

**“BABEŞ-BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY  
FACULTY OF EUROPEAN STUDIES  
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**PHD DISSERTATION**

**AXIS MUNDI AND THE SYMBOLISM OF THE CENTRE  
IN JAPANESE MYTHOLOGY  
THE TREE AND THE COLUMN IN JAPANESE FESTIVALS  
– SIMILARITIES TO ELEMENTS FROM NORSE MYTHOLOGY –**

**- SUMMARY -**

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## CONTENTS

### Acknowledgements

### Remarks regarding the photographs in the present dissertation

## CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Preliminary considerations
- 1.2 Chapters summaries
- 1.3 Remarks

## CHAPTER 2 – GENERAL PRESENTATION OF JAPANESE MYTHOLOGY AND OF THE RESEARCH IN THIS FIELD

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Definition and delimitation of “Japanese mythology”
- 2.2 *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* – history and contents
  - 2.2.0 Introduction
  - 2.2.1 *Kojiki*
  - 2.2.2 *Nihon Shoki*
  - 2.2.3 *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* – resemblances and differences
- 2.3 Japanese mythology and other mythologies
- 2.4 The current status of research in Japanese mythology
  - 2.4.1 Research on Japanese mythology in Japan

**2.4.2** International research on Japanese mythology

**2.4.3** Research on Japanese mythology in Romania

**2.5** Summary

**CHAPTER 3 – THREE ESSENTIAL NOTIONS FOR THE ANALYSIS OF AXIS MUNDI IN JAPANESE MYTHS AND FESTIVALS – *AXIS MUNDI. KAMI. MATSURI***

**3.0** Introduction

**3.1** *Axis mundi*

**3.1.1** *Axis mundi* – images and representations

**3.1.2** *Axis mundi* and vegetal symbols

**3.1.3** The cosmic mountain

**3.1.4.0** The functions of the *world axis*

**3.1.4.1** *Axis mundi* and shamanism

**3.1.4.2** *Sacred space* and *profane space*

**3.1.4.3** *Sacred space* and *profane space* in Japanese culture – some remarks

**3.1.4.4** *Sacred time* and *profane time*

**3.1.4.5** *Sacred time* and *profane time* in Japanese culture – some remarks

**3.1.5** Summary

**3.2** *Kami*

**3.2.1** Definition. The context in which the *kami* concept was formed

**3.2.2** The problem of translating the *kami* concept from Japanese and an attempt to understand this concept through the *makter* concept in Norse mythology

**3.2.3** Summary

### 3.3 *Matsuri*

- 3.3.1 The Japanese traditional calendar. *Matsuri* and *nenjū gyoji*
- 3.3.2 The structure of a *matsuri*
- 3.3.3 *Ke, hare, kegare*
- 3.3.4 *Matsuri* and *nenjū gyoji* through images
- 3.3.5 Summary

## CHAPTER 4 – SHINTŌ

### 4.0 Introduction

#### 4.1 *Shintō* – definition and brief history

- 4.1.1 Is *shintō* a religion?
- 4.1.2 Japan in the prehistoric period. Some clues of early *shintō* practices
- 4.1.3 *Shintō* in *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*
- 4.1.4 *Shintō* in Chinese chronicles
- 4.1.5 *Shintō* and the *Ritsuryō* system
- 4.1.6 The evolution of *shintō* after the *Heian* period
- 4.1.7 The controversy regarding the fact that *shintō* is a religion or not – some remarks
- 4.1.8 Summary

#### 4.2 *Shintō* – the „religion” of the Japanese?

- 4.2.1 The relationship of the Japanese to religion. The behaviour of the Japanese in a Buddhist temple and in a *shintō* shrine
- 4.2.2 „Born *shintō*, dead Buddhist”
- 4.2.3 „*Kurushii toki no kamidanomi*” – when and why do Japanese people participate in religious activities
- 4.2.4 About *shintō* shrines and solidarity in the community

