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Research Articles

Emerging Scholars

Holy vows and realpolitik: Preliminary notes on Kōyasan's early medieval *kishōmon*

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Introduction

MY CURRENT research concerns the written vows made at the Shingon Buddhist temple Kōyasan 高野山 in the early medieval period (1185–1392). The temple complex at Kōyasan is situated in the mountainous interior of modern Wakayama prefecture, Japan, which in the pre-modern era corresponded to the province of Kii 紀伊. In the early medieval period, Kōyasan was developing a system of local rule centred on control of private estates (*shōen* 莊園) in the area surrounding the temple. This was an era of decentralization, in which national authority and systems of rule were losing their potency in the face of rising localization and the increasingly central role of the warrior class. With warriors taking an ever greater share of estate revenue and assuming greater administrative control within *shōen*, estate proprietors such as Kōyasan were faced with diminishing income, leading to centrally-located temples and aristocratic families effectively losing all control over distant estates. Located in the mountains of Kii and overlooking the estates along the Ki river, Kōyasan by contrast was close to its land and was strongly involved in warrior society. A major facet of this relationship with warrior estate managers was the *kishōmon* 起請文, or written vow, signed at the temple as both a performative act of submission to its spiritual authority and as a contract and code of conduct between proprietor and estate manager (*shōkan* 莊官).

As yet there has been very little research conducted on *kishōmon* in English-language academia, let alone on the religious-secular function of these vows in the context of the estate system and local power. The cosmological structure of Nanbokuchō period (1336–92) *kishōmon* is mentioned in passing in Sato Hiroo's "The Emergence of Shinkoku (Land

of the Gods) Ideology in Japan” and Mark Teeuwen and Fabio Rambelli’s *Buddhas and Kami in Japan: Honji Suijaku as a Combinatory Paradigm*.¹ The political aspect of *kishōmon* is mentioned in Lorraine Harrington’s “Social Control and the Significance of Akutō”, which briefly deals with Kōyasan *kishōmon* and their use with criminals.² However, these studies largely consider *kishōmon* in passing as support for broader arguments on religion or society; for detailed study of the written vow one must turn to Japanese-language scholarship, notably *Hyakusho mōshijō to kishōmon no sekai* by Irumada Nobuo, Satō’s *Kishōmon no seishinshi*, and his recent contribution to the field, “Nihon chūsei zenki ni okeru kishōmon no kinō ronteki kenkyū”.³ My research builds on previous scholarship by considering the *kishōmon* as a tool of social control and a reification of the social and political relationship between monks and warriors, estate managers and temple, within the Kōyasan Domain. In particular, it seeks to establish the degree to which Kōyasan *kishōmon* were standardized in text and function in the late thirteenth to early fourteenth centuries, and to what extent this standardization departed from the general use of written oaths in early medieval Japan.

What were *kishōmon*?

Kishōmon originated in the late Heian period among high-ranking monks and the aristocracy, but became increasingly popular across Japan from the mid-twelfth century onwards.⁴ Vows were signed for a wide variety of purposes, but within the Kōyasan Domain, the *kishōmon* was soon adapted to specific purposes and took on a standardized form of both oath and the terms that were sworn.⁵ These standardized oaths coincide with the establishment of Kōyasan’s early-medieval system of rule and the integration of the local elite into the hierarchy of the temple domain. Approximately one hundred pre-modern

1. Satō, Hiroo, “The emergence of Shinkoku (Land of the Gods) ideology in Japan,” in *Buddhism and nativism: framing identity discourse in Buddhist environments*, ed. Henk W. A. Blezer and Mark Teeuwen, *Challenging paradigms* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 32f; Mark Teeuwen and Fabio Rambelli, eds., *Buddhas and kami in Japan: Honji sui-jaku as a combinatory paradigm* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), *passim*.

2. L. Harrington, “Social control and the significance of Akutō,” in *Court and Bakufu in Japan: essays in Kamakura history*, ed. J. P. Mass (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 243f.

3. Irumada, Nobuo, *Hyakushō mōshijō to kishōmon no sekai: Chūsei minshū no jiritsu to rentai* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1986); Satō, Hiroo, *Kishōmon no seishinshi: Chūsei sekai no kami to hotoke* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2006); Satō, Hiroo, “Nihon chūsei zenki ni okeru kishōmon no kinō ronteki kenkyū,” *Shigaku Zasshi* 120, no. 11 (2011).

