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A Portrait of Abe no Seimei

Abe no Seimei is one of the most famous figures in the history of Onmyōdō, with many tales attached to his name that attribute to him special powers and accomplishments. This article looks at the historical records concerning Abe no Seimei and tries to reconstruct what can be known historically of his life and actions. The records show that Abe no Seimei did not reach prominence and a high rank until late in his life, well over sixty years of age. The article concludes that if the *onmyōji* Abe no Seimei had not lived a long life, he probably would not have achieved the unusual fame that developed in later periods.

KEYWORDS: Abe no Seimei—*henbai*—demons—*onmyōji*—*ritsuryō* code—*shikigami*—festival rituals

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DURING THE time that Abe no Seimei 安倍晴明 (921–1005)¹ was active, there was a nobleman, Fujiwara no Yukinari 藤原行成 (972–1027), who was one of the three outstanding calligraphers of his day. We know from his diary, *Gonki* 権記 (Chōhō 2 [1000].10.11.), that Seimei was regarded at the time as the “preeminent practitioner of Onmyōdō” (*michi no kesshutsusha* 道ノ傑出者).

On the eleventh day of the tenth month of Chōhō 2, the reconstruction of the Imperial Palace, which had previously been destroyed in a fire, was finally completed. On that day, Emperor Ichijō (980–1011, r. 986–1011) moved from his temporary residence into the new palace building, at which time Seimei performed the magical step called *henbai* 反閤. According to Yukinari, this was the first time *henbai* had been performed on such an occasion. Formerly when the emperor had entered a new palace, a ritual act involving the scattering of uncooked grains of rice (*sangu* 散供) had been made, a rite that came under the purview of the *Onmyōryō* 陰陽寮 (Bureau of Yin and Yang), the government office in charge of divination, calendars, astrology, and time-keeping. So in 1000, Abe no Seimei not only performed a rite different from precedent, but it was done by someone who was not an officer of the *Onmyōryō*. As to why this was permitted, Yukinari wrote, “It was because Seimei was the preeminent practitioner of (*onmyō*)dō that he attended on the emperor” (*Gonki*, Chōhō 2.10.11).

The *henbai* that Seimei performed on that occasion was a series of special steps used to tread the ground accompanied by incantations. An example of its use prior to 1000 appears in the diary of Taira no Chikanobu 平親信 (945–1017), *Chikanobu-kyō ki*, in an item dated Ten'en 2 (974).2.9. A prominent *onmyōji* 陰陽師 called Kamo no Yasunori 賀茂保憲 performed *henbai* on behalf of Minamoto no Michisato 源通理 who was leaving for the province of Sanuki to which he had been appointed Provisional Assistant Governor. It is easy to imagine that this was done to ensure him safety on the road. For people of the time, *henbai*

* Editorial note: This article makes reference to a large number of textual sources—diaries, compilations, and so forth—some well known, and others not. Rather than add annotations explaining each text, we have given only the transliteration of the titles, for example *Gonki* and *Shōyūki*.

1. The characters of Abe's given name, 晴明, would normally be read according to the Japanese pronunciation as “Haruaki.” However, in Japan, the names of prominent people are customarily read according to the Chinese pronunciation, in this case, “Seimei.” Therefore in this article I will employ the form “Seimei,” except in a few exceptional cases.

seems to have been a magical device to guarantee personal safety when going to an unknown place or a place perceived as dangerous.²

Thus, it was not strange that *henbai* should have been used when the emperor was moving into a new palace. A new residence truly was an unknown space. In fact, the nobility of the time would not have occupied a newly-built dwelling until a complex series of rites focusing on the new building, including the performance of *henbai* by *onmyōji*, had been undertaken. For example, Fujiwara no Michinaga 藤原道長 notes in his diary *Midōkanpakuki*, in an entry dated Kankō 2 (1005).2.10, that he had waited for Abe no Seimei at the gate of his new residence. It seems that Seimei, who was supposed to perform the rites for the newly-built mansion, was somewhat late in arriving.³

Several tales in the twenty-seventh fascicle (*Honchō reikibu*) of the *Konjaku monogatari shū* suggest that people in the Heian period considered not just new dwellings but any kind of house as a potentially dangerous space occupied by spirits and demons. Even when the nobility began using a residence after a period of disuse, they would have an *onmyōji* perform *henbai* before occupying it again.

Fujiwara no Sanesuke's 藤原実資 diary *Shōyūki* gives us another example pre-dating 1000. In 985 Sanesuke was living in a residence called Nijō-tei that faced onto Nijō ōji (avenue). He placed it for a time at the disposal of the consort of Emperor Enyū, Empress (*chūgu* 中宮) Fujiwara no Nobuko 藤原遵子 (957–1017). During that time, he lived at another of his residences, Ononomiya, after a considerable period of disuse. Before living there again, he had an *onmyōji* called Agata Tomohira 縣奉平 perform *henbai*, preceded by the ritual scattering of uncooked rice (*sangu*). And after Nobuko left the Nijō residence, and Sanesuke was about to move back in, Abe no Seimei performed *henbai* for him.⁴

It was in such an environment that Seimei instituted the performance of *henbai* for the emperor when he moved into his newly-built palace. It later became customary for *onmyōji* to perform *henbai* on all such occasions. Abe no Seimei had been able to institute this new procedure because of his renown among his contemporaries.

A Person Who Sees Demons

An important court ritual on the last day of the year was called *tsuina* 追儺. The prototype of the modern *setsubun* and its bean-throwing, it was held to expel all demons that had gathered within Japan to outside the boundaries of the land in

2. In an example of *henbai* after 1000, the *onmyōji* Koremune no Fumitaka 惟宗文高 performed it when generals appointed to put down the rebellion of Chiba no Tadatsune left the capital (*Shōyūki*, Chōgen 1 [1028]. 8.5). For details on *henbai*, see KOSAKA 1993.

3. For rites pertaining to newly-built dwellings, see SHIGETA 2004, 179–211; 2005, 13–98.

4. *Shōyūki*, Kanna 1 (985). 5.7; Eien 1 (987). 3.21.

the four directions. It is thought that at least by the middle of the Heian period the court nobility were performing similar ceremonies in their own residences. In the *Seiji yōryaku* 政事要略 (An outline of governance), compiled by Koremune no Tadasuke 惟宗允亮 (n.d.) in the early years of the eleventh century, an interesting anecdote concerning Abe no Seimei in relation to the *tsuina* is recorded:

In the intercalary twelfth month of Chōhō 3 [1001], the birth mother of Emperor Ichijō, Higashi Sanjōin Fujiwara no Akiko 東三条院藤原詮子, died, and that year's court *tsuina* was cancelled. Consequently, the prevailing mood was such that private performances of the ritual in the residences of nobles were also cancelled. However, as Abe no Seimei told Tadasuke when he visited him, when he had performed the *tsuina* at his own residence on the last night of the year, it had so appealed to the people of Kyoto that they began to perform it too, like an annual event. Hearing this, Tadasuke added the remark, "Seimei is a master of Onmyōdō" [*onmyō no tassha* 陰陽ノ達者].

