The “Separation of Gods and Buddhas”
at Ōmiwa Shrine in Meiji Japan

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The development of Shinto during the Meiji period constitutes one of the most fascinating phenomena of modern Japanese history, especially in view of the far-reaching effect that the State Shinto of the late Meiji period had on many aspects of Japanese life. But although the nature of Meiji-period Shinto has been widely researched, far less attention has been directed to the genesis of the movement as an intellectual, political, and religious force. Since many of the keys for understanding the later development of State Shinto are found in the years of the Meiji Restoration, research on this period—which could be called the shinbutsu bunri (separation of gods and Buddhas) period—is essential if we are to comprehend the full significance of the Shinto movement.

The term shinbutsu bunri refers to the separation of Shinto and Buddhism (actually the expulsion of Buddhism from syncretic Shinto-Buddhist sanctuaries) that occurred from the spring of 1868. This separation was one of the central events in the formation of modern Japanese Shinto. The present article analyzes the events of the shinbutsu bunri period at one of Japan’s most important shrines, Ōmiwa Jinja in Nara Prefecture. The events connected with this shrine from 1868 to the early 1870s provide an interesting reflection of what happened to religious institutions throughout Japan during that period.

The Nara Basin is sure to impress anyone traveling through its thickly settled plains as a region of deep historic significance. In the distance to the east lie the green-wooded mountains of Yamato, whose beauty has been praised in poetry since the time of the Manyōshū万葉集.

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Students of Japanese history will recognize familiar names everywhere, like Ame no Kaguyama, Unebi, Kasanui, and Makimuku. The innumerable temples, shrines, and emperors’ tombs located in this region date back to the most ancient of times.

Where the plain ends abruptly at the gentle curve of the mountains, not far from the city of Sakurai, there rises a single, densely wooded mountain noticeable for its perfect conical form. This is Mt. Miwa 三輪山, also known as Mimoro 御諸山 or Mimuro 御室山 (ŌMIWA JINJA 1975, pp. 75–80, 650; KANDA 1971, pp. 852–55; ANTONI 1988, p. 79). Even in Japan, a land of sacred mountains, Mt. Miwa is nearly unparalleled as a stage of religious activity and as an object of religious adoration. Archeological evidence shows that there have been cultic centers on the mountain for so long that their origins are lost in the darkness of prehistory (ŌMIWA JINJA 1968–91, pp. 727–923; 1975, pp. 3–30). However, the principal reason for the reverence accorded to Mt. Miwa is the special place it holds in Shinto mythology. Both the Kojiki and Nihongi tell us that the mountain’s divinity, Ōmononushi no mikoto 大物尊, is a manifestation of the great god of Izumo 出雲, Ōkuninushi no kami 大國主神 (ANTONI 1988, passim; NAUMANN 1988, pp. 122–23). Ōmiwa Jinja 大神神社 at the base of the mountain is where this deity of the Izumo line is worshipped. This “Shrine of the Great Divinity” claims, moreover, to be the “oldest shrine of Japan.”

Although the historicity of this claim is doubtful (and controversial as well), the Ōmiwa Jinja shows certain peculiarities that make it, indeed, one of the most remarkable sanctuaries in Shinto. Unlike most other Shinto shrines, the main building of the complex is not a honden 本殿 (the place in which the deity’s shintai 神體—the “body of the divinity”—is enshrined) but the haiden 拝殿, the “devotion hall” in which religious rituals are performed. The divine mountain Miwayama is itself the shintai of the god Ōmononushi, and is regarded as holy and invulnerable. Thus religious adoration is directed straight to the mountain.

Around this central sanctuary is located a group of sessha 摹社 and massha 末社, branch shrines, with their divinities having a special relationship to the main divinity of Ōmiwa Jinja. Among them one can find smaller complexes like Himuka Jinja and Kuebiko Jinja as well as more magnificent examples like Sai Jinja and Hibara Jinja (also

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1 For information on Miwa archeology in English see BARNES and OKITA 1993.

2 This assumption is based on the mythical chronology found in the Kojiki; even nowadays the shrine’s publications accept these dates as historically valid (ŌMIWA JINJA 1977, preface), as does PONSONBY-FANE (1974, p. 57), the only author who has written on the history of Ōmiwa Jinja in English.
known as Yamato no Kasanui no mura). Special importance is accorded to the last-mentioned of these, since, according to the Nihongi (Sujin), Kasanui is where Amaterasu Ōmikami, the sun goddess and ancestral deity of the imperial family, was worshipped by Toyosukiihime during the reign of the legendary Tennō Sujin, before her shintai had been transferred to Ise. The shrine therefore refers to itself as moto-Ise, “original Ise.”