4. Irumada, Nobuo, *Hyakushō mōshijō*, 35.

5. The Kōyasan Domain (Kōyasan-jiryō, 高野山寺領, *shikka no shōen*, 膝下の莊園) was a large area of contiguous estates in north-eastern Kii province under the administration of the temple. In contrast to the nationally-scattered estates of other major temples, Kōyasan concentrated its estate holdings within a specific area, claimed as a divinely-commended “ancient domain” (*kyūryū*, 旧領) through association with the temple’s protective gods, Niu 丹生 and Kōya 高野. Over the course of the Kamakura and Nanbokuchō periods (1185–1392), Kōyasan acquired all of the land within the boundaries of the “ancient domain” through donation, commendation, lawsuit, and armed invasion.

kishōmon survive in the archives of Kōyasan, with some sixty of these dating from the early medieval period. Through them we are able to observe the means by which Kōyasan demanded the fealty of *shōkan* and warriors, and by examining the terms of the agreements that they swore to uphold we are offered a detailed insight into estate society. This provides a window into the relationship between monks, warriors, and cultivators within Kōyasan *shōen*. The vows sworn at Kōyasan were a formalization and regularization of the society of northern Kii. The temple, acting as the focal point, controller, and guarantor of these vows thus occupied a tremendously important position in this society. Not only were *kishōmon* signed at the temple itself, but their terms were decided in conference on the mountain and, judging by the uniformity of their language, were written out by Kōyasan's own scribes. The temple was thus providing the framework for the agreement of social roles in local estate society; in Foucauldian terms, Kōyasan was controlling the organization of discourse. Through control of the language, structure, and divine content of the vows, the temple was acting as the institutional apparatus through which local families articulated their social position and responsibilities.⁶

There can be no clearer expression of the integration of religious and temporal power in the medieval period in Japan than the *kishōmon*. The oath's validity and power came from the spiritual and political power of the issuing temple: drawing on the power of the nation's gods and Buddhas, deceased patriarchs and esoteric deities, *kishōmon* threatened oathbreakers with divine punishments in this life and the next. The subject matter of the vows themselves, in contrast to the religious nature of this frame text, was overwhelmingly practical and strongly linked to everyday society and local politics. The terrible power of the vow, drawing on powers considered immanent and fearful, and the institutional might of the temples at which they were signed lent *kishōmon* a practical authority as *de facto* legal documents.⁷ In a time when the reach and authority of central government was weakening, the vow represented an independent and decentralized means to create binding agreements and enforce judgement. The *kishōmon* was therefore a means for parties to sign an agreement guaranteed by the authority of the temple without involving the governments, and crucially was also a means for temples to enforce their spiritual and temporal power over signatories. In Kii Province, *Kishōmon* were used to chasten criminals and set the terms of their "parole", to articulate the rights and responsibilities of estate officials, and to enforce their submission to the overlordship of the temple proprietor. This written vow is thus closely connected to the evolution of administrative control and local power in the early medieval period.

In the context of medieval Japan, the weight of this religious force and the importance of the written document should not be underestimated. Medieval society depended on the authority of the written document to guarantee landholding, rights, responsibilities, and inheritance.⁸ *Kishōmon* added to this inherent authority the power of the gods and

6. M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), 194, 196.

7. Satō, Hiroo, "*Kishōmon no kinō*," 27f.

8. Hitomi Tonomura, "Forging the past: medieval counterfeit documents," *Monumenta Nipponica* 40, no.

Buddhas, coupled with the fear of disease and damnation, to create a potent guarantee of the oath. The sacred importance of the *kishōmon* and its use as a tool to articulate power relationships echoes the importance of the sworn oath in European society of the same period. Marcel Bloch's statement on the practice of swearing fealty (*foi*), one of the central concepts of European feudality, might equally have been made about Japanese *kishōmon*: "in a disturbed society, where mistrust was the rule ... the appeal to divine sanctions appeared to be one of the few restraints with any efficacy at all."⁹ Within the framing language of religious might, *kishōmon* document a wide variety of matters both religious and secular: monks swearing abstinence from alcohol, warriors giving fealty to their overlords, and criminals promising to stick to the straight and narrow.¹⁰ The adaptability of the document, a simple two-part vow consisting of the articles to be sworn and the gods guaranteeing it, and its close association with temples—centres of not only religious but also economic power—naturally saw it develop a strong association with the *shōen* system in the medieval period.