#### 4.2.5 Summary

### CHAPTER 5 – THE BIRTH OF THE JAPANESE ISLANDS. *AXIS MUNDI* IN *KOJIKI* AND IN *NIHON SHOKI*

#### 5.0 Introduction

#### 5.1 Japanese creation myth

#### 5.2 The reed shoot

#### 5.3 *Izanagi* and *Izanami*. The floating bridge of heaven, the spear, the pole

#### 5.4 *Kojiki* – the country in the middle of the reed plain and the people living there

#### 5.5 *Nihon Shoki* – the ascent of *Amaterasu Ōmikami* on the heavenly ladder

#### 5.6 *Amaterasu Ōmikami* in the cave. The *Sakaki tree*

#### 5.7 The myth of *Ninigi no mikoto*. His descent from the sky and his palace with a central pole

#### 5.8 Conclusions

### CHAPTER 6 – *AXIS MUNDI* AS TREE AND COLUMN IN JAPANESE FESTIVALS

#### 6.0 Introduction

#### 6.1 *Ki Matsuri*. The tree cult in Japanese culture

##### 6.1.1 *Ki Matsuri*

##### 6.1.2 The tree cult in Japanese culture

#### 6.2 *Yomisashi Matsuri*. The *Sakaki tree* in Japanese culture

##### 6.2.1 The *Sakaki tree* in Japanese culture

##### 6.2.2 *Yomisashi Matsuri*

#### 6.3 *Hashira* – from myth to modern Japan

Axis mundi and the Symbolism of the Centre in Japanese Mythology  
The Tree and the Column in Japanese Festivals  
– Similarities to Elements from Norse Mythology –

Renata Maria Rusu

CONTENTS

**6.3.1** *Hashira Matsuri*

**6.3.2** *Onbashira Matsuri*

**6.4** *Shōreisai*. The ascent of *Amaterasu Ōmikami* to Heaven. *Mitate*

**6.5** Conclusions

**CHAPTER 7 –FINAL CONCLUSIONS**

**7.1** Summary and final observations

**7.2** Future research

**ANNEX**

***AXIS MUNDI IN NORSE MYTHOLOGY***

Introduction

Short presentation of the mythological resources

*Yggdrasil* – image and representation

*Yggdrasil* and the Norns – or *axis mundi* and time

*Yggdrasil* and shamanism

Summary

Norse mythology and Japanese mythology – *Yggdrasil* vs. world axis  
representations in Japanese myths

**REFERENCES**

Axis mundi and the Symbolism of the Centre in Japanese Mythology  
The Tree and the Column in Japanese Festivals  
– Similarities to Elements from Norse Mythology –

Renata Maria Rusu

Summary

**KEY WORDS:**

Japanese mythology, *Kojiki*, *Nihon Shoki*, *axis mundi*, *kami*, *matsuri*, *shintō*, Buddhism, religion, reed shoot, *Izanagi*, *Izanami*, the floating bridge of heaven, the spear, the pole, the country in the middle of the reed plain, *Amaterasu*, the stairway to heaven, the *Sakaki tree*, *Ninigi no mikoto*, tree, column, *hashira*, *mitate*, Norse mythology, *Yggdrasil*

## SUMMARY

*Axis mundi* – or, as **Mircea Eliade** calls the representative images of this concept, „*the symbolism of the Centre*” – is one of the most important concepts of mythology. In the present dissertation, we chose to concentrate on the way this concept is represented in Japanese culture - starting with the myths and going all the way to festivals which continue to bring the concept to life even today. The theme itself is extremely vast and we do not dare presume we have exhausted its analysis, but our passion for the Japanese culture has allowed us to put together and to reveal some elements specific to the concept that were very little analysed before. More than anything, we wish to state from the beginning that we did not intend to “explain” myths, because we have learned – from **Mircea Eliade** and a few other researchers – during the few years of study of myth that they were not born to be explained but to be lived by, or better say, so that people can live their lives through or according to them. We therefore always tried to look at things from the perspective of those who lives believing in the myths and concepts presented, and we followed their evolution through history. Research on the world axis and its representations in Japanese mythology is less numerous than research on the image of *Yggdrasil* in Norse myths for example, especially if we think about material in other languages than Japanese, to which access of the readers is somewhat limited.

