

Research Notes

***Meitokuki: Earthquakes and Literary Fabrication in the Gunki Monogatari***

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This is a short introduction to a problem that affects two areas of research: historical seismology and medieval literature. The *Meitokuki* (1392–96), a *gunki monogatari* or battle narrative, reports an earthquake on the fifteenth day of the tenth month of the second year of Meitoku (1391). This report has been and is still accepted as legitimate. However, a full investigation of the sources adduced as proof of this earthquake's historicity leads to the conclusion that no contemporary records confirm the *Meitokuki* report. Furthermore, an analysis of the *Meitokuki* text as a *gunki monogatari*, which is a genre of historical fiction, demands a comparison of its earthquake report with those in other *gunki monogatari*. Such a comparison with those in the Kakuichi variant of the *Heike monogatari* (before 1371) and the *Taiheiki* (about the same decade) reveals a specific form as well as a function of the earthquake report as an omen of impending disaster. This study proposes that, of the three examples, only the *Heike* report is authentic and that the two others are fabrications based on it. This conclusion is important for two reasons. First, it identifies the earthquake report in *gunki monogatari* as a type scene, a traditional narrative unit not unlike the Homeric scenes of arming, embarkation, and reception of the guest, or indeed the gunfight or chase scene in Westerns. Second, it demonstrates the importance of the type scene in the development of the *gunki monogatari* as a genre of fiction.

**Keywords:** *gunki monogatari*, historical seismology, *Meitokuki*, *Taiheiki*, *Heike monogatari*

*Meitokuki* 明德記 (The Record of the Meitoku Era) is a *gunki monogatari* 軍記物語 (battle tale or epic) that recounts the failed revolt of Meitoku 2.12.30–Meitoku 3.1.1 (1391–92) of the Yamana 山名 family, military governors of eleven provinces, led by Ujikiyo 氏清 (d. 1392) and his nephew and son-in-law Mitsuyuki 満幸 (d. 1395). Their target was the third shogun of the Ashikaga 足利 house, Yoshimitsu 義満 (1358–1408; shogun 1368–94).<sup>1</sup> The *Meitokuki* reports that, two and a half months before the battle, on the fifteenth day of the tenth month of 1391, an earthquake took place in the capital city of Kyoto:

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1 *Meitokuki* 1941.

Just at that time on the fifteenth day of the same (tenth) month at the hour of the horse [midday], there was a tremendous earthquake. Folk going up and down the street could not even manage to walk; people seated comfortably in their houses were frightened completely out of their wits. The Director of the Bureau of Divination (*on'yō no kami* 陰陽頭), Tsuchimikado Ariyo 土御門有世, a noble of the third rank, hastened to the [shogun's] palace [and] this is what he said: “The great earthquake today was a movement of the bird of the golden wings [*garuda*], which is beyond [our ability to counter by] purification. The meaning of the portent [is that] traitors have appeared in the world intent on [seizing] high office. Accordingly, there will be a great revolt within fewer than seventy-five days. But, you will have victory within a single day.” So saying, he made his prediction. Everyone from the shogun to the various lords and their personal retainers was thinking, “Whatever may [the meaning of] this be? Even if this earthquake is an auspicious omen, anything could happen to anyone in a hard [fought] battle!” Thinking this, people of any sensibility reflected on their sins, nor was there anyone who did not keep a close guard upon himself.<sup>2</sup>

This *Meitokuki* entry has long been regarded as an authentic record of an earthquake. Even today, it is adduced as the record of an earthquake in journal articles and university databases.<sup>3</sup> However, such evidence as we have points to a literary fabrication. There are two reasons for this assumption.

