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Excerpt from *A Pilgrimage to Sumiyoshi* by Ashikaga Yoshiakira

Kendra D. Strand

University of Michigan - Ann Arbor, kdst@umich.edu

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I looked far out over the expanse of the ocean, and to the west were Awaji Island, Suma, Akashi Bay, and other such places. I thought, “If only I could take the boat to go over and look,” but of course, taking into account people’s fears as a result of the conflicts in this world, I did not. Instead, we spent one night and returned to the Capital at dawn.

Bound for Awaji,
parting the mists—
a sailing ship,
its ultimate destination unknown,
going over the waves

I looked at Suma Bay, and I saw the rising plumes of smoke from the salt fires.

Like the smoke
rising from the salt fires,
vainly,
whose yearning is it
that smolders so?

I looked at Akashi Bay.

The poem I composed
out of leaves of words alone—
in the dawn sky,
the moon, bright over Akashi Bay
and its stretch of sandy beach

Then I went once more before the god of Sumiyoshi. After offering words of farewell, I departed from its presence.

Like the fence I saw at Mitsu,
how many thousands of years
will you protect us?
See us through to our destination,
O god of Sumiyoshi!

In this single scroll, I yielded to my brush and recorded my impressions of these various places, thinking that perhaps it will be of interest to people of another time.

Early in the Fourth Month

Yoshiakira [seal]

A *Pilgrimage to Sumiyoshi* (*Sumiyoshi no môde* 住吉詣) describes a journey to the Sumiyoshi Shrine in the early summer of 1364 by the second Ashikaga Shogun, Yoshiakira 足利義詮 (1330–1367, in office 1358–1367). It is a short travel journal, comprised of only fifteen poems with relatively short prose passages throughout. Although its authorship is uncertain, it has traditionally been attributed to Yoshiakira. The journal opens with observations about the scenery as the party travels by boat along the Yodo River into Settsu Province to Naniwa Bay, what is now Osaka Bay.

The failure of the Kamakura shogunate in the early fourteenth century led to a series of military conflicts between the rising Ashikaga warriors of the Northern Court, who occupied the traditional imperial palace in the Capital (present-day Kyoto), and followers of Emperor Go-Daigo 後醍醐天皇 (1288–1339, r. 1318–1339), who had fled to Yoshino to establish the rival Southern Court. In this context, it may appear unusual to see Yoshiakira pausing to take in a series of landscape views and to compose poems about them. In this case, however, the acts of traveling to a famous pilgrimage site and composing poems along the way are a means of declaring and legitimizing claims to political and military power over the area, with the additional support of divine favor and protection of the Sumiyoshi deity.

The passage translated here is the climax of Yoshiakira's journal, describing the moments when he surveys the views from the shore at Sumiyoshi, approaches the main shrine, offers his poems as prayers, and then returns to his residence in the Capital. The poems exhibit an imaginative engagement with the landscape—as commentators are careful to point out, the smoke of salt fires at Suma would not have been visible from Sumiyoshi, which lies on the opposite side of the bay. Likewise, the sailing ship “bound for Awaji” is a metaphor for Yoshiakira's unfulfilled desire to visit the island. And although he ostensibly made this journey during the violent rivalry between the Northern and Southern Courts, the only indication of such hardship lies in his decision not to approach Awaji because of “people's fears as a result of the conflicts in this world.” His caution was surely well founded; Go-Daigo and his successors frequented Sumiyoshi, Suma, Akashi, and Awaji Island, to spend months at a time at temples in the area. Such seeming inconsistencies in representing the journey or its geography are not so much a sign of inaccuracy or fabrication, but instead are the product of the poet-traveler's construction of a historical and literary ideology within the landscapes that he describes.

Despite their brevity, these poems are complex in their allusions to past famous poems. Each name—Awaji, Suma, Akashi, and Sumiyoshi—is an *utamakura*, or a famous place in the poetic canon. Each of the names is linked to the others through their geographical proximity and through their occurrence together in such texts as the *Tales of Ise* (*Ise monogatari*, ca. 900) and the *Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*, ca. 1008). As a result, much of the poetic imagery is shared:

white waves, mists, the moon, and the cries of the plover create an impression of the region. Against this backdrop are layered those important poetic associations that are specific to each name, such as the boat rowing toward Awaji, the smoke of salt fires at Suma, and the ancient sacred fence surrounding the Sumiyoshi Shrine. In this way, a rich description of the landscape is constructed in the words of each poem by using poetic imagery, linking famous place names to past travelers, and gesturing toward canonical poems about the respective famous places.

Perhaps the most challenging poem to translate was the one composed at Akashi Bay. A more literal gloss of the poem reads: “Words are all that remain beneath the lingering light of the moon over Akashi Bay and its stretch of sandy beach.” There are two pivot-words (*kakekotoba*) in this poem. First, a pairing of the verb “to be” (*ari* 有り) and the moon at dawn (*ariake* 有明) emphasizes the fragility of words—until it is canonized, a recited poem may simply fade like a moon that pales in the light of daybreak. The second pivot-word is in the place name (Akashi 明石), a homophone of the adjective “bright” (*akashi* 明かし). In the light of dawn, one wouldn’t expect the moon to shine brightly, except that the name Akashi insists upon it here. The poem thus posits two contradictions: the permanence of words against an image of fading moonlight, and a brightly lingering moon even as dark night dissipates into morning. If we take the “leaves of words” to be the poems from the old tales and poetic anthologies, then the poem reflects Yoshiakira’s awareness that a canonized text becomes the only physical trace that remains of his predecessors; that the people who recited, wrote, and read before him are now gone.

This awareness is echoed in Yoshiakira’s notion, articulated in the final line, that his own journal would be “of interest to people of another time.” This statement in particular resonates with us, the contemporary readers, as we suddenly see ourselves in a new light, a gleam in the imagination of Yoshiakira as he contemplated a future in which his own story had become part of history.