Axis mundi and the Symbolism of the Centre in Japanese Mythology  
The Tree and the Column in Japanese Festivals  
– Similarities to Elements from Norse Mythology –

Renata Maria Rusu

Summary

Mythology has always played a very important role in the life of the Japanese, and it continues to do so even today. The myths and legends presented in the *Kiki* chronicles are the basis on which Japanese arts, theatre, and literature developed, and the Japanese still learn and retell about their *kami* and about the heroes in these chronicles. The fact that the festivals held today in Japan contain scenes from the myths in the *Kiki* chronicles suggests that the myths were known by the people. The long history of some of the festivals suggests that these myths were known even when the chronicles were written down, even if the way in which they were written did not make them accessible to common people. In this thesis, we decided to concentrate on those myths in the *Kiki* chronicles which contain elements whose symbolism reminds one of the concept of *axis mundi* and on Japanese festivals which deal in one way or another with representations of the concept we are analysing.

So far, researchers only identified one or two elements and Japanese mythology and said that they correspond to symbols of the world axis. In the present dissertation however we identify at least eight elements which correspond to the symbolism of the centre, and we prove that these elements are part of the most important myths of the entire Japanese mythology. We therefore hope that our research will bring a little more light in this field of study. Regarding contemporary Japan, we chose to refer exclusively to those festivals that deal with trees and columns as representations of the concept of *axis mundi* or the symbolism of the centre. The immensity of this subject matter and of the number of festivals that take place in Japan does not allow us to comprise all the representations of the concept we analyse, but the chapter dedicated to festivals is representative of what we tried to prove and it opens new ways of research for the future. We have often been told – especially by Japanese professors and researchers somewhat surprised that a foreigner is attempting to do research on “Japanese mythology” – that our field of study is huge and has many ramifications. This has proven to be true in the present dissertation also, as in order to analyse the concept of *axis mundi* in Japanese myths and festivals we had to create a spider web to cover a delimitation of what “Japanese mythology” is, explanations of terms such as *kami* and *matsuri* – specific to Japanese culture and without the understanding of which we could not have completed

Axis mundi and the Symbolism of the Centre in Japanese Mythology  
The Tree and the Column in Japanese Festivals  
– Similarities to Elements from Norse Mythology –

Renata Maria Rusu

Summary

our analysis, not to mention the concept of *axis mundi* itself, a very complex and fertile concept in all world cultures.

The present dissertation has seven chapters, each beginning with an introduction and ending with a summary (**Chapters 2 – 4**) or a conclusion (**Chapters 5 and 6**). The dissertation also comprises more than 230 photographs to prove many of the aspects discussed in the dissertation.

**Chapter 1** is an introduction which comprises some clues about the way we have followed towards completing the present dissertation and a short synthesis of the chapters, while **Chapter 7** is one in which we present the final conclusions and reflect upon possible future developments of the subject matters in this dissertation.

In **Chapter 2** we make a general presentation of Japanese mythology, as well as a synthesis of the research in this field, both internationally and in Romania. First of all, we defined and delimited in this chapter the notion of “Japanese mythology” as a notion covering exclusively the myths in *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki*. We presented the historical conditions in which the chronicles were written down and we briefly presented the structure, the contents, and the purpose for which each chronicle was written, pinpointing also some resemblances and differences between them. We also presented some common points Japanese mythology has with other mythologies, and in the last part of the chapter we summarised some of the stages through which research on Japanese mythology has passed both in Japan and abroad. We saw in this context how little has been published about Japanese mythology in Romania.

Japanese mythology is also known as *shintō* mythology, the two terms having *Kojiki* and *Nihon Shoki* as a common point. **Chapter 2** is therefore closely connected to **Chapter 4**, in which we discuss about *shintō* – the way of *kami*. We have chosen to present things this way in order to reveal on one hand elements specific to mythology – as they appear in the chronicles – which we use for our analysis in **Chapter 5** and elements specific to *shintō* beliefs and manifestation in festivals on the other hand, which we use in our presentation in **Chapter 6**.

In **Chapter 3** we present three notions that are essential for our research – *axis mundi*, *kami* and *matsuri*. These notions are very important for the understanding of how the concept of world axis and the symbolism of the centre are represented in

Axis mundi and the Symbolism of the Centre in Japanese Mythology  
The Tree and the Column in Japanese Festivals  
– Similarities to Elements from Norse Mythology –

Renata Maria Rusu

Summary

Japanese myths and in festivals. We therefore stopped first of all at the concept of *axis mundi* itself and at the characteristics of the symbols which are representative for the centre, and we continued the chapter with the presentation of two notions specific to Japanese culture: *kami* (often mistakenly translated as “god” or “deity”) and *matsuri* (which somewhat correspond to “festival” or “celebration”).

