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Tama Belief and Practice in Ancient Japan

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Recalling, Binding, and Pacifying Spirits of the Dead

Beliefs and practices surrounding the *tama*, the animating spirit that gives life to the physical body, constitute a central symbolic and ritual complex in early Japan. This is particularly apparent in the *Ten Thousand Leaves* (*Man'yōshū*, hereafter *MYS*), the anthology of Japanese poetry that is often cited as the earliest extant work of Japanese literature. It will be recalled that the *Ten Thousand Leaves* contains the lines "I cannot make out the sleeves / she waves in farewell" (*imo ga mode saya nimo miezu*, *MYS* 2:135). Although it is not clear from the translation, this is an obvious reference to the performance of a spirit-beckoning (lit., "spirit shaking," *tama-furi*) ritual. The intention behind the action of the poet's wife is to guarantee his safe return. The belief in the efficacy of this action is related in a general way to the familiar Western custom, now largely attenuated into metaphorical usage, of keeping a candle burning in the window while someone is away. In both cases, the belief is that the action will help the absent person find his or her way home again safely.

There are a large number of references to spirit-beckoning rituals in the extant poetry from early Japan, as well as in prose passages from the three texts. Again in the *Ten Thousand Leaves* (*MYS* 2:132; Levy 1981:99), Kakinomoto Hitomaro (d. ca. 708–715) says in one of the set of poems on parting from his wife:

Iwami no ya	O does my wife
Takatsuno-yama no	see the sleeves I wave
ki no ma yori	from between the trees
waga furu sode	on Takatsuno Mountain
imo mitsuramu ka	in Iwami?

Here again the ritual action of spirit-beckoning is visible. The following are the last lines of *Ten Thousand Leaves* (*MYS* 2:27; Levy 1981: 134–135), a ritual funeral

lament by Hitomaro on, according to the headnote, the death of his wife. A messenger had just brought news of her passing.

iwamu sube	I did not know what to say,
namu sube shira ni	what to do,
oto nomi o	but simply could not listen
kikite ari eneba	and so, perhaps to solace
waga kouru	a single thousandth
chie no hito e mo	of my thousandfold longing,
nagasamuru	I stood at the Karu market
kokoro mo ariya	to where often she had gone
wagimoko ga	and listened,
tomazu idemishi	but could not hear
Karu no ichi ni	the voices of the birds
waga tachikikeba	that cry on Unebi Mountain
tamatasuki	where the maidens
Unebi no yama ni	wear strands of jewels,
naku tori no	and of the ones who passed me
koe mo kiezu	on that road,
tamahoko no	straight as a jade spear,
michi yuku hito mo	not one resembled her.
hitori dani	I could do nothing
niteshi yukaneba	but call my wife's name
sube o nami	and wave my sleeves.
imo ga na yobite	
sode so furitsuru	

Various elements of early Japanese belief and practice are found here. Note the frequent use of homonyms of *tama* here—*tamatasuki* and *tamahoko*—in addition to *tamazusa* earlier. The reference to the crying of birds alludes to the belief that the departing spirit of the dead often assumed the form of a bird. In waving his sleeves, Hitomaro was performing a spirit-beckoning rite to call back his wife's spirit. Unless one understands this, Hitomaro's action of waving his sleeves is meaningless. The early Japanese did not consider death to be a permanent or irreversible state, at least for a short period after an individual had expired. Since death was believed to be a result of the spirit having left the body, various spirit-beckoning-related rituals were performed in an effort to attract the animating spirit back into the body. In this light, even in the twentieth century we can appreciate Hitomaro's action as a desperate attempt to deny the reality of the death of a loved one. Though the specific ritual expression is historically and culturally bound, the informing emotional response to death is recognizably more universal.

The mobility of the spirit was a source of anxiety for the early Japanese, as we have seen. In addition to rituals to recall a departed spirit, they had rituals to bind it (*tama musubu*) and others to restrict or impose boundaries on its movement. The latter practice is alluded to in two elegies (*banka*) found in *Ten Thousand Leaves* (*MYS* 2:151, 154; Levy 1981: 108, 109), from the time of the temporary enshrinement of the corpse of the Emperor Tenji (r. 661–671):

(151)

kakaramu no	If I had known
kokoro shiriseba	it would come to this,
ōmi-fune	I would have tied signs of interdiction
hateshi tomari ni	around the harbor
shimeyu wa mashi o	where the imperial craft did berth.