This legend—the historicity of which will not be examined here—reveals a particularly important aspect of the history of Ōmiwa Jinja: its extraordinarily deep ties with the imperial family. The national significance enjoyed by the shrine stems from this relationship. Thus the influence and prestige of this shrine has increased in times of strengthened imperial rule and waned in times of imperial decline. Since the Ritsuryō era it has been one of the most important shrines in the empire; due to its links with the imperial court it was also counted among the so-called nijūnishia 二十二社 (twenty-two shrines).

The fortunes of Ōmiwa Jinja rose with the Meiji Restoration in 1868, when imperial rule was “restored” and efforts began to remake Shinto into the state religion of the new Japan. As early as May 1871 Ōmiwa Jinja was made a kampeitaisha 官幣大社 (Major Imperial Shrine), the highest rank in the newly created system of Shinto shrines (ŌMIWA JINJA 1968–91, bekkan 2, p. 135; MORI 1992, 36; UMEDA 1975, 319–21; LOKOWANDT 1978, p. 274, Dok. 29). After the end of the Pacific War, however, the shrine was deprived of this position by the SCAP authorities, who on 15 December 1945 issued the “Shinto directive” officially abolishing Shinto’s status as a state religion. Since that time Miwa Jinja has been one of the religious corporations united under the umbrella organization known as the Jinja Honchō (Main Association of Shinto Shrines). The shrine’s close relationship with

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4 On the question of the identification of Yamato no Kasanui no mura with Hibara Jinja see ŌMIWA JINJA 1968–91, vol. 3, pp. 614–52. The term moto-Ise is found in connection with other shrines as well.

5 On the system of the twenty-two shrines see NAUMANN 1988, pp. 230–31; on the position of Ōmiwa Jinja within this system see ŌMIWA JINJA 1975, p. 149.

6 For information on State Shinto see, for example, MURAKAMI 1986, 1990; in Western languages HARDACRE 1989; HORI and TODA 1956; LOKOWANDT 1978; and ANTONI 1991a.

the imperial court has not disappeared in the post-war period, however. Indeed, it seems more alive than ever before.

This fact is glaringly symbolized by a recently erected structure that, because of its stifling monumentality, gives rise to mixed emotions even in the sympathetic observer. This is the new gate to the enlarged shrine area, the so-called Ōtorii 大鳥居 (great entrance gate), which was built in 1986 in the middle of Sakurai city following the same design as previous gates but in proportions never before seen. This dark monument, clearly visible even from a distance, is built not of wood in the traditional manner but of black steel, and rises gloomily over the town to a height of 32.2 meters as it frames the green silhouette of Miwa mountain. The slab at the pedestal of the torii proudly proclaims the torii to be the biggest ever built, and that it “will last for 1,300 years.”¹⁸ The torii’s dimensions do indeed exceed those of the previous “biggest torii in Japan,” another dark steel gate twenty-five meters in height built in 1974 and found at the entrance of Japan’s most controversial shrine complex, Yasukuni 靖国 Jinja in Tokyo.

Special importance should be accorded the fact that the torii was erected in commemoration of a ritual visit (go-sanpai 御参拝) by the late Shōwa Tennō, who died in 1989 (ANTONI 1989). The visit took place on 13 October 1984, on which day the emperor offered a large ōtamagushi 大玉串 (sacred branch) as a sacrifice to the deity of Miwa (ŌMIWA 1989 (no. 77): 50–55.; ŌMIWA JINJA 1968–91, bekkan 2, p. 169). Shortly thereafter, on 7 January 1985, work commenced on the new torii. It was built along the imaginary extension of the road leading into the shrine, in the immediate neighborhood of the old Ichī no torii (first torii), a modest wooden structure in the traditional style. Construction proceeded quickly: various religious ceremonies were held on 12 and 24 December 1985 and 23 January 1986, and the torii was officially opened on 28 May 1986.⁹ Since that time the southern Nara Basin has had a new, clearly visible symbol, one devoted to the memory of the imperial shrine visit as well as to the sixtieth anniversary of Shōwa Tennō’s accession to the throne in 1926.¹⁰

Hence even now Miwa proclaims its close ties to the imperial court, and continues to stress the State-Shintō period prior to 1945. The remaining strength of that spiritual order is attested to by the amazing fact that regular ceremonies are still held in commemoration of the most ideologically significant document of the Meiji state, the Kyōiku

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¹⁸ Technical information on the Ōtorii is contained in YOSHIDA 1989, p. 5; ŌMIWA 1986 (no. 70), pp. 52–54; 1986 (no. 71), pp. 27–30, 44 (with timetable).

⁹ For photographs of the opening see ŌMIWA 1986 (no. 71): 58–59.

