

# Carrying the Mikoshi: Further Field Notes on the Shrine Festival in Modern Tokyo

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A festival is like a circus that has spilled out over a whole neighborhood; it brings with it the bitter-sweet feeling that no matter where you contrive to be, you are unavoidably missing most of the fun. A festival is a garden of delights, and part of the joy of it is knowing there is just too much joy abroad for any one person to absorb.

But the most conspicuous activity of the festival centers about the excitement of the street procession. For the great mass of people, it is the very heart of the festival. And for the priest, it is the emissary that transports the presence he guards at the sanctuary swiftly through the streets, to gather his people together and bring them to the sanctuary's domain.

As observers try to describe the exuberance of these street processions, the customary line that separates the sociologists from the poets becomes blurred. James Kirkup, for example, says of the festival of *Sanja-sama* (in the Asakusa section of Tokyo): "The festive atmosphere takes most of its vigour and beauty from these parades of chanting youths, packed close together in dense masses of hot, sweating, naked humanity as they support on bare arms and shoulders the great weight of these black-lacquered palanquins with their rich ornamentation. The youths appear to be in a kind of trance of manly effort as they hoarsely chant their rhythmical cry of '*Washoi, washoi, washoi.*'"<sup>1</sup> And R. P. Dore writes: "All through the day relays of young men, well primed with rice wine and all wearing a cotton *yukata* of uniform pattern, their faces made up and a towel tied tightly round their foreheads, carried the heavy gilt

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1. James Kirkup, *Tokyo* (London, 1966), p. 83.

god-cart on their shoulders, displaying their strength and virtuosity as they careened in a heaving rhythmically shouting mass from one side of the road to the other, narrowly missing trams and fences and deriving from their vociferous team action the exhilaration of a rugby scrum or of a bayonet charge"<sup>2</sup>. That is the exterior, the visible source of the excitement of the procession: the "trance of manly effort" of the young men carrying the *mikoshi*, the divine palanquin (the *Jinja Honcho*, the federated association of shrines, prefers that term) or (less elegantly) the "god-cart".

But there is also a less visible, an "interior" reason for excitement, better understood and remembered by the priest: "The essence of the procession . . . is the movement of the *kami* through the parish. This is accompanied by a symbolic transfer of the *kami* from the inner sanctuary to an ornate and gilded sacred palanquin (*mikoshi*), which becomes temporarily the abode of the *kami*".<sup>3</sup> This explanation was offered by a member of the faculty of Kokugakuin University, where young men are trained for the shrine priesthood: central to the procession, he says, and "in fact, the only reason for there being a procession, is the sacred palanquin. . ."<sup>4</sup>. Thanks to the *mikoshi*, the *kami* is able "to pass through the parish and bless the homes of the faithful"<sup>5</sup>.

This "interior" reason for the excitement of the festival procession (this "theology" of the procession, I suppose we might say) is understood by the elders, as well as the priests; a recent traveler writes: "The palanquin advanced, now slowly, now quickly, lunging and swerving to right or left, or turning completely in its tracks, or sometimes spinning like a top. 'It goes where the gods want it to,' an old man explained to me"<sup>6</sup>.

With the coming of autumn, the labyrinthine streets of old Tokyo are noisy with these processions. One simply ventures out onto the streets on a Saturday afternoon or Sunday, and the sound of distant drums and shouting is in the air. When I arrived in Tokyo some years ago (in September, as it happened),

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2. R. P. Dore, *City Life in Japan: A Study of a Tokyo Ward* (Berkeley, 1965), p. 251.

3. Ono Sokyo, *Shinto: The Kami Way* (Rutland and Tokyo, 1962), p. 68.

4. *ibid.*, p. 69.

5. *ibid.*, p. 70.

6. Fosco Maraini, *The Island of the Fisherwomen* (New York, 1962), p. 85.

I had barely found my family a place to live and begun the unpacking, when we heard a rhythmic drumbeat, and went up to the roof to see what was going on. In the street below, a procession appeared, and we quickly went down to join them. There we encountered a long straggling procession of fifty or more small children, the little girls in bright, pretty *yukata*, and the little boys in Western-style short pants and summer shirts. They were pulling on long ropes, drawing a small cart with a large drum on it. On this little wagon were four boys, who took turns beating the drum, as the rest of the children (more girls than boys) pulled the drum-cart along the street, carefully watched by a young policeman in a snappy white cap, a scattering of easy-going local merchants in loose-fitting *happi* coats over equally loose-fitting *zubon-shita* (long white cotton undershorts), and assorted young mothers with babies strapped to their backs. Atop the drum, his majestic wings arched upward as though ready for flight, his broad tail feathers fanned out in splendid display, perched the golden phoenix. He had the grandeur of an eagle, the pomp of a peacock, the bravado of a rooster, and is the delight of Jungians who see him as an archetypal reminder of "the 'phoenix' which we all keep within ourselves, enabling us to live out every moment and to overcome each and every partial death. . . ," a symbol of "the regeneration of universal life"<sup>7</sup>. The street procession, as we shall see, is at one of its levels a celebration of male youth, of young manhood, and the phoenix is an apt mascot for the energetic lads beating the drum. These particular drummer boys employed two rhythmic patterns, one of which was *DON DON chin chin chin* (where *DON* indicates a resounding thump made by striking the drum hard in

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7. J. E. Circlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (New York, 1962), p. 242. See also C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (London, 1959), pp. 375-376. Sigmund Freud, somewhat less complicatedly, suggests that "probably the earliest significance of the phoenix was that of the revived penis after its state of flaccidity..." (*Collected Papers*, vol. V, London 1950: "Acquisition of Power over Fire" 1932, p. 292). The Japanese for phoenix is *hō-ō*. Its mythology came to Japan from China, along with that of the dragon, the *kirin* (the camelopard or fiery horse) and others. As to what its presence on the *mikoshi* means, I found a variety of opinions. One man told me it is an omen of a prosperous year. Another told me he was quite sure it was "the bird that lighted atop the Emperor Jimmu's bow to guide his way in battle. It was a golden bird, and its radiance blinded his enemies, and so they were defeated. That is what we were taught in school, in my day (before the Pacific War)." He was confusing it with the *Yata-garasu* of mythology, which was a crow sent by the sun goddess. Still another man told me: "It is a happy bird, like the stork."

the center, and *chin* indicates a clacking blow that is made by striking the drum at the rim, in both cases with the drum stick; capital letters are used to indicate the louder sound, lower case the quieter). The alternate pattern, which follows, is *DON DON DON chin chin*; so the whole pattern sounds something like this: *DON DON chin chin chin DON DON DON chin chin DON DON chin chin chin DON DON DON*—and so on.

