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The Archaeology of Religion and Ritual in the Prehistoric Japanese Archipelago

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Abstract and Keywords

This article reviews the evidence and interpretation of the development of ritual traditions in the prehistoric Japanese archipelago prior to the appearance of Buddhism in mid-sixth century AD. Key sites and materials are selected from the Jomon period (c. 14,000 BC–c.500 BC), the Yayoi period (c.500 BC–AD 300), and the Kofun period (AD 300–710). While introducing a series of key sites, the article adopts a thematic approach to evidence for religious activity in the Japanese archipelago including: cosmology; the transformative qualities of ‘ritual’ material culture; evidence for ‘ritual specialists’; the existence of generative schema behind the diversity of ritual traditions; monumentality; the ritualization of the expression of human-animal relationships; and the ritual expression of transitions during the life cycles of individuals and communities.

Keywords: Jomon period, Yayoi period, Kofun period, religious activity, cosmology, material culture, ritualization, human-animal relationships, life cycles

1 Introduction

THIS chapter will review the evidence and interpretation of the development of ritual traditions in the prehistoric Japanese archipelago prior to the appearance of Buddhism in the mid-sixth century AD. Key sites and materials will be selected from the Jomon period (c.14,000 BC–c.500 BC), the Yayoi period (c.500 BC–AD 300 AD), and the Kofun period (AD 300–710). A number of good general surveys of Japanese archaeology are available in English (Aikens and Higuchi 1982; Pearson 1992; Imamura 1996; Mizoguchi 2002).

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The early occupants of the archipelago left behind a rich material culture, large parts of which are interpreted as being ritual in nature. Interpretations draw on traditional Japanese ethnology, which is in turn heavily influenced by studies of the 'native' religious traditions, and are often considered to have coalesced under the broad rubric of Shintoism (Harris 2001). This chapter, rather than adopting this usual, rather essentialist, discourse used for the development of 'early Japanese religion', presents case studies from each period. These case studies, while reflecting the distinctive nature of specific contextual materials from the archipelago, illustrate more general processes whereby local ritual traditions develop, interact, influence one another, and are transformed over time through the playing-out of generative schema, rich in symbolism and embedded in the social reproduction and transformation of communities at the local and regional scales.

While introducing a series of key sites, this chapter will adopt a thematic approach to evidence for religious activity in the Japanese archipelago including: cosmology; the transformative qualities of 'ritual' material culture; evidence for 'ritual specialists'; the existence of generative schema behind the diversity of ritual traditions; monumentality; the ritualization of the expression of human-animal relationships; and the ritual expression of transitions during the life cycles of individuals and communities. (p. 458)

2 The Archaeology of Religion and Ritual in Japan

The word for religion, 'an overarching term encompassing a variety of spiritual traditions' was only introduced into Japan in the 1850s, translated as *shukyo* (Thal 2005: 8). This term (a Buddhist term for 'sectarian teachings'), however, 'emphasized religion as a doctrine rather than as ritual' (ibid.: 8). In an intriguing twist, in the compromise between Western imposed freedoms of religious belief, and the constraints of an emerging state doctrine (i.e. State Shinto), a number of state-supported shrines were treated as 'not religion'.

For many in Japan, the origins of Shinto lie in the prehistoric period, in particular the Yayoi (Harris 2001). Mori Mizue, writing on the 'dawn of Shinto' notes the contrast between the hunting and gathering Jomon period and the rice-agriculture-based Yayoi period, noting that 'the least we can say is that the excavations of ritual sites from the Yayoi period leave little doubt that during this period, people believed in, and worshipped, spiritual powers that controlled the weather and the crops. These sites bespeak the existence at this early date of what we may call *kami* workshop' (Mori 2003: 12). However, the same authority acknowledges that recent archaeological discoveries have blurred the boundaries between Yayoi and Jomon so that 'the animism of the Jomon period will also have to be taken into account as a possible ancestor of Shinto' (ibid.: 14).