The concept of *axis mundi* – *the central axis of the universe* – is one of the most common mythological concepts all over the world. We presented in this dissertation the many representations of this concept and some of the notions often associated with it (like sacred space and sacred time) and we tried to understand how such a powerful concept can manifest itself in so many different cultures and especially what is its significance for those who lived believing in its existence. The bibliography for the study and research of this concept is extremely extensive, and we can say without exaggerating that all great mythology and religion researchers have touched upon this subject matter more or less. For the present dissertation we mostly used research carried out by **Mircea Eliade** – who published many books on this subject matter – and we also mentioned research carried out by researchers such as **Jacques Brosse**, **Marija Gimbutas**, **Emile Durkheim**, and **Joseph Campbell**.

The other two concepts we presented in this chapter are specific to Japanese culture. We believe it is not possible to understand the Japanese myths presented in **Chapter 5** or the festivals presented in **Chapter 6** without understanding these two notions: *kami* and *matsuri*. The bibliography in this field is again huge, as these two concepts are essential for *shintō* and for Japanese culture in general, so most researchers have discussed them at one point or another. For the first concept, we tried to briefly summarise the way the understanding of this concept has evolved in an attempt to see what *kami* actually mean for the Japanese. Also, we stopped on a long-discussed problem, that of the translation of this word from Japanese, in an attempt to offer a new perspective of the way the concept can be understood. When it comes to *kami*, many researchers bring up the famous words by **Motoori Norinaga**, who once said “I don’t know what *kami* are”. This just proves how difficult the concept is, even for Japanese researchers, but its importance for the study of myths, of festivals, and of Japanese culture in general is huge. In our analysis of the myths in **Chapter 5** and in our

Axis mundi and the Symbolism of the Centre in Japanese Mythology  
The Tree and the Column in Japanese Festivals  
– Similarities to Elements from Norse Mythology –

Renata Maria Rusu

Summary

presentation of the festivals in **Chapter 6** we often mention *kami*, so we have to try to understand the concept. In order to do so, we tried not only to summarise the opinions of researchers in the field, but also to offer a new perspective – maybe somewhat unexpected – to ease the understanding of the concept especially for those less familiar with Japanese culture and language. In order to explain the concept as well as possible, we started by offering some of the most commonly accepted definitions up to now and we briefly saw how the concept evolved in time, concentrating on the significance *kami* have had in the *Kiki* chronicles and at the time the chronicles were written down, as well the role played by *kami* in Japanese festivals. We also discussed the problem of the translation of this term from Japanese so that it can be understood by those less familiar with Japanese culture but not only, and we tried to look at the concept from the perspective a another concept surprisingly similar – that of makter (forces, powers, energies) in Norse mythology. Of course, our presentation is very brief, but what we tried to show is the character of *kami* and the fact that this concept is not equivalent to that of “god”. The *kami* concept is much vaster and it may include that of “god”. A much better equivalent we have identified is that makter from Norse mythology. For people living in the islands of Japan and in the Scandinavian peninsula 2000 years ago, life was a mystery. For them, the world of living comprised people, plants, animals, but also rocks, trees, mountains, rivers, and seas. People believed that something “lives” in these objects. All of them had in them a certain force, a power that people learned to venerate as time passed.

Regarding the notion of *matsuri*, we briefly presented what these manifestations often referred to as “festivals” consist of and we saw that this translation is not entirely correct. We also briefly presented the structure of a *matsuri* and three defining concepts of time and space, as well as their perception – *ke*, *hare*, *kegare* – which have a great importance in understanding the concept of *matsuri*. In the last part of the chapter we tried to show in a few representative images the place *matsuri* occupy in the life of the Japanese. Small or large, famous or barely known outside the community, *matsuri* have always been and will always remain for the Japanese a way of pleasing their soul in a way they cannot do in everyday life. Through these celebrations, the Japanese can become, for a few hours, children, and to escape everyday problems, to take a short

Axis mundi and the Symbolism of the Centre in Japanese Mythology  
The Tree and the Column in Japanese Festivals  
– Similarities to Elements from Norse Mythology –

Renata Maria Rusu

Summary

brake from everyday problems. Also, a day in which a *matsuri* takes place is a day which reminds the Japanese of the importance of seasons, of historical events, of traditions. As they take part in a *matsuri*, the Japanese make their connection to the community stronger. By celebrating traditions, they keep them alive and constantly renew the experiences they have inherited from their ancestors. The idea of a place one belongs to is celebrated through these specific activities, and from the community's perspective, organizing a *matsuri* is a way to promote its values, interests, and aspirations. As not only a manifestation of the identity of the place and the people, *matsuri* are manifestations of the identity of the community. Based on history, religion, politics, and other aspects of the culture of the place, *matsuri* offer the individual something known and familiar, but also something new, a unique experience.

