



Review

Author(s): Marie Maurin

Review by: Marie Maurin

Source: *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (Summer, 2002), pp. 242-244

Published by: [Sophia University](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3096718>

Accessed: 17-02-2016 03:08 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Sophia University is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Monumenta Nipponica*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

as Ruoff implies. Despite efforts to project a popular middle-class image, the imperial family still lives an aristocratic, highly privileged existence. While the photograph of Empress Michiko embracing a distraught survivor of the Kobe earthquake suggests Ruoff's theme of "the people's emperor," it is noteworthy that for the front cover of the book he (or perhaps the publisher) saw fit to use an earlier photograph that visually signifies "the emperor's people." This photograph shows Emperor Hirohito greeting a large flag-waving crowd during public celebrations of his birthday in 1986. But Hirohito, flanked by his family, is standing far back in the distance, remote from his well-wishers and elevated high above them on the porch of the imperial palace. The picture's sharpest image is that of a policeman intently scanning the people in the foreground for any signs of possible trouble. One wonders whether, in these respects, more recent photographs of Emperor Akihito's birthday celebrations are much different.

Japanese Prehistory: The Material and Spiritual Culture of the Jōmon Period.

By Nelly Naumann. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2000. xiv + 273 pages. €64.00.

MARIE MAURIN

Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales

The ever-increasing discoveries by archaeologists excavating Jōmon period sites have yielded a large number of interpretations, theories, and works, which, in turn, are often called into question by still newer discoveries. Given this circumstance, in *Japanese Prehistory: The Material and Spiritual Culture of the Jōmon Period*, the late Nelly Naumann has published a book ambitious in that it not only offers an inventory of the most recent findings, but also attempts to respond to various questions that have been posed about the inhabitants of the Japanese archipelago in the Neolithic era.

In the introduction, Naumann defines clearly the object of her study. Instead of limiting herself, like the majority of Western and Japanese researchers, to the material aspects of Jōmon culture, she declares her intention to attempt to elucidate, even if only in a fragmentary manner, the mystery of the symbols adorning Jōmon vessels and clay figurines (*dogū*). These symbols, she notes, seem undeniably to have had a ritual purpose. Were not they then the product of a more highly developed spiritual and religious context than the rudimentary cult of fertility commonly ascribed to the people who inhabited the archipelago during the several tens of centuries constituting the Jōmon period? To answer this question she proposes to compare the objects of Jōmon culture with those of other cultures.

Japanese Prehistory consists of two parts, one devoted to the material context as such and the other (much longer) to the spiritual universe of the Jōmon people. In part 1 the author examines the current state of archaeological discoveries from the Neolithic period and the conclusions that can be drawn from them regarding the material life of the inhabitants of the archipelago. She reviews the different phases of the Jōmon period together with the sites, artifacts, and remains associated with those phases. One thing that seems almost certain today, she argues, is that pottery arrived in Japan not only from the south, as has been generally held, but also from the north. In 1994, for instance, pottery shards of the same type as ones recovered from the site of Miyamae in Gifu prefecture were found at Ustinovka 3, a site on the Pacific coast

of Russia. Carbon 14 analysis indicates that they may date back $12,960 \pm 120$ years, which would make them the oldest artifacts of this sort as yet discovered. There are also good grounds for thinking that throughout all phases of the Neolithic period the inhabitants of the archipelago were able to navigate not only along the coasts, but also across the sea. Their adventurous spirit was undoubtedly a factor in the originality and vigor of Jōmon culture, as exemplified in the richness of forms and motifs seen in its pottery and figurines.

Part 2 is divided into three sections, each of which takes up a different aspect of the spiritual universe of the Jōmon people. In the first of these sections Naumann begins by explaining the difficulties she faced in her research on this subject. The vestiges of the most ancient phases of Jōmon culture are not substantive enough, she notes, to make possible any conclusion about the spiritual life of the people of this era. It was thus necessary to confine her investigation to the later phases of the Neolithic period, for which there is available a profusion of richly decorated clay figurines and vessels. Even so, she reminds us, one cannot hope to describe or reconstruct rites and ceremonies for which no trace remains; the scope of her study is consequently limited to an investigation of the significance of a number of symbols and other cultural objects. The rest of this section reviews the general characteristics of graves, stone artifacts, figurines, and masks of this period. Only the most painstaking observation of such objects, she holds, can hope to yield eventually a decoding of the message that they carry.