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Perhaps the most influential study of archaeological traces of early ritual practices in Japan is the monumental survey of Shinto archaeology edited by Oba Iwao, professor at Kokugakuin University in Tokyo, for long the centre for the study of Shinto and the training of Shinto priests (Oba 1983). Oba was responsible for some very significant archaeological investigations at sites including the Oyu stone circles in Akita Prefecture in the 1950s. Histories of Japanese religion often begin with a consideration of the earliest periods (e.g. Earhart 2004: 22–8; Kasahara 2001: 27–46).

3 Ritual Practices Among Late Palaeolithic and Jomon Foragers (14,000–500 bc)

The period from the late glacial to the first millennium BC is known by the term Jomon, which refers to the cord-marking on many of the pottery vessels which characterize the period (Habu 2004; Kobayashi 2004). This single name, however, represents a great diversity of material expressions, although there are shared characteristics. It would, nevertheless, be misleading to assume that there was any unity of religious system or ritual structures. People during this long period did dedicate considerable energies to what archaeologists recognize as ritual facilities, and the performative aspects of the rituals thought to have been carried out are expressed both in the spatial layout of these facilities, and by many of the aspects of the material culture with which they are associated.

The most recent extensive survey of ritual activity during the Jomon period identified a series of themes: beliefs connected with hunting and fishing; burials and the cult of the (p. 459) dead; upright stones, stone pillars, and phallic stones; anthropomorphic and zoomorphic ceramic figurines; and clay masks (Naumann 2000). Kobayashi Tatsuo and his colleagues have proposed that many Jomon sites were constructed so as to be aligned on the movements of celestial bodies, notably the sun and the moon, and key landscape features such as distinctive mountain peaks, and have postulated a Jomon cosmology based around the relatively permanent settlements of pit houses, many of which developed a circular structure (Kobayashi 2004). During the long Jomon period, divided into six sub-divisions, a multitude of regional and local cultures developed, giving rise to a great range of material culture forms (in particular pottery styles) thought to reflect considerable cultural diversity, within a broader cultural co-tradition (Kobayashi 2004).

In his 1908 synthesis of Japanese archaeology, the Scottish doctor and amateur archaeologist Neil Gordon Munro described the stone circles at Oshoro, near the port of Otaru in Hokkaido (Munro 1908). He suggested that the stones, although not megalithic, were laid out oriented to movements of the celestial bodies, indicating an early interest in cosmology. There are several hundred such sites around the Japanese archipelago (Suzuki 2007), with a distribution from Hokkaido to Kagoshima, though the majority are

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in eastern Japan. These sites are widely regarded as burial sites or regional ritual centres (Kodama 2003). Among the most famous are the double rings of Manza and Nonakado at Oyu in Akita (Aikens and Higuchi 1982) and Komakino in Aomori (Kodama 2003).

While there is evidence for intensification of human–animal relationships in the Jomon, including signs of hunting pressure on deer populations from the Late Jomon, and suggestions of the management of wild boar, including transporting them to parts of the archipelago where they were not native, notably Hokkaido and some smaller offshore islands, there is no proof of domestication of any species other than the dog. On occasion, as at the Incipient Jomon rock shelter at Kamikuroiwa on Shikoku, dogs were treated to careful burial (Aikens and Higuchi 1982). However, at a number of sites animal bones are found suggesting that their deposition served some religious or cultic purpose from the Early Jomon. These include Mawaki in Ishikawa Prefecture, where the bones of dolphins appear to have been treated in a very specific fashion:

In a small place, together with bones of other animals and fish, the bones of about 300 dolphins were found. Their skulls had been deposited in a special way: some in a fan-like circle, the muzzles facing inwards, or with two skulls lying parallel or muzzle to muzzle. In the same place a carved pole was found, 2.5 m long, diameter 45 cms. Three zones are carved out, but only a part of the middle zone is well-enough preserved to recognise a round center as big as the palm of a hand, and two crescents each to the left and right of it' [Naumann 2002: 12]

and Higashi Kushiro in Hokkaido 'where dolphin bones were laid out radially, the muzzles pointing outwards, covered with red iron oxide' (Naumann 2002: 12).