First, there is extant no corroborating documentation. The earliest alleged record is found in the diary, the *Yasutomi-ki* 康富記, of Nakahara no Yasutomi 中原康富 (1400–57), a member of the lower aristocracy who filled a variety of administrative positions in the Grand Council of State and became chamberlain to the high-ranking Takatsukasa 鷹司 family.<sup>4</sup> His diary notes under Bunnan 文安 6.4.13 (5 May 1449):

Recent examples of great earthquakes...The second year of Meitoku, tenth month, sixteenth day, a great earthquake [foretelling] the battle [near the intersection of] Nijō [and] Ōmiya.<sup>5</sup>

There are problems in the reliability of this record, however. Firstly, Yasutomi was not born until 1400 and the entry in question was not made until 1449. The entry is thus not contemporary with the earthquake itself and, since based on an unknown source, must on principle be treated with caution if not dismissed outright. Secondly, the date of the earthquake, given as “the sixteenth day of the tenth month,” differs from that of “the fifteenth day” in the *Meitokuki* cited above. The question, of course, is why the discrepancy. All the manuscripts used by Tomikura Tokujirō 富倉徳次郎 in his 1941 edition or collated by Wada Hidemichi 和田英道 agree on the date of “the fifteenth.”<sup>6</sup> The entry concerning the earthquake in 1391 in the *Yasutomi-ki* comes in a list of earthquakes (and rituals conducted to

2 *Meitokuki* 1941, p. 19.

3 For journal articles see Tonooka 2013 and Katahira et al. 2006; for databases see Shizuoka 2014 and NDL 2013.

4 *Nihon jinmei daijiten*, s.v. “Nakahara no Yasutomi.”

5 “*Onai kinrei, Meitoku ni nen jūgatsu jūrokunichi ōnai, jūnigatsu misoka Nijō Ōmiya ni oite kassen*” 大地震近列, 明德二年十月十六日 大地震, 十二月卅日於二條大宮合戦. *Yasutomi-ki*, vol. 2, p. 386.

6 *Meitokuki* 1941, p. 19; Wada 1990, p. 16.

counter their effects); as a specialist in court ritual, he would keep track of these important matters. The problem lies in his source material, whatever it was.<sup>7</sup>

The reason for the discrepancy regarding the dates may be found in the divination recorded in the *Meitokuki*, according to which the shogun Yoshimitsu would face an insurrection “within less than seventy five days” and achieve “victory within a single day.” In the old Japanese calendar, there are thirty days per month; seventy five days from the fifteenth day of the tenth month would be the last day of the twelfth month, the thirtieth. However, Yoshimitsu did not achieve his victory until the next day, the first day of the new year. It is possible that, at some point, the date was changed from the fifteenth to the sixteenth in order to make the diviner’s prediction of trouble within seventy five days, and its resolution, correspond with the day of the actual battle on the first day of the new year.<sup>8</sup>

Two more texts are regularly adduced as proof of the earthquake. The report of an “earthquake [on] the sixteenth of the same (tenth) month” is carried in the *Nanpō kiden* 南方紀伝, also known as the *Nanchō kiden* 南朝記伝, a pre-1700 chronological account of the period of the Southern and Northern courts (Nanbokuchō 南北朝; 1336–92).<sup>9</sup> The *Zoku shigushō* 続史愚抄 is a similar historical account written by the aristocrat, courtier, and scholar Yanagiwara Motomitsu 柳原紀光 (1746–1800); it reports that on “the sixteenth day, younger brother of the earth-snake [day], in the middle of the day, an earthquake shook forcefully (*jūrokunichi tsuchinoto mi, gokoku, jishin ō[kiku] ugo[ku]* 十六日己巳。午刻。地震大動).”<sup>10</sup> Not surprisingly, Motomitsu gives as his sources the *Nanpō kiden*, the *Meitokuki*, and the *Yasutomi-ki*.

The only extant documentation that can be considered even remotely contemporary with the *Meitokuki* is an entry in the *Sōgonkō shitsujichō* 莊嚴講執事帳 (1248–1868), a diary listing monthly ceremonies conducted by the temple Chōryūji 長瀧寺 in the province of Mino 美濃 (in the south of modern-day Gifu prefecture). It reports, “[In] the second year of Meitoku, a younger brother-sheep [year], there were great famines [and] earthquakes shook some thirty nights and days” (*Meitoku ninen kanoto hitsuji, daikikatsu ... jishin yoruhiru sanjū nichi ugo[ku]* 明德貳年辛未，大飢渴 [中略] 地震夜昼三十日動). However, it does not specify a date or refer to the capital city as the location of the earthquake.<sup>11</sup>