Over the drumbeat we now heard shouts. The drum cart (called *dashi*) simply announces what is to come, it prepares the way for the *mikoshi*. Pulling the *dashi* is primarily the work of the girls, but beating the drum and carrying the *mikoshi* are male privileges. And here they came, fifteen boys all dressed in short checkerboard jackets, carrying a glittering *mikoshi*, and chanting with great gusto: *hai-za HAI-ZA hai-za HAI-ZA*. . . The *mikoshi* (W. G. Aston called it the "carriage" of the God<sup>8</sup>, because it is a means of carrying the *kami* to his parishioners) resembles a very ornate miniature temple, black lacquered and encrusted with golden ornaments and trimmings, some of which hang loose and jingle as the *mikoshi* is jostled about. It is draped with a red silk cord, and surmounted by another, even more majestic phoenix, in the same attitude as the one on the path-clearing drum. This ornate portable temple is mounted on two large beams that extend lengthwise, out beyond the base, and two shorter beams tied or otherwise fixed laterally across the two main beams. The *mikoshi* is thus carried ark-of-the-covenant style, with the boys on the left side calling out "*HAI-ZA!*", jogging to a little dance step, left on *HAI*, right on *ZA*, as the boys on the other side chant the response, "*hai-za!*" This chant is in effect a simple work chant, for the *mikoshi* is heavy, and the work of carting it and hoisting it goes easier if the whole *mikoshi* team can move with a single movement, and with a certain *esprit*. Sometimes (as in this case) the boys are very young and inexperienced, and so are led by a young adult (who often turns out to be the school's track coach) who at times puts his shoulder to the *mikoshi* alongside the others, and at times runs ahead of the *mikoshi*, jogging backwards, to give them direction and encouragement. He keeps his police whistle in his mouth, and toots out the pace, so that with every *HAI-ZA hai-za HAI-ZA* you hear a *tweet tweet* (rest, rest) *tweet tweet*. Other guides will be on hand as well: merchants in *happi* coats, one carrying a pair of saw-horses on which to rest the *mikoshi* from time

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8. W. G. Aston, *Shinto: The Way of the Gods* (London, 1905), p. 222.

to time, policemen in white pith helmets, another schoolteacher keeping up on his bicycle.

The atmosphere about the procession is all informality and congeniality. People are relaxed, enjoying their children's fun and their own, getting in touch again with their own youthful memories, and warmly cordial to neighbors and strangers. At festival time, there are in fact no strangers. As I made my way through the fall festival season that year, I would begin my Friday evening or Saturday morning taking the streetcar at the corner, in any direction, and getting off at the first sign of a neighborhood festival (clusters of girls in their best *kimono*, paper flowers over every garden gate, the sound of a distant drum), usually just a few stops from home. I carried a camera (one doesn't like to be too conspicuous), a small tape recorder, and a roomy camera bag without which my work would have been difficult indeed. As I followed this or that *mikoshi* team or *dashi* procession about, neighborhood residents and shop keepers (the "downtown" people, Tokyo's salt-of-the-earth) would hand me pears, mandarin oranges (*mikan*), box lunches (*obento*) of *sekihan* (festival rice), *O-Inari-san* (the fox's favorite), assorted *sushi*, and an occasional small bottle of *sake*, complete with a plastic cup. I would stuff my pockets, and then the camera bag, munch what I could as I went, but soon I would have to return home to unload, and then set out find my way back, often happening upon the wrong *mikoshi* team, and finding myself at an entirely different festival! Sometimes I was with my family, and we would meet some proud parents along the procession route, who would invite us to their home for green tea and bean-paste sweets. One such introduced himself as a radio announcer, whose four-year-old son had just carried the *mikoshi* (the very smallest one) for the very first time. A prouder father cannot be imagined. He called his son "Mr. Taihe." He said that he himself never visits the neighborhood shrine, and suggested that he was really too sophisticated a man, and too enlightened, to want to have much to do with the shrine faith. But carrying the *mikoshi* was obviously a different matter. His wife refilled our cups, and we discussed the severe tremors of the night before (he called them earthquakes "earth aches," a phrase that still haunts me). Then shouts of "*hai-za!*" greeted our ears, and we were off again, following another procession, and meeting new friends.

This time the *dashi* was preceded by two rather plump schoolboys carrying iron staffs at least as tall as themselves,

with an iron ring at the top, and two other rings interlocking. As the boys walked proudly ahead of the drum-cart, they would bang the iron staff hard against the pavement, causing the iron rings to jangle with a loud metallic clatter, and they would shout "hai-za!" These iron walking-staffs are properly called *shakujô*, and are apparently Indian in origin, where they were used by wandering Buddhist monks to clear the path ahead of them of small insects, in accordance with the doctrines of *ahimsa*, and compassion for all living creatures. I have read that they are sometimes used to mark time in the chanting of Buddhist sutras, and have often seen statues of *Jizô* carrying the *shakujô*. In the shrine processions, it clearly serves two functions: to set the pace, and to rid the path down which the *kami* is to travel of evil influences—in other words to chase off the bad spirits. One friend, when I asked what to call these devices, said "O-harai" (purification), and added: "it is to make way for the *kami*."

The drum cart that followed was unusual, in that the design on the drum consisted of five large black discs painted around the outer circumference, with a bare spot in the middle of the drumskin. Perhaps the discs had at one time been connected together at the center in a pinwheel effect; it was impossible to tell, because the middle surface was completely worn away, from constant use. The traditional *dashi* drum design is the *mitsu-domoe*, which is formed by painting three large black discs at the center of the circle (sometimes just barely touching, but usually not), and then spiraling a tail from each, counter-clockwise, diminishing the breadth as you approach the rim. The effect is a kind of *yin-yang* symbol, but suggesting three elements instead of dualism (a three-cornered election struggle is called *mitsu-domoe* in modern Japan). These designs seem to have a warlike origin, as patterns imprinted on protective shields, in the days of archery and armor and swordfighting<sup>9</sup>. As for the meaning of the three-comma design, I have read that it portrays the interplay between the three elements of air, fire, and water<sup>10</sup>. Another interpretation I have seen is that it is an amuletic charm against the dangers of fire, and in its suggestion of a vortex signifies the fire-quenching powers of swirling

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9. Yamada Taka, "Shinto Symbols," in *Contemporary Religions in Japan*, vol. 7, no. 2 (June 1966), p. 121.

10. William P. Malm, "Edo Festival Music and Pantomime" (mimeographed essay prepared for the Performing Arts Program of the Asia Society, New York, 1971), p. 4.

waters. It is for this reason, the argument goes, that the *mitsu-domoe* is often seen on the roof tiles of ancient wooden temples, residences and shrines, where the threat of destruction by fire is a fearful one<sup>11</sup>. The Japanese surely are a people who are at least subconsciously aware of the force of mountain waters rushing to join the rolling and often turbulent sea, and have shown a special feeling for these water-flow movements in their art. I believe that special ear for the sound of moving water is also evidenced in the simple yet intricate alternation of rhythmic patterns in the processional drum beat—in its regulated irregularity—and even more in certain *gagaku* and *bugaku* rhythms.