(154)

Sasanami no	For whom does the guardian
oyamamori wa	of Sasanami's imperial mountains
taga tame ka	post his signs of interdiction,
yama ni shimeyuu	now that you, my Lord,
kimi mo aranaku ni	are no longer?

Here, following the death of Tenji, the imperial consorts retrospectively lament the fact that when he had fallen ill they had not had rituals performed that might have kept his life spirit from leaving his body and passing into the mountains, the realm of the dead.

If the conditions of death were not deemed proper, the spirit leaving the body could be in a state of aggravation that required pacification. The recitation of poems to pacify certain spirits, a major type of ritual poetry in early Japan, is found in different forms throughout the Japanese religious tradition. Although most of the poems collected in the *Ten Thousand Leaves* concern the imperial family or courtiers, there are others that deal with anonymous figures. Here is a good example of this type of poem (MYS 2:22; Levy 1981: 141–143):

Sanuki no Samine no shima ni, ishi no naka ni minakareru hito o mite, Kakinomoto Asomi no Hitomaro no tsukuru uta isshu narabe ni tanka	**Poem by Kakinomoto Hitomaro upon Seeing a Dead Man Lying among the Rocks on the Island of Samine in Sanuki, with Tanka**
tamamo yoshi	The land of Sanuki,
Sanuki no kuni wa	fine in sleek seaweed:
kuni kara ka	is it for the beauty of the land
miredomo akanu	that we do not tire
kamu kara ka	to gaze upon it?
kokoda tōtoki	Is it for its divinity
ametsuchi	that we deem it most noble?
hi tsuki to tomo ni	Eternally flourishing,
tariyukamu	with the heavens
kami no mi omo to	and the earth,
tsugite kuru	with the sun
Naka no minato yu	and the moon,
funa ukete	the very face of a god—
waga kogi kureba	so it has come down
toki tsu kaze	through the ages.
kumo i ni fuku ni	
oki mireba	Casting off
toi nami tachi	from Naka harbor,

he mireba	we came rowing.
shiranami sawaku	Then tide winds
isana tori	blew through the clouds;
umi o kashikomi	on the offing
yuku funa no	we saw the rustled waves,
kajihiki orite	on the strand
ochikochi no	we saw the roaring crests.
shima wa ōke do	Fearing the whale-hunted seas,
mei kuwashi	our ship plunged through—
Samine no shima no	we bent those oars!
ariso mo ni	Many were the islands
iorite mireba	near and far,
nami no to no	but we beached on Samine—
shigeki hamabe o	beautiful its name—
shikitae no	and built a shelter
makura ni nashite	on the rugged shore.
ara doko ni	
koro fusu kimi ga	Looking around,
ie shiraba	we saw you
yukite mo tsugemu	lying there
tsuma shiraba	on a jagged bed of stones,
ki mo towamashi o	the beach
tamahoko no	for your finely woven pillow,
michi dani shirazu	by the breakers' roar.
oboboshiku	If I knew your home,
machi ka kōramu	I would go and tell them.
washiki tsumara wa	If your wife knew,
	she would come and seek you out.
	But she does not even know the road
	straight as a jade spear.
	Does she not wait for you,
	worrying and longing,
	your beloved wife?
hanka nishu	[Two envoys]
tsuma mo araba	If your wife were here,
tsumite tagemashi	she would gather and feed you
Sami no yamano no	the starwort that grows
e no uwagi	on the Sami hillsides,
tōgi ni kerazu ya	but is its season not past?
okitsu nami	Making a finely woven pillow
kiyoru ariso o	of the rocky shore
shikitae no	where waves from the offing
makura to makite	draw near,
naseru kimi kamo	you, who sleep there!