¹⁰ See plate at the bottom of the torii.
chokugo 教育勅語 (Imperial Rescript on Education). The most recent such ceremony was held on 30 October 1990 (Ōmiwa Jinja 1968–91, bekkan 2, p. 174).

The remnants of Meiji ideology in the self image of Ōmiwa Jinja are intriguing enough, but they provide only a hint of the drastic events that took place during the religious and political changes of the Meiji Restoration.

“The Separation of Gods and Buddhas” at Ōmiwa-Shrine

The start of Shinto as a state-related religion was marked by a governmental decree, the shinbutsu bunri rei 神仏分離令 or shinbutsu hanzen rei, issued on 28 March 1868. This edict, based on Fukko (restoration) Shinto 復古神道 ideology with its orientation towards the Hirata and Mito schools, ordered the “separation of the gods and Buddhas” at all Shinto shrines. The carrying out of this directive on the local level was accompanied in part by frightening outbursts of violence against Buddhist institutions (haibutsu kishaku /haibutsu hanzen/). In this way a thousand-year tradition of religious tolerance between Buddhism and Shinto (shinbutsu shûgô 神仏習合) came to an abrupt end.

From ancient times until the Meiji Restoration jingûji 神宮寺—temples that symbiotically combine elements of Buddhism and Shinto—were found throughout Japan. Miwa itself had three jingûji: Daigorin-ji 大御輪寺, Jõgan-ji 清願寺, and Byödô-ji 平等寺. The ideological foundation of the jingûji was a syncretistic model that identified the indigenous kami as manifestations of various Buddhas and bodhi-


sattvas. The basis for this ideology was supplied principally by Tendai and Shingon, the two most important schools of Heian Buddhism. *Honji-suijaku* 本地垂迹 thought in Tendai argued for the primary union of kami and Buddhist higher beings in the form of *honji,* “eternal prototypes,” and *suijaku,* “incarnations” or “manifestations”; Ryōbu 両部 Shintō, associated with Shingon and having close connections with Ise Shinto, attempted to explain the kami in terms of the dual aspects of chief Mikkyō deity, Dainichi Nyorai (the “Great Sun Tathāgata”; Skt. Mahāvairocana). Nevertheless, both Buddhist schools viewed the divinities of Shinto as inferior in position and importance, being simply “local” manifestations of the universal—and thus higher—divinities of Buddhism. 13

Miwa’s variant of Ryōbu Shinto was known as Miwa(-ryū) 三輪 Shinto. Miwa theology identified the mountain and its deity as being of “one body” (*ittai* 一体) with Amaterasu. Mt. Miwa formed the *shintaisan* 神体山 of Dainichi Nyorai, whose dual aspects—the *kongōkai* and the *taizōkai*—were expressed, respectively, in the south and north portions of the mountain. The various other geographical details of Mt. Miwa were regarded as embodiments of tantric objects of ritual. 14

This syncretistic doctrine dominated religious thought and feeling in Japan for over a thousand years, but especially since the final years of the Heian period (794–1185). In reaction to this outlook, and to the Tokugawa bakufu’s naming of Buddhism as the state religion, there arose among *kokugaku* 国学 philosophers during the Edo period (1600–1868) a movement to purify Shinto of all Buddhist elements. At the time of the Meiji Restoration this nationalistic religious and philosophical movement succeeded in converting its ideals into national policy.

If ever there was an example of religious coexistence in Japan it was at Mt. Miwa, where Shinto, Buddhism, and folk religion existed in a close, seemingly inseparable unity. 15 Yet here too the separation of Buddhism and Shinto—i.e., the elimination of the Buddhism teachings that had in the course of history entered Shinto—was carried out

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in such a thorough way that today hardly anything remains of the important Buddhist syncretistic past. Of the numerous buildings that used to fill the complexes of the three Miwa jingū of Daigorin-ji, Jōgan-ji, and Byōdō-ji, only a single structure remains.

DAIGORIN-JI

This remaining structure was, until 1868, the hondō (main hall) of Daigorin-ji, housing the temple’s honzon本尊 (central image), a Tempyō-era (729–748) Eleven-Headed Kannon (jūichimen-kannon十一面観音, Skt. Ekādaśa-mukha) of great artistic merit. The building now stands isolated at the northern edge of the Ōmiwa Jinja complex; experts on Japanese religious architecture can identify it as originally “non-Shintoistic” owing to its roof construction, which is in the irimoya-zukuri入母屋造 style. Since 1868 the structure has formed a sub-shrine of Ōmiwa Jinja called Wakamiya若宮 or Ótataneko大田田根子 Jinja, dedicated to the ancestors of Ōmiwa Jinja’s priests and to Ótataneko, one of the earthly descendants of Ōmononushi no kami.