After the drum-cart came the *mikoshi*, preceded by a man clacking wood blocks together, in the fashion of those fire-wardens one encounters on quiet streets on January nights, announcing the curfew, the call to extinguish fires in the houses (*covrefeu*) lest they be left untended through the night. He was a neighborhood merchant, active in shrine affairs, helping the *mikoshi* carriers by setting the pace, as they chanted *HAI-ZEI hai-zei HAI-ZEI*. As we went up a steep hill, the chant gradually evolved to *HAI-ZA hai-za*, then *WOI-SEI woi-sei*, then *ROI-SEI roi-sei*. When we reached the top of the long hill, the procession was halted, and the guides sent the drum-cart down one street and the *mikoshi* down another. The drum beat, which had been unsteady and irregular until then, became a firm *DON DON DON chin chin chin chin DON DON DON chin chin chin chin*. The *mikoshi* chant too became vigorous, as the merchant guides would call out *ROI-SEI!* and all the boys carrying the *mikoshi* would respond in union, *roi-sei!* When we came to the home of a wealthy or otherwise influential member of the community who had made a major contribution (of either cash or *sake*) to the shrine for the celebration of the annual festival, the boys heaved the *mikoshi* up over their heads and back, up and back, to loud shouts of *ROI-SEI! ROI-SEI!*, and then rested it on the saw-horses placed at the entry-way to the house, often going in, at the parishioner's invitation, for refreshments. When they came out, they rallied around the sacred ark, and clapped their hands in unison: clap clap clap (rest) clap clap clap (rest) clap clap clap (rest) CLAP—and up went the *mikoshi* in another exuberant round of hoists, and then they were on their way again.

There are of course all sorts of variations on these rhythms. One group we encountered in the Hongo Sanchoe area chanted

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11. Yamada, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

*HUYA-HUYA huya-huya HUYA-HUYA huya-huya* all afternoon, without variation. The basic chant, having four syllables instead of the usual two, made more for a rolling than a bouncing motion, and seemed clumsy for generating the required buoyant breathless excitement. Where this group excelled was in their performance of the *teuchi*, that little hand-clapping ritual in honor of the generous neighbor or shop keeper. Hongo streets are almost nothing but shops, and at almost every shop the elders would call a halt by rapidly banging their wood blocks together. The *mikoshi* was set down on the wooden rests, and all bellowed out a lusty *yo-o-o-o-o-o*, with the best rising inflection of the *Noh* tradition, and clapped equally lustily. Then a few delegates from the group of elder guides approached the shopkeeper and his wife. There was much bowing and cheerful exchange of greetings and pleasantries, as in an English Christmas. A gift was given—either money in an envelope, or a wrapped package—which was placed by the elders *on* the *mikoshi*, at the base (Italian saint's day fashion, a gift for the *kami*). There was another shout of *yo-o-o-o*, and another *teuchi* hand-clap (*teuchi* is the *shitamachi* way of sealing a bargain, or closing a business deal; it also signifies a reconciliation or renewal of social bonds). And off they went, shouting *HUYA-HUYA*, the echoing response coming not from the other side of the *mikoshi*, or between the boys and their guides: here every other boy shouted the opening chant (the first, third, and fifth boys on each side, say), and then the second, fourth and sixth boys gave the response.

I was pondering the rich variety of these chants one afternoon when my seven-year-old daughter came home from a tiring day at the neighborhood school, and plumping herself down in the easy chair exclaimed, "Yei-sa!" The school track team jogged by every afternoon (surely this is one of the commonest sights all over Tokyo) chanting "*Hai za, hai za.*" By spring, a company *apato* had been built next to our home, and we watched a team of *modoki* moving men hoisting a heavy safe up the side of the building, with block and tackle, shouting "*Oi-sa! Oi-sa!*". In Japan, there are many pleasant ways of letting your neighbors know you are exerting yourself to the fullest, and that even sitting down may exhaust all the energy you can muster.

The most imaginative chant variations I ever heard were done by a playful group of parents who had waited at the *o-tabisho* for their children to return from the procession. This *tabisho* is usually a vacated shop or home, which is used for the duration of the festival as a resting place for the *mikoshi* and

as a gathering place for lay shrine and community officials, who often celebrate the end of the festival there, drinking up the huge quantities of *sake* that have been given as gifts to the *kami*, as *o-miki* (communion wine, I suppose we would say), with their evening meal. After the festivities are over, this temporary community center reverts to being just another empty building. As the poem observes:

*Matusri ga sunde*  
*moto no aki-mise*  
The festival being over,  
It was a house-to-let again.<sup>12</sup>

And R. H. Blyth comments: "The empty house (or shop) was used as a temporary shrine and meeting and drinking-place, and was the gayest house in the street. Now it is only a vacant house again, the sliding doors shut. . ."<sup>13</sup>

When the children brought the *mikoshi* back to the *tabisho* (its home away from home during the three days of *o-matsuri*) after a full circuit of the neighborhood, they hoisted it over their heads several times in joyous salute, and then rested it on the saw horses within the *tabisho*, to await its next circuit, with another team of boys. The retiring team was given two fruits each. Sometimes they are given cakes, and sometimes little cardboard tickets that say "Neighborhood Friendship Society" on one side, and "Candy Ticket" or "Cake Ticket" on the other. These can be taken to the neighborhood shops and redeemed for ¥30 worth of merchandise, of the child's choosing.

At any rate, the children dispersed, and the adults had their fun. They did a merry (and somewhat beery) *teuchi*, and then picked up the *mikoshi* and danced with it. It was a beautiful dance, like one of those impromptu dances that are done in Greek taverns. A few of the men's wives joined in, but it was generally the older wives who did so: some in their fifties, a few perhaps still in their forties. One young man in front called out the chant, Cab Calloway style, and the others responded. This is how some of it went:

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12. R. H. Blyth, *Edo Satirical Verse Anthologies* (Tokyo, 1961), p. 1. Aston (*op. cit.*, p. 222) calls the *tabisho* a *tabi no miya* ("travel-shrine") or "*repositoir*" for the *mikoshi*. As headquarters for the town association, it is more commonly called *o-miki-sho* in present-day Tokyo usage.

13. *ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

Leader: *Hoi-hoi!*  
 Response: *Hai-za!*  
 Leader: *Hoi-ha!*  
 Response: *Hai-za!*  
 Leader: *Hû-ha!*  
 Response: *Hoi-hoi!*

It was a superb performance, lacking in the total exertion and passion of youth, but full of skill and humor and dexterity.

Following these street processions, one soon realizes there are several different sizes of *o-mikoshi*. The smallest children are started out on the smallest *mikoshi*. Then they graduate to the middle-sized *mikoshi*, and by the time they reach adolescence, they are ready for the full size *mikoshi*, a massive and excruciatingly heavy device. The dance (I cannot call it a walk, and it is somehow much more than a jog) of these boys just across the threshold of manhood, with the big *mikoshi*, is a dance of pain and total exertion and, often, an ecstatic dance. After a season of watching this dance, I asked a close friend if I was not indeed watching a possession dance. He was not an anthropologist, but the president of a small iron works in the Asakusa district. We too had met along some procession route. He had been taking movies of his son, taking part in his first *o-matsuri*, and had asked me if I would like to see the developed footage the following week-end. I said I would, and we became fast friends. And so I asked him: Are the young men carrying the *mikoshi* 'possessed' by the *kami* they carry? Does the spirit of the *kami* enter their bodies, and govern their movements? He did not quite comprehend, and as he was sampling my home-brewed coffee at the time, I sketched coffee being poured into a cup on a pad, and then sketched *kami*-power pouring into a *mikoshi*-bearer. "Yes!" he said. "Old men think this! But young men think carrying the *mikoshi* is like making jazz." And then he said: "I carried the *mikoshi* from the time I was ten, until I was eighteen. Questions of this kind never occurred to me in those years." And then he added: "*O-matsuri* is part of our lives."