As we mentioned in **Chapter 2** of this dissertation, Japanese mythology is in fact *shintō* mythology, the point of intersection between the two notions being the *Kiki* chronicles. Often seen as the main “religion” of the Japanese, this way of *kami* presented in **Chapter 4** is a system of beliefs that developed in close connection to the myths described in the chronicles. If for the Japanese history and mythology were synonyms for many centuries, we cannot forget that even if eventually the two terms were separated under the influence of western culture, the Japanese have succeeded in bringing mythology into history, into the present, Japan being one of the few countries with a live mythology, kept and lived after even today based on the beliefs and practices described in the chronicles.

The old inhabitants of the Japanese islands looked at the world around them as at a world full of significance, like any other people in the world for that matter. For them, the world was full of sacred powers, certified by myths. The traditions of various areas gradually started to consolidate around the imperial cult, which became more and more powerful, until the consolidation of the way of *kami – shintō*. A great impact in this context came from influences outside Japan. Put in front of a world vision and of interpretations of existence different from what was known to them, and being forced to give a name to their religious, cultural, and political traditions which were not yet clearly defined, the Japanese borrowed two Chinese characters 神(*shin*) = *kami* and 道(*tō*) = way. The word „*shintō*” (神道) was first used in the section about the period

Axis mundi and the Symbolism of the Centre in Japanese Mythology  
The Tree and the Column in Japanese Festivals  
– Similarities to Elements from Norse Mythology –

Renata Maria Rusu

Summary

preceding the section about emperor **Yōmei** (r. 585-587) in *Nihon Shoki*, but it was just a word borrowed from Chinese and used to make the distinction between the worship of *kami* and the worship of Buddha. Adopting this term seems to have complicated and amplified the tensions regarding the understanding of the meaning of life and the world for the Japanese on the one hand, and the pretensions of Confucianism and Buddhism that they are universal laws and principles.

As time passed, due to the contacts Japan had with Korea and China, and then with the rest of the world, the cultural and religious impact was more and more felt as the Japanese adopted and adapted concepts, symbols, and rituals from Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity, the yin – yang school, etc. We can therefore make a very important observation for the way the Japanese see “religion”: for them, none of the religions or the semi-religious systems that made it to Japan excluded each other. In a very broad sense, what we call Japanese mythology or *shintō* mythology today is a system which integrates beliefs from many religious systems, especially Buddhism and Confucianism. If, for example, Buddhism can easily be defined as a religion, the situation is more complicated for *shintō*, as researchers generally say it is not a religion.

In an attempt to offer a very clear image of what *shintō* is, as well as in an attempt to catch those aspects that are relevant for the study of myth and Japanese festivals, we separated this chapter into two parts: one in which we mark the important moments in the evolution of *shintō* beliefs and their influence on the life of the Japanese, briefly presenting the almost 1500 years of history since the Kiki chronicles were written down to modern times, while in the second part we stop at the question of whether *shintō* is a religion or not. We also briefly present the long discussion of whether *shintō* is the religion of the Japanese and we see in this context what *shintō*, Buddhism and other religions mean for the Japanese.

An essential characteristic of religion in Japan is that everything focalises on action, tradition, and etiquette. Religion in Japan must be analysed not from the perspective of belief and religious doctrine – which not only miss the social aspect of the activities inspired from religion, but also lead us to the wrong conclusions – but from the perspective of the way the Japanese are involved in religious activities. It is the only way we can reveal the long line of religious motifs, deeply inserted in Japanese

Axis mundi and the Symbolism of the Centre in Japanese Mythology  
The Tree and the Column in Japanese Festivals  
– Similarities to Elements from Norse Mythology –

Renata Maria Rusu

Summary

society, which go along with the other aspects of social life in Japan. Only because these motifs are so deeply integrated in culture it does not mean that they are less implicitly religious, on the contrary, it means that profoundly religious dimensions still operate in Japanese culture, helping create the way the Japanese behave and see the world.