If there are no independently verifiable reports of the earthquake in the extant contemporary diaries of Kyoto aristocrats or records of temples in the capital, we have to assume that any or all the documentation beyond the *Meitokuki* is most likely based ultimately on the *Meitokuki* itself. The *Meitokuki* was indeed widely read throughout the fifteenth and succeeding centuries. Written in 1392 and then revised and expanded in 1396 by the author, most likely by someone in the service of the Ashikaga or of a highly placed

7 A variant of the *Meitokuki* published in 1897 in the *Shiryō tsūshin sōshi* 史料通信叢誌 does carry the date of “the sixteenth” (*Ihon Meitokuki*, p. 89), as do the blockprint versions, *Meitokuki* 1614, seventh page, and *Meitokuki* 1632, vol. 1, p. 39.

8 This discrepancy continues for the next four hundred years and more. The version in the 1893–94 edition of the *Gunsho ruijū* 群書類從 also gives “the fifteenth,” and yet the 1904 edition of the *Dainihon jishin shiryō* 大日本地震資料, citing this very text, insists on giving the date as “the sixteenth.”

9 “*Onajiki jūrokunichi jishin*” 同十六日地震. *Nanpō kiden*, p. 54; *Nanchō kiden*, p. 237.

10 Yanagiwara 1902, vol. 2, pp. 228–29.

11 The diary entry is cited in Tonooka 2013, pp. 39–40. The single year of the diary including this entry is included in Gorai 1983, pp. 586–94, and the whole text is included in *Shirotori-chō shi*.

vassal, the text enjoyed no little popularity.<sup>12</sup> It is mentioned three times in fifteenth century diaries as being circulated in the imperial family. According to the *Kanmon nikki* 看聞日記, in 1416 Imperial Prince Fushimi no miya Sadafusa (伏見宮貞成, 1372–1456) recorded hearing the performance of a *monogatarisō* (物語僧), a professional reader of tales, who was either a priest professional or just as likely a professional reader dressed as a Buddhist priest: “Again summoning the *monogatarisō* of the other day, had him narrate; he narrated a part of the rebellion of Yamana [the former governor of] Mutsu.”<sup>13</sup> Again, the *Kanmon nikki* reports that in 1434, Emperor Go-Hanazono 後花園 (1419–71; r. 1428–64) presented a copy of *Meitokuki* along with a copy of *Sakaiki* 堺記 (record of Sakai, or the revolt and defeat of Ōuchi Yoshihiro 大内義弘 in 1399) to the shogun Ashikaga Yoshinori 足利義教 (1394–1441) on the occasion of the birth of his son, Yoshikatsu 義勝 (1434–43).<sup>14</sup> And in 1479, according to the *Chikanaga-kyō ki* 親長卿記, Emperor Go-Tsuchimikado 後土御門 (1442–1500; r. 1464–1500) had Kanroji Chikanaga 甘露寺親長 (1424–1500) read him the *Meitokuki* (“*gozen ni oite Meitokuki yom[ashimerare]*” 於御前被讀明德記).<sup>15</sup>

The *Meitokuki*'s popularity and availability are indicated by the sheer number of manuscripts, in which it is unsurpassed in battle literature.<sup>16</sup> In the Tokugawa period, the *Meitokuki* was published by block print several times during the seventeenth century and again by Hanawa Hokiichi 塙保己一 (1746–1821) in that great compendium of historical texts and literature, the *Gunsho ruijū* 群書類從, first published between 1779 and 1819.<sup>17</sup> But if there is no contemporary, corroborating documentation of an earthquake in the tenth month of the first year of Meitoku, then it must have been fabricated in the *Meitokuki*, and there must be a reason for its fabrication. I propose that the reason can be found in the form and function of the very specific genre of historical writing known as *gunki monogatari* and the role of the earthquake report in the development of the genre.

