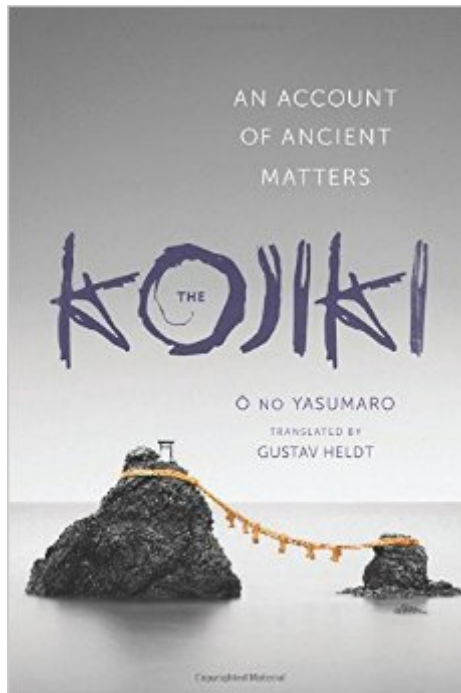


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The Kojiki: An Account Of Ancient Matters (Translations From The Asian Classics)



Synopsis

Japan's oldest surviving narrative, the eighth-century Kojiki, chronicles the mythical origins of its islands and their ruling dynasty through a diverse array of genealogies, tales, and songs that have helped to shape the modern nation's views of its ancient past. Gustav Heldt's engaging new translation of this revered classic aims to make the Kojiki accessible to contemporary readers while staying true to the distinctively dramatic and evocative appeal of the original's language. It conveys the rhythms that structure the Kojiki's animated style of storytelling and translates the names of its many people and places to clarify their significance within the narrative. An introduction, glossaries, maps, and bibliographies offer a wealth of additional information about Japan's earliest extant record of its history, literature, and religion.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This review is for Heldt's edition, which is the most affordable modern translation of the Kojiki. This translation is very readable to a modern audience, and although I do not read Japanese, I've read scholarly reviews praising Heldt's accuracy. I do have two major issues with this edition. The first is Heldt's insistence in translating the names of characters and places. It makes it very difficult to keep track of who is who, and where events are taking place. I lived a year in Japan and I couldn't tell you where most of the stories in the Kojiki took place from this edition because instead of saying "They went to Izumo" Heldt gives us "They went to Bellowing Clouds". Likewise I cannot cross reference

anything concerning characters because their Japanese names are not used. My second issue was Heldt's decision to not include notes on the text (foot or end notes). He does include a glossary of personal and place names, but these are listed exclusively under Heldt's translated names (and these translations are exclusively his own, not a scholarly consensus). This again makes cross referencing very difficult. Ultimately this edition is best for someone who is only interested in reading the stories of the Kojiki and necessarily looking to learn much about the politics and such behind the text. As for the Kojiki itself, I found it to be rather disappointing. It does contain some stories of the Shinto Kami early on, but more than anything this is an inflated genealogical text establishing the tradition of the Japanese Imperial family. I found few of the stories to be exciting. The only tale I found to be emotionally engaging at all was that of Yamato-takeru (here called Yamato Brave). Certain sections of the Kojiki literally just list an emperor's name, their consorts, their offsprings, and the years they reigned. I would only recommend the Kojiki to someone who is really curious about the earliest story of Shinto Kami or with an interest in the establishment of the tradition of the a Japanese Imperial family. If you really want to read the Kojiki and don't want to pay tons of money for a more scholarly developed edition, then this is the one to get.

Heldt has chosen a radical approach that brings out the landscape of ancient Japan, offering translations of places and kami names. His translation that approaches the appeal of the original for Japanese readers; a major reason the Kojiki is widely read today in Japan is precisely because of the kind of poetic appeal that Heldt tries to emphasize in his translation. Readers should be warned that this is a VERY different philosophy from the Philippi translation and they should acquire that one if they want "reconstructed ancient phonology", which Heldt is opposed to on principle. But this translation is far superior to the Chamberlain edition that is widely available online.

A lovely read for anyone who enjoys mythology and history, and where they intertwine. A stylistic choice, I almost wish the translation used footnotes for names as opposed to their direct translations, but you quickly get past it. Beautifully bound, designed, translated and presented. A real treat.

I'm with others who have stated that it would have been better to keep the names in Japanese rather than use translated names. It detracts from the narrative; it doesn't add to it. The author could have placed the English names in an index like he did with the Japanese names.

This is by far the best translation of the Kojiki yet. Modern yet elegant in its style without the awkward 19th century English stylings of Aston's original translation. Of all the Japanese classics, the Kojiki is by far my favorite! The stories of the Shinto mythology and countless kami have always been fascinating to me ever since I first came across them in a college textbook twenty years ago. And while this hard cover edition is a bit on the pricy side considering its small size, it's worth it. The hard cover design is simple yet beautiful, begging to be opened. Perhaps one day Gustav Heldt will get around to doing a modern translation of the Nihon Shoki (Nihongi). If so, I'd be there to preorder it.

I took a Japanese supernatural tales class and we had to read this book. The literal translation of the Japanese names were supposed to make the reading easier but failed its objective; I got even more confused. I would not recommend this translation. It really took the mysticism out of the stories.

Vivid translation of the imposing ancient myth of the creation of Japan. Dispels any illusions that the Greeks and Egyptians cornered all the wild weirdness conceivable in a cast of daring and demonic divinities.

Mandatory for anyone serious about understanding Japan

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