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## *Finding Hōryūji in Afghanistan*

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Image: Mizuno Seiichi, Basawal and Jelalabad-Kabul. Buddhist Cave-Temples and Topes in South-East Afghanistan, 1965. Stupa of Guldarra near Kabul

To say that a religion is a means to colonize—which implies an intentional act of establishing political control over human subjects—sounds simultaneously awkward and yet familiar. It is awkward because we tend to identify divinity with religion, thereby conflating faith and a system of cultural constructs. Yet it is also familiar because arguments along this line have developed since secular voices began calling into question political influence over religions in the name of the Enlightenment. This lecture takes this dichotomy one step further, by examining the Japanese archaeological enterprises in Central Asia and Afghanistan, before and after World War II, as a way to interrogate connections between power-knowledge construction and the study of Buddhist archaeology. The lecture looks specifically at the imposition of political powers and the Japanese struggle to redefine their geopolitical position in the modern world, through evidence of religious representations. In the end, one must ask, to what extent could a form of religious knowledge empower claims of geopolitical hierarchy?