The poet opens by praising the geographical place in terms reminiscent of the *kunimi* poems discussed earlier. This praise is not accidental, for the poem participates in the same symbolic and ritual complex. The headnote provides the purported occasion of the poem's genesis, yet the long first section does not introduce any human figures. Rather, it is devoted exclusively to praise of the land, which it declares beautiful and divine (*miredomo akanu kamu kara ka*, etc.). The identity of the drowning victim is unclear, as even Hitomaro does not know his name or hometown. Why, then, does Hitomaro use the long form (*chōka*) for this banka? Most scholars agree that such poems must have been part of a ritual performed for the pacification of the spirit of the accident victim, whose fate had denied him the normal funeral rites. Itō Haku, for example, sees this chōka and the envoys as a product of Hitomaro's participation in the traditional belief and ritual complex surrounding travel and of his service in the imperial court. Here Hitomaro seeks to pacify both the spirit of the land, through stylized praise, and the spirit of the dead, through recalling the love of the dead man's wife and suggesting that if only she knew where the corpse was, she would dutifully lament at his grave site.

The poem, however, is even more complex, for if the chōka is read carefully, one can see that Hitomaro also identifies himself with the drowning victim; he, too, is on a dangerous journey over the same seas that claimed this man's life. The effect of this rhetorical identification is once again to focus, although in a deflected or oblique manner, on the danger Hitomaro and his companions face in undertaking a journey ordered by a member of the imperial family. Ostensibly a poem on an anonymous drowning victim, Hitomaro takes the opportunity to turn it into another variety of a "boastful complaint" as he rehearses the horrors of the storm that forced his ship to beach on Samine. The poem, then, is quite complex in intention and in address, for it is directed in part to the kami of the place, praising the site's beauty and offering thanks for the party having found refuge there; in part to the spirit of the drowning victim; and in part to the assembled traveling companions of Hitomaro and ultimately to his patron in the imperial family. This fact suggests that Hitomaro was himself enmeshed in the rationality informing court society. In the middle section of the chōka he is not so much performing a ritual of pacification of the spirit of the dead man as he is rhetorically positioning himself within the ranks of court functionaries. This internal linkage of the poet's own situation with that of the drowning victim was not lost on the compilers of the *Ten Thousand Leaves*, for the very next poem in the anthology, 2:223, is reputed to be Hitomaro's lament on his own impending death far from his wife and home.

Kakinomoto Asomi no Hitomaro, Iwami no kuni ni arite mimakaramu to suru toki, mizukara itamite tsukuru uta isshu	**Poem by Kakinomoto Hitomaro in His Own Sorrow as He Was about to Die in the Land of Iwami**
Kamo yama no	Not knowing
iwa neshi makeru	I am sleeping with the rocks
ware o kamo	on Mount Kamo for a pillow,

shira ni to imo ga	is my wife waiting,
machi tsutsu aramu	waiting for me?

Ten Thousand Leaves 3:426–437 are all similar in theme, concerning both men and women whose corpses had been discovered, and all are categorized as banka. According to the headnotes, the corpses of the women in 428 and 429–430 were apparently cremated, indicating that this Buddhist practice was not unknown in Japan in Hitomaro's lifetime.

Two Types of Imperial Funeral Laments

The discernible differences in rhetorical content and effect in *banka* are a function of the respective positions of the deceased in the line of succession. For those who occupied critical positions in the court hierarchy, banka tend to be much more political and mythological, in an effort to legitimate the succession and the newly reconstituted court hierarchy. On the other hand, for individuals who were neither serious contenders in the succession nor pivotal figures in its determination, banka tend to rehearse the sense of loss felt by a surviving spouse. Such banka are much closer to the type of laments performed for individuals outside the imperial family.

Poem 2:199–202 is an example of the banka concerned with the imperial succession, whereas 2:196–198 (Levy 1981: 124–126, adapted) is an example of the second type of imperial banka. The latter reads:

Asuka no himemiko Kinoe no araki no miya no toki, Kakinomoto Asomi no Hito maro no tsukuru uta isshu narabe ni tanka	**Poem by Kakinomoto Hitomaro during the Period of the Temporary Enshrinement Palace of Princess Asuka, with Tanka**
tobu tori no	Crossing a bridge of stone
Asuka no kawa no	(one source says "stepping stones")
kamitsu se ni	over the upper shallows
iwahashi watashi	of the Asuka River,
(hitotsu ni iu, iwanami)	where the birds fly,
shimotsu se ni	crossing a plank bridge
uchihashi watasu	over the lower shallows.
iwahashi ni	Even when the *tamamo* [water plants]
(hitotsu ni iu, iwa nami ni)	trailing from
oinabikeru	the bridge of stone
tamamo mo zo	(one source says "stepping stones")
tayureba ouru	breaks, it grows;
uchihashi ni	even when the river weeds
oi o oreru	spreading
kawamo mo zo	beneath the plank bridge
karureba hayuru	withers, it sprouts again.
nani shi kamo	Why, then,

wago ōkimi no	do you, our Princess,
tataseba	forget
tamamo no mokoro	the morning palace
koyaseba	of our splendid Lord
kawatamo no gotoku	who, when you rose,
nabikaishi	yielded to you
yoroshiki kimi ga	like the *tamamo*,
asamiya o	who, when you lay down,
wasuretamau ya	stretched out
yuiniya o	like the river weeds?
somukitamau ya	And turn away from
utsusomi to	the evening palace?
omoishi toki	I recall the time
harube wa	you were in this world,
hana orikazashi	how in spring
aki tateba	you broke off and decorated
momijiba kazashi	yourself with blossoms,
shikitae no	and when autumn came
sode tazusawari	decorated yourself
kagami nasu	with colored leaves,
miredomo akazu	how your hempen sleeves
mochitsuki no	crossed.
iya mezurashimi	Like a mirror
omōshishi	you never tired of gazing
kimi to tokidoki	on the Lord,
idemashite	who you thought
asobitamaishi	as precious as
mi ke mukau	the full moon.
Kinoe no miya o	Sometimes with the Lord
toko miya to	you would go out
sadametamaite	on formal excursions
ajisawau	to the palace at Kinoe,
megoto mo taenu	where the sacred food trays
shikare kamo	face each other.
(hitotsu ni iu, soko oshimo)	But now that you have established
aya ni kanashimi	that palace for all eternity,
nuetori no	gone are the eyes that met him,
katakoi tsuma	your words he heard.
(hitotsu ni iu, shitsutsu)	Is that why our Lord,
asatori no	(one source says "in deep regret")
(hitotsu ni iu, asakiri no)	choked with sorrow,
kayowasu kimi ga	moaning his unrequited love
natsukusa no	like the tiger thrush,
omoishinaete	goes back and forth,
yūtsutsu no	like the morning birds,
kayuki kakuyuki	(one source says "the morning mist")
ōbune no	to attend you?
tayutau mireba	When we see him

nagasamuru	wilting like the summer grass,
kokoro mo aranu	staggering
soko yue ni	like an evening star,
semu sube shireya	reeling
oto nomi mo	like a great ship,
na nomi mo taezu	with a heart that cannot be consoled,
ametsuchi no	we know not what to do.
iya tōnagaku	Thus, at least let us remember
shinoiyukamu	if only the sound,
mi-na ni kakaseru	if only the name,
Asuka-gawa	forever far and long
yorozuyo made ni	as heaven and earth.
hashikiyashi	Let us remember
wago ōkimi no	for ten thousand years
katami ka koko o	the Asuka River
	that bears her precious name—
	this the *katami* of our beloved Princess!

tanka nishu	Two Tanka
Asuka gawa	If they had piled branches
shigaramiwatashi	across the Asuka River
seka maseba	to stop its course,
nagaruru mizu mo	even the streaming waters
nodo ni ka aramashi	would have become quiet.
(hitotsu ni iu, mizu no	(one source says "would have
yodo ni ka aramashi)	become a pool")
Asuka-gawa	Asuka River!
ashita dani	Even tomorrow alone
(hitotsu ni iu, sae) mimu	(one source says "if only")
to omoeyamo (hitotsu ni iu, omoe kamo)	I want to see you!
wago ōkimi no	(one source says "hope to")
mi-na wasuresenu	I cannot forget
(hitotsu ni iu, mi-na	the precious name of my Princess.
Wasuraenu)	(one source says "I will not
	forget the precious name")

This lament was probably presented by Hitomaro as a surrogate for the husband of Princess Asuka. Princess Asuka, a daughter of the Emperor Tenji and Tachibana no Iratsume, died on 4/4/700. The lament comes out of the period of temporary interment of the corpse in the *mogari no miya*. The number of variants mentioned in the interlinear notes suggest that this lament may have been performed numerous times, either at this temporary enshrinement palace or, quite possibly, for others who had died at other times. If the early Japanese practice was similar to other cultures where oral laments are performed, a number of reciters or singers probably offered the same basic lament.