(*Seiji yōryaku*, kan 29, "Nenjū gyōji jūnigatsu ge")

This episode also appears to have been recorded in the *Shōyūki*, though the actual entry has been lost, like so much of the diary. However, its index lists the entry "Chōhō 4 [1002].1.7. The question of the cancellation of the *tsuina* due to Court mourning," and there is an addendum that says, "When Seimei began the [*tsui*]na, others followed suit" (*Shōki mokuroku*, kan 20, "Kyūin kyōji"). In other words, the story as Tadasuke heard it was not grandiose self-promotion by Seimei but the common recognition by people of the time that "Seimei [was] a master of Onmyōdō."

We have already seen that the *tsuina* was a ritual to exorcise demons. People of the Heian period seem to have truly expected that its performance would ensure that all demons would be driven away from the land. For example, according to the diary of Emperor Daigo, when there was an influenza epidemic in 908 (Engi 8), after a while people came to attribute its cause to the fact that the *tsuina* had not been performed at the end of the previous year and as a result it had been impossible to drive away completely those demons that spread disease (*ekiki* 疫鬼; *Daigo tennō goki*, Engi 8.12.29).

According to the *Engishiki* 延喜式, compiled at the beginning of the tenth century, the *tsuina* as a court ritual was completely under the supervision of the Onmyōryō, and the procedure began with a ritual prayer (*saimon* 祭文) chanted by an *onmyōji* (*Engishiki*, kan 16, "Engi Onmyōryō shiki"). Seeing that *onmyōji* were in charge of the ritual as a whole and played an important role in it, it is very likely that the same applied to private *tsuina* performed in the residences of the nobility.

Here we see a connection between *onmyōji* and demons. People in the Heian period seem to have believed that *onmyōji* had the ability to see demons. There

is a tale in the *Konjaku monogatari shū* that relates that Abe no Seimei had been able to see them since he was a small child (*Konjaku monogatari shū*, kan 24, Tale 16). We also know from the diary of the emperor Uda that an *onmyōji* who served Emperor Montoku at the beginning of the Heian period was spoken of as “a person who sees demons” (“Uda tennō goki,” Kanpyō 1 (889).1.18.). In the *Shin-sarugakuki* by the scholar Fujiwara no Akihira 藤原明衡 (d. 1066), a fictional character called “Kamo no Michiyo, Onmyōdō Master” was presented as the ideal of an *onmyōji*, of whom it was said, “Though he had received the body of a human being, his heart/mind communicated with the demons and spirits [*kishin* 鬼神].”⁵

Thus, the fact that *onmyōji* who “communicated with the demons and spirits in mind” and “saw demons” were in charge of expelling demons would have been seen as completely natural by the people of the time. And given this, the great influence exerted by Abe no Seimei on the occasion of the *tsuina* of 1001 does not come as a surprise as he was so highly regarded.

Gen, Effectiveness

In the middle of the seventh month of Kankō 1 (1004), there was a drought. According to the information brought by Fujiwara no Sanenari 藤原実成 (975–1045) to Fujiwara no Michinaga, the Festival Ritual of the Five Dragons (*goryūsai* 五龍祭) performed by Abe no Seimei had been “effective,” and Seimei had been given “a gift.” This appears in Michinaga’s diary (*Midōkanpakuki*, Kankō 1.7.14).

The *goryūsai* was a magical rite performed by *onmyōji* to produce rain. Sanenari’s comment that it had been “effective” indicates some response, and Seimei’s gift represented a reward for his work. The entry in Michinaga’s diary tells us that Seimei had caused rain to fall during a drought through the performance of the *goryūsai*, and received a reward for his success. This suggests that Michinaga, along with other people during the Heian period, believed that the *onmyōji* Seimei could cause rain to fall through magic.

This incident appears to have been recorded in Sanenari’s diary as well. In Fascicle 19 of the *Shōki mokuroku*, there is an item dated Kankō 1.7.16 that states, “Seimei receives a reward for the effectiveness [*gen* 験] of the Festival of the Five Dragons.” Unfortunately, the entry itself has not survived in the *Shōyūki*. I would like, however, to draw attention to “*gen* of the Festival of the Five Dragons.” Here it appears in the context of Seimei receiving a reward because of the effectiveness of a magical ritual he had performed.

5. Of course, not all *onmyōji* were so thought of by all people. For example, in an entry in the *Shōyūki* dated Manju 1 (1024).10.29, we see that robbers entered the residence of an *onmyōji* called Nakahara no Tsunemori, and from an item “Ran gyō no koto” in Fascicle 17 of the *Shōki mokuroku*, we know that an *onmyōji* called Ōnakatomi no Sanemitsu “suffered an indignity.”

DATE	ACTIVITY	SOURCE
Kōhō 4 (967).6.23	Selecting an auspicious time and day for the ritual signalling the beginning of political activities	<i>Honchō seiki</i>
Tenroku 3 (972).12.6	Report to the emperor concerning celestial aberrations	<i>Chikanobu-kyō ki</i>
Tenroku 3 (972).12.6	Report to the authorities about performing the Rite of the Four Directions to control the prevalence of epidemics	<i>Chikanobu-kyō ki</i>
Ten'en 1 (973).1.9	Report to the emperor concerning celestial aberrations	<i>Chikanobu-kyō ki</i>
Ten'en 1 (973).6.11	Divination about uncanny phenomena for the emperor Enyū	<i>Chikanobu-kyō ki</i>
Ten'en 1 (973).6.11	<i>Henbai</i> performed in occasion of the emperor Enyū's progress to the Chūkain	<i>Chikanobu-kyō ki</i>
Ten'en 2 (974).6.12	Riverside purification performed for the emperor Enyū	<i>Chikanobu-kyō ki</i>
Ten'en 2 (974).12.3	Report to the emperor concerning celestial aberrations	<i>Chikanobu-kyō ki</i>
Eikan 2 (984).7.27	Selected an auspicious time and day for the enthronement ritual of the emperor Kazan, succeeding the emperor Enyū, and the ceremony naming Kanehito Shinnō (later emperor Ichijō) as Crown Prince	<i>Shōyūki</i>
Kanna 1 (985).4.19	Purification performed because Fujiwara Sanesuke's concubine was late giving birth	<i>Shōyūki</i>
Kanna 1 (985).5.29	Purification performed on the completion of Emperor Kazan's period of mourning	<i>Shōyūki</i>
Kanna 2 (986).2.16	Divined that the appearance of a snake in the building of the Dajōkan was auspicious	<i>Honchō seiki</i>
Eien 1 (987).2.19	Performed <i>henbai</i> on the occasion of Emperor Ichijō moving from the Gyōkasha 凝華舎 to the Seiryōden	<i>Shōyūki</i>
Eien 1 (987).3.21	Fujiwara Sanesuke had <i>henbai</i> performed on returning to his Nijō mansion after an absence	<i>Shōyūki</i>
Eien 2 (988).7.4	Performed a <i>kiki-sai</i> (ritual to expel illness-causing demons) at the residence of Fujiwara Sanesuke	<i>Shōyūki</i>
Eien 2 (988).8.7	Selected an auspicious time and day for the performance of an esoteric Buddhist ritual and the <i>Keikokuseisai</i> for the emperor Ichijō	<i>Shōyūki</i>
Eien 2 (988).8.18	Wrote a letter of explanation about why he did not perform the <i>Keikokuseisai</i> for the emperor Ichijō	<i>Shōyūki</i>
Eiso 1 (989).1.6	Made a divination concerning the illness of the emperor Ichijō	<i>Shōyūki</i>
Eiso 1 (989).1.7	Performed a purification for the illness of the emperor Ichijō	<i>Shōyūki</i>
Eiso 1 (989).2.11	Ordered to perform the <i>Taizan Fukun sai</i> for the emperor Ichijō	<i>Shōyūki</i>
Eiso 1 (989).2.16	Performed <i>henbai</i> on the occasion of the emperor Ichijō's progress to Enyūji	<i>Shōyūki</i>
Shōryaku 4 (993).2.3	Performed a purification for the illness of the emperor Ichijō	<i>Shōyūki</i>
Shōryaku 5 (994).5.7	Reported that a Ninnōkō should be held in the Imperial Palace	<i>Honchō seiki</i>
Chōtoku 1 (995).10.17	Reported on whether or not divination had been performed when a report was made concerning celestial aberrations	<i>Gonki</i>
Chōtoku 3 (997).6.17	Selected an auspicious day and time for the emperor Ichijō's progress to visit Higashi Sanjōin (his mother)	<i>Gonki</i>
Chōtoku 3 (997).6.22	Performed <i>henbai</i> on the occasion of the emperor Ichijō's progress to visit Higashi Sanjōin (his mother)	<i>Gonki</i>
Chōhō 1 (999).7.8	Performed <i>henbai</i> when the emperor Ichijō moved from the east to the north of his temporary palace, Ichijōin.	<i>Gonki</i>
Chōhō 1 (999).7.16	Made a divination concerning the illness of Emperor Ichijō	<i>Gonki</i>
Chōhō 1 (999).7.16	Selected an auspicious day to perform an "Onmyōdō festival" (unspecified) for Emperor Ichijō	<i>Gonki</i>
Chōhō 1 (999).10.13	Made a divination about the necessity of the Great Empress Dowager, the Imperial Princess Shōshi, moving residences to treat an illness	<i>Shōyūki</i>

