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RITUALIZED WRITING: BUDDHIST PRACTICE AND SCRIPTURAL CULTURES IN ANCIENT JAPAN. By Bryan D. Lowe. Studies in East Asian Buddhism, 27. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017. Pp. xvi + 272; illustrations. \$60.00.

Due to the vagaries of history, documents related to the copying of sutras in Nara in the eighth century were preserved in a storehouse known as the Shōsōin. This concentration of documents surrounding the activities of a single scriptorium over a period of just several decades provides a unique means for gaining insight into a web of practices that would otherwise be lost to us, but until now they have not been the focus of a book-length study in English. Lowe uses these materials among others in this intimate look at the processes of sutra production in medieval Japan and their various intersections with social and cultural practices. The focus varies among the chapters, placing the scriptural processes in the context of literary and religious tradition, individual lives, social organizations and institutional change. By demonstrating how the copying of Buddhist texts was an opportunity for forging or reinforcing common identities (or distinctions) among people of varying backgrounds, Lowe repeatedly highlights the inadequacies of simple characterizations of class, state or society in the realities of Buddhist practice and perhaps in any understanding of medieval Japan. In his examination of significant minutiae, Lowe also demonstrates the benefits of comparison with materials from Dunhuang and elsewhere, highlighting both the universal nature of some East Asian practices as well as the peculiarities of the Japanese case. Instructively, this wide-ranging analysis of fine detail remains grounded in the materiality of the sources at play, adroitly demonstrating both the wealth of these sources and how to use them.

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