

knowledge required to evaluate it, but also because the arguments are often sketched out rapidly.

As a provisional intervention into an ongoing debate – or rather, into several interlocking and overlapping debates – this book leaves one eager to see the responses of historical linguists and archaeologists, especially those whose theories it critiques. It also whets the appetite for more from Unger himself, who will certainly continue to develop these ideas. This challenging work requires real commitment from its readers – especially non-linguists – but the intelligence and verve with which it is written, and the remarkable range of information and insight it incorporates, ensure that it richly rewards the effort.

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Eccentric Spaces, Hidden Histories: Narrative, Ritual, and Royal Authority from *The Chronicles of Japan* to *The Tale of the Heike*

DAVID T. BIALOCK

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xiv, 322 pp. + notes, bibliography, glossary of Chinese characters, index

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David T. Bialock's *Eccentric Spaces, Hidden Histories* represents an impressive work of scholarship that is wide-ranging in its exploration of texts and thoroughgoing in its investigation of often overlooked facets of works such as *Heike monogatari*, *Kojiki*, *Nihon shoki*, *Man'yōshū*, and *Ōkagami*. According to Bialock, twentieth-century literature and history scholars' efforts at 'constructing a classical canon and narrative of Japan's national emergence all but effaced these [non capital-centric] geographies and spaces in the interests of national unity and one national space' (3). One of his primary goals, therefore, is to '[provide] an eccentric reading of the earlier canon that recovers some of the discursive terrain of the medieval *Heike* that has been concealed by earlier canonical readings of the classical tradition' (4). This desire to recover, a term that recurs frequently over the book's eight chapters, propels Bialock's methodology, which centers upon performing a series of astute re-readings of canonical texts that foreground

their marginal aspects and underscore these peripheral aspects' potentially disruptive implications for ensconced narratives and ideologies.

This recuperative project struck me, on the whole, as being both worthwhile and well wrought. The work of the book consists mainly in extending the historical context in which *Heike* and its textual forebears have traditionally been understood and in emphasizing the pervasive impact a range of religious and performance traditions (Daoism, *dengaku*, exorcism rituals) had on the transmission and reception of these texts. One of the things Bialock does scrupulously is outline debates amongst Japanese scholars over the interpretation of works like *Heike monogatari*, *Kojiki*, *Nihon shoki*, and *Ōkagami*; his thorough description of the debate between Fukunaga Mitsuji and Fukui Fumimasa (26–30) represents an excellent example of this. Something else Bialock does scrupulously, but less consistently than I would have liked, is to provide extended close readings of relevant passages. To be sure, there are glimmers of this capacity at several points in the work, such as when Bialock provides this refreshing reading of an Engyōbon passage about Fujiwara no Moronaga:

Drawing on Hirano's observations, we can extend this analysis into the relationship that the text establishes between scriptive and political space. [. . .] In an ingenious trope, the constitutive elements of the graphs, by means of which the court had for centuries promulgated its authority in the form of edicts and official histories, become emblematic of the country's collapse into division. The written language thereby enacts a figural fall into division, producing a multiplicity of realms where there had once been unity. (204)

The cogent, creative character of readings like this made me lament the fact that they tend not to be developed further before another subsection begins, making more for a constellation of shrewd, suggestive points than lines of sustained argument that felt fully rendered.

Chapters four and five, 'Royalizing the Realm and the Ritualization of Violence' and 'Peripheries of Power: Toward an Ambulatory History', however, stand as remarkable exceptions to this tendency. These are fascinating in their patient consideration of the productive gaps to be found in reading works like *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* against one another through the figure of Yamato Takeru. Here especially, Bialock blends critical awareness of contemporary scholarly debates, literary sleuthing, and conceptual verve into a cohesive argumentative arc. His talents as a reader thus shine through, leading him to make provocative statements like the following: 'In this fashion, *Ōkagami* registers the moment when wandering reciters gain figural custody of historical narrative, which becomes literal with the itinerant reciters of the medieval *Heike*. Once the written production of court scholars, history has now become the utterance of wandering reciters at the margins of power' (157).

The thinkers whose ideas seem to influence Bialock most are Henri Lefebvre and Deleuze and Guattari, whose writings on the cultural construction of 'spatial practices' and nomadology, respectively, are cited on several occasions. While the invocation of such concepts seemed both apt and potentially fruitful, these references usually appear more decorative than integral to the arguments made, and there is little engagement with the ideas themselves to be found beyond explanatory descriptions of terms. Of particular note in this regard are the terms 'assemblage' and 'nomadic speech', both of which occur several times throughout the text. While Bialock explains what he has in mind with regard to the latter (on 135, in particular), I often got the sense that

these terms are being employed for their ostensible thematic links to topics but without a compelling interest in exploring the radical implications of the theories in relation to the cultural practices he tracks so ably. I wondered, for example, if statements like ‘it is the nomadic that has now taken possession of the court’ (174), didn’t come too hastily, and at the expense of more rigor. For instance, might not the critical purchase of ‘the nomadic’ as an idea in fact lie in the way it potentially *exceeds* the normative notions of property upon which ‘possession’ is premised? I note this detail since less precision in this instance might reduce the potential of Bialock’s stimulating analysis to gesture beyond the simple binaries it seeks to complicate.

Two more minor criticisms: First, given their multiple shared concerns, it seemed somewhat odd to me that Terry Kawashima’s vital study, *Writing Margins* goes unmentioned. Secondly, the absence of a character glossary of Japanese terms is unfortunate. Considering the philological thrust of Bialock’s adeptly handled recuperative project and the broad range of texts across which his analyses roam, such a reference would help readers keep better track of the subtle lexical shifts Bialock charts.

These items constitute drawbacks, not fatal flaws, however, and don’t diminish *Eccentric Spaces*’ considerable scholarly value. Bialock’s book represents a hefty contribution to English-language studies of medieval Japanese literature and will no doubt serve as an important reference for students and scholars of literature and religious studies. Bialock chronicles with great attention to historical context and linguistic nuance the shifting significance of spatial practices and textual production in medieval Japanese culture. In the process, he consistently locates obscure turns of phrase and accents their ideological significance in relation to concerns about the management of authority, purity, and the bodies of cultural actors roaming society’s borders such that the texts he treats come to disclose dimensions that had been heretofore effaced. The result of this endeavor is a work that, while following an episodic itinerary, still manages to be richly informative in its exhaustive attention to detail and consistently perceptive in its pointed emphasis on the peripheral presences that call central discourses into question.

Text Mentioned

Kawashima, Terry, *Writing Margins: The Textual Construction of Gender in Heian and Kamakura Japan*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001.

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Queer Voices from Japan: First Person Narratives from Japan’s Sexual Minorities

MARK McLELLAND, KATSUHIKO SUGANUMA and JAMES WELKER (eds)

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A thick collection of personal ‘voices’ from queer Japan initially sounded like one of those politically laudable projects that would at best produce an interesting pastiche of individual stories addressing few larger intellectual issues. Moreover, having read and taught Mark McLelland’s earlier social history *Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the*