DATE	ACTIVITY	SOURCE
Chōhō 1 (999).10.13	Selected an auspicious day and hour for the Imperial Princess Shōshi to move to the residence of Ōe Masamune.	<i>Shōyūki</i>
Chōhō 1 (999).10.19	Report on miscellaneous affairs surrounding the move of the Imperial Princess Shōshi to the residence of Ōe Masamune.	<i>Shōyūki</i>
Chōhō 1 (999).11.7	Selected an auspicious day and hour for performing a fire prevention ritual in the Imperial Palace	<i>Gonki</i>
Chōhō 1 (999).11.7	Was ordered to perform a fire prevention ritual in the Imperial Palace	<i>Gonki</i>
Chōhō 2 (1000).1.10	Reported on some matter (unspecified) at the residence of Fujiwara Michinaga	<i>Midō-kanpakuki</i>
Chōhō 2 (1000).1.28	Selected an auspicious day and hour for the installation as empress of the consort of the emperor Ichijō, Fujiwara no Shōshi	<i>Midō-kanpakuki</i>
Chōhō 2 (1000).2.16	Selected an auspicious day and hour for the visit by the empress Shōshi to Hōkōin	<i>Midō-kanpakuki</i>
Chōhō 2 (1000).8.19	Divined whether rats in Fujiwara Yukinari's quarters in the Imperial Palace were a lucky or unlucky sign	<i>Gonki</i>
Chōhō 2 (1000).8.19	Selected the harmful direction for constructing the Nuidonoryō	<i>Gonki</i>
Chōhō 2 (1000).10.11	Performed <i>henbai</i> on the occasion of the emperor Ichijō moving from his temporary palace, Ichijōin, to the newly-erected Imperial Palace	<i>Gonki</i>
Chōhō 3 (1001).6.20	Selected an auspicious day and hour for Higashi Sanjōin, Fujiwara Senshi, to venerate a statue of Fudō	<i>Gonki</i>
Chōhō 3 (1001).6.20	Selected an auspicious day and hour for Imperial Prince Atsuyasu (first-born son of Ichijō) to eat fish for the first time	<i>Gonki</i>
Chōhō 3 (1001).12.17*	Divined whether or not the ill Higashi Sanjōin, Fujiwara Senshi, should move to the Sanjō residence of Fujiwara Yukinari	<i>Gonki</i>
Chōhō 3 (1001).12.23*	Reported on miscellaneous matters concerning the funeral rites of Higashi Sanjōin, Fujiwara Senshi.	<i>Gonki</i>
Chōhō 3 (1001).12.29*	Performed the <i>tsuina</i> , cancelled in the Imperial Palace because of the death of Senshi, in his own home	<i>Seiji yōryaku</i>
Chōhō 4 (1002).3.19	Reported on the reason for the incessant fires in the Imperial Palace	<i>Gonki</i>
Chōhō 4 (1002).3.19	Reported on the origins of the names of the gates of the Imperial Palace	<i>Gonki</i>
Chōhō 4 (1002).11.9	Performed <i>Taizan Fukun sai</i> for Fujiwara Yukinari	<i>Gonki</i>
Chōhō 5 (1003).8.21	Made a divination concerning the illness of Imperial Prince Atsuyasu	<i>Gonki</i>
Kankō 1 (1004).2.19	Selected a site in Kohata for Fujiwara Michinaga to build the (mortuary temple) Sanmaidō	<i>Midō-kanpakuki</i>
Kankō 1 (1004).2.26	Asked by Fujiwara Yukinari whether it was auspicious or not to perform a Buddhist rite on a Kōshin day	<i>Gonki</i>
Kankō 1 (1004).6.18	Divined whether there was any death pollution at the residence of Fujiwara Michinaga	<i>Midō-kanpakuki</i>
Kankō 1 (1004).6.20	Reported that it was not suitable for Fujiwara Michinaga to erect a Buddhist statue on a <i>metsumon</i> (inauspicious) day	<i>Midō-kanpakuki</i>
Kankō 1 (1004).7.14	Performed the Five Dragons Festival	<i>Midō-kanpakuki</i>
Kankō 1 (1004).8.22	Divined whether or not the empress Shōshi should visit Ōharano Jinja	<i>Midō-kanpakuki</i>
Kankō 1 (1004).9.25	Divined whether rumbling at Tōnomine (the grave of Fujiwara no Kamatari) was auspicious or not	<i>Midō-kanpakuki</i>
Kankō 1 (1004).12.3	Performed an Onmyōdō ritual (unspecified) at the residence of Fujiwara Michinaga	<i>Midō-kanpakuki</i>
Kankō 2 (1005).2.10	Performed a ritual for a new construction for Fujiwara Michinaga's new Sanjōin	<i>Midō-kanpakuki</i>
Kankō 2 (1005).3.8	Performed <i>henbai</i> when the empress Shōshi visited Ōharano Jinja	<i>Shōyūki</i>

* The year in bold indicates an extra month in the lunar calendar.

FIGURE 1. Abe no Seimei's activities.

A similar story survives in another entry in the *Shōyūki*, dated Shōryaku 4 (993).2.3. On that day, Abe no Seimei visited Sanesuke at his home. Just prior to this, Seimei had been promoted from the Lower to the Upper Grade of the Senior Fifth Rank and he seems to have been visiting Sanesuke to inform him of this. According to what Seimei himself said, when Emperor Ichijō suddenly fell ill, Seimei performed a purification ceremony to treat the illness. It was because “there was instant effectiveness” that Seimei later received the raised ranking as a reward. Here too we find Seimei being given a reward because of the effectiveness of his magic (*Shōyūki*, Shōryaku 4.2.3).