Japanese people – common people as well as researchers – hesitate to say that *shintō* is a religion. What is clear though is that *shintō* is deeply integrated in their everyday lives. Millions of Japanese people apply *shintō* principles in their lives and take part in rituals related to birth, marriage, passing exams, moments of crises in the life of a person, New Year, etc. *Shintō* is also deeply connected to arts and politics, as well as to Buddhism and Confucianism, presenting a series of problems and challenges to the researcher. But the most important element we must remember is the huge impact *shintō*, with all its implications, has on the life of Japanese people from the oldest times to present.

In **Chapter 5** we tried to emphasize the central character and the importance of the connection between “heaven(s) and earth” in Japanese mythology, connection made through *axis mundi* and its representations. *The Centre* is the place where creation begins, the place where *kami* undertake their first activities, which are essential to the creative process, the place which then becomes the pivot point of the entire universe. This point makes the connections between up and down, between the world of men and the world of *kami*. *The central axis of the universe* is the one that gives life, sustains it and maintains it. Although the elements which represent *the central axis* in Japanese myths were rarely analyzed in detail, researchers being please in the best of cases just to observe the existence of some symbols of the concept of *axis mundi* in Japanese mythology, without doing an analysis of them and without following their evolution within the myth, we saw in the present dissertation that they are present from the first pages of the chronicles which contain the respective myths and that they follow the development of the story like a red thread, from the beginning to the point in which *Ninigi no mikoto* descends on earth. In this way, we managed to discover at least eight elements which can be assimilated to the symbolism of the centre.

Axis mundi and the Symbolism of the Centre in Japanese Mythology  
The Tree and the Column in Japanese Festivals  
– Similarities to Elements from Norse Mythology –

Renata Maria Rusu

Summary

- A first representation of the *central axis of the world* is the *reed shoot* from the myth that tells about the creation of heaven and earth. This *shoot* is the *centre* from which creation begins; it links the world above with the world below, the world of men with the world of *kami* – two worlds between which a powerful link is thus formed.
  
- A series of elements appear one after the other and in relations to one another: the floating bridge of heaven, the spear, the pole or the column. *Izanagi* and *Izanami*, the two *kami* responsible for creating the islands of Japan, sit on this *bridge* with the *spear* in hand, use it to create a first island and descending, find the *pillar* around which they continue the creation process. All these elements play an essential role in the creation process and they are all representations of the *axis mundi* concept.
  
- People - *utsushiki aohitokusa*, and the world in which they live – the country in the middle of the reed plain, are also elements heavily marked by the symbolism of *the centre*. Their name stands as a testimony to this and even if we don't know how and why the first Japanese were created, we can speculate that the first Japanese man and woman were created from the *reed* which sprouted in the initial chaos, like for example, *Ask* and *Embla*, the first man and woman from the Norse mythology where created from tree trunks, possibly from ash tree trunks, the same type of tree as *Yggdrasil*.
  
- A famous episode of Japanese mythology shows the way in which *Amaterasu-ō-mikami* hid in a cave, leaving the world to darkness and cold. This myth brings to our attention *the sacred tree* of the Japanese, *the Sakaki tree*, due to of which (and due to the sacred objects hanging from it) life can continue both for people and for *kami*.

Axis mundi and the Symbolism of the Centre in Japanese Mythology  
The Tree and the Column in Japanese Festivals  
– Similarities to Elements from Norse Mythology –