The long history of Daigorin-ji, the former headquarters of Miwa Shinto, came to a sudden end with the Meiji Restoration. On 17 March 1868 Ōmiwa Jinja, like shrines throughout the nation, was directed by the new central government to unfrock of the bettō別当 and shasō社僧, the Buddhist priests who had served at shrines; henceforth the former priests were to carry out their duties dressed in white (i.e., rank-neutral) clothing. On 28 March 1868 the bunri rei was issued. Three weeks later, on 19 April 1868, a final (!) report was composed concerning the inspection of the “illustrious idols” of what had been Daigorin-ji, now renamed Ótataneko no mikoto Shrine. The report manages to completely ignore the fact that the shrine had until a few weeks before been the main sanctuary of the syncretic Buddhist Daigorin-ji complex.


17 For architectural sketches see Ōmiwa 1989 (no. 76): 24–25.

18 See Tsuji and Murakami for regulations concerning Nara Prefecture (1926, vol. 2, pp. 2–166); Lokowandt 1978, Dok. 6, 7, 8, 10, 11.

19 Ōtataneko no mikoto go-shinjiku no kiji大田田根子命御神軸之記事. Text in Ueda 1989, pp. 77–79; Ōmiwa Jinja 1968–91, vol. 4, p. 826. The inspection was carried out by an official named Ōtani Shūjitsu of the newly created Jingikan. After seeing the amount of material at the new shrine he sent for the painter Okamoto Tōri who, according to Ōmiwa Jinja (1968–91, bekkann 2, p. 133), was in the service of the Shoryōryō, the Imperial Tomb Department (Lokowandt points out, however, that this office started work only on 17
Later in April 1868 the final unfrocking of the Daigorin-ji monks took place: now by national law they had to practice as kannushi 神主 or shajin 神人 (Shinto priests) (ÔMIWA JINJA 1968–91, bekkan 2, p. 133). The following month the removal of the temple’s treasures commenced. It is not entirely clear how many of the treasures were saved, but the whereabouts of the most important and valuable items are known. The main image of Daigorin-ji, the statue of the Eleven-Headed Kannon, was rescued by the nearby Shingon temple Shôrin-ji 聖林寺, south of the town of Sakurai. Housed in a separate building, the imposing statue is still there today as a kyaku-butsu 客仏, a “visiting Buddha,” although its origin at Miwa is not mentioned in the temple’s publications.²⁰ After being relocated to Shôrin-ji it became famous as a work of art through a painting of the American artist, philosopher, and art historian Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1904). His painting of the Eleven-Headed Kannon can be admired in Shôrin-ji’s main hall.

In the late summer of 1868 the treatment of the former Daigorin-ji, as well as that of the other Miwa jingūji, became far more harsh. On 27 September the Nara Prefectural government authorized the leveling of all Daigorin-ji structures except the main hall, but including the three-storey pagoda and the gomadô 護摩堂 (prayer hall) (ÔMIWA JINJA 1968–91, bekkan 2, p. 134). Although such drastic measures were not permitted by the bunri rei and attacks against Buddhist institutions were strictly prohibited as early as 10 April 1868 (LOKOWANDT 1978, p. 251), such action in the case of Ômiwa Jinja was obviously sustained. A year later, on 8 October 1869, the installation of the new shrine’s deity (shinzasai 新座際) took place, and final remodelling began on the main hall to alter it to more Shinto-like lines (ÔMIWA JINJA 1968–91, bekkan 2, p. 134). In March 1870 the alteration work—spiritual as well as architectural—was complete, and the once-important temple of Daigorin-ji was now a small branch shrine on the fringes of the Ômiwa Jinja. By the time Ômiwa Jinja was made a kampeitaisha on 14 May 1871, Daigorin-ji and the other Miwa jingūji were no longer mentioned in public. Today their existence is preserved only in documents

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published by the Ōmiwa Jinja and by historians.

The main hall of Daigorin-ji was probably saved—albeit in changed form—only because in the past it had occasionally been referred to as the “Wakamiya” of Ōmiwa Jinja, following the shrine’s syncretistic traditions (MURAYAMA 1990; for sources see ŌMIWA JINJA 1968–91, bekkkan 1, pp. 43–44). This escape was not open to the other Miwa jingūji, which were completely destroyed (although, as we shall discuss later, there has been a recent attempt to revive the former Byōdō-ji).