Structure of a Vow

Kishōmon generally conformed to a basic binary structure composed of the vows or information to be sworn to (the *maegaki* 前書) and a religious declaration (*shinmon* 神文). This basic structure was followed by *kishōmon* across the country, but with important differences within both sections depending on the issuing temple and matters concerned. Both oath and religious declaration are therefore informative in reconstructing the role and nature of the *kishōmon* in early medieval Japanese society. The *shinmon* acts as a frame to the *kishōmon*, the guarantee of the articles sworn therein. This divine authority unified godly power with secular contract, listing the gods, Buddhas, departed souls and esoteric deities invoked as witnesses and guarantors of the vow, and the divine punishments that would befall oathbreakers. The *shinmon* is thus both the authority which guarantees the vow and a symbol of religious power. In the early medieval period, the written word held great power, with signed documents considered to be legitimising and sacrosanct in themselves.¹¹ To this already puissant form were added the strongest forces known to Japan—the divine force of Buddhist and Shintō deities, representing the spiritual as well as political and military power of the great temples. *Kami* were regarded with active fear, and the invocation of divine punishment was not signed lightly.¹² To sign a *kishōmon* was

1 (Spring 1985): 70

9. M. Bloch, *Feudal society* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), 147

10. Satō, *Kishōmon no seishinshi*, p. 20 (alcohol); others: *Kōyasan monjo*, vol. 1–8, Dainihon komonjo, iewake (Tokyo: Tokyo University Press, 1904–) (hereafter *Km*), Vol. 7, Doc. 1783 (1333), Vol. 1, Doc. 360 (1290), and Vol. 1, Doc. 447 (1271).

11. G. M. Berger, ed., *Currents in medieval Japanese history: essays in honor of Jeffery P. Mass* (Los Angeles: Figueroa Press, 2009), 37.

12. Toshio Kuroda, "Shinto in the history of Japanese religion," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 7, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 16.

to do so in fear of the wrath of the immanent powers that surrounded you, from powerful and august deities such as Hachiman and Amaterasu herself to esoteric Buddhas and the souls of the founders of Buddhist sects.

The deities invoked in *kishōmon* were themselves an important element in the politics of social control. Kōyasan's landed domain was grounded in the rhetoric of the "ancient domain" granted to Kūkai by the local deities Niutsuhime 丹生都姫 and Kōya 高野. Niu and Kōya were enshrined at Amano Shrine 天野社, a key estate holder within the Kōyasan community, and both deities feature prominently in the *shinmon* of Kōyasan *kishōmon*.¹³ Referred to either as "Niu and Kōya Myōjin" or "the protective gods of Amano", they appear in almost every surviving *kishōmon*. The Amano gods, Niutsuhime and Kariba, were not only the guardians of the local area and intimately connected to the founding of Kōyasan, but were identified with Dainichi Nyorai 大日如来 (Māhāvairocana), the central figure of Shingon cosmology.¹⁴ Through the doctrine of *honji suijaku* 本地垂迹, Niu was portrayed as the manifestation of Dainichi in the Womb Realm (*taizōkai* 胎藏界) and Kariba was the corresponding manifestation in the parallel Diamond Realm (*kongōkai* 金剛界).¹⁵ The invocation of the protective deities of Amano was therefore a symbol both of local and transcendental power, linking Kōyasan's local rule to universal Shingon cosmology. The invocation of local Kōyasan-aligned deities was thus a symbol of the temple's regional authority and right to land, reinforcing the relationship of ruler and ruled articulated in the vows themselves.

In addition to the autochthonic Niu and Kōya, a number of *shinmon* also refer to Hachiman, the protective deity of many estates, especially those formerly under Iwashimizu control. All the vows concerning Ogawa-Shibame and Suda Minami Estates, both carved from Iwashimizu land, swear by Hachiman as well as the Amano gods, and several of the Arakawa vows invoke the local Mifune Hachiman.¹⁶ The inclusion of references to local Hachiman shrines reflected their continuing importance to Kii's estate society, an influence that was not always supportive of Kōyasan rule.¹⁷ That these powers and those of

13. In the premodern era, Kōyasan was a heterogeneous community of related organizations rather than a single administrative hierarchy, with individual components holding estates in their own right within the Kōyasan Domain. The post of head priest of Amano Shrine (*inju* 院主) was held by the Kōyasan *kengyō* 高野山檢校, the highest administrator and de facto abbot of the temple. The post of Kōyasan abbot (*zazu* 座主) was, in the Kamakura period, held in absentia by the abbot of Kōyasan's head temple Tōji.

