

[Kyoto Asian Studies Group February Meeting](#)

Discussion published by Niels Van Steenpaal on Friday, February 3, 2023

Dear colleagues,

The speaker for the February meeting of the Kyoto Asian Studies Group is Jonathan Thumas, who will present “Materialities of Introspection: Fuel Production at a Buddhist Hermitage, 1000-1300 CE” (see abstract below).

The talk will be held on Friday, February 17th, 18:00-20:00 Seminar Room 8 (8号室), on the basement floor of Research Bldg. No. 2 (2号館2階), on the Kyoto University Main Campus (see link below for access information).

Abstract

Materialities of Introspection: Fuel Production at a Buddhist Hermitage, 1000-1300 CE

As a pillar of social and economic complexity, labor is a crucial component for writing the social history of religion. In medieval Japan, Ōhara - just north of Kyoto - was a Buddhist hermitage (bessho) populated by reclusive scholiasts, ascetics, and poet-monks largely from Enryakuji, the monastic stronghold of Japanese Tendai Buddhism. Concurrent with its development as a hermitage, Ōhara became a center for wood fuel production. Local villagers gathered, processed, and peddled firewood and charcoal: essentials for medieval life. Ōhara - and by extension Enryakuji - became a chief source of wood fuel for the capital in present-day Kyoto for nearly the next thousand years. This paper discusses evidence for labor specialization and fuel production at Ōhara over time to raise questions about the relationship between seclusion and industry, and their place in the medieval kenmitsu (Exoteric-Esoteric) Buddhist establishment. How should we understand the significance of fuel at Ōhara, an ostensibly quiet and remote hermitage? I explore the example of fuel

production at Ōhara to raise questions about the wider role of Buddhist institutions and ideas in the lives of the medieval Japanese populace, and the relationship between Buddhism and labor.

Jonathan Thumas is a PhD Candidate at the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University (Foreign Research Scholar, Historiographical Institute, The University of Tokyo).

For access information see:

<https://www.kyoto-u.ac.jp/en/access/main-campus-map>

(the venue is on the south side of the basement floor of the building listed on the map as nr. 34)

Please refrain from bringing food or drinks into the meeting room. Also, in order to comply with the regulations of our venue, please do not forget to wear a mask.

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About the Kyoto Asian Studies Group:

The KASG is a long-standing Kyoto-based research network that hosts monthly research presentations by experts from various Asian Studies fields. Emphasizing long Q&A sessions, we aim to provide an informal atmosphere in which scholars can freely exchange ideas concerning both finished and in-progress research. Admission is free, no registration necessary, and we always welcome new members and presenters.