JŌGAN-JI

All that remains of Jōgan-ji today is the first word in the name of a small sub-shrine of Ōmiwa Jinja, the Jōgan Inari Jinja (KIKUICHI 1987, pp. 36–38). This minor shrine is located at the southern edge of the Ōmiwa Jinja complex, where until the Meiji Restoration Miwa’s Buddhist nunnery was situated. During the Edo period the convent was a subtemple of Daigorin-ji. Owing to the events of spring 1868, however, Ōmiwa Jinja requested on 12 May 1868 that the nunnery be placed under the direct control of Saidai-ji, Daigorin-ji’s head temple in Nara and the headquarters of the Shingon Ritsu school. Just five days later, however, on 17 May 1868, Ōmiwa Jinja requested an official ruling that the nuns of Miwa be unfrocked (ŌMIWA JINJA 1968–91, bekkkan 2, p. 134). This extraordinary request seems to have caused problems, since on 8 September another such appeal was made, this time to the city government of Nara (ŌMIWA JINJA 1968–91, bekkkan 2, p. 134).

Unfortunately there is little information available on what happened between then and the final end of Jōgan-ji; a recent publication says only that the temple was dismantled in 1869, along with Daigorin-ji (YOSHIDA 1991, 37). The remaking of the former nunnery into an Inari shrine must therefore have taken place at that time. Although the historical materials published by Ōmiwa Jinja have little to say on the subject of Jōgan-ji, the extensive archives of the Nara Prefectural Library are available for further research and should yield more data on this question.21

BYŌDŌ-JI

The site of Byōdō-ji is, like that of the other two jingūji, quite difficult to find at Miwa Jinja today. Byōdō-ji, until 1868 the largest temple

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21 In November 1992 a special exhibition entitled “Shinbutsu-bunri and the temples of Nara” (Shinbutsu-bunri to Nara no jiji) was shown in the prefectural library of Nara (Nara-ken-ritsu Nara-toshokan). The catalogue for this exhibition lists several relevant historical documents and sources. As the author could find out, of special relevance for Miwa are archival numbers Mei-gan – 9/ 1A, B, C, 3A, A ff.
complex at Miwa (larger even than Ōmiwa Jinja itself), was completely leveled during the Meiji Restoration and its history brought to an end (YOSHIDA 1991, p. 37).

Nothing remains of the original structures in the complex, which stretched for about 500 m to the east and west and 330 m to the north and south on the southern slopes of Miwa mountain. The structures were numerous, and included a hondō, gomadō, miedō, ñissaikyōdō, kaisandō, akamon, and shōrōdō.22 Forests and orchards now cover the grounds of the temple that, with Daigorin-ji, once formed the center of Buddhist syncretistic life at Miwa. Byōdō-ji differed from Daigorin-ji in that it was not under Saidai-ji but, for a long time, under Kōfuku-ji, the main temple of the Hossō school (Kōfuku-ji, the greatest temple in Nara, was itself nearly destroyed during the bunri period as the result of a clash with the great shrine of Kasuga, Kasuga Taisha [TSUJI and MURAKAMI 1926, vol. 2, pp. 5–108; IWAI 1984; NARA KENRITSU NARA TOSHKAN 1992, pp. 1–3. For Kasuga Taisha see GRAPARD 1992; TYLER 1990, TYLER 1992]).

The recently published chronicles of ŌMIWA JINJA (1968–91, bekkan 2) are remarkably taciturn concerning the demise of Byōdō-ji, especially in comparison with their handling of Daigorin-ji. Although far more important than Daigorin-ji in terms of size, temple treasures, number of monks and buildings, etc., Byōdō-ji receives a cursory treatment with only the most basic of information. We learn that the office of the Jingikan agreed on 20 September 1868 to Ōmiwa Jinja’s petition to unfrock the Byōdō-ji monks, but that the monks were not actually made shajin until April 1870. This fact was made public by the Jingikan in an announcement on 27 December 1870 (ŌMIWA JINJA 1968–91, bekkan 2, pp. 134–35).

Ōmiwa Jinja regards the date of the monk’s defrocking as the official end of Byōdō-ji’s history; the temple’s name does not appear again in the shrine’s chronicle, which extends until 23 November 1990, the day of the Daijōsai of Emperor Akihito. Concerning the undoubtedly dramatic circumstances accompanying the destruction of the large temple complex we are told only that in April 1870 the buildings of Byōdō-ji had been leveled (the word used is tori-harau 取り払う: toru: remove; harau: chase away, drive out). A later effort of the temple’s followers to reconstruct the kaisandō building is said to have failed (ŌMIWA JINJA 1968–91, bekkan 2, pp. 134–35). YOSHIDA merely notes that the monastery’s Buddhist equipment was removed in 1869, its main hall demolished the following year, and its land nationalized in April 1871 (1991, p. 37). The official History of Ōmiwa-

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22 For sketches, drawings, and historical maps see Miwa Sōsho (ŌMIWA JINJA 1928).
Shrine (Ômiwa Jinja shi) is similarly concise, stating only that the temple was “swept away” (haku 摧) (ÔMIWA JINJA 1975, p. 314).