14. J. I. Stone, "Chanting the august title of the Lotus Sutra": *daimoku* practices in classical and medieval Japan," in *Re-Visioning "Kamakura" Buddhism*, ed. R. K. Payne (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 149.

15. Philip L. Nicoloff, *The sacred Kōyasan: a pilgrimage to the mountain temple of Saint Kōbō Daishi and the Great Sun Buddha* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2008), 152; Joseph M. Kitagawa, *Religion in Japanese history* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 63f.

16. Ogawa-Shibame: *Km*, Vol. 7, Docs. 1587 (1269), 1615 and 1622 (1333); and Vol. 8, Docs. 1783 and 1785 (1333); Suda Minami: Vol. 8, Doc. 1780 (1335); Arakawa: *Km*, Vol. 7, Docs. 1571 (1291) and 1576 (1292); and Vol. 8, Docs. 1775 and 1776.

17. Takagi, Tokurō, "Tomobuchi no shō," in *Ki no kuni shōen no sekai*, ed. Yamakage, Kazuo, vol. 1 (Osaka: Seibundō, 2002), 183f.

esoteric Buddhas and Indian deities were not seen as incompatible or fundamentally different reflects the invocation of the broadest range of power available to sanctify and guarantee the document. While there is therefore some variation in the wording of *shinmon* and the powers invoked, the same basic form permeates Kōyasan *kishōmon*, with many *shinmon* identical or near-identical across vows signed in different estates, reinforcing the concept of the document as driven by Kōyasan rather than created to serve the interests of individual estates. While the form of the vow differs from that used by other times, within the Kōyasan corpus it is frequent for the only variation between vows to be the name of the signatory. A standardized statement was used in one third of all the surviving Kōyasan *kishōmon*, with only trivial variations.¹⁸ For example, three vows which, despite being signed over a sixty year period, and in different estates, differed only in the names of the signatories and the phrasing of one word:¹⁹

Shinmon, Kōno, Makuni, and Sarukawa Estates (*Km*, Vol. 1, Doc. 447, 1271).
 梵天帝尺四大天王、日本國中大小神社、天野四所部類眷屬、大師金剛天等兩部諸尊神罰冥罰於 [各々] 身上八万四千毛孔、今生受白癩黒癩重病、來世墮無間地獄、可無出期之狀如件。

Shinmon, Arakawa Estate (*Km*, Vol. 1, Doc. 448, 1286)
 蒙梵天帝尺四大天王、日本國中大小神社、天野四所 [権現] 部類眷屬、大師金剛天等兩部諸尊神罰冥罰於 [為時] の身上八万四千毛孔、今生受白癩黒癩重病、來世墮無間地獄、可無出期之狀如件。

Shinmon, Kōno, Makuni and Sarukawa Estates (*Kamakura Ibun*, Doc. 31779)
 蒙梵天・帝尺・四大天王、日本國中大小神社、天野四所部類眷屬・大師・金剛天等兩部諸尊、神罰冥罰於 [違犯] 身上八万四千毛吼（孔）、今生受白癩・黒癩重病、來生墮無間獄、不可有出期之狀如件。

By Bonten, Taishaku[ten] and the four Great Heavenly Kings, the great and small shrines of the country of Japan, the protective gods of Amano, [Kōbō] Daishi (Kūkai), and the various Buddhas of the Diamond Realm and Womb Realm, may their heavenly punishment and underworldly punishments fall