Renata Maria Rusu

Summary

- There is a myth which only exists in *Nihon Shoki*, in which *Amaterasu-ō-mikami* is sent to the heavens on „heavenly ladder” (in the words of **W.G. Aston**) or „a celestial pole” (in the words of **Yoshida Atsuhiko**) – another representation of *axis mundi*.
- The last myth discussed in this chapter is the one about *Ninigi no mikoto*, the nephew of *Amaterasu-ō-mikami*, who comes down to earth on a mountain peak. Accompanied by a group of important personalities, comprising *kami* which are today worshiped at Ise in small altars in which *Sakaki* branches are placed as a symbol of their special statute, *Ninigi no mikoto* builds a palace with a *central support pillar* which is said to have reached to the skies and also went down to the centre of the earth, ensuring the link – like a true symbol of the *axis mundi* concept – between the sky, the earth and the underworld. At the same time tradition says that the floating bridge of heaven, on which *Ninigi no Mikoto* and his court descend, disappears after this moment, thus the link between the sky and the earth, between the world of *kami* and the world of men is broken, causing a tear between the *sacred space* and the *profane space*. In this myth, another important role is played by *Taka-mi-musu-bi-no-kami*, who was also called *Taka – gi* „tall tree”, because of the fact that it is believe he was a *kami* of rice fields, which came down through *branches* placed near the fields during fertility rituals.

We have seen that *axis mundi* is present in Japanese myths, and that it plays a role of the same importance as in other cultures, even if it is not present in the form of a gigantic *tree*, like *Yggdrasil* in the Norse myths. In **Chapter 6** we see that the legacy of these myths is kept alive in modern Japan, in a series of customs reiterated in a large number of festivals, in which we can easily identify the presence of the *axis mundi* concept under different forms. We present in this chapter the important role played by *trees* and *columns* under different forms in Japanese culture, as symbols of the *axis mundi* concept.

Axis mundi and the Symbolism of the Centre in Japanese Mythology  
The Tree and the Column in Japanese Festivals  
– Similarities to Elements from Norse Mythology –

Renata Maria Rusu

Summary

Starting from the importance of the *tree* in general, importance certified in myths and kept alive through rites and rituals to this day – an example being *Ki matsuri* presented in this dissertation, we continued by presenting a certain *tree* perceived by the Japanese as being sacred: *the Sakaki tree*. This *tree* plays a very important role in the Japanese creation myth, and it continues to play the same role in today's *shintō* rituals, as well as in some festivals like the one presented in this dissertation. From myth to contemporary Japan, *the Sakaki tree* holds a unique place in the heart of the Japanese.

This chapter continues with the presentation of three festivals with rituals which are centred on different representations of the *hashira* concept. Again we have a concept which appeared in the myth under different forms and which continues to play an important role in Japanese culture, especially in architecture but also in festivals, where it appears in the form of *giant columns* made of branches, or in the form of *giant trunks* placed in *shintō* altars, or in the form of *pillar-columns* or *torches* which are used in different rituals, most of them reminding of the myth and having rolls which can be analyzed in connection with the *axis mundi* concept.

For the modern man, it can be hard to understand what the meaning of the *column* or *pillar* was 2000 years ago. Maybe more important than the object its self was the process of erecting the *pillar*, and doing it as part of a well established ritual, and respecting it over the centuries. Even if we can't easily understand the meaning of these symbols, we can still understand how important it was for the people in those times to build up these *pillars*. Examples from all cultures of the world are numerous, all showing that for the primitive man these *pillars* were symbols of divinity. As seen in this dissertation, the Japanese started building altars only after Buddhism entered Japan. Until then, rocks, mountains, trees and other elements of nature were the holly dwellings of the *kami*. The *columns* which started to be built were nothing else than symbols of the connection people saw between their world and the world of *kami*. *Hashira* – these huge *columns* which take different shapes, are the places where Japanese people went thousands of years ago and where they go today to receive their *kami* or to watch them descend or ascend to their world. Borrowing **Post Wheeler's** terminology, we can say that “*true Yggdrasils*” have always existed in Japan in one way or another.

Axis mundi and the Symbolism of the Centre in Japanese Mythology  
The Tree and the Column in Japanese Festivals  
– Similarities to Elements from Norse Mythology –

Renata Maria Rusu

Summary

In the future, we plan to continue to follow the way these concepts are represented in festivals in Japan, as trees as well as mountains, flags, or any other derived shape. We plan to develop **Chapter 6** of this dissertation in an individual volume, through an even more profound analysis of the five *matsuri* presented but also through the introduction of other *matsuri*. Other aspect in this dissertation that may be developed in the future include the analysis of shamanic manifestations, the analysis of the mountain as a symbol of *axis mundi* in Japanese culture, time and its passing in old Norse and in Japanese cultures, etc. we also plan to extend our research more on the comparison of Romanian and Japanese folklore. For example, starting from this dissertation, we believe many interesting aspects can be revealed regarding festivals and the way people take part in them in Japan and in Romania. Through quotes from the Kiki chronicles, we also plan in the distant future to provide a translation into Romanian of at least the section regarding the Age of Gods from the chronicles, as a first step towards a possible translation of the texts into Romanian.