One of the most beguiling elements of Jomon ritual material culture are the ceramic figurines and the suggestively phallic stone bars of various shape (Kaner 2009; Mizoguchi 2007; Naumann 2000). Parts of more than 15,000 individuals are now recorded on the Jomon figurine database. In 2006, at Meotoshi in Yamanashi Prefecture, a large quantity of figurine fragments were recovered from the evocatively named 'woman man stone' site (Bunkacho 2007). The site is located on a level terrace against the spectacular backdrop of the three peaks of the Kofu Komagadake mountain range, and was a centre for ritual activities for over 1,000 years, between 5500–4500 BP in the Middle Jomon period. These rituals appear to have (p. 460) focused on the huge 'woman-man stone', some 2.5 m long and 1.7 m high, a natural boulder, which is located at the middle of the site. Other remains included a cluster of 18 pit buildings, a single arranged stone feature and a short distance away, an associated dump area. Centred on this large boulder were discovered some 70 figurine fragments, along with stone bars, miniature pottery vessels, and other objects of ritual nature. The deposits contained a large proportion of ash, suggesting that fire played a significant role in these ritual practices. As is typical of many figurine assemblages, there was considerable variation within the group from Meotoishi. Yamanashi Prefecture is famous for its figurines: in the 1970s the Shakado site produced over 1,000 figurine fragments, all broken (Yamagata 1992) and over 1,800 figurine

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fragments have been recovered from the largest Jomon site yet discovered, from Sannai Maruyama in Aomori Prefecture (Habu 2008).

Jomon burial traditions are every bit as complex as those of complex hunter-gatherers the world over. They have been analysed mainly from the perspective of attempting to understand what they can tell us about the nature of Jomon social organization, although this discourse has, somewhat inevitably, given the parameters of the debate, become bogged down in a sterile argument over where there was, or was not, any institutionalized social hierarchy present during the Jomon, with evidence for ascribed (rather than simply achieved) social status (Kaneko 2005).

The presence of a large number of cemeteries throughout the archipelago, lend themselves to a historical analysis, in which changes in the material aspects of burial rites can be observed. Several of the best-known cemeteries from sites such as Tsukomo were excavated many years ago (Harunari 1986). Recent examples include Mukaisamada A and D in Akita Prefecture (Bunkacho 2002). These burial grounds often had long histories of use—as did many of the settlements themselves. Sannai Maruyama, for example, one of the largest Jomon settlements yet discovered, was occupied for around 1,900 years (Habu 2008). Differences in body orientation and the clustering of graves have suggested to some archaeologists that family or lineage groupings are represented spatially (for example Harunari Hideji 2002 and Hayashi Kensaku 2001). The elaborate burials also suggest a belief in the afterlife, and a concern with managing ancestral spirits.

Mukaisamada is part of a large ritual complex dating to the early part of the Final Jomon, located on a terrace overlooking the Komata River in northern Akita Prefecture. The complex comprised two circular arrangements of stones. To the east was a circle some 13 m in diameter, centred on a stone-surrounded hearth, some 1.4 m in length, around which were located a large number of grave pits and a dump area. The ritual areas appeared to have been separated off from the valley beyond by an earthen bank or mound. From the dump area and the earthen mound were recovered large quantities of artefacts which may have featured in ritual practices, including ceramic and stone figurines, engraved stone plaques, stone bars, along with stone beads and other accessories. Many of these objects are thought to have been used as part of the funerary rites associated with the many graves at the site. The assemblage suggested to the excavators that this was a site where objects were 'sent off', along with the spirits of the departed.

