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it might be difficult to argue that visual and textual representations of Jewish persecution have nothing to do with the actual violence perpetrated against them.

Bale's book offers a useful insight into the world of feelings of medieval people, but Christian-Jewish relations in the Middle Ages were rather complex and Bale's view is one-sided. A survey that includes the role of feelings as well as the role of power and its mechanisms and takes into account specific local social conditions, complexities and particularities can provide us with a more complete picture of this matter.

Another important insight provided by this study is that it deconstructs the idea of "anti-Semitism" as something that moves from one generation to the next. Anti-Semitism should be studied in its historical context instead of being used in such a way as to label medieval people.

By analyzing medieval texts, pictures and buildings but neglecting texts by members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and monastic orders, and by sometimes overstating the role of feelings, Bale's conclusions can sometimes be monolithic or even one-sided. However, all in all, his book manages to bring some new insights not only into the historiography of Christian-Jewish relations but also into the history of medieval persecution. By understanding the role of feelings and affect, we have the possibility of creating a more complete picture of medieval culture.

STAMATIA NOUTSOU

## **Isabelle Prochaska-Meyer, Kaminchu: Spirituelle Heilerinnen in Okinawa,**

**(Vienna Studies on East Asia 2),  
Wien: Praesens Verlag 2013,  
247 p.  
ISBN 978-3-7069-0782-8.**

In her extensive work about female spiritual healers (*kaminchu*) in Okinawa,

which is based on her doctoral thesis, Isabelle Prochaska-Meyer takes the reader on a journey from prehistoric times through the Kingdom of Ryūkyū to modern times and shows the erratic history of attitudes towards women who are considered to be spiritually gifted. Her historical approach leads to an interpretation of the phenomenon of *kaminchu* and their functions in the past and today, where they contribute to the identity of the local community, which is presented as different from the rest of Japan. While women in religious functions were well respected and even given important positions in the society of the ancient kingdom, later attempts to modernize the society of Okinawa went hand in hand with a campaign to "enlighten" the citizens and make spiritual healers, then called *yuta*, and their clients appear backward and superstitious, an attitude that still affects the perception of them.

In the first main chapter (p. 24-77) we learn about the history of Okinawa with a focus on the history of women and their positions in society regarding religious functions. This is important from two perspectives – first, the implementation of a system of women priests on various levels of officialdom and in families has an effect on the concept of female spirituality; second, knowing about the economic ties and cultural exchange with the Chinese empire, which led to a degree of sinicization in the kingdom of Ryūkyū, makes one understand why, for example, the Chinese horoscope is very important in rituals involving ancestor worship and healing, which are most often connected to the condition of deceased family members.

The second chapter (p. 78-117) is dedicated to religion in Okinawa as a whole and introduces the reader to the idea of the spiritual power of women as protecting sisters, from which some researchers have concluded that Okinawan society might have been a matriarchal system in the past. This theory, however, can be questioned since the spiritually gifted sister protects the brother and is therefore in his service, so to say. Aside from ancestor worship, the author draws our attention to the importance of nature and the places where spiritual entities

are located and demand respect from humans through prayer and ritual offerings – here, we are again made aware of the significance of knowledge about Okinawa’s past; rituals take place at ancient pilgrimage sites, holy places, or even wells fallen into disuse, connected with the belief in the survival of the ancestors. The correct behavior in dealing with spirits was and is also an integral part of the daily life within the home of a family – at least for those families who were or are clients of *kaminchu*. Here is an example: in the light of traditional concepts of lost souls it becomes understandable that the *furu nu kan*, the spirit of the toilet, is regarded as very powerful (p. 115): one has to know that a lost soul might follow a person especially at night and that it can be cast off when the person visits a toilet before entering a house.

