning the Mongol Invasions—how large were the forces on either side? How well did the Japanese troops fight against the Mongols? And how decisive was the kamikaze, or the divine wind, in the course of the battle? Here, Conlan presents a vivid and detailed picture of the number of Japanese and Mongol troops and their tactics, and argues that the Mongol troops were not as large and mighty as commonly believed, and the Japanese were not as incompetent, and therefore, were not in need for the divine intervention in order to win the battles. The study of the Mongol Invasions have seen great progress in the recent years, especially with the

1. The only lengthy studies on the Kamakura bakufu and temples are Martin Collcutt's *Five Mountains: The Rinzai Zen Monastic Institutions in Medieval Japan* (Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1981), Brian Ruppert's *Jewel in the Ashes: Buddha Relics and Power in Early Medieval Japan* (Harvard University Press, 2000), Mikael Adolphson's *The Gates of Power: Monks, Courtiers, and Warriors and Premodern Japan* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), and Roy Ron's recently completed dissertation, *Powerful Warriors and Influential Clergy: Interaction and Conflict between the Kamakura Bakufu and Religious Institutions* (PhD dissertation, University of Hawai'i, 2003).

increasing awareness of the scholars of Japanese history of the need to view Japan in the larger context of Asian history. The recently published volume, *Mongoru no shūrai*, includes a chapter by a scholar of Mongol history, Sugiyama Masaaki, which reexamines the meaning of the Mongol Invasions of Japan in the context of Afro-Eurasian regions during the Age of the Mongols.² Contrary to Conlan's argument, Sugiyama suggests that there were indeed 27,000 men in the Mongol troop during their first attack on Japan. He, however, agrees with Conlan in saying that the Japanese had fought vigorously and inflicted great damage on their enemy, which made the Mongol leaders decide that the occupation of the Hakata Bay was difficult, and hence retreat. According to Sugiyama's reading, the storm (or strong wind) that occurred (or may not have occurred) during the first invasion was not a major factor for the Mongol retreat. Sugiyama further suggests that the Mongols had no intention to conquer Japan in their first invasion; for them, their objective had been met as long as they could intimidate and hence contain the Japanese troop from supporting the Southern Sung, which was their major target of seizure at the time. Not being an expert of military history, I am in no position to judge whose view is correct. Conlan's reconstruction of the battles poses an important argument which calls for further examination by scholars not only of Japanese history, but of Chinese, Korean, and Mongol histories.

In the final section of his essay, Conlan addresses the issue of "State, Religion, and War." Conlan's investigation of the role of religion in the battles goes beyond the commonly known belief in the "divine winds" (kamikaze) or in Japan as the "land of the gods" (*shinkoku*). He notes that the latter, especially, was a belief that was limited to "a small coterie of courtiers and priests throughout the thirteenth century." Instead, his discussion extends more widely to the personal and local perceptions of the otherworldly forces held by the warriors, including Takezaki Suenaga, demonstrating the significance of religion for the people of medieval Japan. Hence, although the Japanese forces may have been able to win the battles without the "divine intervention," Takezaki Suenaga and his contemporaries naturally believed that the victory had been won with the help of the gods. As Conlan concludes, "herein lies, perhaps, the distinction between the modern and medieval mind-sets."

Yet, can we simply say that religion was a matter of "mind-sets"? In other words, were there not political maneuvers on the part of the religious institutions in an attempt to increase their influence? Due to the nature of the work and the limited length of the essay, it is perhaps unfair to expect an in-depth analysis of the religious institutions and their involvement in the defense here. Yet, I would have liked to see a more political treatment of religious institutions in the essay and translated documents—how they "used" the Mongol Invasions for their political and economic interests, and thereby, created the discourse of kamikaze, which continued to

2. Sugiyama Masaaki, "Mongoru jidai no Afuro-Yūrashia to Nihon," in Kondō Shigekazu, ed., *Mongoru no shūrai* (*Nihon no jidaishi*, vol. 9, Yoshikawa Kōbunkan 2003), pp. 106–50.

occupy the minds of medieval courtiers and warriors for centuries to follow. For instance, Conlan could have included in his translations a claim or two made by temples and shrines regarding their merits and contributions to the victory to examine how they used the discourse of kamikaze or *shinkoku*. That would have helped explain why Kamakura or the Court responded in the way they did to the priest Tahōbō's dreams or to the holy man Nyoen's miraculous report in the last two translated documents.

Finally, a word on the use of the scrolls. Having translated the scrolls and reproduced them in full, Conlan could have given a more critical and analytical reading, not only of the verbal texts, but of the illustrations as well. As has been noted lately by many scholars, *emaki* are great sources for historical studies. However, these visual materials should not be used simply to extract factual information (ex. the kinds of weapons or tactics used in the battle). Important issues to address would be why the author chose to depict (or not depict) certain events or things, or why he/she chose to illustrate the event or the object in a certain manner. One obvious question that came to my mind after viewing the scrolls, for example, was why, of so many religious institutions mentioned in the verbal text, only Hakozaiki, Sumiyoshi, and Shikanoshima are depicted. Did those places have a special meaning to Takezaki Suenaga, or to the people who experienced the Mongol Invasions? Of course, these are not easy questions to answer; yet an attempt to answer such questions would help us explore the mind of the author, and possibly, the medieval mind-set.

All in all, *In Little Need of Divine Intervention* is undoubtedly an important work that should prove to be of great interest for scholars of political, military, cultural, and religious history. Conlan's work calls for a reexamination of an extremely important event in medieval Japanese history, and provides the groundwork to begin the study. Conlan's translations and essay would certainly inspire and invite scholars of various disciplines to engage in further debate over this event that involved diverse sectors of medieval Japanese society.

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