Two approaches dominate the interpretation of the archaeology of the Jomon period. The first, largely inspired by Marxist writings, considers that Jomon societies were unable to progress beyond the hunting and gathering mode of production, as they did not adopt agriculture. This meant that they became 'trapped' in a cycle of stagnation, expressed through increasingly useless rituals. The cultural dynamic here is one of stadial cultural evolution and progress, and Jomon societies were unable to do this. Such an approach overlooks the creativity and agency inherent in Jomon societies. Jomon peoples developed (p. 461) their own very sophisticated ways of expressing their relationship with the other

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world through local cults and ritualized practices. Central to these practices was a recognition of the ability for human beings to be transformed into other entities, which we would regard as either animate or inanimate. The power to transform is an essential attribute of the religious systems which developed, a power which is embodied in the transformative qualities of the clay used to create the great range of ceramic forms in the Jomon, which underpinned the success of the subsistence strategies adopted over ten millennia: cooking the rich resources available to the foragers and transforming them into edible foodstuffs.

The second theme is that various ritual practices, from burial with grave goods to the construction of stone-built monuments, were expressions of social power rather than ritual power or religious authority. This theme is at the forefront of discussions by scholars such as Junko Habu and Oki Nakamura who have argued that there was a degree of inherited, or ascribed, social status in the Jomon period, and that the primary function of ritual practice was to express and legitimate this ascribed status. There remains considerable disagreement about this (Habu 2004).

An alternative approach to these issues in Jomon religion is to accept, as does much recent anthropological theory, that there is nothing 'natural' or 'primitive' about an egalitarian ideology, but that it has to be proactively and discursively maintained. Add to this the way in which religious traditions are reproduced and transformed in small-scale societies (Barth 1988; Kaner 2007), and we have the foundations for a new approach to Jomon religion which not only accepts the distinctiveness of Jomon spiritual experience (avoiding the teleology of looking for the origins of Shinto), but also accepts that this distinctively religious aspect of Jomon life was not epiphenomenal to subsistence or social organization, but was deeply implicated in and causal to Jomon ways of life.

The foraging communities who occupied the Japanese archipelago during the Jomon period developed an elaborate cosmology which related fixed locations in the landscape to movements of the celestial bodies. Stone circles and other features were aligned on distinctive landscape elements notably rivers. Ritual specialists, if they existed, are thought to have been part-time, although some scholars, notably Watanabe Hitoshi (1998) consider that they may have represented a class of person in whom a certain stratification of authority and power may have been embodied. Certain burials, for example one from Yamaga in Kyushu, with shell armlets and jadeite axes, are cited as evidence for this (Kobayashi 2004). The ceramic figures and pottery masks, and the intriguing emerging representative designs embedded in many of the Jomon cooking vessels, suggest a concern with transformation and the awareness of the potential to take on different personalities.

4 The Elaboration of Ritual Authority: Religion and Rice-Growing in the Yayoi (500 bc-ad 300)

As is the case in much of the rest of the world, the adoption of agriculture is considered to be one of the great disjunctures in the history of the occupation of the Japanese archipelago. The appearance of wet rice agriculture in north-west Kyushu around 900 cal BC, associated (p. 462) with the construction of paddy fields and other new technologies, notably metalworking and silk weaving, all introduced from the continent, marked the beginning of an inevitable demise in Jomon cultural manifestation, and its replacement with a set of ritual and religious practices, greatly influenced by the agricultural way of life. Rice itself, given such prominence in subsequent constructions of Japanese identity (Ohnuki-Tierney 1994), and its preparation and consumption may well have been circumscribed by ritual and belief (Hosoya 2009). Religion and ritual continued to play a major structural role in the reproduction and transformation of communities and societies in the archipelago, albeit in a different form to that of the preceding Jomon period. Kobayashi Tatsuo (2004) and others have argued that the native Jomon populations attempted to use ritual in order to 'resist' the spread of the agricultural lifestyle as suggested by the large number of ceramic figurines manufactured in western Japan in the final stages of the Jomon period.