The *mikoshi* procession of the adolescent boys is in many ways a wholly different affair from the processions done by small children. The little boys, who set out early in the day, are but innocents rehearsing the mere outer form of a patterned release of emotions they have not yet felt. The carrying of the bigger *mikoshi*, which usually begins in the late afternoon and extends into the early evening, can be a wild performance. The boys put a spring into their step, and almost jump about. The path

the *mikoshi* takes is erratic, and as the afternoon wears on and the perspiration starts to oppress, the *mikoshi* appears to have a will of its own. The bearers zig-zag down the narrow streets, staggering and almost crushed by the burden on their arms and shoulders, but carried forward by the sheer momentum of the ornate ark. Crowds line the streets, and gaze out from upstairs balconies, filled with admiration for these muscular athletes of the *kami*. They quickly shed their *happi* coats in the late summer heat, and wrap belly bands above their tight cotton undershorts. Some wear only a loin cloth. Many wear lipstick and red eye-markings: a short red line extending from the outer corner of the eye, toward the ear. As the dance becomes ecstatic, the shout becomes *hoi! hoi!*, and the elders have to work hard to keep the *mikoshi* from crashing into the lines of spectators along the roadside, or from running into a wall. Sometimes a man with a big fan walks ahead of the *mikoshi*, walking backwards, watching over his shoulder, and gesturing with the fan to the youths, to steer them a bit to the left, or a bit to the right, to slow them down, or (most difficult of all) to maneuver them around a corner at an intersection. Another of the *ujiko* (laymen of the shrine) holds a pair of wooden blocks, which he clacks together rapidly and piercingly loudly, to snap the boys momentarily out of their rapture, to get them to look where they are going. When all other efforts fail, a few of the huskier *ujiko* simply wade into the *mikoshi* team and plant their immense hands on the *mikoshi* frame, and push with all their might against the tide, to avert collisions or wrong turns. Still, the *mikoshi*'s movements are not so easily managed. In Asakusa, I saw one immense *mikoshi* round a corner, careen down the street, and then bash into a seven-foot high wooden garden fence. The owner peeped out of his second floor window just in time to see one well-intentioned elder prop up a shattered fence post as best he could, shrug his shoulders and amble off to catch up with the *mikoshi*. (The man, I was told, was a bit of a grouch, and therefore not too popular with the youth of the neighborhood, leading one to wonder whether, if this be *kami*-possession, the boys are not possessed of the *kami*'s *ara-mitama*, or "rough" persona.) Another time I saw a sizeable *mikoshi* enter the intersection near the Kokusai Theatre, one of the busiest corners in Tokyo. Police had stopped traffic in all directions, and the *mikoshi* came jogging innocently into the middle of the crossing, and began to make its turn to the left, as previously worked out by a joint conference between *ujiko* and traffic officials. But

the *mikoshi* stalled, and simply couldn't be pushed ahead. The traffic officers blew their whistles, burly shopkeepers leaned in, but the *mikoshi* started to back up. Traffic kept piling up, and the police were about to give the green light, when the *mikoshi* again lurched into the intersection, only to retreat back again into the side street. Soon bystanders put their shoulder to the ark, and after ten minutes or so of the best Mack Sennett slapstick, the ark had finally made it through, and normalcy (such as it is) returned. Next year, no doubt, the police will suggest keeping to the smaller side streets, or abandoning the street festival entirely.

Aside from the controls provided by fan and woodblocks and muscular chaperones, the *ujiko* act as coaches, who do not encourage ecstasy in the bearers, if only for practical reasons. A meandering *mikoshi*, a *mikoshi*-Juggernaut is more festive than a polite *mikoshi*, but the guides try to keep damage and injury within limits. And since ecstasy and exhaustion go together, they often correct the course of a gyrating *mikoshi* by removing a few of its entranced and exhausted bearers and retiring them to the sidelines for a time, and sending in new bearers in their place. When they are refreshed (a few healthy swigs of *sake* help enormously), they will rejoin their comrades, and add renewed gusto to the proceedings. By the time evening comes, every member of the team has benefited by these periodic pauses to refresh, and the managers' job becomes more difficult, requiring that they too pause for occasional renewal of spirit. And the *mikoshi* goes more and more "where the gods want it to."

The day ends, in some shrines around the periphery of Tokyo, with the *mikoshi* team carrying the *mikoshi* up the steps of the shrine, and parking it in a specially constructed temporary enclosure adjacent to the *haiden* (outer hall of the shrine). The priest then emerges with a small pitcher of *sake* and a little saucer. He offers each boy a saucer full of *o-miki*: communion *sake*. That in a sense (for the boys at least) completes the cycle of *o-matsuri*: the *kami* has emerged from the holy-of-holies, descended the steep steps into the town below, traveled through all the by-ways of his parish, and then, with the aid of the adolescent boys who bore his carriage, returned to his year-round dwelling. And now the *kami* thanks these boys by sharing with them wine that has been given him in celebration of his annual day, and consecrated before his presence.

The moment when the *mikoshi* team returns to the shrine

grounds is an especially exciting one. Girls in their prettiest *kimono* stroll about, sampling fried delicacies and enjoying the gentle sociability of the occasion. In the background is heard the quaint eccentricities and humor of a *matsuri-bayashi* group, a handful of old men playing rustic flutes and drums and cymbals. The sweet smell of autumn rides in on the evening air. And then (*hai-za! hai-za!*) a seething squad of sweating bodies, the jostling ark on their glistening shoulders, comes crashing in on the placid scene, and girls squeel and shriek in surprise and delight, hastily making a path for this unexpected but welcome intrusion of masculinity.

But in Tokyo proper this scene does not occur. First of all, there are just too many *mikoshi*. Space is precious on the grounds of the shrine, which is crammed with stalls selling food and whatnot, and crowds who have come to make an offering to the *kami*, or see *kagura*, or sample the sweets. At the shrine nearest my home, the parish was divided into seventeen "towns" (neighborhoods, we would say), and twenty-five *chōkai* (town associations). Each town association owned at least one small *mikoshi*, and one big one. The priest was not sure how many there are in all, but he said there were at least fifty. Before the war, his shrine also owned one enormous *mikoshi*, which was the special ark of the shrine itself, but it burned (along with the shrine, in the incendiary bombings of 1945), and was never replaced. A few shrines in Tokyo still have these shrine *mikoshi*, but they are not used every year, and when they are they often must be pulled by oxen, on a cart. Nearby Nezu shrine (whose parish embraces about sixteen towns) has twenty or thirty *mikoshi* (each town has one, two, or three), and the shrine itself has three enormous arks of its own. They used to be carried all day long during festival time, I was told by one of the priests; but now only one of the three is taken out (that has been so since the Taisho era), and since "not so many men want to carry it nowadays," it is placed on an oxcart. At Yushima Tenjin, the priest told me that customarily the festival procession of the shrine (*chōkai* processions aside) consists of three ox-drawn wagons, the first carrying musicians, the second holding the giant *mikoshi*, and the third another *hayashi* group. "But now we can hold our processions only on Sundays, because of police (traffic) regulations. And we only have the big procession on alternate years. We did not have one last year, and I am not at all sure about this year." Why? I asked. "Too costly. We need an ox to draw the wagon, and it's expensive to get an ox

from a farmer. And then, one or two hundred people walk behind the *mikoshi*, and we must give them all *obento* and gifts of money.—It's like a *daimyo* procession, you know. They walk with *shakujō* or staffs with paper streamers. And the *mikoshi* has to be decorated too! You had better plan on seeing the Asakusa festival next May!"

