



**Anonymous 無款**  
(15th century)

“Portrait of Kōbō-Daishi”

Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk  
95.7 x 41.2 cm. (37 3/4 x 16 1/4 in.)

This 15th-century Muromachi-period painting presents a portrait of the Heian-period Buddhist Priest Kūkai 空海 (774-835), known posthumously as Kōbō-Daishi 弘法大師 (The Grand Master Who Propagated the Buddhist Teaching).<sup>1</sup> Kūkai is famed today as a calligrapher and for founding the Shingon sect of Buddhism. In 816, Emperor Saga accepted Kūkai's request to establish a mountain retreat at Mount Kōya 高野山, which became a huge Shingon 真言宗 Buddhist temple settlement. In this painting, Kōbō-Daishi is seated on a chair in the center of the composition, a common iconographic representation of the figure that appears in many other examples (fig. 1).

In these images, Kōbō-Daishi is holding a Shingon symbolic *vajra* 金剛杵 in his right hand and a rosary 数珠 in his left hand. Unlike the Ryūsen-in version, however, the present painting reflects the *honji suijaku* 本地垂迹 idea of combining Shinto and Buddhist deities of the Niutsumehime Shrine 丹生都比売神社 (also known as the Amano Shrine 天野大社) and Mount Kōya.

The composition of this painting also relates to another hanging scroll, *Kōbō-Daishi, Niu Myōjin* 丹生明神 and *Kōya Myōjin* 高野明神 owned by the Kongōbuji 金剛峯寺 Temple (fig. 2). The pictorial surface of this Kamakura-period work is divided into three registers, at the center of which is the triad consisting of Kōbō-Daishi sitting in a chair in *shinmyō* style flanked at the bottom by Kōya Myōjin (left) in ceremonial court robes, and Niu Myōjin (right) dressed as a court lady.

*Okunoin*, where Kobo Daishi is in eternal meditation, is depicted in the upper register, as are the innermost mausoleum, the lantern path, and the wooden *sotoba* sake casks that line the pathway. The Niutsumehime Shrine (*i.e.* the Amano Shrine), which lies at the foot of Mount Kōya and enshrines Kōya Myōjin and Niu Myōjin, is painted at the bottom of the register. In the Amano landscape, the worship halls and shrines of the four deities – Niu, Kōya, Kehi 氣比, and Itsukushima 巖島 – are painted in the center of this register. These are surrounded by a Many-Treasured (*taho*) Stupa 多宝塔 and a sutra repository. This painting is also known as the “Question and Answer Presentation” (*mondōkō*) 問答講. The Shingon practice of Question and Answer at Mount Kōya began in 1191 but was disrupted. This practice was later reinstated by the Muromachi-period Priest Kaison 快尊 (1391-1466).

Although the upper and lower registers of the Kongōbuji version do not appear in the present version, the Four Deities do surround Kōbō-Daishi. Kōya Myōjin in court robes, which is located in the bottom left of the central register of the Kongōbuji version is moved to the upper left in the present version. Kōya Myōjin, who is also referred as Kariba Myōjin 狩場明神 (Hunting deity) is an important Shinto deity for the Shingon Buddhists. When Kōbō-Daishi was searching for a mountain location that would be suitable for a meditation hall, Kōya Myōjin appeared in the guise of a hunter accompanied by two dogs, and they helped Kōbō-Daishi find a site on Mount Kōya. Due to their assistance, Kōbō-Daishi was able to amicably take over the Niutsuhime Shrine's vast domain in Amano from the goddess Niu Myōjin. Kōya Myōjin is a son of Niu Myōjin. His *honji* Buddhist figure is Rushana-butsum (Virocana).

Niu Myōjin, who is also referred to as Niutsuhime, appears at the bottom right in the Kongōbuji version and is located in the upper right in the Kaikodo version. Niu Myōjin is a female mountain deity who resides on Mount Kōya and is a younger sister of Amaterasu 天照大神, the Supreme Sun Goddess. Niu Myōjin gave permission to Kōbō-Daishi to use her property, through the intervention of Kōya Myōjin. The word “niu” is found in the names of places associated with the mining of mercury ore (cinnabar). Scholars suggest that Niu Myōjin may have been the deity of clans which did such mining.

In the Kaikodo version, Kehi Myōjin 氣比明神 is added to the lower right of Kōbō-Daishi. Kehi Myōjin is represented as a Chinese court lady holding a fly whisk. She is a daughter of Niu Myōjin and a younger sister of Kōya Myōjin. At the lower left, there is a representation of Itsukushima Myōjin 巖島明神 a female deity wearing Chinese courtly robes and holding a lute. She is also a daughter of Niu Myōjin, and her *honji* Buddhist figure is Benzeiten, a Japanese Buddhist goddess, who originated in the Hindu goddess Saraswati.

The iconography of the Four Deities matches that of the *Mandala of the Four Deities of Mt. Koya* (= *Niu-Koya Four Shinto Deities* 丹生高野四社明神像). For example, the Four Deities of Mount Kōya appear in the *Mandala of the Four Deities of Mt. Kōya* produced in the 16th century Momoyama period, a painting housed in the Kozanji 興山寺 Temple (fig. 3). Another example is the Muromachi-period painting of the same title housed in the Cleveland Museum of Art (fig. 4). In both cases, the two dogs that assisted Kōbō-Daishi to find the property and helped him to settle are depicted at the bottom of composition. These dogs also appear in the Kaikodo version of *Kōbō-Daishi and the Four Local Deities of Mount Koya*.

Kazuko Kameda-Madar, Honolulu, 2018

1. This essay uses material drawn from two exhibition catalogues: *Kukai and Mount Koya: Treasures of a Sacred Mountain*, Kyoto National Museum, 2003; and *Sacred Treasures of Mount Koya: The Art of Japanese Shingon Buddhism*, Honolulu Academy of Arts, 2002.



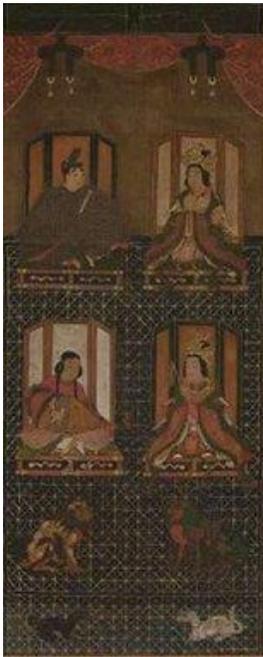
Fig.1 *Seated Kōbō-Daishi*, hanging scroll, Kamakura period, Ryūsen-in 竜泉院, Mount Kōya.



Fig. 2 *Kōbō-Daishi, Niu Myōjin and Kōya Myōjin*, 14th century, Kamakura Period, Kongōbuji.



Fig. 3 *Mandala of the Four Deities of Mt. Kōya*, 16th century, Momoyama period, Kōzanji 興山寺 Temple.



(Fig. 4) *Mandala of the Four Deities of Mt. Kōya*, Muromachi period, Cleveland Museum of Art.  
<http://www.clevelandart.org/art/1999.262>