

Calvin B. Kendall, *The Allegory of the Church: Romanesque Portals and Their Verse Inscriptions*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1998, xv + 401 pp., 40 black-and-white illus.

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[See table of contents](#)

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Book Reviews

Comptes-rendus de livres

CALVIN B. KENDALL, *The Allegory of the Church: Romanesque Portals and Their Verse Inscriptions*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1998, xv + 401 pp., 40 black-and-white illus.

The University of Toronto Press, it would appear, is committed to publishing interdisciplinary studies of medieval art. This book follows up their recent *Artistic Integration in Gothic Buildings*, in which one of its distinguished contributors, Willibald Sauerländer, decrying the “extreme specialization” of the study of Gothic sculpture and alluding at the same time to the decontextualization that it fosters, points out that the study of medieval sculpture has remained “immune to the astonishing renewal of medieval studies in such neighbouring fields as literature and history”.¹ Calvin Kendall has now broadly answered this challenge, not for “Gothic” sculpture but for “Romanesque” – his terms of reference encompass all of Europe during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This flanking attack on what is still essentially an art historical problem comes from a historian of medieval Latin verse,² who has examined here a prominent element of many Romanesque portals that has largely been overlooked by art historians: namely, their inscriptions. Although there are some singular exceptions, historians of Romanesque portal sculpture have largely ignored these inscriptions or subordinated their importance to the imagery they frame; yet as Kendall makes eminently clear, they are fundamental for the understanding of their accompanying figural sculpture, with which they form a synthetic whole. By means of a systematic examination of these inscriptions, he has expanded the discourse on one of the most distinctive phenomena of Romanesque art – the elaboration of church portals – and, at the same time, provided art historians with a secure basis for a significantly new evaluation of the figural sculpture which has, until now, been their more narrowly focused object. His approach also has salutary applicability far beyond the realm of portal sculpture.

The book is divided into two parts: the first (pp. 1–195) comprises a series of chapters, in four thematic sections, which provide a systematic analytical investigation of inscriptions on Romanesque church portals and several of their manifold implications; the second (pp. 197–300) provides a Catalogue of Romanesque Verse Inscriptions. There is also a plate section, located roughly in the middle of the book, five maps and, at the end, a section of notes, a bibliography of works cited, and a full index.

Kendall’s central thesis is that “the Romanesque church was a material allegory and that the portal with its verse inscription spoke the allegory in the voice of Christ and the Church” (p. xi). This synesthetic perspective differs from the more usual, visually oriented characterization of Romanesque portal sculpture

as being dominated by theophanies of Christ – which, by comparison, seems mute. Although not all Romanesque facades were given inscriptions, they occurred often and were widely distributed throughout Europe. The interactions of text and image, moreover, are so revealing and so distinctive that even an understanding of portal programmes without inscriptions expands greatly when the tradition of inscriptions is borne in mind. Kendall not only characterizes the inscriptions as texts in their own right but demonstrates how they participated in a “dynamic interaction between the portal and its intended audience” (p. xi).

One of the strengths of this approach is that the reception of the works is accorded parity with their authorship. Not only is the portal characterized as the site of “liminal spiritual transformation” (p. 3), but Kendall relates this experience to an “allegorical imagination” deeply rooted in exegetical habits of mind. It has been claimed that “few habits of the medieval mind are as foreign to the modern western world as the impulse to take symbolism seriously.”³ Arguably, however, the polysemous nature of medieval sign theory, developed in that rich tradition of biblical interpretation known as exegesis, is even more foreign to an audience still struggling to free itself from an uncritically positivistic tradition. It is, thus, of enormous benefit that Kendall begins the book by explaining the mechanics of exegesis, with its three- or even fourfold levels of sense: “The threefold method involved the assumption that a text could reveal any one of three senses – a literal or historical sense, a moral sense, and a sense variously referred to as ‘intellectual,’ ‘mystical,’ or ‘allegorical.’” (p. 7) This approach shows clearly how, for a medieval audience, imagery was open to multiple possibilities of meaning: “The literal level referred to some reality in the unredeemed world. The three spiritual levels offered a spiritual meaning of the text with respect to the past, the present, and the future of the reader. A typological allegory referred to Christ or the Church; a tropological, or moral, allegory referred to the moral experience of the individual Christian in the present; and an anagogical allegory referred to the joys of heaven that the Christian might look forward to.” (p. 11) With this framework in mind, Kendall shows how the physical presence of a church was open to a whole range of allegorical meanings – from the Temple of Solomon, to the community of the faithful, to the human heart, to the Heavenly Jerusalem – and how that affected the understanding of the portal of a church and the design of its decoration.