Any such putative Jomon 'resistance' was, however, ultimately overcome and many of the distinctive Jomon ritual objects and presumably practices gave way to Yayoi successors. Yayoi archaeologists have typically recognized the following as the material traces of ritual activity: bronze bells and mirrors, elaborate bronze weapons and talc imitations/skeumorphs, oracle bones suggesting divination, and a rich, if very heterogeneous, mortuary record (Hudson 1992: 156-68), which tracks the 'development of formal cemeteries...linked to an increasing concern with ancestral rights to land'. Koji Mizoguchi has expanded on this theme in recent publications (2005), in which he argues for greater awareness of expressions of lineage and differentiations between lineage groupings.

Did the ways in which ritual and religious practices were implicated in Yayoi life differ greatly from Jomon ritual traditions? We have less evidence for the spatial ordering of ritual activities from most Yayoi settlements. And yet the continuing importance of initiation rites involving bodily mutilation including tooth filing suggests that life-history rituals continued to be important. In addition, it appears that Yayoi people developed new ways of communicating with the spirit world, including the use of divination involving the interpretation of burnt animal bones. Yayoi people also innovated with ways of portraying what are interpreted as winged shamans and other activities, through etchings on pottery vessels, particularly from sites such as Karako-Kagi in Nara, and representational scenes of a probable mythological nature on some 10 per cent of the 400 or so bronze bells which they deposited in western Honshu at field margins and away from everyday settlement.

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Mark Hudson has suggested a structured set of relationships between some of the key aspects of Yayoi society, emphasizing the role of warfare and increasing social cohesion: 'the need for warfare and social cohesion was negotiated through the ritualisation of war and its association with hunting' (1992: 149). In this relationship, the ritualization of warfare is represented by the development of 'wide-bladed, impractical ritual objects' derived from 'actual weapons' and seeing 'weapons...become objects of worship' (ibid.). Hudson continues:

Ritual weapons were also made of wood and were probably used in performances, such as those described in the *Wei Zhi* and depicted on bronze mirrors. This mirror provides a clear link between (mock) warfare and the hunting of deer. If we agree that the deer represented land spirits in agricultural ritual, then I believe we can understand why hunting and warfare scenes are so common in Yayoi art. Hunting and warfare were a metaphor for the control of the wild or, in other words, the domestication of both rice and society. [Ibid.: 149]

(p. 463) Indeed, Edward Kidder has argued that human action during the Yayoi was greatly constrained by 'an overarching fear of malignant spirits' which represents 'the bonding feature of Wa society' (2007: 228):

we find a psychologically insecure mentality that acts only after divination, depends on the interpretation of dreams, looks for signs and omens to guide future action, explains ordinary occurrences (such as diseases) as the work of hostile spirits, sees life in inanimate objects with nefarious potential, and believes in physical transformation. [Ibid.: 228]

These new religious configurations gave rise to some new forms of sacred place. As part of a move towards enclosure, seen clearly in the moated settlements of the Yayoi, such as Ikegami-Sone and Yoshinogari (Mizoguchi 2002: 3), sacred precincts around central 'shrine-like' buildings began to appear. The monumentalization of Yayoi ritual architecture represents the expression of a new exclusivity in Japanese religious tradition. Some commentators, such as Kidder (2007: 77) consider these structures to be 'special, raised floor dwellings for their spiritual-political leaders', based on the ground plans of arrangements of large post-holes and engravings on pottery sherds. Kidder continues: 'The type persisted as an elite dwelling and was for structural form adopted for the first of the religious shrines—Izumo Taisha and Ise Jingu both have elevated floors—presumably because it was the shaman's house' (ibid.). The largest example known is from the Yoshitake-Takagi location of the Iimori site in Fukuoka, dating to the Middle Yayoi, a structure with six posts along one side and five posts along the other estimated to have been some 12 m high and with over 120 m² of floor space (Kidder 2007: 78). An example at Ikegami Sone was associated with a 'ritual well' (Inui 1999).

