

Discovery and Process

I first found the images of the Cyprus etc. online after a shot in the dark search for “異国船徳島” “foreign ship Tokushima”. The red ensign immediately attracted me but I had just bought a rather rundown old fisherman’s cottage in need of a lot of renovation and it was another 6 months before I visited the Tokushima Prefectural Archive and saw the original manuscript. The quality of the detail in of the artwork was most impressive and Tani san, a volunteer archivist, fascinated me with her brief description of the detailed recorded. I immediately wanted to translate it and took a transcribed version home with me. The transcription work into readable Japanese had be carried out by the volunteers of the Tokushima Old Manuscript Reading Group and Tani-san had been the editor on this project. The transcript booklet also contained a second shorter manuscript.

I had recently read Moby Dick and remembered a description of the preparation of the sperm oil. The smoke rising from the ship in the drawing seemed to fit with Melville’s account so before attempting to start the translation and I began researching around this hypothesis.

I showed the transcript booklet to Japanese friends, acquaintances and students. Everyone told me it was too difficult to read for ordinary modern Japanese native speakers. I did not let this discourage me and started using “brute-force” technics to translate it. By this I mean that 95% of the time I did not simply read the text and type the translation out straight from my knowledge of Japanese; instead I scanned the text into a computer, used optical character recognition to digitalize it, used word for multiple-word mechanical translation, played with the syntax to get something close to English grammar, analyzed the result against the original and overall context, doing individual word searches online for Edo period meanings where necessary to improve it semantically, polished it up stylistically and finally tried to imbue it with a period ambience. This process is very time consuming and, as it turned out, the first half a dozen pages of the manuscript were an extremely boring description of troop deployments which totally killed my motivation.

So next I tried approaching a university professor who lived near me and had done some research into Edo period architecture in Mugi. I asked him if he could introduce a student who might help me with creating a modern Japanese version in unison with me. I knew that this would commit me more and the two processes would complement one another. He himself agreed to help but as it turned out was in fact too busy to follow through.

Time passed and at the beginning of this year I was certain of my whaler theory. I had mentioned the possibility of my professor acquaintance preparing a simplified version to Tani-san and she seemed keen that someone from Tokushima prefecture should be involved in the process so I invited her and the Tokushima Old Manuscript Reading Group down to Mugi to visit the location that the Cyprus moored and explain my whaler theory. The head of the village and I took them out in our boats. Apart from Tani-san they all seemed underwhelmed by both the experience and my theory but despite that we had lunch, tea and cakes together and Tani-san kindly agreed to prepare and send me a simplified digital version.

The next week at work I told one of my students, Shimoda-san, about what I was trying to do and he asked if he could make a copy of the transcript. He started reading it and giving overview and background explanations in class. This allowed me to ask questions and explore lines of enquiry.

By now, I was investigating the possibility of a whaler by sending off the picture of the ship to the National Maritime Museums in London and local museums with strong connections to whaling in the UK and Canada. All enquires came back negative usually with a request for money if I wanted them to look properly which I was seriously considering when the answers from my questions to Shimoda-san ruled out the possibility of the ship being a whaler. There just were not enough small boats on board and there was no record by the samurai of any kind of whaling equipment. Next, I started looking at records of Royal Navy ships that had been built 25 to 15 years or so previous. If she was a repurposed Navy ship I would be able to find her there and there were probably only about 30 brigs commissioned in this period. I thought I might be able to identify her by chasing down the

history of each of them. However, Shimoda-san told me that she had no gun ports and that the samurai had checked this very carefully.

As I had been investigating the possibility of her being a whaler, it had become apparent that mutinies were not just something that happened on the *Bounty*. I had even ordered a book about a mutiny on a whaler a few years before 1830. She wasn't a whaler and she wasn't a former Navy ship and I was running out of ideas. Then, while talking to Shimoda-san one Thursday evening, almost in an act of despair, I typed in "mutiny 1829" and the *Cyprus* popped up. Within seconds with an in-text search I found the word Japan and just knew it had to be her. The first thing I did after class was phone Tani-san, the lady who had set me on this course two and a half years before.

Two days later I presented everything I had found to archivists at the Prefectural Archive and they were excited. The "large ball", the brig's design with the main mast at the rear, the time line, the description of the events: everything fitted. A few days later Tani-san sent me her simplified digitalized version of the manuscript. To be honest it was not nearly as simplified as I had initially hoped but actually this was to prove advantageous as fidelity to the original manuscript was now of the utmost importance due to the manuscript taking on a new significance.

To achieve the best quality of translation with the time and resources available was now essential. To do this my translation was checked against the original by Shimoda-san then it was translated back in to Japanese by another student. Tobe-san and this back-to-Japanese translation was then checked against the original by the archivists. Then experts on the *Cyprus*, Australian colonial history, Australian penal history, Australian maritime history and Edo period Tokushima history all very kindly checked the final results for us with any corrections being made to both the English and Japanese versions. Then I compared the two versions for to make sure there had been no divergence or careless mistakes and finally three native speakers from each language proof read them for us. Then the translators, myself and Tobe-san, gave each translation the final once over.

Before we had started our work, the original text had already gone through a straight digitalizing transcription then to a more readable transcription. Then I put it into English and then back to modern Japanese. Every step of the way there have been checks and double and triple checks. During this process, we fixed a couple of mis-transcriptions and found one spelling mistake by the original chronicler. We are human and our time and resources were limited so there may still be one or two small mistakes in the final version but everyone worked with a sense of responsibility to the people of the communities whose history it is and we hope that the result is something that can be enjoyed by the average high school student or layperson but also of value to the academic historian.

In my postgraduate studies, I once read a book written by the French philosopher Lyotard in the late seventies called *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. In it he postulates that with the advent of the “network” new knowledge would be created by bring two previously unassociated pieces of knowledge together. Although he later described the book as his worst work, this idea stuck with me and the discovery of the Cyprus is perhaps good example of two simple two-word searches allowing me make a connection that 30 years ago would been almost impossible to discover.