The *Meitokuki* is not the only medieval *gunki monogatari* that carries a suspicious report of an earthquake. In the *Taiheiki* 太平記 (1374), for example, there is a report of an earthquake in 1331, which is either Gentoku 元徳 3 or Genkō 元弘 1 (one or the other of these era names will be used depending on the variant and the political leanings of the author).<sup>18</sup> As translated by Helen Craig McCullough, the passage reads as follows:

Again, in the first year of Genkō [1331], a fire came forth from the Northern Valley [of Mt. Hiei] of the East Pagoda of the Mountain Gate, instantly destroying the Cloister of the Four Kings, the Great Lecture Hall, the Lotus Hall, and the Amida Hall. Wherefore the spirits of men were chilled within them, and they thought, “Surely these

12 For the date, see author's colophon preserved on the 1448 (Bunnan 5) copy of the original manuscript held by the Yōmei Archives of the Konoe house (Wada 1990, p. 308). For the putative author, see Wada 1990, pp. 311–14.

13 “*Senjitsu no monogatarisō mata mesarete kore o katarashimu. Yamana Ōshū no mubonji no ichibu kore o kataru*” 先日物語僧又被召語之。山名奥州謀反事一部語之。“Yamana Ōshū” is also read “Yamana Mutsu.” Fushimi no miya Sadafusa (Go-Sukō-in 後崇光院 [1372–1456]), *Kanmon nikki*, Ōei 23.7.3 (27 July 1416). Niunoya 2009, p. 16. This and the following extracts are more than well known and cited extensively, as in Okuno 2004, p. 348.

14 Eikyō 永享 6.2.9 (12 July 1434). *Kanmon nikki: kenkon* 看聞日記: 乾坤, vol. 62, 1932, pp. 19–20.

15 Bunmei 文明 11.8.8 (25 August 1479). *Chikanaga-kyō ki*, p. 52.

16 Wada 1990, p. 262. For the list of extant manuscripts and blockprint texts, see Wada 1990, pp. 264–73.

17 *Meitokuki* 1959.

18 *Taiheiki*, chapter two (section 7: *Tenka kaii no koto* 天下怪異の事).

are omens of disaster in the realm.” Moreover, on the third day of the seventh month of the same year of Genkō, a great earthquake suddenly dried up the tidal beach at Senri-ga-hama in Kii [Province] for more than two thousand yards. And at the hour of the cock on the seventh day of that month, an earthquake crumbled the summit of Mount Fuji for five thousand feet. Then did Urabe no Sukune divine by roasting a large tortoise shell, and the yin-yang doctors elucidated the divination texts. The omens said, “The sovereign’s estate will change; the great ministers will encounter calamity.” Wherefore secretly the diviners offered up an unquiet opinion to the throne, saying, “In all things let the emperor be prudent.” And with anxious hearts men thought, “These fires at temples are not commonplace occurrences, nor the earthquakes in diverse places. Untoward happenings are close at hand.”<sup>19</sup>

Koyama Masato 小山真人 has surveyed fifty-six historical records relating to the volcanic eruptions of Mt. Fuji, including the *Taiheiki* reports of the collapse of the summit of Mt. Fuji and of the drying-up of the beach at Senrigahama 千里浜 just before. As in the case of the *Meitokuki* earthquake, neither of these two events, nor the earthquakes said to have caused them, are confirmed by any contemporary records. Even so, confirmation of the earthquake collapsing the summit of Mt. Fuji has been sought in temple traditions associated with the Nichiren sect temple Kannōji 感応寺, in what is now the city of Shizuoka 静岡: “According to temple tradition, there was a great earthquake [and] much damage on the seventh day of the seventh month of Genkō” (*Jiki iwaku Genkō gannen shichigatsu nanoka ōnai bakai* 寺記云元弘元年七月七日大地震破壊).<sup>20</sup> Ishibashi Katsuhiko 石橋克彦, in reviewing the literature on the exclusion of this earthquake from the list of legitimate historical earthquakes by Usami Tatsuo 宇佐美龍夫, has pointed out that the Kannōji documents, like all temple narratives, are no more immune to fictionalization than other forms of literature; the so-called “tradition” has probably been contaminated by the earthquake report in the *Taiheiki*.<sup>21</sup> There are, in other words, no reliable contemporary sources that enable us to confirm the earthquake.