According to a Tokyo newspaper article, the most inexpensive *mikoshi*, of the sort used by the neighborhood associations, costs ¥50,000 (about \$140), and the most expensive is over ¥1,000,000 (\$2,775)<sup>14</sup>. The catalogue of an Asakusa wholesaler who specializes in *mikoshi* (Asakusa is just the place for the shopper with curious interests) lists *mikoshi* ranging from \$200 to \$500 for the smallest, and \$2,500 to \$5,500 for the largest. All are of the highest quality, and feature four lesser phoenixes perched at the four corners of the roof, as well as the large phoenix at the apex. Drum carts (complete with drum and phoenix) range from \$275 for the smallest and simplest, to \$1,800 for the grandest in the shop.

The *mikoshi* are stored, throughout the year, in sheds (garages, really) that line the outer reaches of the shrine grounds. In some cases that places the *mikoshi* on the same level with the main buildings of the shrine. In other shrines (and this was the case with my own neighborhood shrine) the *mikoshi* garages are located at the very foot of the steep hill on which the shrine proper stands. On the day before the festival begins, or sometimes on the morning of the first day, all the *mikoshi* are removed from storage by officials of the town associations, and driven by truck to the *tabisho* located within the town (neighborhood). (The *o-tabisho* is more commonly referred to as the *o-miki-sho*, for reasons that will soon become apparent.) On the Monday morning following the festival, five or six men of the town association convey the ark back to storage, and then retire to the home of the boss of the association, for a bit of *sake*—"to offer thanks to the *kami*," as my informant told me.

Before the *mikoshi* leaves the storage shed, the priest descends from the shrine and blesses it—that is to say, performs the purification rite. He also conveys from the *honden* a small object called a *mitamashiro*, which he installs within the *mikoshi*, to be beheld by no one. That little object represents the pre-

14. Mainichi Shinbun for June 11, 1966. Yen-dollar conversions are calculated at the 360-1 rate in effect before the 1971 devaluation of the dollar.

sence of the spirit (*mitama*) of the *ujigami*, the god of the district. It is a small wooden block, standing upright, and affixed to a wooden base. It is about 4 cm. high, and square at the top (about 3.5 cm. by 3.5 cm.). For the smaller *mikoshi*, there is a smaller *mitamashiro*: about 3×2.4×2.4. Each *mitamashiro* is inscribed with the holy name of the *ujigami*, and then completely covered with gold and silk material. Or so I was told by the shrine priest, who went off to the sanctuary to measure them precisely. Other shrines, he told me, may use a small mirror. Lewis Bush mentions other possibilities: "a *gohei* . . . , or a small rooted *sakaki* tree, a wooden phallic symbol, and sometimes a fine linen thread which hangs from the roof"<sup>15</sup>. Professor Matsudaira, well-known Japanese authority on festival customs, mentioned (in conversation) one town where a small lion mask is used, and another where hemp strings are hung from the center of the roof ("They peel off the outer skin of the hemp, and hang it from the center of the roof. This symbolizes the *kami*'s presence.")

As he places the *mitamashiro* within the *mikoshi*, he recites the *Harai Kotoba* (Words of Purification):

"To the august kami Izanagi  
And to the kami of purification  
Who appeared when Izanagi performed purification at the Plain  
of Ahagi, at Tachibana, in the land of Himuka (Miyazaki Prefecture)  
in Tsukushi (Kyushu):  
Please purify and cleanse the various evils (*magagoto*), sins (*tsumi*),  
and pollutions (*kegare*) which may be present.  
Thus do I pray. Please accept our prayers for this."

Why don't you have the sacred arks brought up before the shrine for this little ceremony, I asked. "The stairs are too steep," he replied. "We never have the *mikoshi* enter the shrine grounds proper." It was very impressive, I commented, when the boys brought the ark right onto the shrine grounds at the end of the day, and received their *o-miki* from the priest, right then and there, at that shrine outside Tokyo. "Here," he replied, "*o-miki* is taken at the *o-miki-sho*."

R. P. Dore describes the typical *o-miki-sho*:

A *fuda* of the local shrine is placed in this branch shrine and blessed by the local priest (or rather 'purified'). Below it are ranged tiers of shelves on which are placed gifts of fruit, cakes or wine bearing a

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15. Japan Times for April 5, 1966.

piece of paper marked 'Before the Holy Presence,' followed by the name of the giver. In front is a tray for money contributions which are wrapped in an envelope marked 'Before the Holy Presence' and bearing the name of the donor on the back.<sup>16</sup>

This *fuda* or *o-fuda*, used here to signify the holy presence, is usually a card or paper on which the name of the *kami* has been inscribed, then placed inside an envelope, often tied with a gift ribbon, and then sometimes set on a wooden tray, or encased in plastic (a modern development), and often provided with a purple silk cord, for hanging. The same word can mean a tag, a name card, a doorplate, a placard; it is in a sense the god's calling card. Its installation at the *o-miki-sho* by the priest means that the *kami* has extended his presence beyond the sanctuary, into the very heart of the parishioners' neighborhood.

Dore describes the *o-miki-sho* as the link between the town and the shrine, and consequently as a "branch shrine," which is there for the townsmen "to pay their respects to the . . . *kami* as an alternative to going to the shrine"<sup>17</sup>. The *o-miki-sho* does indeed serve partly as a temporary neighborhood branch of the shrine, but is by no means a substitute for it; that at least seemed to be the community's understanding of it in Bunkyo-ku, when I lived there. The *o-miki-sho* is necessary as an anchorage for the *mikoshi*, which must remain in the town if the god is fully to remain in the town, in all his *matsuri* power; the "branch shrine" is to make him feel at home, and to provide his hosts with a gathering place:

The *o-miki-sho* also acts as an office where the officials of the ward can sit and confer on the progress of the celebrations and the state of the universe—with the effect of gradual diminution of the bottles of wine which have been placed 'Before the Holy Presence.'<sup>18</sup>

Here again one is reminded of how comfortably the *shitamachi* people of Tokyo mix religious celebrations with the earthiest of behavior, leaving the observer with the uncomfortable sense that the dichotomy of sacred and secular may after all be quite artificial. Dore adds: "Apart from the original purification ceremony which is formal and perfunctory and attended only by one or two

16. R. P. Dore, *op. cit.*, p. 302. Where Dore uses the word "ward" to translate *chô*, I have used "town," or occasionally (and rather carelessly I fear) "neighborhood." I follow the standard Tokyo practice of calling a *ku* a ward, where he uses the term "borough."

17. *ibid.*, pp. 301–302.

18. *ibid.*, p. 302.

officials (the priest has to visit twenty-three such shrines in one day) here are no communal religious celebrations at the *o-miki-sho*"<sup>19</sup> (whether the absence of laity from a Shinto ceremony makes it perfunctory is another question).