Among the Byôdô-ji properties removed from Miwa after the bunrei were some extremely valuable items, like a set of the Daihannyakyô (Skt. Mahâprajñâpûramitâ-sûtra) in six hundred kan dating from the late Heian era. This was removed to Hongan-ji in Kashihara, Tôichi Prefecture, but was returned to Ômiwa Jinja in 1964 (a fact cited by the shrine as proof of its presently amiable relations with Buddhism [ÔMIWA JINJA 1975, p. 697; YOSHIDA 1991, p. 37]).

Another such treasure was a statue of a seated Fudô Myôô 不動明王 (Skt. Acalanâtha),23 the main Buddhist image of Byôdô-ji and one of its most important works of art (ÔMORI 1992a, pp. 198–99). The work was registered as a National Treasure in 1908 and has, since the end of war, officially regarded as an Important Cultural Property of Japan. In 1873 the sculpture was taken into the custody of Hase-dera 長谷寺 (Chôkoku-ji), a temple in the mountains just east of Miwa. Hase-dera has since ancient times been one of the most famous temples in Japan and is renowned for its beauty; it presently forms the headquarters of the Buzan school of Shingon Buddhism and is the eighth stage on the western Japanese pilgrimage route (HIRAHATA 1992, pp. 60–65). Hase-dera’s central image is an Eleven-Headed Kannon, which dates from 1538 and is, at a height of 10.18 meters, the largest wooden sculpture in Japan (HASE-DERA n.d., p. 11). Byôdô-ji’s Fudô-myôô image is housed not in Hase-dera proper, but in the small subtemple of Fumon-in in front of the main temple. Fumon-in’s priest Maruyama Tsuranaga took the statue on 14 January 1874 and made it the temple’s honzon the following year (see IKEDA and ÔYA 1974, p. 1206; HASE-DERATATCHU FUMON-IN n.d., a). Since that time Miwa’s terrifying Fudô Myôô has been kept there.

In view of the fact of Byôdô-ji’s complete destruction, the student of Miwa history may be surprised when walking south from Ômiwa Jinja along the yama no be no michi 山辺道 to come across an inconspicuous complex of buildings in what used to be the temple’s entrance area. It requires a second look before the complex can be recognized as a Buddhist temple. Hidden behind encircling walls, the buildings have obviously been erected quite recently; a stone sculpture of Shôtoku Taishi at the temple’s entrance has not yet acquired a patina, and the hondo is made of ferro-concrete. A few older buildings around the main hall stand in curious contrast to this modern edifice. Most

surprising to the interested visitor will be the name of this seemingly insignificant complex: Byōdō-ji. Once again there is a temple with this great and ancient name at Mt. Miwa; unfortunately the present temple, founded on 4 June 1977, has no ties with the old Miwa syncretism, though it claims to follow the traditions of the former monastery. The “reestabishment” of Byōdō-ji has been made possible, according to the temple priests, through the support of more than 100,000 followers since 1977 (MARUKO n.d.).

Apart from the new “Byōdō-ji,” there can be found on the grounds of the former monastery only one other building relating to religion. This building, located a bit up the mountain, belongs to the Miwa-kyō(kai) 大神教(会), another religious community that has played an exceedingly important role in the modern history of Miwa. It would be beyond the scope of this paper to go into detail concerning this community, so I shall only note that the Miwa-kyōkai (which should not be confused with the syncretistic Miwa Shinto of the Middle Ages) was one of the so-called “teaching institutes” (kyōin 教院) that, under the administration of Ise Jingū, were set up throughout the country in order to promulgate the “Great Teaching” (daikyō 大教), a new state religion or ideology that increasingly took on the doctrines of modern Shinto theology, especially with regard to the position of the emperor (HARDA CRE 1989, pp. 42–59). Miwa’s kyōin, established on 18 February 1880, was “small teaching institute” (shōkyōin 小教院); in 1882 it was renamed the Miwa-kyōkai (Miwa church) and used for the preaching of Shinto. Even after World War II this religious corporation remained in existence, independent of Ōmiwa Jinja (ŌMIWA-KYŌ HON IN n.d. a/b, passim; HARDA CRE 1989, p. 82). Today it is headquartered in the town of Miwa in the area of the First Torii (ichi no torii) and in sight of the new Great Torii. The fact that the organization has a quite imposing structure on the former grounds of Byōdō-ji indicates that there have been final decisions made even with regard to real estate.