The inscriptions themselves are introduced, firstly, by a history of verse inscriptions, and secondly, by an analysis of the poetics of the inscriptions. The historical component is distinctive in two ways. While the principal focus of the book is on portal inscriptions throughout Romanesque Europe, their pre-

history comprises a more wide-ranging discussion of inscriptions throughout church buildings, but in a much more limited geographical range, centred on Rome. As well, Kendall's history of inscriptions, which begins in 4th-century Rome, is not limited to carved inscriptions; mosaics, in fact, figure more prominently in the early period. Much of the evidence for these inscriptions is documentary, since so little of the material actually survives, but whereas for figural imagery, reconstruction based on literary descriptions and antiquarian sources can provide only approximate ideas of original images, inscriptions can be recorded quite accurately. There is thus scope for a fairly exact history of church inscriptions. Kendall does not attempt completeness for his treatment of pre-Romanesque inscriptions. Its purpose is introductory, but it might be said to raise intriguing possibilities for further research along the same lines. Indeed, this is not Kendall's main area of expertise, and there are occasional infelicities in this otherwise valuable section.⁴ His main concern is to show, through inscriptions, the development of the idea of the church as sacred space, for it is on this foundation that the portal takes on its liminal character.

The poetics of Romanesque verse portal inscriptions is not only fascinating, but Kendall's treatment of it is also of particular value since, as a general phenomenon, it has been almost completely ignored. Unfortunately, for anyone not trained in medieval Latin verse, Kendall's explanation of the language and form of the inscriptions is fairly condensed. Many people, even many medievalists, are unfamiliar with the distinctions between the quantitative dactylic hexameter and the rhythmical trochaic septenarius. Kendall's focus is on the former since almost all verse inscriptions on Romanesque portals take this form: in hexameter verse, each line comprises six metrical feet, and in dactylic hexameters "each of the first four feet could be either a spondee (long, long) or a dactyl (long, short, short), the fifth foot was always a dactyl, and the sixth foot could be either a spondee or a trochee (long, short)" (p. 71). Many, in fact, form leonine hexameters, in which the lines also contain internal rhyme. Whether the reader is familiar with such verse forms or not, however, Kendall places his verse inscriptions into a quite precise literary framework. That most of them take the same form is surprising; as Kendall shows, this venerable verse form, long out of date for actual verse by the Romanesque period, has a solid tradition in building inscriptions. By this time, these verse forms required prodigious erudition to compose, and it becomes clear that Romanesque inscriptions deserve to be considered every bit as much as distinctive artistic creations as their accompanying sculpture.

The inscriptions make clear not only the powerful presence of their accompanying sculpture but, rather surprisingly, a concern for the status of images that is seldom imputed to the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Although Kendall rightly men-

tions Bernard of Angers' well rehearsed reaction to the image reliquary of St Foy in the early eleventh century, he also cites portal inscriptions that extend this concern beyond freestanding sculpture. Accompanying the image of Christ in the tympanum of the now demolished south portal of Ferrara Cathedral, dating from ca.1138–40, was an inscription that proscribed idolatrous reception: "The image which you see is neither God nor man in the flesh, but it is God and man in the flesh which the image signifies." From the frequency of such inscriptions, Kendall concludes that "artists and clergy felt obliged to assert repeatedly the distinction between representation and real presence" (p. 81) and that the tangible presence of the church as allegory and the consequent numinous quality of its portals can be imputed as the cause of concern. The inscriptions more usually, however, gave the church and, more specifically, its portal sculpture a "voice" through the use of the first or second person in inscriptions. In first-person inscriptions, the subject of the sculpture itself "speaks" to the viewer: the Christ in Majesty of ca.1130 above the portal of the Church of Sainte-Trinité at Autry-Issards in Auvergne, through the accompanying inscriptions, tells the viewer: "I, God, made all things; when I became a man, I remade all things" and "I inflict punishment on the wicked; I bestow rewards upon the good" (p. 206). Second-person inscriptions, in the voice of Christ himself or of the church, frequently address individual viewers directly: a mid-twelfth-century inscription from the portal of the church at Bourg-Argental gives voice to the tympanum image of Christ in Majesty: "You who are entering, why do you not come in haste?" and "... if you drink of me, your thirst will be no more" (p. 210). The inscriptions thus constitute "mimetic representations of discourse" (p. 96) which are actualized in the act of reading, thus lending the accompanying sculpture a performative element that is integral to the medieval experience of art. Kendall speculates, in fact, that the experience of entering such portals may sometimes have been mediated by clerical interpreters, the more effectively to enhance the "personal transformation" of "passing from secular into sacred space" (p. 98).