I asked an elderly neighbor who was active in festival affairs: How are the *mikoshi*-bearers chosen? "Anyone can join in who wants to," he said. "They just go to the *o-miki-sho* and ask." And how do they prepare, I asked the neighborhood priest. Do they observe any abstentions, perform any purifications? "Nowadays, they just come to the *o-miki-sho*, and I purify them there, along with their *mikoshi*. They really ought to bathe in water, before carrying the *mikoshi*. If we lived nearer to the sea, they would go into the water for purification." Matsudaira told me that in olden times, they had to wash, to purify themselves; they had to assiduously avoid spoiled food, and they had to avoid the family hearth if there had been any misfortune in the family, for that would constitute a pollution of the family hearth; if there had been a death in the family, they could not participate for that year. That was the negative preparation. On the positive side, he said, in order to qualify for the privilege of carrying the *mikoshi*, you have to be loved by the *kami*; so two or three days before the beginning of the festival, they would go to the shrine, and stay there day and night "to get acquainted with the *kami*". When the time for the festival arrived, and they emerged from their sacred retreat, they had something of the divinity in their persons. Aston reports: "When a festival was approaching, the intending participant was specially careful to avoid (*imi*) all possible sources of pollution. He shut himself up in his house, refrained from speech and noise and ate food cooked at a pure fire. A special *imi* of one month was observed by the priests before officiating at the greater festivals"<sup>20</sup>. "Nowadays most youths don't know the meaning of the *mikoshi* and the *matsuri*," one of my priest friends lamented once. "They think it is just for recreation. In olden times, it was understood to guarantee the youths good health in the year to come." Will the old meaning ever be found again, I asked him? "Year by year, the meaning vanishes," he said sadly.

About seven months after the festival, the *ujiko-sôdai*, the

19. *ibid.*, p. 302.

20. W. G. Aston, *Shinto: The Ancient Religion of Japan* (London, 1921), p. 68.

shrine's board of governors, met inside the *haiden* of the shrine, to plan next September's festival. This year's festival had been a *hon-matsuri*, a full celebration of the *taisai* or annual festival, so next year's would be a *kage-matsuri*, a shadow festival, a far less ambitious celebration. Such was the custom at this shrine, as at many. There was food and drink at the meeting, and much discussion of the traffic problem. Thus far, the police had forbidden carriage of the *mikoshi* back and forth between the shrine grounds and the *o-miki-sho*: that is why they are now transported by truck. The police have not objected to the arks plying the streets of the neighborhoods, so long as it is done on weekends, and the *mikoshi* teams keep off the major streetcar routes. The chairman of the meeting, a retired banker and the elder statesman of the group, called for a report on the *mikoshi* situation for next fall. The head of a local print shop rose and gave his report: "The manager of the traffic section of the police department is an old friend of mine, so I went to him informally to ask him. I made it clear that I was there just for myself, not officially in behalf of the shrine governors, and so I want to make it clear that this is an unofficial report on an informal inquiry. He said no *mikoshi* this year." There was no great expression of surprise from the small assembly (nineteen men and one woman, filling in for her husband—of whom ten were weather-beaten ruddy-faced men, representing the *shitamachi* sections of the parish, two in workshirts, one with bare feet, one in a short "Eisenhower" jacket, others in simple *kimono*, all with thinning or silvery hair; nine wore crisp business suits, and represented the *yamanote* section). This was to be a "shadow" year anyway; but all agreed that they would at least like to have the small *mikoshi* out, for the smaller children. "What will become of *o-matsuri*, if this congestion keeps getting worse every year?" A maker of badges and buttons mused. "Only the little *mikoshi* for small children will survive." The woman delegate commented: "Even the little *mikoshi* will have to go"; and many nodded their heads. Oblivious, he continued: "It is the older boys, that is the trouble. They drink too much *sake*, and start quarreling. It is as the proverb says, *Matsuri ni kenka* ("At *matsuri* time, a quarrel always happens"). That is one reason the police are trying to eliminate them. So soon it will be only for little children, and only on Sunday. It won't even be Saturday and Sunday. Just Sunday." There was further discussion, and then all agreed to ask the man from the local print shop to go back and see that some official in the traffic section, this time

in his official capacity as representative (not of the *ujiko-sôdai!*) of his local town association (*chô-kai*), and ask whether the smaller *mikoshi* might not be trucked to the *o-miki-sho*, and used within the limits of the town. He consented. Others said: "We would like to have the *mikoshi* processions, but we understand the viewpoint of the police. And we would not want to see any one injured in the traffic." The following day I was visiting with a professor at the Shinto seminary, and I asked: What do you think of the proverb, *Matsuri ni kenka*? "It's not a proverb," he said, "it's the truth, it's a fact. Too much *sake*." And he added: "I hope you won't judge Shinto by these excesses."

The opinions of the elders are of course easily obtained. But what the youths themselves think about the festival and the sacred ark is not so readily ascertained. Festival time is surely not the best time to ask; and after the festival they are embarrassed and quite bashful, especially in discussing it with strangers. So I arranged for a neighbor, who was an official of his town association, to meet with the *mikoshi* team, and ask them some questions I had prepared. The general embarrassment was still apparent; one boy remarked: "I feel a little shy about participating in the procession. I guess carrying the *mikoshi* as we do is a little stupid. But when festival time comes round, I feel like doing it, and shouting '*wasshoi, wasshoi*'." One often notices that the boys in *mikoshi* parades are quite uneasy, especially in neighborhoods where the *yamanote* influence is waxing stronger. Especially when the *mikoshi* is at rest on the saw-horses, and they take a break to let traffic through, or to allow the marshalls to visit nearby shops and round up gifts to take back to the *o-miki-sho*, you will see them sitting on the pavement, cross-legged, some with horn-rimmed glasses and quite a scholarly look, ashamed of the attention they are calling to themselves, their moral reservations all too apparent in their expressions.

But the interview was highly instructive. I learned, for example, that taller boys are generally placed at the front of the ark, and shorter boys at the rear. That puts an extra burden on the shorter lads, because more of the weight lands on their shoulders. One feels the pain first on the shoulders; often the skin is rubbed raw by the second day. Then you feel pain in the legs, especially the calves. "My shoulders ache for a week or so after," one said. "Everyone has pain for a few days," another said. "My legs hurt for quite a long time after," said the short one. "The more it hurts," volunteered the first, "the more we

say 'wasshoi!'" How painful the experience is depends to some extent on the skill of the team. "It has to be balanced well," I was told; "it can't be bounced up and down too much; and the team has to walk with small steps." That is in fact what gives the whole performance a dance-like quality, for the steps are very short and almost mincing, like those of a beautiful young woman in a tightly wrapped *kimono*, but with the legs driving (see Plate IV).

How do you prepare for the festival procession? "When I hear the sound of the *dashi* drum, and eat *sekihan* (rice with red beans) in the morning, I somehow get the feeling of *o-matsuri*. It is a very special feeling, and it is a strange feeling."

Do you know what is in the *mikoshi*? "*Ujigami-sama*." Who is your *ujigami*? (Nervous laughter) "We don't know." When you carry the ark, do you think of it as carrying a god? More laughter; then, "Yes." What is a *kami*, do you think? One said: "I don't think deeply about such things, but I believe in the *kami-sama*." Another: "I never thought about it." A third: "It's for a festival!" (laughter from the others).