On the History of the Jingūji of Miwa

The two sculptures—the Eleven-Headed Kannon and the horrific Fudō-myōō—point to a past when Miwa was an important locus of Buddhist-Shinto syncretism. A closer look at the complex’s history might thus provide important clues as to why the expulsion of Buddhist elements was so vigorously pursued.

The history of the Miwa jingūji did not begin with the medieval Miwa Shinto described above, but goes back far into early Japanese history. As the History of the Ōmiwa Shrine tells us, Miwa’s first jingūji, Ōmiwa-dera (also known as Miwa-dera), was already in existence dur-
ing the early Nara period, as verified not only by historical data but by archeological findings in the area of today’s Otataneko Jinja (the former Daigorin-ji) (Ōmiwa Jinja 1975, pp. 223–24). Records concerning the temple’s foundation can be found in the Miwa Daimyōjin engi 三輪大明人縁起, dated 1318 (Ōmiwa Jinja 1968–91, vol. 2, pp. 1133–38; Ueda 1989, pp. 95–103; Ōmiwa Jinja 1928, pp. 12–21; see also Kubota 1971, pp. 974, 980). According to this document the first Miwa temple was established during the reign of the nonhistorical Emperor Suinin; this legend—obviously syncretistically inspired—established an indirect link to Otataneko, which in turn provided the basis for the temple’s later tie to Shinto. Another legend says that Shōtoku Taishi discovered the Eleven-Headed Kannon statue in the main hall of the temple, where it has served as honzon ever since (Ōmiwa Jinja 1975, p. 225).

Although these legends leave us little closer to the temple’s actual origins, we do know that it continued through the Heian period but went into an apparent decline at the start the Kamakura era. The monk Eison 敏尊 (1201–1290)—posthumously known as Kōshō Bosatsu 興正菩薩 and famous as the founder of numerous temples in Yamato—is said to have revived the temple, renaming it Daigorin-ji in 1285.24 Eison was educated in the temples of Kōya-san, Tōdai-ji in Nara, Daigo-ji in Kyoto, and finally at Saidai-ji in Nara. His ties with Miwa resulted from the long periods he spent there later in his life.25 During a pilgrimage to Ise Jingū he realized—according to shrine tradition—the unity of Amaterasu-ōmikami and Miwa-daimyōjin (Ueda 1989, 95–97; Ōmiwa Jinja 1975, p. 230). Eison is said to have founded the Ritsu school of Shingon Buddhism (Shingon Risshū), reviving Saidai-ji—formerly one of the “Seven temples of Nara”—as the main temple of this school (Kaneko 1987). Daigorin-ji was incorporated into the Saidai-ji system, and remained a branch temple (matsuji) until the Meiji Restoration.

The history of the jingūji of Miwa is considerably complicated by the presence there of another important Buddhist teacher at roughly the same time as Eison: Kyōen (? –1223), known as Miwa Shōnin 三輪上人, the Saint of Miwa. Kyōen, the founder of Byōdō-ji, was also influential the syncretistic development of Miwa.26 The first record of Kyōen dates to 1255, just a few decades after his death; this is the

24 On the life and work of Eison see Kaneko 1987, pp. 75–192.
Miwa-shōnin-gyōjo (OMIWA JINJA 1975, pp. 226–27) composed by a disciple of Kyōen. All later work on Kyōen has been based on this source.27

It is said that Kyōen came from Chinzei (present Kyūshū). His date of birth is unknown, but various records set it between 1140 and 1150. After long wanderings through Yamato studying the Daihannya-kyō, he made his way to the Iwashimizu Hachiman Shrine and finally to Miwa, where he was enlightened and developed his own teachings. Kyōen is regarded as the actual founder of Miwa Shinto by some specialists (see SHIMONAKA 1937–1940, vol. 3, p. 328; ABE 1984–85; ÔMIWA JINJA 1968–91, vol. 3, p. 1000; see also KUBOTA 1971, pp. 975–76). He established a Buddhist seminary and monastery (dōjō) to disseminate his syncretistic teachings based on Shingon Mikkyō; named the Miwa-besshō in 1233, from 1236 it was also called Byōdō-ji (although legend has it that the temple was founded by Shōtoku Taishi and revived by Kyōen).