This direct voice of Christ, speaking from the tympanum, is subject to more than just literal interpretation. Other exegetical levels of meaning are sometimes explicitly invoked. Tropological signification is certainly signalled by the presence of the Virtues and Vices in portal programmes, and such moral concerns sometimes take a specifically penitential form. On the north portal of the little Pyrenean church of Saint-André at Luz-Saint-Sauveur, the late twelfth-century tympanum features Christ in Majesty surrounded by the four beasts of the Evangelists and a now incomplete inscription beginning: "The court of heaven is open to the righteous pilgrim ..." and the theme is taken up again on the lintel, where another inscription advises the pilgrim "If you want to enter, since it lies open, seek

[humility?] for yourself" (pp. 106–07). Here, both tropological and anagogical meanings are suggested, since those entering the church are likened to those who have chosen salvific virtue and since the church itself is likened to the court of heaven. Where a modern reader more usually seeks a single reading, the magnificent exegetical polysemy of the Middle Ages, suggested here by inscriptions, creates a complex experience that goes far beyond what one might imagine from looking mutely at the rather typical sculptural subject of the tympanum.

The performative aspect of inscriptions occasionally, in fact, suggests or emphasizes the ways that the portal functioned in more than just general terms. In considering the well known Last Judgement portal at Conques, in which a trumeau divides the portal into two doors, Kendall shows that the inscriptions direct entrance through the left door (Christ's right) under the representation of the blessed in heaven, suggesting anagogical identity of the church with the Heavenly Jerusalem and also, on a tropological plane, giving the portal an "instrumental function" in the salvation of those who pass through it (pp. 109–10). Christ's words "I am the door" (John 10: 9), alluded to in many verse portal inscriptions, similarly provoke multiple exegetical responses that equate salvation with entrance to the church, but in some of them, which Kendall calls "admonitory," the formula proactively engages with those entering the church. There is even a group of portals in northern Spain in which "exhortation to penance" makes explicit reference to the public rites of penance that took place in front of the portal.

"You whoever you are – a man with a burden of deadly sin – who are reluctant to prostrate yourself in sorrow to the supreme Lord before this portal, the gate is entered in no other way, because it is held to be Christ" (p. 122); this early twelfth-century inscription on the portal of the church at Cassan in southern France might be thought to accompany a typically threatening Romanesque figure of Christ the Judge, yet there is no figural sculpture here at all; the inscription occupies a marble plaque placed in the middle of the tympanum and alone admonishes those entering the church. Thus, both in combinations of word and image and even where there is no figural imagery, inscriptions provided portals with an exegetical tenor which was surely intended for other portals in which sculpture alone, without inscriptions, was used to create an effect. Kendall, in fact, extrapolates this idea into an "interpretive model," and indeed, this is one of the useful results of his study. But it must be said that when he makes use of this interpretive model to analyse a regional group of Romanesque portals in Aquitaine (Ch. 11), in which the sculptural decoration is for the most part limited to the archivolts surrounding the portal and which seldom feature inscriptions, the results are, unfortunately, less than compelling. Much of this imagery, as Kendall eloquently acknowledges, is "richly obscure" and for that very reason defies

too close application of the pregnant allegorical interpretation evident in other regional "schools" of Romanesque portal sculpture.

