SUMMARY

Why Does Godzilla Land at Shinagawa?:
An Examination of Shinagawa’s Boundary Properties
Based Mainly on Edo-Period Sources

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In the movie Gojira (Godzilla), directed by Honda Ishirō (1954), Godzilla first comes ashore at Shinagawa before going back out to sea; he then lands again at Shibaura, a little farther north, and invades the heart of Tokyo. To examine the significance of Godzilla’s first landfall, I used mainly Edo-period sources to determine how the people of Edo-Tokyo viewed Shinagawa. Large vessels used to have to moor off Shinagawa because Tokyo Bay north of that point contained many shoals and this topography made it difficult for anything above a certain size arriving by sea to travel north of Shinagawa. Godzilla, being colossal and northward-bound, is thus forced to emerge there.

It should also be noted that, on the landward side, Shinagawa lay at the city’s southernmost limit, outside the great wooden gate at Takanawa which marked the border of the city proper. As Edoites journeying west were farewelled at the gate or in Shinagawa and welcomed there on their return, this area was a point of ingress as well as part of the periphery of Edo—a boundary site, in other words. Thus, Godzilla enters the heart of Tokyo through a locus that was both the city’s entrance and its boundary in the Edo period. These associations have been carried over into modern times, as can be inferred from a newspaper’s description of the Shinagawa district in a report on its being incorporated into Tokyo City in 1932.

We can thus recognize the probable influence of traditional associations dating back to the Edo period in Godzilla’s landing at Shinagawa.