18. Identical or near-identical *shinmon* in addition to the three quoted in the main text are found in the *Minamoto no Tametoki kishōmon-an* of 1286; the *Sakanoue Kiyozumi kishōmon*, *Sōtsuibushi-dai narabi ni kumon kishōmon*, *Kōno no shō sōtsuibushi-dai Kunitaka ukebumi*, *Makuni no shō bantō Minamoto no Masayuki kishōmon*, *Kōno no shō kumon jōsei ukebumi*, *Sarukawa no shō kumon sō Nōshin ukebumi*, *Kōno no shō Kami'i toneri kishōmon*, *Kōno no shō Masayuki-myō bantō Masayuki kishōmon*, *Shami Dairen kishōmon*, *Makuni no shō sōtsuibushi-dai Hōren kishōmon*, *Shami Saishin kishōmon*, *Nagai Kiyokuni kishōmon*, *Sarukawa-gō kumon sō Nōshin kishōmon*, and *Kōno no shō Ōkubo bantō Sakanoue Sueshige kishōmon* of 1291; *Sarukawa no shō kumon Nōshin kishōmon* and *Kōno no shō kumon Taira no Yoshinobu kishōmon* of 1302; and the *Tsukatsuki no shō satanin-ra rencho kishōmon-an*, *Kii sanko no shō Sarukawa Makuni Kōno shōkan ukebumi*, and *Arakawa no shō shōkan-ra kishōmon* of 1332. *Km*, Vol. 8, Doc. 1782 (1286), Vol. 1, Doc 236, Vol. 5, Doc 952, Vol. 7, Docs. 1590, 1592, 1593, 1594, 1595, 1596, 1597, 1603, and 1614, Vol. 8, Doc. 1777, 1778, (1291), Vol. 7, Docs. 1599, 1600, (1302), Vol. 7, Doc. 1546 (1332), Vol. 8, Doc. 1921 (1332); and *Kamakura ibun*, Doc. 31779 (1332).

19. Kōno, Makuni, and Sarukawa estates, 1271 (*Km*, Vol. 1, Doc. 447); Arakawa estate, 1286 (*Km*, Vol. 1, Doc. 448); Kōno, Makuni and Sarukawa estates, 1332 (*Kamakura ibun*, Doc. 31779).

on the eighty-four thousand pores of [the signatory's] body, in this life to suffer from the grave illnesses of white leprosy and black leprosy, and in the next life to fall into the depths of Muken Hell without the possibility of relief, signed in this manner: [signatories]²⁰

This standardized invocation is found in *kishōmon* from across the Kōyasan Domain and across the span of the early medieval period in Japan, but is not replicated in detail by the vows of other temples. Therefore despite the *shinmon*'s role as the minor section of each text, less directly concerned with the temple's estate affairs, it was nonetheless significant in establishing the conceptual and political space dominated by the spiritual authority of Kōyasan within the physical boundaries of its local domain in Kii.

Maegaki and the content of vows

The terms sworn in Kōyasan *kishōmon* (the *maegaki*) were often as standardized as the holy vow (*shinmon*). Taking the “Kōno no shō sōtsuibushi Kunitaka ukebumi” of 1291 as a representative example, it can be seen that of the vow's forty-one articles, every single one is found in at least four extant documents; the average (median and mode) is seven, and some of the articles are found in ten, twelve, or fourteen different vows signed between 1270 and 1330.²¹ The articles sworn in each vow address the contemporary concerns of estate society—regulating and protecting the ownership of land and resources, the degree of control exercised by the *shōkan* over the yeomanry and peasantry, the rights and prerogatives of monks, and the prevention and punishment of crime. The articles of the vows are therefore an expression of the social rules of the Kōyasan Domain, containing provisions to governing access to the water supply and natural resources, articulations of property and criminal law, and social and moral precepts focusing on respect for monks and Buddhist concepts such as the proscription of hunting and hawking. By signing the *kishōmon* and swearing to obey its precepts, the signatory—invariably a member of the local elite, a monk or warrior resident in a Kōyasan estate—was agreeing to a direct covenant with the temple and its system of private government.

The terms of the vows place significant emphasis on protecting the rights and privileges of the temple's monks, using *kishōmon* to enforce a behavioural hierarchy favouring the temple in local society. Good examples of this are the twelve separate *kishōmon* signed between 1288 and 1332 which contain the identical command, “I/we will not bathe before monks”.²² Whilst it is not beyond the power of imagination to conceive of a local official whose public bath queue-skipping was so uncouth as to offend the resident monks

20. Bonten and Taishaku (Taishakuten) are the Indian deities Brahma and Indra (Śakra), and the four great heavenly kings are the Shitennō 四天王, world-protecting devas in Buddhist cosmology. Kōbō Daishi is the respectful posthumous name for Kūkai, the founder of Kōyasan and Shingon Buddhism in Japan.