Several archaeologists have argued for a religious 'revolution' between the Middle and the Late Yayoi periods, which gave rise to the ideological underpinnings for the state-level polities which came about during the later third century in the Kansai region of central Honshu. Gina Barnes (2007: 114-15) describes this process partly in terms of

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'ritual replacement': 'The emergence of paramount chiefs following the demise of bronze bell ritual...indicates greater hierarchisation of society and is interpreted as ritual replacement: a shift from worshipping the "spirit of the rice" to the worshipping the "spirit of the ruler"' (ibid.: 114). Barnes further notes that: 'In the Japanese case, archaeologists put the onus of action on the populace, who transfer their focus of attention from fertility rituals to individuals whom they recognise as their leaders, revering them as gods in and of themselves' (ibid.: 115).

Koji Mizoguchi developed a related theme. He identifies the person interred in grave three at Yoshitake-Takagi in Fukuoka as a 'shaman' or a 'shamanistic leader', 'mediating the relationship between the community and the supernatural as an Other' (2002: 154). This person, whose physical remains have long since vanished in the acid-rich soil, was buried with 'a bronze mirror with sophisticated geometric patterns, two bronze daggers, a bronze spearhead, a bronze halberd, and a C-shaped stone bead...as well as numerous stone cylindrical beads, probably making up a necklace' (Mizoguchi 2002: 153-4). Mizoguchi argues that this person had both religious authority (expressed through the mirror) and social authority (expressed through the weapons), and represented a form of 'community leadership' (ibid.).

By the second century AD we have forms of evidence not available to us for the earlier period. These are the accounts of life in the archipelago left to us by the historians who compiled the *Wei Zhih*, a sixth-century Chinese account, which includes details of (p. 464) embassies sent from the land of Wa, equated with one of the polities in the archipelago. These accounts, the first eye-witness descriptions of the Japanese archipelago and its inhabitants, describe the presence of special diviners in missions sent from Japan to the Chinese court:

there is always one man who does not comb his hair, does not remove the lice, lets his clothes become dirty, does not eat meat, and does not get near women. He is like a mourner and works like a diviner or an ascetic/abstainer. If there is good luck, in view of this they will all give him slaves and valuable things, but if disease or injuries occur, they dispatch him because as the diviner he had not been respectful [of his vows]. [Kidder 2007: 15]

The chronicles also describe divination using oracle bones, and the magic nature of rulership, as embodied in the figure of Queen Himiko and her brother (Barnes 2007; Hudson 1992: 173; Kidder 2007).

A number of spheres of activity, including some completely new ones, became heavily ritualized during the Yayoi period. Changes in attitudes towards animals and plants expressed new relationships involving domestication and shifts in perceptions of the wild and the tame. Transformation continued to be an important feature of ritual material culture; but instead of, as in the Jomon, elaborate ceramic forms fulfilling this role, now it was the transformative qualities of metal, in particular bronze, that characterize this. Violent feuding, perhaps fuelled by competition over land and water, fed the development of the ritualized display of arms and armour. The nature of ritual authority underwent

considerable changes, in particular around the middle of the third century AD, as leaders consolidated their positions by gathering in control of access to the gods and spirits. Whereas Jomon rituals appear to have been focused on the settlements which were at the centre of their cosmology, Yayoi rituals moved out across the landscape, reflecting the increased human involvement in constructing and cultivating paddy fields and associated irrigation systems.