Do you use make-up? Two said "Never have." A third said: "When I begin to feel excited about the festival, I have a drink of *sake*, and I put on make-up. Then I feel the atmosphere of the festival more. I use powder, brush-on lipstick, and eye-liner." Why do you do that? "I don't know why it's done, really," he replied; "I just know I enjoy the atmosphere of the festival more by doing it." And another chimed in: "It is for being in high spirits."

Do you ever feel, as you carry the ark, that the spirit of the *kami* has entered into your body? "I've never felt that," they all said.

Does *sake* make carrying the ark easier? "I'd feel shy without it." "It gets to be more and more fun, as you carry it further, and drink more." A voice in back cautioned: "But it's no good drinking too much!"

Did you ever get hurt carrying it? Only one responded. "Once it came down hard on one side, and I broke my middle finger. It wasn't too bad. A new nail grew out. That was when I was in fifth or sixth grade."

What is it like for you, when the day is over? "When night comes I am worn out, but I can't get to sleep, what with the pain in my shoulders." Another said: "When I carry it I put a small cushion of cloth under the bar; but it doesn't help much."

And another: "I head straight for the bath house. The bath is free for us that day. They give us a special ticket, and we go in free on the festival day." And another: "I feel a little sad when it's over." And yet another: "I too. Satisfied, but a little sad."

Only two of the boys interviewed offered any information about themselves. One said he was eighteen, and works at a small factory. The other was in his second year in high school. His father is owner of a restaurant.

I have periodically raised the question of possession here because I think it a crucial question. And I am inclined to agree with William Fairchild when he says that ecstasy is the heart of the *matsuri*. Festival time is the time when the *kami* descends, and his descent is evidenced in his possession of his people. Through that possession he announces his will to them.

Every shrine had a festival, from the earliest times in Japan, and thus "ecstasy came to be a national religious practice"<sup>21</sup>. The purpose of all these festivals, says Fairchild, was "to learn the will of the gods" (a divinatory function), and to "bring the human will, and the social and political activities into harmony with the divine will" (reconciliation, restoration of harmony, renewal of reciprocal ties between *kami* and community, and within the community)<sup>22</sup>. Yamada says as much when he comments: "The shaking and convolutions of the *mikoshi*, which resembled somewhat an ecstatic dervish in which the *kami* and not the participants were supposed to direct the movements, were believed to be essential for the pleasure of the *kami*"<sup>23</sup>. Aldous Huxley mentions the use of "gymnastics for the production of ecstasy";<sup>24</sup> but where his interests lay in the direction of solitary ecstasies, we are dealing here with ecstasy that is encountered by a group. And that perhaps is consistent with other patterns in Japanese society. For while individual ecstasy is not unknown in Japan, popular religion provides rather for group enthusiasm and corporate ecstasy. And even that is closely watched and skillfully and gently controlled.

Related to the question of possession is the curious custom of the wearing of cosmetics by the adolescent boys transporting the ark. There are many theories to explain this custom, but all theories converge at one point: the use of white powder for

21. William P. Fairchild, "Shamanism in Japan," in *Folklore Studies*, vol. XXI (1962), p. 41. See also pp. 44 and 98.

22. *ibid.*, p. 45.

23. Yamada, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-112.

24. Aldous Huxley, *Beyond the Mexique Bay* (New York, 1960).

the face (called *oshiroi*, and made of rice or millet flour), plus eye-shadow and eye-brow pencil, constitutes a modest disguise, mildly concealing the identity of the ark-bearer, or at least suggesting, from a distance, that he is some other kind of being than he actually is. But why should he want to disguise himself? Face powder and other make-up create an effect that is mildly mask-like, depending of course on how heavily they are applied; and a mask, as Caillois says, is "a face at once adventitious, terrible and monstrous, that at one and the same time conceals and frightens; it unites and combines the two functions of mimicry and ocelli"<sup>25</sup> (ocelli are those circular markings on the wings of butterflies, which sometimes resemble eyes, and thus frighten off marauding birds and other predators). But surely the *mikoshi* boy's rice powder does not make him look terrible and monstrous; quite the contrary, it makes him look gentle and girlish. And what might he be mimicing? And what might he be trying to frighten off?

I asked a shrine priest: Why do the boys wear make-up? He answered: "It means, 'Get away, devils (*oni*)!' The devils know us by our faces; so, it's a disguise." Festival time is a critical time, it is a time when the *kami* are among us, and will indicate to us what the year ahead holds in store for us. But being a time when the gods are abroad, it is also a time when the devils are abroad. The streets down which the *mikoshi* will travel is full of them. That is why the way is prepared (cleared) with the pounding of the *dashi* drum, the jangling of the *shaku-jô*, the magical sign of the *mitsu-domoe* (a close look at plates II and III will show that the *mikoshi* is covered with these amuletic insignia). The priest continued: "It is a sacred car, carried by strangers they do not know, so the devils will run when they see it coming."

The *mikoshi* carrier is also a kind of warrior, and U. A. Casal reminds us that in Heian times, warriors put on this same white make-up to conceal their identity from the spirits of the men they killed on the battlefield, who might, in death, come after them, looking for revenge as ghosts. "If on the battlefield the warrior's make-up made him appear quite otherwise than he did while peacefully occupied in his village, how could the spirit be able to identify him without it?"<sup>26</sup> Casal also cites this pas-

25. Roger Caillois, *The Mask of Medusa* (New York, 1964), p. 107.

26. U. A. Casal, "Japanese Cosmetics and Teeth-Blackening," in *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan, third series*, vol. 9 (1966), p. 8.



Plate I. Where the *kami* dwells. The elevated holy-of-holies, or *honden*, located at the far end of the shrine. At festival time, the *kami*-presence is transferred from this building into the *mikoshi*, so that he may visit his parishioners, and by riding through the parish, purify it.



Plate II. A *mikoshi* team, before setting out. These pictures were taken in Senzokuchō, Asakusa.



Plate III. On their way.



Plate IV. Further along the way.



Plate V. Some of the *mikoshi*-bearers are now in a near-trance state, and may soon be removed to rest, and return later.



Plate VI. As ecstasy and exhaustion become more prevalent, the course of the *mikoshi* becomes less manageable and more erratic, and fresh bearers are sent in to try and redirect it.

sage from the Pillow Book of *Sei Shonagon*: "So close did the procession pass that one could study the very texture of the soldiers' faces. I remember one who had put on his powder unevenly, so that here and there his dark skin showed through, looking like those black patches in the garden where the snow has begun to melt"<sup>27</sup>.

A professor who is a kind of Shinto theologian (rather a modern development) told me: "From olden times, in order to do some performance for the *kami*, it was necessary to wear make-up or a mask, to change one's character. To do something divine without having one's personal ego get in the way, to devote one's whole being to the deity. For this reason, masked *kagura* dancers often thought of themselves, as they performed, as the *kami* whose mask they were wearing." What part are the *mikoshi*-bearers playing? "Messengers of the *kami*." Does the disguise serve to ward off the *oni*? "Maybe. Anthropologically speaking, that is probably correct. (He looked in his folklore dictionary.) This says that the disguise is to remove the ego, and prepare one for trance. It is to induce trance (*kamigakari*)."