21. *Km*, Vol. 7, Doc. 1590 (1291).

22. 「寺僧以前不可沐浴事」, *Km*, Vol. 1, Docs. 236 and 449 (1291); Vol. 7, Docs. 1592, 1595, and 1603 (1291), and in the longer form 「庄官以下輩、寺僧以前不可沐浴、但二番螺以後可罷臨、又路次騎馬等可存札

of the estate, it is harder to countenance a total of twenty-four men whose ablutionary behaviour was so offensive. Rather, the prohibition of taking a bath before monks, along with similar articles demanding respect for monks and protection of their lands, demonstrate that the vows signed by local officials were semi-standardized rather than extracted for specific offences. This prohibition, standardized across a large number of Kōyasan *kishōmon*, is found nowhere else in the early medieval corpus.²³ A further example is found in a similar article sworn in seven *kishōmon* which completely overlap with the bathing prohibition vows. The oath-takers swore that:

Estate managers and their followers shall behave with courtesy towards temple monks, and the estimation of social position must not be abandoned. Furthermore their retainers, not to mention shrine attendants, temple attendants, and servants of the whole temple complex must be treated with the same respect and we (the signatories) must not oppose them.

庄官以下輩、向寺僧、可存礼節、而量分際、不可處理於非、又縱雖公人堂衆、為惣寺使者時、同存儀不可成敵對事。²⁴

Other notable articles within *kishōmon* declared protection for monks' forestry and fields within estates and forbade managers from entering monks' land when pursuing criminals. These articles suggest the role of this form of *kishōmon* as an articulation of the relationship between the temple and the managers within its domain, the signing of which was an act of submission by local leaders acknowledging the temple's prerogatives in the estate.

Conclusion

Under the guarantee of divine but strongly localized power, the *kishōmon* signed at and held by Kōyasan set out the social and political relationships which governed the domain's land and society. *Kishōmon* were imposed on estate society by the temple as it

儀事」—“Shōkan and their followers must not bathe before monks, but must wait until after the second horn-call until they go. Furthermore, riders on the road must keep good manners”; found in *Km*, Vol. 7, Docs. 1590, 1593, 1594, 1600 (1302), and 1614 (1291); Vol. 7, Doc. 1546, and Vol. 8, Doc. 1921 (1332). Use of the Trumpet Conch (*horagai* 螺) as a horn by Kōyasan monks is attested in an early *kishōmon* signed by the residents of Kanshōfu estate objecting to horn-blowing monks forcibly entering their properties:「堂衆并法師原下居、或百姓住家邊立寄、卒吹螺押入家中」—“Temple workers and senior monks [went to] Shita'i and, approaching the houses of the *hyakushō*, they blew horns and forcibly entered households”; *Km*, Vol. 2, Doc. 316.

23. The term *mokuyoku* 沐浴 for bathing is attested in contemporary documents, such as *Daigoji monjo*, Vol. 5, Doc. 969 and the fifteenth-century records of the Kōyasan “Great Bathhouse”, *Km*, Vol. 8, Docs. 1772-4, but is not found in any non-Kōyasan *kishōmon* or in the context of regulating bathing or preserving monkish privilege.

24. Some versions have the minor variation of 而量其分際 and/or 為惣寺使時者 or 為惣使寺時者; *Km*, Vol. 7, Docs. 1590, 1593, 1594, 1600 (1302), and 1614 (1291); Vol. 7, Doc. 1546; and Vol. 8, Doc. 1921 (1332).

established new direct working relationships with power-holders in the area, setting out the rights and responsibilities of the *shōen* elite as agents of Kōyasan. The *kishōmon* is a physical manifestation of the combination of spiritual and political power wielded by the temple complex, a demonstration of how religious authority was combined with military strength to achieve local control. In Kōyasan's *kishōmon* we may therefore see a record of the network of alliances and vendettas through which Kōyasan interacted with the provincial elite. Furthermore, the documents cluster around transformative periods in which the temple was attempting to assert greater control over the land and people of nearby estates, primarily the late Kamakura to Nanbokuchō Periods and again in the early fifteenth century. The changing frequency of vows corresponds closely to political events at the provincial and national level, with *kishōmon* providing a record of how the temple was affected by and responded to political opportunities to expand its domain in Kii.