Yet, in general, Kendall's interpretive model not only serves to provide new understanding to a substantial number of decorated Romanesque portals, but it also more broadly offers a perspective with which to re-interpret the "period." It comes as a refreshing change, for an art historian, to read of the "twelfth-century Renaissance" not under a Panofskian shadow that cannot seem, finally, to shake off the ideological predominance of that later Renaissance, but in terms of "an interest in keeping up with the latest fashion" conjoined with the realization of a new sense of the historical relationship between the "ancients" and the "moderns" (pp. 155ff).⁵ And he follows up his chapter on "The Search for the New" with an equally stimulating one called "Artists and the Pursuit of Fame." If there is still any need of dispelling historicist notions of medieval "anonymity," then Kendall finishes the job.⁶ Even with an awareness of all that is new and varied in Romanesque art,⁷ it is very difficult to imagine an art historian writing statements such as: "Church administrators were alive to the need to keep up with the latest fashions, and there is ample evidence that the artists of the twelfth century thirsted for fame" (p. 176). Granted, some discussion of the change in art practice from an essentially monastic activity towards that of a secular profession would have made such a bomb "smarter," but it is in just such interventions that the disciplinary boundaries of art history are fruitfully shattered. Kendall's only mention of such a distinction in practice is in his brief treatment of the early thirteenth-century female sculptor Sabina ("It would probably have been out of the question for a woman to have found employment in a monastery" p. 184).

After so much stimulating new evaluation, the last chapter on patronage comes as something of a disappointment. As sympathetic as Kendall is to artists who sign their work, the recording of patrons' names is characterized as an "evident distraction" that would have had an effect contrary to the allegory of the church, "reminding worshippers that the church was a material object external to the self and dominated by the human will." Such an opinion perhaps betrays too much the boundaries of Kendall's own discipline, and in this respect, I should think that he might have something to learn from art history, not to mention social history and anthropology, all of which take patronage much more seriously.⁸

In a related sense, when it comes to distinguishing between Romanesque and Gothic portals, Kendall's treatment is more off-hand and, in my view, weaker: the author is at his best when he stays close to the inscriptions, and as he rightly notes, in contrast to Romanesque portals, Gothic ones are distinctly devoid of inscriptions. The usually more profuse, more tightly

organized, and more complex programmes of Gothic portal sculpture are, in Kendall's view, the result of the allegory of the Church being "thought of as symbolic of a transcendent reality rather than as a reality inherent in the material church" (p. xii). As stimulating as such an interpretive premise might be, it tends to leave out of consideration that churches and their decorated portals are material creations which represent concentrations of considerable expense. The change from "Romanesque" to "Gothic" has as much to do with patronage, as well as with institutional transformations within the church and the growing concern for ecclesiastical hegemony.⁹ As noted above, however, a sympathetic treatment of patronage issues is disappointingly absent from the book. To his credit, Kendall acknowledges that his thesis "makes no claims to being a General Theory of Romanesque" (p. xii), but the book's distance from material and economic realities at times makes one forget that.

The second part of the book comprises a Catalogue of Romanesque Verse Inscriptions. Inscriptions from 192 churches have been arranged alphabetically, first by city and then by dedication of the church. The entry for each portal lists the various inscriptions, together with their locations and an encapsulated description of any related figural sculptures. Then, for each inscription, a transcription is given, fully recording suspensions, incompleteness, superimposition of letters, line breaks, etc., followed by a metrical description, a translation, and further comments. This Catalogue provides a useful reference work in two respects. Firstly, Kendall has reread and retranslated even inscriptions that have long been cited, occasionally correcting earlier transcriptions and/or sharpening the sense of earlier translations.¹⁰ Secondly, it provides a substantial corpus that can be used for exploratory or comparative purposes. There are some limitations to his coverage, however. Firstly, "dedication inscriptions are admitted only if they are associated with other verse inscriptions or have some claim to being part of the façade decoration" (p. 199). Thus, for example, even though the dedication inscription on the early eleventh-century lintel of Saint-Genis-des-Fontaines is discussed, transcribed and translated in the analytical text, it is not included in the Catalogue. Secondly, the Catalogue is limited to "Latin verses carved in stone on mural surfaces" (p. 199). Thus, for example, in his Catalogue entry for Saint-Denis, the inscriptions formerly on Suger's bronze doors are not included. Within these limits, however, Kendall's catalogue "constitutes a largely unexplored 'archive' of texts" (p. xi) representing, by the author's admission, some twenty years of careful collecting. Kendall avers that his Catalogue, while it "cannot claim to be exhaustive," none the less includes all "inscriptions of major importance" (p. xii). Whether he has quite managed this or not, this Catalogue is an impressive accomplishment.¹¹

In closing, a word should be said about the book *qua* book.