In the section on “Hateful Things” in the *Makura no sōshi* (The Pillow Book), Sei Shōnagon 清少納言 mentions “Someone has fallen ill and a *genza* 験者 (exorcist) is summoned.” Thus in Abe no Seimei’s day, people called *genza* were associated with the curing of illness. *Genza* were Buddhist priests who performed magical rites, such as esoteric rituals and magico-religious prayers (*kaji kitō* 加持祈祷), in a variety of situations, including the curing of illness. *Gen* or *shirushi* as understood by the people of the Heian period appear to be synonymous with what we today call “effectiveness.” Buddhist priests who performed esoteric rites or *kaji* were called *genza* (people having *gen*) because there was an expectation that their rituals would be effective.

People had similar expectations of the effectiveness of the magical rituals performed by *onmyōji*, such as festival rituals and purifications to cure illness, and for other purposes.⁶ At the same time, these *onmyōji* could raise their reputation by displaying *gen*, that is, exhibiting the effectiveness of their rituals. The two examples we have examined above are typical. The reason that the *onmyōji* Abe no Seimei achieved fame as “the preeminent practitioner of Onmyōdō” was due in part to the effectiveness of the various rituals he performed.⁷ FIGURE 1 lists Seimei’s activities as an *onmyōji* based on contemporary sources; they show the diverse types of magic that he practiced.

Abe no Seimei in Old Age

Though its author is unknown and the date of its compilation uncertain, the *Nihon kiryaku* is highly esteemed as a basic historical source for the time up to the mid-Heian period. In an entry dated Tengen 1 (978).7.24, there is a report saying “A thunderbolt fell, damaging the residence of the *onmyō hakase* Izumo Kiyōaki 陰陽博士出雲清明.” Izumo Kiyōaki has been widely regarded as referring to Abe no Seimei. This is because the characters 清明 used to transcribe the name may be pronounced either “Kiyōaki” or “Seimei,” and recent mono-

6. For the work of *onmyōji* in treating illness, see SHIGETA 2004, 124–78; 2005, 99–192.

7. For magical practices performed by *onmyōji*, see OKADA 1991; YAMASHITA 1996.

graphs and articles concerning Abe no Seimei have frequently identified the two as being the same. It is certainly a telling anecdote for scholars interested in the trope of Seimei's failures, speaking as it does of his inability to prevent a thunderbolt striking his own house.

It may be, however, that the person who appears as Izumo Kiyooki in the *Nihon kiryaku* is not Abe no Seimei at all. We should not underestimate the fact that the text employs "Izumo Kiyooki," not "Abe no Seimei."⁸ The *Chikanobu-kyō ki* refers to Abe no Seimei as *tenmon hakase* 天文博士 (doctor of astrology) for the first time in an entry dated Tenroku 3 (972).12.6, while the late Heian historical work, *Honchō seiki* 本朝世紀 (Chronicle of imperial reigns) mentions "Abe Ason Seimei, *tenmon hakase*, Senior Fifth Rank, Upper Grade" in an entry dated Kanna 2 (986).2.16. It is difficult therefore to think that he could have occupied the post of *onmyō hakase* in 978, and so it appears to be pushing things too far to identify Abe no Seimei with the Izumo Kiyooki mentioned in the *Nihon kiryaku*. Nevertheless, some scholars remain convinced, despite the evidence, that Abe no Seimei and Izumo Kiyooki are the same man.

Those interested in Seimei's failures should note an entry in the *Shōyūki* dated Eien 2 (988).8.18. Because of an astrological divination that said the star Keikokusei 熒惑星 was not in a good position as far as Emperor Ichijō was concerned, Jinzen 尋禪, the Tendai *zasu* 座主 (head priest), was to perform an esoteric Buddhist ritual and Seimei a magical rite called the Keikokusei Festival (Keikokuseisai 熒惑星祭) on that day. However, Seimei did not perform any ritual for the emperor. Did he have a reason for not doing so, or did something happen that was beyond his control? Or was there some deeper reason? We just do not know. However, as a result, Seimei had to write a letter of explanation. This failure of Seimei's, which is backed by historical evidence, is the only one known at present.

If we set aside the entry in the *Honchō seiki* dated Kōhō 4 (967).6.23 that deals with "the *onmyōji* Seimei" selecting an auspicious time and day for the ritual signalling the beginning of political activities, the earliest and most reliable record concerning him is in Taira no Chikanobu's diary, *Chikanobu-kyō ki*. However, this record only lasts a scant three years, from 972 to 974. It is therefore difficult to attain reliable information about Seimei before 967. The last entry concerning Seimei is found in the *Shōyūki*, dated Kankō 2 (1005).3.8; after that he no longer appears in the records of his contemporaries. He may have died around that time. At any rate, we can only follow Seimei's trail for around thirty years, from 967 to 1005.

A genealogy of the Abe family included in a collection of genealogies compiled in the fourteenth century called the *Sonpi bunmyaku* says that Seimei died

8. Some variants have the orthography "Izumo no Kiyooki/Seimei" 出雲晴明 but this does not mean it refers to "Abe no Seimei."

at the age of eighty-five. If we take 1005 to be the year of his death, we can estimate he was born in Engi 21 (921). If so, Seimei was already over fifty when he first made an appearance in the *Chikanobu-kyō ki*, and so he was already an old man. This means that the only records we have of Seimei are from his old age.

Perhaps the only more-or-less reliable record that exists for Seimei before this time is the information contained in the *Sonpi bunmyaku*—Seimei was a student of Kamo no Yasunori, who, according to the undated *Dazaifu mandokoro chōan*, was a “doctor of the three ways” (*sandō hakase* 三道博士), that is, of yin-yang divination, astrology, and the calendar (*Heian ibun* No. 4623). Minamoto no Tsuneyori 源経頼 (986–1039), who lived around fifty years after Yasunori, kept a diary called the *Sakeiki* 左経記. An entry dated Chōgen 5 (1032).5.4 says, “In Japan, the foundations of Onmyōdō were laid by Yasunori.” This tells us that the *onmyōji* called Kamo no Yasunori who was Abe no Seimei’s teacher was highly regarded among the Heian nobility as a preceptor of *onmyōji*.

The Abe genealogy in the *Sonpi bunmyaku* describes Seimei as “originally a graduate student (*tokugōshō* 得業生) in astrology.” This suggests that Seimei may have studied under the *tenmon hakase* Yasunori as an advanced student of that subject. We have already seen that Seimei was appointed *tenmon hakase* at the end of Tenroku 3 (972), in all likelihood as the successor of Yasunori. It is also thought that Yasunori transmitted knowledge of yin-yang divination to Seimei, as well as astrology.⁹ An entry dated Ten’nen 2 (974).5.14 in the *Chikanobu-kyō ki* records that when Kamo Yasunori climbed Mount Hiei to select by divination a site for a new hall, he was attended by Seimei. This is an indication of the close ties that existed between the two men as teacher and student.