5 The Appropriation of Religious Power by the Tomb-Builders of the Kofun Period (c.ad 250-710)

In the early third century AD, large mounded tombs, many with a distinctive keyhole shaped plan, began to be constructed in the archipelago. These tombs give the name Kofun, literally 'old tombs', to the period in which the first state-level society appeared in the Kinai region, around modern-day Nara and Osaka. This construction of monumental tombs grew out of earlier Yayoi burial traditions, represented by the large mound at Tatetsuki in Okayama (Kondo 1977), or the huge tomb associated with the large settlement of Yoshinogari in Kyushu (Barnes and Hudson 1991). But the construction of tombs in the Kofun period was implicated in the formulation of a new religious tradition involving new cult practices adopted from the East Asian continent and the influence of Daoist beliefs. Within the domestic context, ritual spaces became increasingly formalized within distinct elite residential compounds. Liminal areas, including offshore islands, perhaps most notably Okinoshima (Matsumae 1993), and mountains, such as Mount Miwa in Nara Prefecture, became the foci of cult activities involving (p. 465) the deposition of a range of ritual material culture. These developments reflect new cosmological beliefs expressing how the newly emergent paramount rulers saw their place in the world and beyond. The final resting places of the deceased elite were protected by terracotta tomb guardians, set up around the flanks of the great tombs (Maison 2001). Although the earliest Japanese quasi-historical chronicles, the *Kojiki* (Philippi 1977) and the *Nihongi*, also known as the *Nihon Shoki* (Aston 1972), were only written down in the eighth century and were undoubtedly coloured by the viewpoint of the ruling lineage whose rule they sought to legitimate, they provide important evidence for the nature of belief and cult activity during the period of the tombs and during this time, ritual authority accrued to the rulers themselves.

Recent scholarship on the Early Kofun period has emphasized its ritual nature. Gina Barnes reflects a contemporary Japanese view that this period saw the emergence of a central authority in the archipelago which brought together the various regional groupings through 'a new religious framework which adopted Chinese conceptions' (2007: 179). These Chinese conceptions were, according to Barnes, likely to have included the cult of the Queen Mother of the West, while elements such as the

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worship of females with divine powers, marriage with gods, and associations with mountains, materialized through ritual paraphernalia including staffs made of jade and bronze mirrors with 'beast-deity' patterns, all creating strong links to political authority. The location of Makimuku in Nara Prefecture was closely involved with this process of the emergence of centralized political authority, and focused upon one of the most distinctive landscape features in the vicinity, Mount Miwa. Gina Barnes and Edward Kidder have both made recent compelling arguments for the significance of the Miwa Court. Barnes has proposed that this court was based on the concept of 'godly authority' (*shinken*) which expresses the 'charisma' and religious 'attractiveness' of the Miwa cult figures. Barnes argues that 'the authority of Miwa was established on the basis of deity-beast mirror procurement and on the creation of a new religious cult to respect Himiko (= Princess Yamato) as the supplier of the mirrors and to worship her husband Oho-mono-nushi-no-kami as the god who oversaw these wonderful "things"' (2007: 183). And this authority in turn was 'constantly exercised' by recreating a set of values —'respect, moral standing, affection, wealth and enlightenment'—'in the performance of rituals and the use of material objects [such as beast-deity mirrors and jade staffs] to mystify central power. This materialisation of the ideology served to both reinforce and extend Miwa authority and become a form of "governance"' (ibid.: 185).

There is still debate about the nature of the social formations of the Kofun period, which witnessed the construction of some of the largest monuments of the ancient world, the great mounded tombs, including that designated as the final resting place of the fifth-century ruler Nintoku. Supplementing the archaeological record are the accounts of this period written down in the early eighth century, the *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*, full of evocative detail about the events and rulers of the centuries around the arrival of a new foreign religion, Buddhism, introduced from the Korean peninsula in the middle of the sixth century. At about the same time as the King of Paekche on the south-western peninsula was despatching sutras and Buddha statues to his counterpart in central Honshu, a massive volcanic eruption of Mount Haruna in eastern Honshu buried an entire Kofun-period landscape, preserving for archaeology the layout of an elite residential compound at Mitsudera in modern-day Gunma Prefecture, the investigation of which in the 1980s provided a hitherto unparalleled glimpse into domestic ritual practices of the higher echelons of regional society at the time (Ishino 1992).