My own neighborhood priest thought the boys wore make-up "to be beautiful for the festival. It is the same thing as wearing your finest *kimono*. It is a time of enjoyment." A lady friend offered: "In feudal times, you could tell a genteel person by the whiteness of his skin. Highwaymen were sun-burned, dark and weather-beaten. So to be white-skinned was a mark of elegance." A neighbor said he thought there was some Kabuki influence here; red indicates strength and bravery, green is for ghosts and spirits and visitors from another world, and "a white skin has . . . the connotation of gentleness of birth"<sup>28</sup>. In all the processions I saw, the basic ingredient of the make-up was the white rice flour applied all over the face, not too heavily, with small amounts of red and occasionally green markings about the eyes, for accent.

Is there an element of female impersonation here? That I suppose is the first conclusion one jumps to, especially if one has no knowledge of past use of face powder by both men and women. Early in the season I made this jotting in my notebook, after seeing a cluster of boys who had just finished their rounds, munching dumplings in a doorway: "The boys' faces are made up,

27. *ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

28. Aubrey S. and Giovanna M. Halford, *The Kabuki Handbook* (Rutland and Tokyo, 1956), p. 437.

and their skin glistens after the procession, and they look quite soft and feminine. It really registers with me this time that this may be a kind of female impersonation." Fosco Maraini mentions witnessing a procession in which the "youths were dressed as women" and wearing make-up, and comments: "This wearing of women's clothes is certainly a feature of great anthropological interest, but I have not succeeded in discovering a satisfactory explanation for it"<sup>29</sup>. Our Victorian forebears were not so timid. Aston writes: "True inspiration, such as that which touched Isaiah's hallowed lips with fire, belongs chiefly to the male sex. The *kangakari*, or hypnotic trance, on the other hand, has in Japan, as elsewhere, a decided preference for women and boys"<sup>30</sup>. In a footnote, he quotes Max Müller as having said: "Antiquity regarded the soul of woman as more accessible to every sort of inspiration. . ."<sup>31</sup>. And the Rev. D. C. Buchanan, M. A., Ph. D. writes: "Women, at least in Japan, are more subject to hysteria than men. Their will-power being weaker they are more sensitive to suggestion than those of the sterner sex. They have, as a rule, stronger and more vivid imaginations than men"<sup>32</sup>. That is why, he says, in almost all the instances of possession he has heard of in Japan, "women were the ones into whom the deity entered"<sup>33</sup>.

If disguise implies mimicry, is it not also possible that the ark-bearers are trying to look like children? I am apparently not the first to suggest this use of cosmetics; a European traveler, exploring Kyushu in 1691, wrote of the women of the south: "They all paint themselves, which makes them look like so many Babies"<sup>34</sup>. If that is so, the application of the white powder is meant to denote, and perhaps to further, a Return to Innocence. The Return to Innocence is one of the recurring themes of the festival. It is there in the bazaar on the shrine grounds, it is there in the *kagura*. Matsudaira answered all my questions about make-up quite succinctly: "It is to show that this is not an ordinary man; the *mikoshi*-carriers have become like divine children."

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29. Maraini, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

30. Aston, *Shinto: The Way of the Gods*, p. 357.

31. *ibid.*, p. 357.

32. D. C. Buchanan, "Inari: Its Origin, Development, and Nature," in *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan, second series*, vol. XII (1935), p. 52.

33. *ibid.*, p. 50.

34. Cited by U. A. Casal in the work cited, p. 23.

And being divine children, they are not only children, they are also goldly. Yasaburo Ikeda comments that *bon* dancers sometimes put on make-up "to show that they are not of the earth but of the other world"; they are thus impersonating the gods they are dancing for<sup>35</sup>. Equally interesting is Taka Yamada's account of the child who rides on horseback at the head of certain shrine processions. "The child is called *hitotsu mono*, literally, one-thing, which indicates that he is unique and has no substitute. . . . A boy chosen for this position purifies himself for seven days prior to the festival. Then on the day of the festival a priest repeats magic formulas and puts make-up on him. Suddenly the child falls into ecstasy, in which state he remains until the festival is over and the make-up washed off"<sup>36</sup>. The boy took the place of the *mikoshi*. It was said that the divine spirit (*shinrei*) possessed him. In modern usage, the boy is often replaced by a *mikoshi*, but it is still said that the *shinrei* "rides in the *mikoshi*"<sup>37</sup>.

This explanation plays down somewhat the dimension of sexuality that many observers have felt to be a key quality of the festival procession. I myself have in my earliest field notes occasional jottings like this one: "As the boys approached the *tabisho*, they danced up and down around it, rythmically raising and lowering the *mikoshi* and shouting with extra gusto. There was a curiously sexual quality about this movement, though I would be hard pressed to say what exactly I mean by this." Quentin Crews writes of a *mikoshi* procession: "It was somehow a provocative step, charged with sexuality, and must also have given the god an extremely uncomfortable ride, the more so because every few yards the young men would shudder the palanquin, making its dangling metal decorations dindle and glitter in the firelight"<sup>38</sup>. Yet the sexual aspect is very much there. It is there in the expression on the boys' faces, that mixture of agony and ecstasy, for those who care to see it. It is there in the dance-like quality of the *mikoshi* walk (I suppose Crewe would see this as a kind of paradox: the *bon odori*, which is meant to be a dance, is really a kind of stylized walk; and the walk that is done with the sacred ark is really a kind of dance). And, if

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35. Ikeda Yasaburo, "Festivals in Japan," in *Oriental Economist*, February 1961, p. 93.

36. Yamada, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.

37. *ibid.*, p. 11.

38. Quentin Crewe, *Japan: Portrait of Paradox* (New York, 1962), pp. 187-188.

there is any doubt in your mind, go to Asakusa. You will see the ark-bearers wearing only loin cloths, their bodies covered with tattoos and their bare backs glistening in the sun, taking obvious pleasure in their self-exhibition; and little groups of giggly gossiping girls in *yukata*, on their way to and from the bath house, bowl and bath towel in hand, stopping to chat with one another excitedly, and pretending not to notice.

It is all there in the festival procession: the male exhibitionism, the display of strength and courage and bravery—the virtues of the warrior, the revival of innocence and return to sources, and above all the communal quality of it all. Neighbors decorate their doorways with a standard paper flower decoration selected by the town association (so that “the approaching *kami* may more easily discern his parish” and be glad “that every member of it intends to take part in his festival”<sup>39</sup>), put on their uniform *yukata* that they have chosen, through the town association, to signify their neighborhood, and then together they drive out their demons. And though the obstreperous persona (the *ara-mitama*) of their *ujigami* may occasionally show his face, if only to assist in the expulsion of their demons, his *nigi-mitama* or gentle self is there too, in the glowing white faces of his messengers, the carriers of his carriage. And through their corporate spirit and his gentle presence, ridden of demons, they restore the community to itself. The *mikoshi* crew is the advance guard of this force of restoration and renewal.

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39. Geoffrey Bownas, *Japanese Rainmaking and Other Folk Practices* (London, 1963), p. 28.