The explanation in the Kamo genealogy in the *Sonpi bunmyaku* that Kamo no Yasunori, who was both *tenmon hakase* and *reki hakase*, planned to leave only the calendar within his own family line and entrust astrology to the Abe family does not necessarily appear to be based on historical fact. Because there was no one in the Kamo family sufficiently versed in astrology to succeed Yasunori, and as the Abe family continued to produce men proficient in astrology after Seimei himself, the result was that after the eleventh century a system had been formed where the Abe were in charge of astrology, and the Kamo the calendar. The explanation in the *Sonpi bunmyaku* is a later creation and is unrelated to Yasunori himself, and reflects the situation that had come about after the eleventh century between the Abe and Kamo families (SHIGETA 2004, 261–325; 2006, 157–73).

9. The *Ruijū fusenshō* 類聚符宣抄, a collection of laws and ordinances compiled in the late eleventh century, includes a document issued by the Dajōkan dated Tenroku 1 (970).11.8 telling us that Seimei’s son Yoshimasa, an astrology *tokugōshō*, was a student of the *tenmon hakase* Kamo no Yasunori (*Ruijū fusenshō*, no. 9, *Tenmon tokugōshō*). Seimei’s family line was later in charge of both divination and astrology. This has the flavor of a branch from Yasunori’s lineage.

POSITION	DATE	SOURCE
<i>Tenmon tokugōshō</i>		<i>Sonpi bunmyaku</i>
<i>Onmyōji</i>	Kōhō 4 (967) 6	<i>Honchō seiki</i> Kōhō 4 (967) 6.23
Onmyō gonno shōzoku		<i>Sonpi bunmyaku</i>
<i>Tenmon hakase</i>	Tenroku 3 (972) 12	<i>Chikanobu-kyō ki</i> , Tenroku 3 (972).12.6
(former <i>tenmon hakase</i>)	Shōryaku 5 (994) 5	<i>Honchō seiki</i> , Shōryaku 5 (994) 5.7
Shukei gonnosuke	Chōtoku 3 (997) 1	<i>Ōmaseibun-shō</i> (997) No. 7 <i>ge</i>
Bicchūnosuke	Chōtoku 3 (997) 1	<i>Ōmaseibun-shō</i> , Chōtoku 3 (997) No. 7 <i>ge</i>
(rank without position)	Chōhō 3 (1001) 12*	<i>Seiji yōryaku</i> , No. 29
Sakyō gonnodaibu	Chōhō 4 (1002) 11	<i>Gonki</i> , Chōhō 4 (1002) 11.28
Kokusōin Bettō		<i>Sonpi bunmyaku</i>
Daizen daibu		<i>Sonpi bunmyaku</i>

* The year in bold indicates an extra month in the lunar calendar.

FIGURE 2. Abe no Seimei's career as an official.

Abe no Seimei as a Middle-Ranking Bureaucrat

According to an entry in the *Gonki* dated Chōhō 2 (1000).10.21, Abe no Seimei that day acted as deputy for the *Shikibu taifu* 式部大輔 (Ceremonial Commissioner) at a ceremony (*joi* 叙位) conferring promotions on bureaucrats serving the court. The Ceremonial Commissioner was the second-highest position in the *Shikibushō* 式部省 (Ministry of Ceremonies), the government department that dealt with personnel matters related to the bureaucracy. Because the commissioner could not for some reason attend the ceremony, Seimei took his place.

This of course had no relation to his activities as an *onmyōji*. At the same time, Seimei was in a position to deputize for the Ceremonial Commissioner. Though legend and lore do not make it clear whether “Seimei” was human or not, his historical personage (“Haruaki”) was in fact a middle-ranking bureaucrat who served the court: in other words, he was an ordinary member of the Heian nobility.¹⁰ As can be seen from FIGURE 2, Seimei did not pass through life as just an *onmyōji*.

In the article in the *Seiji yōryaku* concerning the *tsuina* of 1001 quoted above, Seimei is described as “Abe no Ason Seimei, Junior Fourth Rank, Lower Grade,

10. Most *onmyōji* whose names appear in records left by the Heian nobility, including those lower-ranking officials who never ranked higher than Senior Sixth Rank, Lower Grade, were all government officials with rank and position—“official *onmyōji*.” A not inconsiderable proportion of them had the rank of Junior Fifth Rank, Lower Grade, which meant they were members of the nobility and middle-ranking bureaucrats. For a list of “official *onmyōji*” of the mid-Heian period, see SHIGETA 2004, 227–83; 2006, 128–44.

without official position.” This means that the “A- of the Fourth Rank” mentioned in the *Gonki* on Chōhō 2.8.19 as having been asked by Fujiwara no Yukinari to perform divination was probably Seimei. According to the *Sonpi bunmyaku*, Junior Fourth Rank, Lower Grade, was the final ranking that Seimei received. The fact that Seimei was possibly without official position when he deputized for the Ceremonial Commissioner fits in well with the entry in the *Seiji yōryaku*.

As an official, Seimei would, under the *ritsuryō* code, have received a salary from the court. A document from the Bureau of Taxation (Shuzeiryō 主税寮) concerning taxes tells us that on Chōhō 4 (1002).4.15, Abe no Ason Seimei was an official of the Junior Fourth Rank, Lower Grade, earning an income of about 361 *koku* 石 of rice per year (*Heian ibun*, no. 1161). In the mid-Heian period, stipends (*iroku* 位禄) were paid from the government in the form of rice, and the amount to be paid was scrupulously determined by rank. Incidentally, among the Taxation Bureau documents is one dated Chōhō 4.4.10 concerning Seimei’s son Yoshihira 吉平, who received an income of about 215 *koku* of rice as an official of the Junior Fifth Rank, Lower Grade.

Under the *ritsuryō* code, officials were, in addition to the above stipend, given rice land called *iden* 位田 (rank rice fields), differing in amount according to their rank. An official of the Junior Fourth Rank, Lower Grade, received twenty *chō* 町 (about fifty acres) and one of the Junior Fifth Rank, Lower Grade, received eight *chō* (about twenty acres). Income from the “rank fields” amounted to around 380 *koku* in Seimei’s case and to around 152 *koku* in Yoshihira’s case.¹¹ In addition, an official position also accrued a salary in the form of *shikibunden* 職分田 (office rice fields). As *tenmon hakase*, Seimei would have received four *chō* (about ten acres), and when he was Sakyō no gontayu 左京権大夫 (provisional senior assistant minister, eastern capital) he probably received two *chō* (about five acres).

There were also semiannual presents (*kiroku* 季禄) to all rank holders in the form of cloth and agricultural implements. But even considering only the main income sources for officials (*iroku* and *iden*), Seimei would have received an annual salary of around 741 *koku* when he was of the Junior Fourth Rank, Lower Grade, and around 367 *koku* when he was of the Junior Fifth Rank, Lower Grade.¹² An entry in the *Shōyūki* dated Shōryaku 1 (990).11.2 reveals that Fujiwara Sanesuke sold his Nijō residence for five thousand *koku*, and according to

11. ABE (1993) attempts to convert the stipend of high-ranking officials of the Senior Second Rank into yen. The conversion of the income from the “rank fields” made here employs his trial calculation.

