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Review:

It was an excellent idea to attempt a more accessible translation of the *Kojiki*, Japan's oldest published chronicle, especially as this has enjoyed a revival of interest among the Japanese public in recent years. What for many years has been the standard English translation, and in many respects still is, was that by Donald Philippi (University of Tokyo Press 1968), which was indeed somewhat formidable. Gustav Heldt has taken quite different policy decisions over his translation, and these are what will be considered in this brief review. Any questions of fundamental accuracy will have to be left to other reviewers with competence in ancient Japanese.

The *Kojiki*, set forth into the world in 712, contains mythological and legendary material about spirits and mortals, mainly emperors. The spirits are *kami*, and this element occurs in many of their names. The decision to refer to them as spirits, rather than “god/s” or “deities” is clearly argued and justifiable. The decision to translate *tennō* as “sovereign” rather than “emperor” (which Philippi uses) is less obvious, especially as the latter has really become quite conventional for the whole line of Japanese monarchs, and “sovereign” is rather differently associated with modern notions of sovereignty.

The decision to base the Romanized transcription for names and terms on modern Japanese transcriptions of the ancient text is very helpful. Many will heave a sigh of relief not to be confronted with the historico-linguistic reconstructions adopted by Philippi, who preferred to use the letter “p” where “h” or “f” would be expected by modern readers, and regularly used other vowels such as “ö” which are no longer recognizable. This brings the *Kojiki* back into tune with the spellings commonly used in general works of history. As Heldt points out, Philippi's work can always be consulted over these matters if needed. Similarly, a number of secondary notes have been abandoned which in the original text sought to indicate the

pronunciation of Chinese characters for Japanese readers. With admirable abstinence, Heldt has not even added his own footnotes, preferring to give further explanations in glossaries (of which more below). The result is a streamlined text which can be picked up and read by anybody without further ado. This will surely arouse the interest of a much wider audience, for example among students, than has hitherto been practical. So it will become a textbook.

There is however a downside for those who already have some familiarity with the *Kojiki*, the *Nihonshoki* and other texts right up to historical presentations by modern writers. This arises because Gustav Heldt has also taken the decision to translate all the names of the spirits, and to show them in transliterated Japanese pronunciation only in the rather rare headings. Thus we have He Who Beckoned for Iza-nagi, Heaven Shining for Amaterasu, Brave Mighty Thunderbolt Man for Take-mika-zuchi-no-o, and so on. Admittedly, most of us who are readers cannot claim detailed familiarity with the names of all the spirits in any case, and the decision to translate them opens up their sometimes rather poetic quality. On the other hand it is necessary for interested students to become familiar with the names and activities of at least some of the more important spirits. In the glossary, all the translated names are provided with the original equivalents; however it is not possible to look them up by starting from the Japanese name itself. For example, we cannot look up Susa-no-o (-no-mikoto) to find out how his name is translated here and where he occurs in the mythology. One has to know in advance that he is being called Rushing Raging Man (as on page 19). Quite by accident we have stumbled on an example which seems to have slipped out of the glossary of names altogether, but this unpredictable spirit has simply played truant and will be found under Raging Man. It is quite entertaining to read about many familiar characters with their new English names, but it would have been helpful, even for those with some experience in the field, to get more signposting of the Japanese forms of names as we go along. The same consideration applies to the numerous translated place names, most of which are redolent with associations, not only in terms of their meaning but also in terms of later Japanese geographical designations. The latter can be explored in the parallel glossary of place names, but again, it would be very helpful to be able to look them up in both directions. The glossary of general terms is somewhat less problematic in this regard, and very useful.

In conclusion, therefore, this translation/edition is much to be welcomed, and thanks are due to Gustav Heldt or “Staff of the Geats Hero” for all his work. At the same time it would be

good to look forward to a second edition with a full index based on the Japanese names and terms themselves.

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