Because Kendall's text is rich in interest for a variety of reasons, one might have hoped that more consideration had been given to turning it into a book that facilitates use. As it stands, not only are all of the notes at the back of the book, but all references in the notes are made using short titles for which reference to the bibliography is necessary. And since references to the Catalogue of Verse Inscriptions in the analytical text are made through the notes, as well, the serious reader can sometimes face a daunting amount of flipping back and forth – from text, to note, to Catalogue, to note, to bibliography, and sometimes to the plate section, as well. Many of these annoyances would have been avoided by the use of footnotes rather than endnotes. As cumbersome as it might occasionally be to use, however, *The Allegory of the Church* not only provides an important new foundation for understanding medieval sculpture, but it is an invaluable reference book, as well.

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Notes

- 1 Willibald Sauerländer, "Integration: A Closed or Open Proposal?," in Virginia Raguin, Kathryn Brush and Peter Draper, eds, *Artistic Integration in Gothic Buildings* (Toronto, 1995), pp. 3–18, esp. p. 9.
- 2 Kendall is Morse-Alumni Distinguished Teaching Professor of English at the University of Minnesota.
- 3 T.A. Heslop, "Brief in Words by Heavy in the Weight of its Mysteries," in *Romanesque and Gothic: Essays for George Zarnecki*, ed. Neil Stratford (Woodbridge, 1987), 111.
- 4 The apse mosaic of the ninth-century church of S. Maria in Domnica in Rome was certainly not the first to display the Virgin with the Christ Child in her lap (p. 27); that in the Basilica Euphrasiana at Poreč dates from ca. 550. And the mosaic panels of "Constantine and Melchisidek" below the apse of S. Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna, are not sixth-century (p. 33, note 3), but seventh-century, from the reign of Emperor Constantine IV Pogonatus (668–85).
- 5 Rather than citing Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (1960; repr. New York, 1969) on this, Kendall cites Giles Constable, "Renewal and Reform in Religious Life: Concepts and Realities," in Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable, with Carol D. Lanham, eds, *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 37–67; and Gerhart B. Ladner, "Terms and Ideas of Renewal," in Benson and Constable, *Renaissance and Renewal*, pp. 1–33.
- 6 In fairness, I should say that such an approach is not entirely unknown within the discipline of art history; see, for example, Peter Cornelius Claussen, "Früher Künstlerstolz. Mittelalterliche Signaturen als Quelle der Kunstsoziologie," in Karl Clausberg, Dieter Kimpel, Hans-Joachim Kunst and Robert Suckale, eds,

Bauwerk und Bildwerk im Hochmittelalter. Anschauliche Beiträge zur Kultur- und Sozialgeschichte (Gießen, 1981), pp. 7–34.

- 7 See the seminal essay by Meyer Schapiro, "On the Aesthetic Attitude in Romanesque Art" (1947) in his *Romanesque Art: Selected Papers* (New York, 1977), pp. 1–27.
- 8 See, for example, Ronald Weissman, "Taking Patronage Seriously: Mediterranean Values and Renaissance Society," in F. W. Kent and Patricia Simons, *Patronage, Art and Society in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 25–45.
- 9 As Margot Fassler, "Liturgy and Sacred History in the Twelfth-Century Tympana at Chartres," *Art Bulletin*, 75, no. 3 (Sept. 1993), 499–520, makes clear, the allegorical tenor of the sculptures on the mid-twelfth-century Royal Portal explicitly reflects the liturgical entrance of the bishop into his church, rather than relating primarily to any transformative experience of the faithful.
- 10 Compare, for example, Kendall's transcriptions and translations with those of Christine B. Verzar, "Text and Image in North Italian Romanesque Sculpture," in *The Romanesque Frieze and its Spectator*, ed. Deborah Kahn (London, 1992), pp. 121–140, 205–07. Several transcription errors in Verzar's article jump out immediately, and her translations do not appear to respect as closely as Kendall's the original Latin syntax. In making this comparison, I in no way intend to belittle Verzar's very interesting work. She is one of a very small number of art historians who have begun to consider portal inscriptions seriously. Rather, I wish to indicate how valuable Kendall's work might be in furthering such efforts.
- 11 As with any pioneering first effort, it is to be hoped that this publication stimulates a wide response, and if necessary, a revised edition might eventually be considered by the publisher. One fairly significant set of inscriptions not included in the Catalogue, for example, are those of the two late 12th-century tympana from the church of Saint-Pierre-le-Puellier now in the Musée de Bourges; see Marie-Louise Thérél, *Le Triomphe de la Vierge-Eglise. Sources historiques, littéraires et iconographiques* (Paris, 1984), pp. 58–59.