12. If we use ABE’s (1993) trial calculation, Seimei’s income would have been around 19,000,000 yen when of the Junior Fourth Rank, Lower Grade, and around 9,500,000 yen when of the Junior Fifth Rank, Lower Grade. Using the same conversion, income from his “official rice fields” would have been around 2,000,000 yen when he was *tenmon hakase* and around 1,000,000 yen when he was Sakyō no gontayu.

the *Gonki*, Chōtoku 4 (998).10.29, that when a residence that would afterwards be used as a temporary palace for Emperor Ichijō was sold, it made eight thousand *koku*. If we consider that these were the kind of prices paid for mansions of the high nobility, we cannot say that Seimei's income was scanty.¹³

However, by the mid-Heian period, when the *ritsuryō* system had become more relaxed, middle-ranking officials with weaker positions did not necessarily receive the stipends that were laid down for them. One of the reasons that many of them attached themselves to powerful senior officials and the high nobility as "housemen" (*kenin* 家人) was to use the good offices of these "gates of power" to secure their income. The *Shōyūki*, in an entry dated Kannin 3 (1019).2.5, tells us that Seimei's son Yoshimasa 吉昌 was a "houseman" of Fujiwara no Sanesuke, and Seimei himself may have been a "houseman" of Fujiwara no Michinaga. Until 1005, Michinaga hardly used any *onmyōji* other than Seimei.

The Highest-Ranked Person of Onmyōdō

In the collection of prose and verse texts called *Chōya gunsai* (Collected records of court and country), compiled in 1116 by Miyoshi no Tameyasu 三善為康 (1049–1139), there is a document dated Chōtoku 1 (995).8.1 included as an example of a report informing the court of the monthly working conditions of officials attached to the Kurōdo-dokoro 藏人所, which functioned as an Imperial secretariat. It tells us that during the reign of Emperor Ichijō, Abe no Seimei was appointed "Kurōdo-dokoro *onmyōji*," secretarial *onmyōji* for the emperor (*Chōya gunsai* 5, *Chōgi ge*, "Kurōdo-dokoro gessō").

On the nineteenth day of the second month of Eien 1 (987), Emperor Ichijō, who had succeeded to the throne in the sixth month of the previous year, moved his sleeping quarters from the Gyōkasha, where he had lived as Crown Prince, to the Seiryōden, and Seimei performed *henbai* (*Shōyūki*). Subsequently, mention is found in various records of Seimei's carrying out divination and magical rites for Ichijō. This was because Seimei was the Kurōdo-dokoro *onmyōji* for Ichijō. We saw above how Seimei received a promotion as a result of a particularly effective purification rite he performed for Ichijō when he suddenly took ill. As the Kurōdo-dokoro *onmyōji* he would have been expected to carry out divination and magical rites when the emperor became sick.

When magical rites were to be performed for the emperor, or when he left the palace, it was extremely important that the day and time be carefully selected to avoid inauspicious days and hours. This would also have been the task of the Kurōdo-dokoro *onmyōji*. FIGURE 1 shows a number of occasions on which

13. From an entry in the *Shōyūki* dated Kannin 2 (1018).5.26, we know that an *onmyōji* called Koremune no Fumitaka built a private "temple." Even Fumitaka, whose final ranking was probably Senior Fifth Rank, Lower Grade, had sufficient means to do so.

Seimei, as Ichijō's Kurōdo-dokoro *onmyōji*, selected auspicious days and times for the emperor. It was Seimei himself who selected the date for the performance of the Keikokusei Festival of 988, and he later wrote a letter of explanation explaining why he did not attend (*Shōyūki*, Eien 2 [988].8.7).

Further mention is made of the Kurōdo-dokoro *onmyōji* in the *Chūyūki*, the diary of Fujiwara no Munetada 藤原宗忠 (1062–1141), about whom it says, “He was a man who served on the Kurōdo-dokoro and was of the highest rank” (*Chūyūki*, Daiji 4 [1129].7.8). Thus by Munetada's time, the highest-ranking *onmyōji* was the Kurōdo-dokoro *onmyōji*. Abe no Seimei was the highest-ranking *onmyōji* of his own time when he was promoted to Senior Fifth Rank, Upper Grade, in 993.¹⁴ This suggests that already by the mid-Heian period, the system or custom existed whereby the highest-ranking *onmyōji* was attached to the Kurōdo-dokoro.

There is another document in the *Chōya gunsai* that we must consider here. It is dated Chōji 2 (1105).2.21 and is a request for the promotion of an *onmyōji* called Kamo no Narihira. As a precedent for the extraordinary promotion of an *onmyōji*, it cites the case of “the second-highest ranked person of Onmyōdō who was given extraordinary promotion” (*Chōya gunsai* 15, *Rekidō*, “Rekidō joshaku shōsō”). Concerning this person, there is a note attached written about the *onmyōji* Abe Yoshimasa: “Chōtoku 4 (998).4, awarded Senior Fifth Rank, Lower Grade; of the highest rank at that time was Yoshihira Ason.” “Yoshihira” was Abe no Yoshihira, who was, like Yoshimasa, a son of Seimei.¹⁵

According to an entry in the *Shōyūki* dated Chōwa 5 (1016). 1.8, Abe no Yoshihira had on that day been awarded the Junior Fourth Rank, Lower Grade. Probably even in 1015 when he was of the Senior Fifth Rank, Upper Grade, Yoshihira was the highest-ranking *onmyōji*. Since Fujiwara no Sanesuke had commented on Yoshihira that “there is not one among the practitioners of Onmyōdō (*onmyōka*) who can compare with him,” it is clear that he was an excellent *onmyōji*, who did not shame the name of his father in any way. Abe no Yoshimasa, who was raised from Junior Fifth Rank, Lower Grade, to Senior Fifth Rank, Lower Grade, was the second-highest ranked *onmyōji*. The expression found in the *Chōya gunsai* concerning “the second-highest ranked person of Onmyōdō” may be thought to mean the second-highest ranked *onmyōji*. If this is so, the “*onmyōji* of the highest rank” was also at the time called “the highest-ranked person of Onmyōdō.” At the time of Emperor Ichijō, the person who occupied this position was none other than Abe no Seimei.

14. The document in the *Chōya gunsai* gave Seimei's rank as Senior Sixth Rank, Upper Grade. This is probably an error on the part of the writer and should not pose a problem.

15. For the relationship between Yoshimasa and Yoshihira, see SHIGETA 2004, 227–60; 2006, 86–102.

Onmyōdō

When the consort of Crown Prince Atsunaga (later Emperor Go-Suzaku), Fujiwara no Michinaga's daughter Yoshiko, died in 1025, an *onmyōji* called Nakahara no Tsunemori 中原恒盛 performed a rite called *tama yobai* 魂喚, "calling back the spirit." This seems to have been a form of magic to summon the spirit of the deceased back into the body, and appears to have been a rite that was in demand. However, several days later, Tsunemori was punished by "high-ranking people of the Way." The reason was that it was unusual for *onmyōji* to perform "spirit calling." This incident was reported in an entry in the *Sakeiki* dated Manju 2 (1025).8.23. Those "high-ranking people of the Way" who punished Tsunemori were undoubtedly senior members of Onmyōdō, in other words, the highest and second-highest ranked *onmyōji*. As the incident shows us, these people controlled the activities of *onmyōji* in general. At that time, the expression "Onmyōdō" did not have the meaning it does today, that is, a systematization of particular ideas and practices. Rather, it meant an organization of people of the same profession, *onmyōji*, who were under the control of "high-ranking people of the Way."¹⁶

Nevertheless, it is likely that this control only existed between the higher and lower ranks of *onmyōji* who were themselves officials.¹⁷ *Onmyōji* with official status like Abe no Seimei could be called *kanjin onmyōji* 官人陰陽師 (official *onmyōji*), but this does not mean that all *onmyōji* at the time were officials. There were also *onmyōji* known as *hōshi onmyōji* 法師陰陽師 (priest *onmyōji*), who had the appearance of Buddhist priests and were without official status, and presumably the control of the Onmyōdō did not extend to them.