The chōka opens by recounting the journey to the site of the princess's *katami*,

a site that is especially associated with the deceased and where it was believed to be especially easy to make contact with the spirit of the deceased. Misaki Hisashi has pointed out that the term *uchihashi*, here rendered as "a plank bridge," is found in five other *Man'yōshū* verses (4:528, 7:1193, 1:256 and 262, and 17:399), four of which refer to the meeting of lovers. Thus, the basic theme of the banka, the love of the bereaved prince and the deceased Princess Asuka, is heightened by even the nouns used. The poet then draws a pointed contrast between two types of water plants that seem to die yet return to life and the death of Princess Asuka. Then in accusatory form the deceased is reprimanded: "Why, then, / do you, our Princess / forget / the morning palace / of our splendid Lord?" The tone may strike the modern reader as irreverent, but oral laments often include this type of recrimination (Alexiou 1974: 46, 106–107).

A prose endnote appended to 2:202, an envoy to a banka for Prince Takechi, clearly indicates that the early Japanese themselves recognized this emotional aspect of the grieving process in the performance of oral laments. The widowed princess presents offerings at the shrine for her husband but also voices her bitterness at his death. The endnote says: "The *Forest of Classified Verse* [*Ruiju karin*] says the above poem is 'by Princess Hinokuma in her resentment against the Nakisawa Shrine.'" The speaker, here said to be Hitomaro, is a surrogate for the bereaved. Thus, we must not be misled into assuming that the first-person "I" in such verses refers to the poet and indicates his personal emotional responses; rather, such an "I" often indicates the surviving spouse and at times even the deceased.

The chōka then goes on to recall the past and the joyous times the princess and her husband had. Aoki Takako has argued that banka on a deceased spouse often recall an idyllic past. Although not mythical per se, it is described in such a way that the "ravages of time" do not appear. The idyllic love of the prince and princess, which would seem to have lasted forever, is recalled in order to bring out in stark contrast the emotional desolation the princess's death has caused. The tone is still accusatory in that in dying, Princess Asuka is said to have turned her back on her faithful and loving husband. The responsibility for the suffering he is experiencing, as well as the sense of disorientation everyone in the court feels, is laid squarely at the princess's feet. But then the lament shifts to note the fact that the Asuka River shares the princess's name and flows by the palace at Kinoe where the couple used to travel together. Thus, this place has become her *katami*. In addition to expressing regret, the envoys (termed *tanka*, although they function here and are normally referred to as *hanka*) seem to allude to ritual efforts to pacify the spirit of the deceased (*tama shizume*) and to call it back. If only the prince had done something differently, perhaps time, like the flow of the river, could have been stopped and the princess's *tama*, like the once surging water, could have become calm and settled. Note, though, that the poem as a whole focuses not only on the deceased but also on the living. Part of the professional poet's duty in such cases seems to have been to declare formally the undying love of the surviving spouse for the deceased.

Nowhere in the entire poem, though, is there ever any mention of other con-

temporary historical events. The focus is entirely on the imperial couple and their love. The imperial succession and the survivor's relative status in the court hierarchy find no mention. In this, 2:196–198 is similar to another banka, 2:194–195, performed by Hitomaro for Princess Hatsusebe and Prince Osakabe. This poem is in sharp contrast, however, to 2:199–202, a banka for Prince Takechi, a son of the Emperor Temmu. It is the longest sequence in the *Man'yōshū* and has been stirringly rendered by Levy (Levy 1981: 127–131; 1984: 137–146). It is not necessary to cite the entire sequence here. Instead, I will merely draw out a few of the elements that distinguish this type of "political" public banka from what we have just seen.