ELIZABETH TEN GROTENHUIS, *Japanese Mandalas: Representations of Sacred Geography*. Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 1999, 227 pp., 22 colour illus., 104 black-and-white illus.

Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis' book is a general survey of those Japanese pictures loosely referred to as "*mandara*" / mandala, encompassing the traditional esoteric mandala, as well as the Pure Land *hensōzu* of the Buddhist traditions and pictures associated with the *kami*-worshipping tradition, or what was formerly referred to as Shintō. The underlying theme of her book is that *mandalas* are pictorial evocations of geographic places in Asia. Secondarily, it is a defense of her use of the broad and popular interpretation of the word "*mandara*" in Japan, a term not only so used by the general public, but also by art historians.

The book opens with a chapter on the continental background of the Taima mandala, which was used as an icon of worship by the Japanese Pure Land sect of Hōnen (1212–1333). The first chapter deals with historical, doctrinal and textual matters concerning the Taima mandala in India and China. There is a discussion of the background of the texts relating to the iconography and its formation; particularly interesting is the section concerning the nine outer courts. These courts depict the nine ways in which the Buddha descends to greet the dying believer at the point of death. Recent research has shown that the concept of nine is based upon Chinese geography of nine provinces, nine categories of people, nine rankings of officials, painters, chess players, and so forth. The number nine was adapted into Buddhist thought from Confucianism and Daoism. The chapter is completed with a discussion of the manifestation of the number nine in paintings related to the Taima mandala from the Dunhuang Caves.

From here, ten Grotenhuis moves into the Dual World Mandalas of esoteric Buddhism and images of individual dei-

ties. In the second to the fourth chapters ten Grotenhuis discusses the mandalas of the Two Worlds – the Diamond and Womb Worlds – which is an introduction to esoteric Buddhism and the concepts surrounding mandalas. She relates the mandalas to notions of sacred geography from China, the Indian stupa, and South Asian sources. Discussions of esoteric Buddhism can become quite dry and incomprehensible to the uninitiated, but ten Grotenhuis manages to elucidate this subject clearly. After contextualizing the esoteric mandalas, there is a discussion of extant examples of these works from Japan. The fifth chapter is concerned with variations of the mandalas of the Two Worlds in Japan.

The sixth chapter again deals with the Taima mandala, but in Japan. Chronologically, esotericism precedes the sectarian Pure Land traditions associated with the Taima mandala, so I am unsure why ten Grotenhuis chose to isolate the first chapter on continental sources of the Taima mandala from the Japanese chapter by inserting the intervening chapters on esoteric imagery. It would have made more sense to place these two chapters on the Taima mandala and other Pure Land traditions together. The Taima mandala, which is of Chinese origin, was re-discovered after centuries of obscurity by a Pure Land Japanese monk, who was seeking an icon of worship for the newly founded sect. This matter is followed by discussions about copies of the Taima mandala and its variations in Japan and abroad. It is difficult to obtain permission to view many of these paintings, though one can find them in black-and-white reproductions in various books.

The book ends with paintings of the Kasuga and Kumanō cults within *kami*-worship of the native Japanese tradition. The Kasuga and Kumanō Shrines are actual places, which are sacred realms on the earth and paradises associated with particular deities. This chapter is interspersed with photographs of these