Entries in the *Shōyūki* dated Chōwa 3 (1014).11.5, Chōwa 4 (1115).7.13, and Chōwa 4.8.2 show that Fujiwara no Sanesuke had a man called "Kōen Hōshi" 皇延法師, who must have been a *hōshi onmyōji*, perform a divination together with Seimei's son Yoshihira. A written deposition concerning a certain curse incident contained in volume seventy of the *Seiji yōryaku* mentions that around Kankō 5 (1008), a *hōshi onmyōji* called Dōman 道満 was a habitual visitor to a noblewoman, Takashina no Mitsuko. Sei Shōnagon's *Makura no sōshi*, in the section "Things that are distressing to see," mentions a *hōshi onmyōji* in connection with his performing a purification wearing a paper cap. It appears they were well-known figures in their society.

Since the nobility, from around the middle of Heian period, had a great abhorrence for spilling human blood they did not attempt acts of violence to

16. For the meaning of Onmyōdō in Heian times, see YAMASHITA 1996.

17. According to an entry in the *Shōyūki* dated Chōgen 4 (1031).3.29, Nakahara no Tsunemori, who had performed the "spirit calling" ritual, was that day appointed to the office of *jō* (third secretary) in the Onmyōryō. He was a lower-ranking official who had successively occupied positions in the Onmyōryō of *onmyōji*, *onmyō no zoku* (clerk), and *onmyō no jō* (third secretary).

eliminate political rivals, but rather employed curses. As a result, there were many incidents involving curses within aristocratic society in Seimei's time, and in a majority of cases the curses were placed by *hōshi onmyōji*. The *Nihon kiryaku*, in an item dated Kankō 6 (1009).2.5, mentions the "*onmyō hōshi* Gennen 源念, who cursed the empress, as well as the newly-born second son of the emperor and the Great Minister of the Left," and the *Hyakurenshō*, a history compiled in the thirteenth century, in an item dated Chōtoku 1 (995).8.10, speaks of "a *hōshi onmyōji* who placed a curse on the Great Minister of the Right." According to the *Shōyūki* (Chōgen 3 [1030].5.4), the *hōshi onmyōji* named Kōen who frequented Fujiwara no Sanesuke's residence was apprehended on suspicion of laying a curse on the daughter of Fujiwara no Michinaga. Again, in the previously-mentioned deposition in the *Seiji yōryaku* concerning a curse incident, the frequenting of the residence of Takashina no Mitsuko by a *hōshi onmyōji* was related to the fact that she used a *hōshi onmyōji* called Ennō 円能 to put a curse on Fujiwara no Michinaga and others. Dōman, another *hōshi onmyōji* who was also a frequent visitor to Mitsuko, might also have been involved in the incident.¹⁸

In contrast to such *hōshi onmyōji*, however, as far as we know from the records available at present, official *onmyōji* like Seimei did not lay curses. From descriptions of their activities they rather protected people from curses, as can be seen in the *Makura no sōshi*, "Things that give a good feeling": "A well-spoken *onmyōji* performing purifications of curses on the dry riverbed."

It is also possible that because curse-laying was performed by *hōshi onmyōji*, official *onmyōji* had no role to play. Considering that the aforementioned Kōen had a student called Gochū 護忠, and Ennō had a student called Myōen 妙延, *hōshi onmyōji* who could enact curses may have carefully trained their successors. Even if this were not the case, official *onmyōji*, under strict supervision of their superiors, would not have been permitted to have any connection with criminal acts such as curses.

Shikigami

Perhaps one of the aspects of the magic employed by *onmyōji* in the Heian period that interests modern people the most is the art of invoking *shikigami* 式神 to do their bidding. *Onmyōji* who appear in tales and legends all possess these *shikigami*, which may be spirits or demons, that they are able to command freely; on occasion they also lay down curses using them. The *onmyōji* Abe no Seimei who appears in this context is accomplished at controlling *shikigami*. His fame in

18. It is interesting that a *hōshi onmyōji* called Dōman actually existed at the time Seimei was active, since lore and legends that were to emerge later feature an *onmyōji* called Dōman (or Dōma) as Seimei's long-standing enemy. In these stories, Dōman is an *onmyōji* who places curses.

this respect must have been widely known, for his use of *shikigami* is mentioned not only in tales in the *Konjaku monogatari shū* and *Uji shūi monogatari*, but also for instance in the chronicle of Emperor Kazan in the *Ōkagami*. In reality, though, there is no mention in the historical record of Abe no Seimei employing *shikigami*, and virtually none even of *shikigami* themselves.

In the ideal portrait of the *onmyōji* Kamo no Michiyo drawn by Fujiwara no Akihira in the *Shin-sarugakuki* he is described as “commanding *shikigami*.” Though this Kamo is a fictional character, this description strongly suggests that the people of the time considered that *onmyōji* could command *shikigami*. The *Shōki mokuroku* contains the heading, “It is said that a *shikigami* is the cause of the Minister of the Left’s troubles,” under the date Chōhō 2.5.9 (*Shōyū mokuroku* 20, “Gonayamu koto”). According to this, it appears that at the time, the illness of the Great Minister of the Left, Fujiwara no Michinaga, was thought to have been caused by *shikigami*.

Today the details of this incident are unknown as the diary entry itself is lost, and we have no knowledge of who may have controlled the *shikigami*. Besides this, there are no other records that mention *shikigami*. There is only a deity called “Shiki no kami” mentioned in the *Makura no sōshi* (“When I first began to wait on the empress”) who is said to be able to judge whether things are true or false.

Perhaps we can make the following conjecture. We see in the *Makura no sōshi* that an *onmyōji* was accompanied by a *kowarawabe* 小童部 (small child or youth), who was very well versed in ritual knowledge.¹⁹ We know too that the *hōshi onmyōji* Ennō, who was mentioned in the *Seiji yōryaku* as being accused of the crime of laying a curse, was accompanied by the *dōji* 童子 (youth) Mononobe no Itomaru. Thus it seems to have been a custom of the time for *onmyōji* to be attended by young boys, and people may have looked on them as *shikigami* commanded by the *onmyōji*. A tale in the *Konjaku monogatari shū* confirms my supposition; it describes how a *hōshi onmyōji* called Chitoku was accompanied by two *shikigami* in the form of boys (*Konjaku monogatari shū*, *kan* 24, Tale 16).

Taizan Fukun sai

One magical rite that was acquired by the historical Abe no Seimei was *Taizan Fukun sai* 泰山府君祭 (Festival rituals of Taizan Fukun). This was an invocation of Taizan Fukun and other deities associated with the Realm of the Dead to increase the petitioner’s allotted lifetime, to bring him riches and honors, and to avert calamity and misfortune. It was also called *Shichiken jōshō sai* 七献上章祭 (Festival rituals of the seven offerings and a letter of supplication). The ritual gained in pop-

19. According to the *Makura no sōshi*, *kowarawabe* carried out all the miscellaneous duties when the *onmyōji* was performing an exorcism or some other rite.

ularity from the reign of Emperor Ichijō and eventually became one of the most characteristic of those performed by *onmyōji*. At first it was used among the court nobility, but during the Kamakura period it spread to the warrior class. Consequently it can be assumed that Abe no Seimei had the intention of popularizing it.