Under the title “*Kaminchu in the Present*” (third chapter, p. 118-150), Prochaska-Meyer presents the results of her fieldwork in Okinawa. What is remarkable here is the assiduous nature of her detailed reports. She has an open approach but maintains a professional distance – while she gains very personal insights and without doubt builds up a personal relationship with her informants, she does not become one of them in the sense of “going native”. While the reader learns to understand and respect the beliefs of the healers and their clients, explanations from a scientific point of view are offered but not imposed on the reader. At the core of this chapter is the topic of the initiation and education of those who follow a call from the world of spirits and are not destined to be other spiritual experts than *kaminchu* because of their social position. Successful initiation requires two things: to be regarded as being born with great spiritual power and to suffer under *kamidaari*, a sickness in various forms that the future spiritual healer has to overcome by accepting the call. Prochaska-Meyer stresses the difference between transitive and intransitive healing and shows how the training of a future *kaminchu* is part of her healing, this including pilgrimage rituals, which again connect the person to the location. Spiritual healing seems to play a significant role in the history of Okinawa and the place itself.

Lately, even tourism has discovered this aspect of Okinawa, which is promoted as a healing site. With this comes appreciation for spiritual healers as well; nevertheless, to be criticized from the social environment and to have to fight for recognition is a part of the process of becoming a *kaminchu*. To accept the call of the world of spirits, which can be accompanied by traumatic events like the loss of a family member, is often a struggle; becoming a *kaminchu* is rarely something someone chooses; some informants even postpone their education as healers in order to be free to undertake childcare, housekeeping and work.

Rejection of a call from the world of spirits can be found in many societies and raises questions about the purpose of such rejection. Does it act indirectly as a form of legitimation and as a way of ensuring quality in the sense of establishing exclusivity in a domain which is confronted with much criticism and the accusation of quackery – things with which spiritual healers and their clients have had to deal with in Okinawa for a long time? Such prejudice has resulted in the taboo of calling a spiritual healer *yuta*, since that name is associated with a campaign against them as being a relict of old times, in contrast to modern times, when rationality and progress are supposed to prevail. Today, language is one of the keys to interpreting the meaning of the phenomenon of *kaminchu*. We learn that it is not only important to understand the history of terms; we also learn that using the local language in Okinawa with its close connection to the old kingdom of Ryūkyū during rituals and consultations is very important and can be seen as a contribution to strengthening the local identity. This might be seen as part of a more general healing process for the people of Okinawa, who still suffer from the events of the Pacific War, in particular the Battle of Okinawa and the following presence of the American military up to the present time. Prochaska-Meyer illustrates how recent history, spiritual healing, and the meaning of location come together in a ritual called *nujifaa*, recounting one such ritual which was undertaken after a *kaminchu*-in-training had been asked to do it by the spirit of the deceased father of her husband, who

had died in war at a place unknown to the family (p. 194-198). From an emic point of view, the family members experienced healing and the soul of the father found peace thanks to a ritual during which they went to the place where, according to the *kaminchu*, the father had died, taking stones with them to connect the father symbolically to the empty grave.

Further interpretations of the phenomenon of *kaminchu* and the rituals they perform can be found in the discussion of the meaning of spiritual healing in the sixth chapter (p. 207-215), while carefully gathered details about soul-concepts, altered states of consciousness, explanatory models of disease, and problems of life in general, as well as details about rituals, are described in the fourth and fifth chapters (p. 151-206) dealing with cosmology and spiritual practice.

In summary, Prochaska-Meyer's work gives detailed information about the history of Okinawa in general and focuses later on religion in Okinawa and the spiritual practice of female healers. Here, the author shares her deep insights with the reader in describing rituals, the initiation and education of healers, and the problems of clients,

which can be read as reports in which informants express themselves and which are open to interpretation by the reader. Meanwhile, the author also contributes interpretations and connects her findings with existing theories without imposing her own opinion on the reader. Her work is multidimensional and complies with scientific standards. It will be of interest to readers coming from various disciplines, in particular Japanese studies – like the author herself – or religious studies. The careful fieldwork shows a connection to social and cultural anthropology and since it deals with healing it might also be of interest to researchers in medical anthropology. Furthermore, we should not forget the growing interest in such literature among healers and their clients all over the world who are acting in the realm of traditional and complementary medicine and who exchange knowledge among themselves and gain information through reading ethnographic studies. In this sense it would be welcome if the work were available in English or Japanese. There is certainly nothing to fear from “natives who talk back”.

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