(p. 466) By the end of the period of tomb-building, a Chinese-style cosmology had been adopted by Japanese elites at least, represented by the explicit Chinese iconography of the Takamatsuzuka tomb, whose discovery caused a sensation in 1973, and problems of conservation continue to be of national interest today (Kidder 1972; Bunkacho 2008). Takamatsuzuka is located in the Asuka region in the south of the Nara Prefecture, where traces of many of the earliest Buddhist temples are also to be found. The tomb mound, some 16 m in diameter and 5 m high, contained a stone burial chamber decorated with frescos derived from Korean and ultimately Chinese models: brightly adorned courtiers and the four principal cosmological beasts, the Azure Dragon, the Black Tortoise, the White Tiger and the Vermilion Bird, all beneath a map of the stars depicted on the ceiling. This was the tomb of a high-ranking nobleman or perhaps a member of the royal family,

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and encapsulates the arrival of a new religious sensibility in the centre of power in the archipelago, just prior to the abandonment of monumental tomb-building in favour of the Buddhist cremation rites.

The spread of Buddhism accompanied the increasing hegemony of the Yamato court across large swathes of the Japanese archipelago. Regional administrative centres were established, each with a standard-format Buddhist temple. Over the coming centuries, Buddhism and the traditional Japanese ritual practices coexisted through a kind of ecumenical syncretism, which was only seriously challenged in the nineteenth century with the promulgation of the new modern nation state of Japan under the banner of a freshly reinvigorated nationalist ideology which rejected the 'foreign' tenets of Buddhism, and fostered a new, and ultimately pathological, ideology, that of State Shinto (Breen and Teeuwen 2000).

6 Conclusions

The archaeology of religion is undergoing a renaissance (Insoll 2004; Renfrew and Morley 2007; Barrowclough and Malone 2007). Many of the elements of the archaeology of religion and ritual in early Japan appear to have been identified at the dawn of anthropological interest, notably Edward Tylor's influential *Primitive Culture* of 1871, which presented examples of animism, shamanism, fertility cults, and the nature of religious authority. But just as anthropology has moved on from regarding such religious manifestations as resulting from 'primitive' epistemologies, so are studies of religion and ritual in the early Japanese archipelago moving on from looking for the origins of 'Shinto'. Tim Ingold (2006) has recently written of animism (the imputation of life to inert objects) as a relational ontology, just as Bird-David (1999) has described it as a 'relational epistemology' (2002: 72): it is 'a condition of being alive to the world, characterized by a heightened sensitivity and responsiveness, in perception and actions, to an environment that is always in flux, never the same from one moment to the next' (Ingold 2006: 10). Life in an animistic universe, with relationships with the spirit world being mediated by shamans, is a theme which runs throughout interpretations of ritual and religion in the Japanese archipelago prior to the appearance of Buddhism. The case studies presented above, however, indicate that the nature of the spirit worlds depended on differing sets of relational ontologies, each of which had their own internal cohesion, worked out and expressed through place-specific rituals and rituals marking various stages of personhood—from birth to death. (p. 467)

Suggested Reading

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A good starting point is a special issue of the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* (Vol. 19 Nos. 2-3) on archaeological approaches to ritual and religion in Japan (1992), edited by Mark Hudson and Simon Kaner. Edward Kidder's volume on Himiko (Kidder 2007) provides an excellent account of Yayoi- and Kofun-period archaeology, relating many of the key archaeological discoveries and themes, to the earliest Japanese and Chinese written sources that relate back to Japanese pre- and protohistory, in particular regarding cult and belief. Koji Mizoguchi's (2002) volume presents the archaeology of the Japanese archipelago from the Palaeolithic to Kofun periods with a very interesting theoretical perspective.

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