The second section, "Images and Symbols," takes its title from a work by Mircea Eliade published in 1952. In his preface to this work Georges Dumézil wrote that "everywhere in religious thought is symbolism," and drawing support from the views of these two eminent historians of religion, Naumann undertakes to put to work her method of analysis based on close observation. Taking as her object of investigation a small singular figurine recovered from the site of Tōnai in Nagano prefecture, she identifies a wide variety of parallels not only between it and other *dogū* of the Jōmon period, but also with examples of Chinese, pre-Columbian, Turkish (Nevali Cori), Mesopotamian (Samarra), Iranian (Tepe Giyan), Greek, and Cretan origin, as well as ones from the Codex Borgia. Noting the presence of symbols common to all these objects, including a serpent, tears, crescent, and two different eyes, she concludes that the figurine from Tōnai represents a lunar deity who may be a dispenser of water, the source of all life, and symbol of rebirth. Naumann then applies the same interpretive process to other recurring Jōmon symbols, notably the hand with three fingers, the toad, and the spiral pattern found on vessels as well as figurines.

In the final section of part 2 the author, always adhering to the methodology she has chosen, makes an attempt to explain the significance of several other symbols, such as the cord frequently found embellishing the abdomen of figurines (this, she proposes, may be an umbilical cord, a spine, or the "cord of life" mentioned in the Japanese creation myths), the strange hairstyles and horns that sometimes adorn their heads, and the second skin that some seem to have. In so doing she does not hesitate to draw daring connections between certain symbolic representations and the deities figuring in the myths.

Based on these findings, the conclusion to the book sketches a tentative picture of the spiritual universe of the Jōmon people. While only a meager selection of the numerous symbols found in Jōmon remains can be identified, they often seem to point towards an opening to the beyond that carries with it the possibility of transcending

death. Certain symbols present on vessels and figurines seem indisputably to refer to the moon, which throughout the passage of months ceaselessly dies and is reborn. Nothing, Naumann asserts, allows us to say whether the Jōmon people regarded the moon or the lunar deity they venerated as being female or male. This is true of both large centers where, dating from different periods, there is evidence of the development of a religious culture—Katsusaka, dating from mid-Jōmon, and Kamegaoka, dating from the final stage. She believes, nevertheless, that the Neolithic inhabitants of the archipelago likely had at their disposal an embryonic lunar calendar based on the positions of the moon in the sky. The discovery of figurines dating from late Jōmon (2500 B.C.–1000 B.C.) that appear to portray people in a posture of prayer seems to indicate, she holds as well, that the Jōmon people can be described as *homo religiosus*.

Nelly Naumann's approach is notable in that she derives her findings about Jōmon culture not from theoretical speculation but from rigorous and meticulous analysis of the remains from this period. Taking care to support her propositions with extensive illustrations, she enlarges the ground for the interpretation of Jōmon remains by multiple comparisons to objects deriving from other cultures. It is this method that enables her to challenge the tenacious presumption that the distinctive features of Jōmon figurines are overwhelmingly "female" in nature, a presumption that has led many researchers to focus their attention on the putative existence of a Jōmon fertility cult at the expense of pursuing various other equally interesting characteristics of the figurines. Naumann likewise never forgets to relativize her findings by reminding us that new archaeological discoveries may call into question all such propositions. Even if some of the author's conclusions are difficult to accept, most particularly her effort to draw connections between Jōmon culture and later Japanese myths, her work should be praised as a notable attempt to decipher and elucidate the complex system of representation developed by the people endowed with a prodigious capacity for imagination and invention who populated the Japanese archipelago in Neolithic times. In this regard this book is a remarkable contribution to the study of Japanese prehistory and to clarifying the fragmentary evidence of a Jōmon "religion."

Dieux et Bouddhas au Japon. By Bernard Frank. Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob, 2000. 462 pages. Paperback €28.97.

ALLAN GRAPARD

University of California, Santa Barbara

This book presents summaries of lectures on Japanese religious iconography given at the Collège de France by the late Bernard Frank, from 1981 to the last year of his life, 1996. Originally published as end-of-the-year recapitulations of a series of lectures and brought together in this format by Frank's former students and colleagues, the individual chapters offer meticulous and revealing analyses of a range of materials: specific objects such as mandalas of individual divinities (*besson mandara*), iconographic manuals of the Heian and Kamakura periods such as *Zuzōshō* and *Kakuzenshō*, and themes and genres such as the famed *Heike nōkyō* scrolls kept at the Itsukushima shrine.