

About the authors

Carmen Săpunaru Tămaș, the editor of the series, is a Romanian anthropologist, currently the coordinator of the Japanese language and culture program at the University of Hyogo. After obtaining her PhD from Osaka University in 2009, she has been teaching Japanese mythology and anthropology at Osaka University, Kobe University, and Doshisha University. Her most recent publications include: “Ritual Practices and Daily Rituals. Glimpses into the World of Matsuri” (Pro Universitaria 2018), “Beliefs, Ritual Practices and Celebrations in Kansai” (Pro Universitaria 2019, 2022), “Forms of the Body in Contemporary Japanese Society, Literature, and Culture” (edited with Irina Holca, Lexington Books 2020), “Epidemics and Ritual Practices in Japan” (edited with Kathryn M. Tanaka, Pro Universitaria 2022).

Eyal Ben-Ari is a former professor of sociology and anthropology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and currently Senior Fellow in the Jerusalem Institute for Security and Strategy. He has carried out work in Israel, Japan, Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong. His academic career spans more than forty years but during the past two decades he has focused on issues related to the armed forces: comparative studies on conscription and reserves systems, managing diversity in the military, temporary ad-hoc units created for operations, special forces and the way social changes have influenced how military forces use their destructive power. He has published about twenty-five authored and edited books mostly about the armed forces but also about early childhood education and white-collar communities in Japan, the social contexts of creativity, or the spread of Japanese popular culture around the world.

Yosri Razgui is a third-year Ph.D. student in Cultural Studies at the University of Kobe (Japan) as a recipient of a MEXT research scholarship from the Japanese government. He has a bachelor's degree in Japanese language and culture and a master's degree in Cultural Anthropology, both from the Ca'Foscari University of Venice (Italy). His current research focuses on the transnational features of Japanese professional football and the cultural readaptation of football-related practices. His other research interests are globalisation patterns, and transnational communities and identities. Part of his current work has been published in an Italian edited book on anthropological research about sports audience (*Il pubblico dello sport*, 2020) and in the Japanese sports studies review "Gendai Supōtsu Hyōron" (2020). Recently, his research has also shifted towards topics related to capitalism in contemporaneity, with particular interest in how the current dominant economic system is affecting human culture and its ritual patterns.

Kathryn M. Tanaka is a Japanese literary scholar who works on the intersections of medicine and literature. She is an associate professor at the University of Hyogo where she teaches in the Global Business Department. Her work focuses primarily on Hansen's disease and modern Japanese literature, in particular a genre of writing that became popular in the 1930s and was known as Hansen's disease literature. She has published several translations of works by one of the best-known writers of this genre, Hōjō Tamio (1914-1937) in *The Asia-Pacific Journal* (2015) and *The Annals of Dimitrie Cantemir Christian University*, Volume XXI, No 1 (2021). Her work primarily focuses on the minority experience of Hansen's disease within the Japanese empire, as she has taken up writing by children (2016), depictions of women and the experience of Hansen's disease (2016, 2019), and has a forthcoming article on patient writing in Taiwan (2022). In addition to her work on Hansen's disease, she has also researched Amabie and medical humanities in the COVID-19 pandemic (2021). She is currently completing a book manuscript on gender and Hansen's disease in Japan, while continuing to explore Amabie, medical humanities, and fictional accounts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Introduction

During a short-term research program organized by Kôgakkan University, Professor Masato Sano talked about a “mistaken” ritual: people throwing money on a rock placed within the precincts of Toyouke Jingû Shrine (Geku - the Outer Sanctuary) in Ise. The custom of throwing money and making a wish at places that are seen as sacred is not a new one, but in this particular case the professor wanted to explain that the rock in question was nothing special, just a place marker to indicate where a temporary altar was to be erected during a certain purification ceremony. The practicality of the rock was substituted by the belief that it was a “power spot” after Hiroyuki Ehara, a Japanese spiritualist, visited the place and claimed to have felt “something special” there, an idea that soon became popular with celebrities. Professor Sano emphasized the fact that this is an incorrect assumption- the fact that somebody felt “something special” does not turn a place or an object into a sacred one (his statement).

Or does it? According to the website of Toyouke Jingû (<https://www.isejingu.or.jp/about/geku/shogu.html>), the shrine was founded about 1,500 years ago, after the legendary Emperor Yûryaku (an emperor whose existence is still not clearly confirmed, believed to have reigned from 456 to 479)

had a dream in which the Sun Goddess Amaterasu appeared and instructed him to establish a shrine for the deity Toyouke, who would provide food for her own (bigger) shrine. From a metaphysical perspective, the difference between feeling “something special”/ having a vision and having a dream is negligible, so what then makes Hiroyuki Ehara’s feeling less significant than Emperor Yûryaku’s dream? For a theologian, it is the distinction between something that has occurred in our times, at an identifiable moment, with agents who are not directly connected with the “official” sacred, and definitely not regarded as its messengers, and something that took place in what Mircea Eliade called *illo tempore*, the primordial time of creation when gods established the models for the human thought and behavior. One incident is from our time, and thus profane, the other is from the age of gods, ergo sacred. For regular people, however, this distinction is less relevant. Shinto is a religion based on the indigenous beliefs and practices of ancient Japan, whose foundation is precisely the idea that *kami* (the Shinto deities) exist everywhere in nature, manifesting themselves in trees, rocks, mountains, or waterfalls, hence regarding a certain rock as a “power spot” is nothing if not natural.

Rituals, like language, are living entities: they are born out of a more or less obvious necessity, to respond to a momentary need, and then they slowly evolve in time. As Roy Rappaport explains, rituals are never entirely new, as a “ritual which has never been performed before may seem to those present not so much a ritual as a charade” (*Ritual and Religion*

2010, Cambridge University Press, p. 32). Without the ancient concept of *kami* manifesting all around us combined with the practice of placing a small offering in sacred places and making a wish, the “mistaken” ritual would have never been born. Its appearance is only one more example of the complex nature of ritual, as well as its necessity in contemporary society.

Researchers have repeatedly shown that ritual is difficult to define not because it is difficult to comprehend, but because it has so many facets and perspectives. As Catherine Bell put it, “to anyone interested in ritual in general, it becomes quickly evident that there is no clear and widely shared explanation of what constitutes ritual or how to understand it. There are only various theories, opinions, or customary notions, all of which reflect the time and place in which they are formulated.” (*Ritual*. Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition) The purpose of this book (the third in the series) is not to provide an entirely new definition of ritual, but to offer examples based on Japanese culture that might explain and clarify the mechanisms of ritual behavior in contemporary Japanese society.

The focus of the series is Kansai, however, the present volume begins with a paper which is not limited to certain area of Japan. Eyal Ben-Ari’s paper is a comparative study of Japan and Israel, but his theoretical framework and research results can be universally applied. Benjamin Franklin mentioned the inevitability of death and taxes; expanding upon that, we can refer to the ubiquity of armed forces and the death that is inevitably associated with them. Ben-Ari defines the concept of a “good death” in the military (an ideal “enacting a symbolic