Prince Takechi was a son of Temmu and led his father's troops in the Jinshin War in 672 in which Temmu (then Prince Ōama) gained the throne. He was married to a daughter of the Emperor Tenji, Princess Minabe. Following the death of the Emperor Temmu in 686, the Crown Prince Kusakabe was to have succeeded to the throne, but he died on 4/13/689 and Temmu's widowed empress acceded as the Empress Jitō. There is some evidence to suggest that at this point Takechi became the heir apparent. An entry in the *Chronicles* for 7/5/69 says, "The Imperial Prince Takechi was made Prime Minister" (Aston 1956: 2:398) This entry indicates that Takechi would have been in control of much of the daily administration of the government. He died, however, on 7/1/696 at the age of forty-two or forty-three. The *Chronicles* entry recording his death is, like that for Kusakabe's death, very brief: "His Highness the Later Imperial Prince died" (Aston 1956: 2:420). The reference to Takechi as *nochi no miko no mikoto*, the Later Imperial Prince, suggests that he succeeded Kusakabe as the heir apparent. Whatever the case may have been, it is clear that he was a major figure in the court and that his death would have had a great impact on the future succession. As it turned out, his demise made much easier the abdication of Jitō in favor of her grandson, Prince Karu (the Emperor Mommu), almost a year later.

With this brief background, it is easier to understand why the public performative banka at Takechi's temporary enshrinement palace would center on the imperial succession. The poem 2:199 (Levy 1981:127) evokes recent history in mythological terms. First, the death of the Emperor Temmu is recorded in mythic terms:

Asuka no	Our Lord,
Makami no hara ni	who, while we trembled,
hisakata no	fixed the far and heavenly
amatsu mi kado o	halls of his shrine
kashikoku mo	on the fields of Makami in Asuka
sadametamaite	and, godlike, has secluded himself
kamusabu to	in the rocks there.
iwagakurimasu	

Dying is itself transformed into the intentional act of a divinity (*kamusabu to iwagakarimasu*)—an act that parallels Amaterasu's secluding herself in the "heavenly rock grotto." The chōka then says that the emperor "went down / as from heaven / to the provinces," again recalling the descent of the grandson of Amaterasu, Ninigi no mikoto, from the High Heavens to the earth. Then, like Amaterasu, the banka says he "gave the task to his son, he being an imperial prince [*miko nagara*] to pacify the raging rebels, / and subdue the land" (Levy 1981: 127–128). This section is followed by a long passage in which the swirl and terror of battle are conjured up (Levy 1981:128–129). Once again, though, the historical events are remembered and recounted in mythic terms: the victory of Temmu's troops is described as a result of divine assistance.

yuku tori no	As they struggled
arasou hashi ni	like zooming birds,
Watarai no	the divine wind
itsuki no miya yu	from the Shrine of our offerings
kamukaze ni	at Ise in Watarai
matowashi	blew confusion upon them,
amakumo o	hiding the very light of day
hi no me mo misezu	as clouds blanketed the heavens
tokoyami ni	in eternal darkness
ōitamaite	

This rhetorical device gives the reign of the Emperor Temmu and that of his descendants legitimacy through appeal to the intervention of the kami in human history. The chōka then alters its focus and moves to Prince Takechi. It mentions that Takechi was positioned to succeed and establish his own rule when he passed away. It also describes an interesting ritual mourning practice in the court:

Haniyasu no	On the fields
mi kado no hara ni	before the Haniyasu Palace Gate
akane sasu	we crawl and stumble like the deer
hi no kotogoto	as long as the sun
shishi ji mono	still streams its crimson,
ihaifushitsutsu	and when pitch-black night descends
nubatama no	we crawl around like quail,
yube ni nareba	turning to look up at the great hall [*ōtono*].
ōtono o	
furisakemitsutsu	
uzura nasu	
ihaimotōri	

The focus of the chōka is now on the desolation and disorientation the prince's death has occasioned. This focus is similar to what we saw in the banka for Princess Asuka, and indeed it will be found in almost all such laments. Then the emphasis and focus shift to the site of the *mogari no miya*. Once again the frustrated expectations of the living are rehearsed, and the deceased is assured that he will never be forgotten by the living. In sharp contrast to the lament for Princess Asuka, there is no mention of the love his wives and consorts had for Takechi. Instead, his career is rhetorically situated in a larger mythistory.

