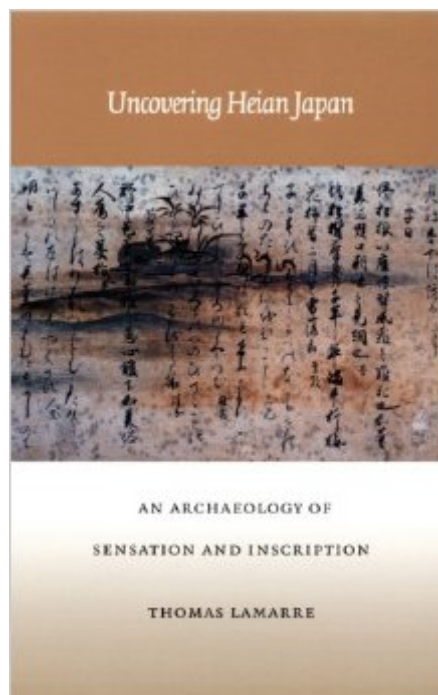


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Uncovering Heian Japan: An Archaeology Of Sensation And Inscription (Asia-Pacific: Culture, Politics, And Society)



Synopsis

The poetry of the Heian court of Japan has typically been linked with the emergence of a distinct Japanese language and culture. This concept of a linguistically homogeneous and ethnically pure "Japaneseness" has been integral to the construction of a modern Japanese nation, especially during periods of western colonial expansion and cultural encroachment. But Thomas LaMarre argues in *Uncovering Heian Japan* that this need for a cultural unity "a singular Japanese identity" has resulted in an overemphasis of a relatively minor aspect of Heian poetry, obscuring not only its other significant elements but also the porousness of Heian society and the politics of poetic expression. Combining a pathbreaking visual analysis of the calligraphy with which this poetry was transcribed, a more traditional textual analysis, and a review of the politics of the period, LaMarre presents a dramatically new view of Heian poetry and culture. He challenges the assumption of a cohesive "national imagination," seeing instead an early Japan that is ethnically diverse, territorially porous, and indifferent to linguistic boundaries. Working through the problems posed by institutionalized notions of nationalism, nativism, and modernism, LaMarre rethinks the theories of scholars such as Suzuki Hideo, Yoshimoto Takaaki, and Komatsu Shigemi, in conjunction with theorists such as Derrida, Karatani, Foucault, and Deleuze. Contesting the notion that speech is central to the formation of community, *Uncovering Heian Japan* focuses instead on the potential centrality of the more figural operations of poetic practice. Specialists in Japanese history and culture as well as scholars working in other areas of cultural criticism will find that this book enriches their understanding of an early Japan that has exerted so much influence on later concepts of what it means to be Japanese.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is a revelation. It helps explain a puzzling feature of Japanese art of this period. The people in the byōbu or Japanese screens show a cosmopolitan world of Koreans, musicians, warriors, nobility, angels, demons, gods and dragons. Art and aesthetics seem to level society. To make a case that before the advent of nationalism all world cultures share this feature is just breathtaking.

A vivid reading of Heian court poetry that removes the interpretive screen later imposed in the name of national identity and modernity to reveal a richly expressive world. Here calligraphy, composition, and community combine in a 'song machine' that links poetics and politics and seeks, quite literally, to calibrate the cosmos. After this book the poetry of 'old Japan' will never be the same.

I am interested in Heian Japan, but this book is way over my head. I've tried 3 times to start the book, but put it down when I go through the notes on pronunciation and translation.

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