The situation is different for another account of an earthquake, that recorded for 1179 (Jishō 治承 3.11.7) in the version of the *Heike monogatari* 平家物語 composed or redacted by Kakuichi 覚一 (d. 1371). Helen McCullough’s translation of “An Exchange of Views with the Dharma Seal,” reads as follows:

...There was a violent, protracted earthquake at about the Hour of the Dog on the Seventh of the Eleventh Month [of the third year of Jishō]. The Director of the Divination Bureau, Abe no Yasuchika, went posthaste to the imperial palace. “The divination has revealed that this earthquake signifies a need for extreme caution. When we consult the explanation in the *Konkikyō*, one of the Three Classics of Divination, we see, ‘Within the year, within the month, within the day.’ This is an extraordinary emergency,” he said, with tears streaming down his face. The official charged with transmitting his words blanched, and the Emperor was also alarmed.

<sup>19</sup> *Taiheiki*, pp. 54–55.

<sup>20</sup> Koyama 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Ishibashi 1999, pp. 414–17; Usami 1996, p. 496. See also Usami 2003. Ishibashi goes on to discuss Tsuji 2013 and his unsuccessful attempt to prove that Edo period documents from the Kannōji in Shizuoka city support the report in the *Taiheiki*.

The young senior nobles and courtiers laughed among themselves. “It was eccentric of Yasuchika to burst into tears like that. Nothing is going to happen,” they said. But Yasuchika was a fifth-generation descendant of Seimei, thoroughly grounded in the lore of the heavens, and his deductions were like pointing to something in the palm of his hand. People called him the August Designator because he never made the slightest mistake. Even when lightning set fire to the sleeve of his hunting robe, he escaped harm. There have been few like him, either in antiquity or in these latter days.<sup>22</sup>

As usual, multiple sources have been adduced as proof, of which two are regarded as authentic. The first is the entry in the *Sankaiki* 山槐記, the journal of Nakayama Tadachika 中山忠親 (1131–95), a court official who served as chamberlain to Taira no Tokuko 平徳子 (1155–1213) when she was empress and when she took orders (as Kenreimon-in 建礼門院), as chamberlain to the Retired Emperor Go-Shirakawa 後白河天皇, and as minister of the center to Emperor Go-Toba 後鳥羽. It reads, “In the hour of the boar [there was] a great earthquake” (*Sono i no koku ōnai* 其亥剋大地震).<sup>23</sup> The second is the entry in his diary, the *Gyokuyō* 玉葉, by Kujō Kanezane 九条兼実 (1149–1207), minister of the center under Emperor Nijō and prime minister and regent to Emperor Go-Toba: “In the hour of the boar, [there was] a great earthquake, the like of which [there] never was [before]” (*I no koku, ōnai kono tagui na[shi]* 亥刻, 大地震無此類).<sup>24</sup> These are contemporary records and, therefore, the authenticity of the earthquake may reasonably be considered to be beyond doubt. The fact that the *Heike* reports the time as the hour of the dog (7–9 p.m.) and the two diary entries report the time as the hour of the boar (9–11 p.m.) makes it likely that the earthquake occurred at some time around 9 p.m.

Moreover, the Kakuichi version of the *Heike monogatari* explicitly attributes to the earthquake report the narrative function of omen of impending disaster. On the twentieth day of the seventh month of the same year (Jishō 2), the Retired Emperor Go-Shirakawa is subjected to the indignity of being exiled by Taira no Kiyomori 平清盛 (1118–81) to the Toba Palace south of the city, and the *Heike* reports the feelings of the people:

“The great earthquake on the seventh was a warning that something like this would happen,” people said. “No wonder the bowels of the earth shook hard enough to frighten the earth deity!”<sup>25</sup>

Reports of earthquakes in the *Meitokuki* and *Taiheiki* also function as omens of impending disaster: of a battle in the first case and, and in the second, of a battle and the flight of members of the imperial family from the capital.