The earliest mention in the historical record of *Taizan Fukun sai* (under the name of *Shichiken jōshō sai*) is in the diary of Fujiwara no Saneyori 藤原実頼, *Teishin kōki*, in an entry dated Engi 19 (919).5.28. The first time it appears in the orthography *Taizan Fukun sai* is in the *Shōyūki*, Eiso 1 (989).2.11. It had been performed for Emperor Ichijō; according to the *Shōyūki*, a rite called *Daiyakusai* 代厄祭 to ward off calamity and disease had been intended for the previous day, but the *Taizan Fukun sai* was performed on this day instead. The ritualist was Abe no Seimei.

After 989, the *Taizan Fukun sai* was frequently performed. An entry dated Chōhō 4 (1002).11.9 in the *Gonki* gives an example of Fujiwara no Yukinari having Abe no Seimei perform it for him, while entries in the *Shōyūki* dated Kankō 2 (1005).2.18 and Chōwa 2 (1011).2.25 suggest that Fujiwara no Sanesuke had it performed by *onmyōji* every year in the second month. And according to a document dated Kankō 7 (1010).10.30, around this time the *Taizan Fukun sai* was one of the customary rituals carried out by *onmyōji* at court for the emperor (*Heian ibun*, no. 458).

As is clear from the gap between performances of more than half a century between 919 and 989, it was rarely performed in the time of Ichijō's predecessors, the emperors Kazan and Enyū. According to HAYAMI (1975), in the mid-Heian period beliefs concerning the Realm of the Dead, such as *Taizan Fukun*, *Enmaten* 閻魔天, and *Jizō* 地藏 were not particularly flourishing. If that is so, it is not surprising to find that the *Taizan Fukun sai* was not popular before the time of Ichijō.

The fact that the ritual gained in popularity from Ichijō's reign may be attributed to Abe no Seimei's energetic sponsorship of it. For example, according to an article in the *Gonki* dated Chōhō 4 (1002).11.28, early that morning Yukinari had presented offerings and petitioned *Taizan Fukun* for long life. Seimei had recommended he do this. We should remember too that it was Seimei who substituted the *Taizan Fukun sai* for the *Daiyakusai*.

It thus appears that Seimei encouraged people to have the *Taizan Fukun sai*, with its focus on worldly benefits, carried out and indeed tried to widen its performance. It may seem a little reckless to attribute to a single *onmyōji* the popularity of the comparatively large phenomenon that the *Taizan Fukun sai* became, but judging from the degree of Seimei's social influence, as seen from the example of the *tsuina* of 1001, this is not such an unwarrantable supposition. This social clout may well have been wielded as a result of his position as the senior figure of *Onmyōdō*.

Conditions of Rising to High Rank

We have already seen that the *onmyōji* with the highest rank had the position of Kurōdo-dokoro *onmyōji*, and the second-highest ranking *onmyōji* had a similar appointment. The Kurōdo-dokoro document of 995 that we examined above gives the name of Kamo no Mitsuyoshi as the Kurōdo-dokoro *onmyōji*.²⁰

Kamo no Mitsuyoshi was a student of Seimei's teacher, Kamo no Yasunori, and appears in the *Gonki* (Kankō 8 [1011].5.9) as an accomplished *onmyōji*: "Mitsuyoshi knows divination inside out; he should be called a god." However, as surviving accounts show, Mitsuyoshi did not perform divination and rituals for Emperor Ichijō anywhere on the same scale as Seimei. It was only after Seimei's death in 1005, when Mitsuyoshi became the senior *onmyōji*, that his activities in this area stand out.²¹

In all likelihood, the "highest-ranked person of Onmyōdō" fundamentally had the position of Kurōdo-dokoro *onmyōji*. The second-highest ranked *onmyōji* may have deputized as Kurōdo-dokoro *onmyōji* for his superior only when something prevented the superior from performing his task. If this is so, the Kurōdo-dokoro *onmyōji*, who had a virtual monopoly on divinations and rituals connected with the emperor, would have had a far greater opportunity to attain a marked level of fame and reputation than his deputy or other *onmyōji* of lower rank. As we have already seen, *onmyōji* of the time were apparently able to boost their recognition as *onmyōji* by the efficacy (*gen*) of their rituals. Such recognition would have been all the greater if that efficacy had been displayed in rituals performed for the emperor. It would have been the same in the case of appraisal through divination.

The *onmyōji* who received extraordinary recognition at the time were only those who stood as the "highest-ranked person of Onmyōdō." More precisely, it was only when a person had attained this position that he received renown. For example, Kamo no Mitsuyoshi was praised with the words "Mitsuyoshi knows divination inside out; he should be called a deity" only after Seimei's death. Again, it was only the year following Mitsuyoshi's death that it was said about Abe no Yoshihira that "there was no one who could compare with him," at a time when Yoshihira himself had become the "highest-ranked person of Onmyōdō."

20. In an entry in the *Gonki* dated Chōtoku 4 (998).8.27, there is mention of "Kamo no Ason Mitsuyoshi, Senior Fifth Rank, Lower Grade, Provisional Director, Bureau of the Palace Kitchen." Thus in 995, Seimei, who had been raised to Senior Fifth Rank, Upper Grade in 993, would have been the number one person of Onmyōdō, and Mitsuyoshi number two. The Kurōdo-dokoro document of 995 gives Mitsuyoshi's rank as Senior Sixth, Upper Grade, but this should be seen as an error on the part of the *Chōya gunsai*.

21. For Mitsuyoshi's activities as an *onmyōji*, see YAMASHITA 1996.

Thus it seems that for official *onmyōji* of the time, the position of the “highest-ranked person of Onmyōdō” was not the result of advancement in society but a condition for it. In this sense, Abe no Seimei’s rise in status came extremely late.

FIGURE 1 shows that on the twenty-seventh day of the seventh month of Eikan 2 (984), Seimei selected the day for the enthronement ritual of Emperor Kazan, who succeeded Emperor Enyū. We can therefore surmise that Seimei had by this time been working as an *onmyōji* in the Kurōdo-dokoro. However, Seimei had selected the day together with an *onmyōji* called Fumi no Michimitsu, and furthermore, Michimitsu was of higher rank than Seimei. This suggests that during the reigns of Enyū and Kazan, Seimei was appointed as the second-highest ranking *onmyōji* of the Kurōdo-dokoro.

It was around 986, when Ichijō came to the throne, that Michimitsu’s name disappears from the record and we can assume Seimei became the highest-ranked figure of Onmyōdō. Having been born in 921, he would already have been well over sixty years of age. No great importance has been attached to this fact, but Abe no Seimei did not possess the necessary condition for advancement until he had entered old age. His fame certainly came late in life.

During the Chōhō era (999–1004), when Seimei was described as the “pre-eminent practitioner of Onmyōdō” and “a master of Onmyōdō,” he had risen to the Junior Fourth Rank, Lower Grade, but he was already aged eighty. His teacher Kamo no Yasunori had achieved the same rank in his fifties, and his son Yoshihira in his sixties. It is apparent from this that Seimei had not advanced smoothly in his career. Indeed, if he had not had such a long life, he might not have won the fame that has allowed his name to become known to us.

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