To appreciate this lament, we must imagine the poem recited in the presence of a large assembly of members of the court who occupied critical positions in the hierarchy, as Takechi did. The public banka on the occasion of Takechi's temporary enshrinement were used to legitimate Temmu's violent assumption of power in the Jinshin War by rhetorically transforming the events surrounding it into a mythistory. In this way, in their public performative roles, poets like Hitomaro helped to give legitimacy to Temmu's successors as well.

Several different forms of ritual poetry from the imperial court have been introduced here. Oral performative poetry was an important expression of the ceremonial nature of the court, a daily spectacle of sight and sound. It was also a resource that could be used in performance by different individuals for different purposes; it served still others when some *uta* were committed to writing and recontextualized. Most important, this poetry gained its coherence and meaning in a dynamic world of political ceremony and intrigue, designed to create and demonstrate power and prestige. Rather than merely reflecting a timeless or static collective ideal, it served as a means of articulating responses to incongruities experienced by the community and of pressing individual and factional claims.

Further Reading

Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974); W. G. Aston, Nihongi: *Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to* A.D. *697* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956 [tr. 1896]); Robert H. Brower and Earl Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961); Edwin A. Cranston, "The Ramifying Vein: An Impression of Leaves—A Review of Levy's Translation of the *Man'yōshū*," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 9 (Winter 1983): 120; Gary L. Ebersole, "The Buddhist Ritual Use of Linked Poetry in Medieval Japan," *The Eastern Buddhist* n.s. 16, 2 (Autumn 1983); Gary L. Ebersole, *Ritual Poetry and the Politics of Death in Early Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), esp. pp. 54–78, on which this article is based; Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969), esp. "The 'God Who Binds' and the Symbolism of Knots," pp. 92–124; Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*, tr. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983); J. H. Kamstra, *Encounter or Syncretism: The Initial Growth of Japanese Buddhism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967); Ian Hideo Levy, tr., *The Ten Thousand Leaves*, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); Ian Hideo Levy, *Hitomaro and the Birth of Japanese Lyricism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Donald L. Philippi, *This Wine of Peace, This Wine of Laughter* (New York: Mushinsho Books, Grossman Publishers, 1968).

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Japan's First Shingon Ceremony

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The title of this selection could be misleading since there are various meanings of the word *shingon*. Since it literally means "true word(s)" and is a common translation for the Sanskrit *mantra*, a "shingon ceremony" could refer to any of a wide variety of Buddhist rituals that took place in Japan from the eighth century on that employed the recitation of the potent formulae known also as *dharani*. Or, since it also designates the name of the Buddhist school founded by Kūkai (774–835) around 816 some ten years after he returned from a two-year stay in China, the title could denote the first official ceremony conducted under the auspices of this representative organization of Esoteric Buddhism in Japan. In actuality, the title draws our attention to something in between these two possible interpretations: to the first recorded ceremony performed by Kūkai after his return from China prior to his efforts to establish a recognized school. Kūkai has become such a celebrated cultural hero in Japan that it may be hard for some to imagine that there was ever a time when he was not famous, but in fact he was not a very visible public figure until several years after he came back in 806, from studying Esoteric Buddhism in the T'ang capital of Ch'ang-an. He left China in the eighth month of 806, and it is thought that he arrived on the southern island of Kyushu by the tenth month. The present text, *Votive Text on the Occasion of a Memorial Ceremony for the Departed Mother of Lieutenant Governor Tanaka of Dazaifu* (*Ten no shōni ga sembi no kisai o makuru ga tame no gammon*), was written in Kyushu in the second month of the following year and is the earliest record we have of Kūkai's activities after his travels abroad. Although traditional accounts have him leaving Kyushu within a year to reside in the capital area near Nara and Kyoto, there are indications that he may have resided in Kyushu for as long as three years before moving to the capital. In either case, his movements in these initial years are not well documented, so the present text offers an important opportunity to glimpse the early activities of the man whose later efforts were to have a profound and lasting impact on Japanese religion and culture.

The text is known in Japanese as a *gammon*, or a "votive document" that records