This brings us to the second reason for regarding the *Meitokuki* earthquake report as fiction. Here, we leave history and *Quellenforschung* (the investigation of sources) and turn to a literary analysis of the texts. *Gunki monogatari*, for all the historical material they contain, are classified as fiction. What makes a history a *gunki monogatari* is the insertion of a broad

22 McCullough 1988, chapter 3, p. 120.

23 *Sankaiki*, vol. 2, p. 310.

24 *Gyokuyō*, vol. 2, p. 305 (maki 31, Jishō 3.11.7). This entry is not listed along with that in the *Sankaiki* in the *Daimihon jishin shiryō*, p. 73.

25 *Heike monogatari*, chapter 3/18 “Exile of the Retired Emperor,” in McCullough 1988, p. 127. For Japanese, see *Heike monogatari*, p. 132.

variety of literary and narrative material. The most recognizable is the religious material: chanting the *nenbutsu* 念仏 at death or when in danger, sermons, stories of religious awakening, of entering religious life, and of the origins of sacred sites and objects.<sup>26</sup> Other ways of fictionalizing a history include changing the chronology of events or even modeling historical material on famous precedents, such as writing the death of a young man in battle on the pattern of the story of the death of Taira no Atsumori 平敦盛 (1169–84) at the hands of Kumagai Naozane 熊谷直実 (1141–1208) in the battle of Ichinotani 一ノ谷 in 1184.<sup>27</sup> The imitation of a particular story or scene results over time in a traditional narrative unit called a type scene, “a recurrent block of narrative with an identifiable structure, such as a sacrifice, the reception of a guest, the launching and beaching of a ship, the donning of armor.”<sup>28</sup> The type scene—especially as it is appears in epic literature—is characteristic of oral-derived literature in many cultural traditions. What the three earthquake reports document, since only one (the earliest) is fact and the other two are fiction, is the development of a type scene, the earthquake as omen. What is so remarkable is how much the three earthquake reports resemble each other. The relationship of the three texts is a given and yet the similarity seems to have eluded literary scholars.

Although there is not a word-for-word correspondence, the three earthquake reports follow the same sequence of events.<sup>29</sup> First, a date is given: “about the Hour of the Dog on the Seventh of the Eleventh Month”; “in the first year of Genkō [1331]...the third day of the seventh month of the same year of Genkō”; and “the fifteenth day of the same month at the hour of the horse.” Second, the earthquake or other natural disaster is described: “a violent, protracted earthquake”; “suddenly dried up the tidal beach at Senri-ga-hama in Kii... crumbled the summit of Mount Fuji for five thousand feet”; and “[f]olk ...could not even manage to walk; people...were frightened completely out of their wits.” Third, divination of the earthquake is performed by a high-ranking specialist of the Abe lineage in order to determine its meaning: “The Director of the Divination Bureau, Abe no Yasuchika, went posthaste to the imperial palace”; “Urabe no Sukune divined by roasting a large tortoise shell, and the yin-yang doctors elucidated”; and “[t]he Director of the Bureau of Divination, Tsuchimikado Ariyo, a noble of the third rank, hastened to the [shogun’s] palace.” And, fourth, a (prescriptive) response is given by anonymous characters standing in for the writer’s intended audience: “[n]o wonder the bowels of the earth shook hard enough to frighten the earth deity”; “with anxious hearts men thought... [u]ntoward happenings are close at hand”; and, finally, “nor was there anyone who did not keep a close guard upon himself.”

The presence of type scenes is one of the critical elements that distinguish epic from history. The close similarity of the examples in the *Heike monogatari*, the *Taiheiki*, and the *Meitokuki* documents the creation of a narrative formula or type scene; the presence of a type scene is a clear signal to historians to treat the material with care and to make certain that there is independent, contemporary evidence before using the event described in the *gunki monogatari* as historical record.

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26 Thornton 2000, pp. 329–31.

27 Thornton 2008.

28 Edwards 1992, p. 285.

29 I have not checked all the other variants of the *Heike*.

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