The imposition of strikingly similar *kishōmon* on the officers of local estate administration are a documentary representation of the links between the temple and local communities. The narrative of the late Kamakura Period is one of the decreasing ability of proprietors to exert control over land and the gradual loss of revenue, corresponding to the growing independence of estates and the warriors who managed them. The network of Kōyasan *kishōmon* both bears out and questions this hypothesis in parts. The vows contain numerous articles reflecting warrior encroachment, from failure to forward revenue to theft of crops and incursions into forestry. However, Kōyasan *kishōmon* also indicate the centrality of the temple to the region as an economic and religious centre, a fount of authority which created the fundamental underpinning of local social structures. *Shokan* were compelled to travel to and from the temple to sign multiple vows—Monk Nōshin, *kumon* of Sarukawa, for example, signed no fewer than five vows over the years 1271–1302.²⁵ The periodic renewal of vows reinforced the relationship between temple and local elite, with the performative act of signing *kishōmon* asserting both the temple's authority and the conferral of legitimacy on its administrators. We may see in this a parallel of the repetition of oaths of fealty in Europe, extracted for much the same reasons.²⁶ Within the vows themselves, local managers swore that whenever they were summoned by the temple they were to attend immediately, or send their sons if they themselves were too ill to travel, on pain of being branded criminals if they failed to comply.²⁷ Failure to co-operate with Kōyasan or to adhere to the terms of *kishōmon* had serious consequences, as demonstrated by expeditionary forces of armed monks sent against the estate managers (and

25. *Km*, Vol. 1, Doc. 447 (1271), Vol. 7, Doc. 1589 (1275), Vol. 8, Doc. 1778 (1291), Vol. 7, Doc. 1594 (1291) and Vol. 7, Doc. 1599 (1302).

26. "There were a great many reasons why the oath of fealty should be exacted frequently. ... [T]his promise—almost a commonplace affair—could be repeated several times to the same person" Bloch, *Feudal society*, 146.

27. 「自山上被召之時、不違日限可參、但沉重病不堪行步之時者、捧嚴重誓狀、可差進子息、若無子息之輩、可進如身之仁、若違此旨者、可被處罪者也」—*Km*, Vol. 1, Doc. 450 (1315), Vol. 7, Docs. 1589 (1275), 1590, 1593, 1594, and 1614 (1291), 1600 (1302); Vol. 7, Doc. 1546, and Vol. 8, Doc. 1921 (1332).

bandits) Minamoto no Tametoki and Genpachi Yoshikata in Arakawa estate.²⁸ Tametoki and Yoshikata's vows were extracted by military force, and when those oaths were broken some years later, the temple responded by mustering a further army of monks and local warriors to destroy the bandit network in battle.²⁹ References to the men disappear from the historical record after this.

Having established the importance of the *kishōmon* to Kōyasan's estate society, there is considerable scope for research within the corpus of vows from the temple. While there is not space here to go into greater detail, it has been possible to recreate the spatial dimension of *kishōmon* usage in medieval Kii province, plotting the prevalence of geographically-bound deities in vows across the area, revealing the influence of competing religious networks. This approach offers a fine-detail map of local belief at the estate level, reflecting the influence of shrines in *shōen* as well as the permeating influence of Kōyasan's Shingon Buddhist cosmology. It has also been possible to examine the temporal record of Kōyasan vows, demonstrating that the number of vows as a proportion of the temple's documentary output increased during periods in which Kōyasan was expanding its local control over warriors and peasants, and falling in eras in which that control was weaker. This quantitative approach allows us to examine the centrality of the holy vow to Kōyasan's secular administration in the early medieval period. In future, I intend to broaden this analysis of both the religious and administrative facets of *kishōmon* to provincial Japan more broadly, examining the extant vows of other major temples.

28. *Kōya shunjū hennen shūroku*, Kōan 9 (1286) 12/3, p. 181; *ibid.*, Shōō 3 (1290) 8/8, p. 182.

29. Yamakage, Kazuo, "Kōya kassen' kai," *Kōyasan Daigaku Mikkyō Bunka Kenkyūsho kiyō* 10 (1997): 21f.

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