The temple flourished, and, by the end of the Kamakura period, it surpassed Daigorin-ji. During the Muromachi era the temple came under control of Kōfuku-ji, but it also maintained close bonds to Daigo-ji in Kyoto (see ÔMIWA JINJA 1975, pp. 229–29; YOSHIDA 1991, p. 36). This double alignment eventually lead to a split of the temple’s priesthood into two groups, one (the gakushū, scholar monks) oriented to Kōfuku-ji and the other (the zenshū, meditation monks) to Daigo-ji, or, more exactly, to its branch temple Sampō-in. The zenshū became increasingly stronger from the latter half of Muromachi period and thus the temple leaned predominantly toward Daigo-ji. It is important to remember here that Daigo-ji, the headquarters of the Shingon Daigo school and the eleventh stage on the western Japanese pilgrimage route (HIRAHATA 1992, pp. 82–87), was at the time a center of Shugendō, the religion of the yamabushi — mountain-ascetics who practiced healing, exorcism, and magic. Because of this tie, Byōdō-ji too from late medieval times became known as a center of Shugendō. Here, at the holy mountain of Miwa, the yamabushi would perform their rituals as they traveled south to the sacred Shugendō mountains of Ōmine and Kimpusen in the regions of Yamato and Kii (ÔMIWA JINJA 1975, p. 229; MARUKO n.d.; YOSHIDA 1991, p. 36).28 The History of Ômiwa-Shrine sums all of this up in a single sentence, telling us that Byōdō-ji withdrew from Kōfuku-ji

27 For example, the Miwa-san Byōdō-ji chūkōkaiso Kyōen-shōnin betsuden 三輪山平等寺 中興開祖慶圓観上人別傳 (ÔMIWA JINJA 1968–91, vol. 6, pp. 652–66) from 1702.

during the Edo era, turned towards the Shingon teachings, then followed the way of Shugendō (ŌMIWA JINJA 1975, p. 229). We can conclude from this sentence, unsurpassed for succinctness, that the temple was from that time on a center of Shugendō.

This fact provides us with a much clearer picture of why the Fudō Myōō sculpture was so important at Byōdō-ji, and of why the temple fell out of favor during the Meiji Restoration. In no other religious group has the cult of Fudō Myōō taken on such a central meaning as in Shugendō (ŌMORI 1992a, p. 199). En no Gyōja, the legendary ancestor of shugendō, was seen by his supporters as an incarnation of Fudō Myōō, and it was probably the yamabushi’s rituals in front of the terrifying Fudō sculptures that caused them to be described by the first Christian missionaries as “devil worshippers.” The yamabushi were also particularly hard hit by the religious politics of the early Meiji era, since their syncretic teachings and practices—a combination of Mikyō, Taoism, and folk religion—were incompatible with the Meiji government’s newly designed state ideology (LOKOWANDT 1978, p. 33). Shugendō was placed under the jurisdiction of Buddhism in 1870, and prohibited altogether as an independent religious group by governmental decree on 17 October (15 September) 1872. It seems to me that hidden here is the real key to understanding why Byōdō-ji, formerly the biggest jingūji of Miwa, was completely destroyed during the bunri period.

The philosophical Miwa Shinto, symbolized by the sculpture of the Eleven-Headed Kannon, has enjoyed a high level of interest in the present research on Miwa. In contrast, there is virtually no reference to the other side of Miwa syncretism, the mountain cult of the Shugendō yamabushi, which identified with the terrifying figure of the Fudō Myōō now at Hase. Allan GRAPARD, using the example of Tōnomine (Tanzan Shrine), examines the far-reaching consequences the Meiji bunri edict had for Shugendō (1984). As close historical and ideological ties existed between Miwa and Tōnomine, this might provide a fruitful starting point for further research on the question of Shugendō in Miwa.

**Conclusion**

Anyone who approaches Mt. Miwa on a lovely autumn day and continues to the shrine cannot help but admire the peace and beauty of the place. Old shrine buildings surround the famous cedar of Miwa (Mi no kamisugi), where believers make offerings of saké and raw eggs to Ōmononushi no mikoto (ancient belief holds that the divinity revealed himself at the tree’s base in the form of a snake). Those who
have studied the shrine’s history will recall the myths of the *Kojiki* and reflect on the inseparable ties between Miwa and Izumo, or on the profound theme of ancient religious thinking, expressed in the iconographic union of tree, snake, and the drink of life (ANTONI 1988).

What is difficult to think of at such a wonderful place are the questions of destruction and devastation, of suppression and unsolved guilt. The visitor must leave the shrine in order to perceive this nowadays invisible side of Miwa. From their isolated places of refuge the Buddhist sculptures of the former Miwa *jingūji*—the Eleven-Headed Kannon and the terrifying Fudō Myōō—silently attest to an entirely different history no longer spoken of at Miwa itself. It is a history of religious variety, of tolerance and of violent debate as well, a history that proclaims there is always more than one way to the truth. These ways were suppressed and cut off in the years around 1868; they had to make room for the new “traditionalism” of Meiji Japan, for the Great Way of Shinto that declared itself to be the sole truth.²⁹ Now is the time to track down the old paths again.

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