Although the present dissertation is first of all a presentation of the symbols of *axis mundi* in Japanese mythology, we often refer to Norse mythology either to present a few resemblances between the two mythological systems in **Chapter 2**, or to reveal the resemblance in the way the Vikings and the old Japanese saw the forces and the energies with which they shared their existence in the section about *kami* in **Chapter 3**, or to make short remarks and mentions of the importance of *Yggdrasil* at various times in the dissertation. *Yggdrasil* is the biggest world tree in all mythologies of the world and it is also the best known example of this kind. We therefore had to add an **Annex** to this dissertation in order to make a short analysis of the world tree *Yggdrasil* as a symbol of *axis mundi*, starting with the presentation of the mythological sources in which the tree is mentioned and continuing with the analysis of the aspects that define it as a world tree, insisting on its connection to the Norns and to shamanism. At the end of this annex we make a few short remarks regarding the symbolism of the centre in Norse mythology and in Japanese mythology.

It is hard to summarize all we have learned about *the world ash Yggdrasil*. The image of this *tree*, its functions and implications are, just like *the tree* itself, huge. We have tried, therefore, to concentrate only on those aspects that are relevant for our

Axis mundi and the Symbolism of the Centre in Japanese Mythology  
The Tree and the Column in Japanese Festivals  
– Similarities to Elements from Norse Mythology –

Renata Maria Rusu

Summary

research. We have seen *Yggdrasil* in relation with *the Norns*, who are neither goddesses of fate in the classical sense, nor do they have so much to do with temporality as they govern the natural flow of human activities, from when they are in the process of occurring until they have accomplished, with the feeling of obligation penetrating the whole process. *The Norns* influence the entire universe in the Norse myths, they influence the world of humans and the world of gods. By watering and caring for *the world ash*, they see to the continuation of life in all these worlds. We have also learned that near the foot of *Yggdrasil*, at *Urðr's well*, the divinities meet and pronounce judgments. The other aspect of *Yggdrasil* we have discussed, its relation to *Óðinn* and *shamanism*, we have seen *Óðinn* as a sun god, we have seen him giving life to the first man and the first woman, we have seen him sacrificed from *the world tree*. In the branches of *Yggdrasil*, which spread out across heaven and earth, live all kinds of animals. At the foot of *the tree* lies the enormous serpent, *Niðhoggr*, who threatens the very existence of *the tree* by gnawing continually upon it. At the very top of *the tree* perches an eagle that does daily battle with the destructive serpent.

In this dissertation we have analysed the concept of *axis mundi* – *the world axis* in Japan, often referring to Norse mythology. We particularly insisted on the connection between *the world axis* and *time* on the one hand, and *shamanism* on the other hand, in the Old Norse myths; also, we tried to stress *the centrality* and importance in connecting “heaven and earth” of the various representations of *the world axis* in the Japanese myths. From our analysis, the following can be concluded: first of all, in both mythological accounts great importance is given to the representation of *the centre*. These representations may take various forms, but the functions are similar in all cases. These functions include:

- *the centre* as the place where creation begins, which afterwards becomes the point of support of the entire universe; as such, it connects *the above* and *the below*, the world of humans and the world of *kami*;
- the symbols of *the centre* as the material from which the first humans were created;

Axis mundi and the Symbolism of the Centre in Japanese Mythology  
The Tree and the Column in Japanese Festivals  
– Similarities to Elements from Norse Mythology –

Renata Maria Rusu

Summary

- the representations of *the world axis* as givers, sustainers, and preservers of life; this function is fulfilled either directly or indirectly; however, there always seems to be a crucial moment which can be solved only by making appeal to the centre and its regenerative powers.

The importance of the concept we chose to analyze in this paper is immense. As we suspected when we started working on this dissertation, we are far from ending the analysis of this crucial element of mythology. But doing this analysis, we can say we somehow managed to clarify the perception we have on Nordic and Japanese myths, or at least to get an idea about what kind of life those carrying these myths with them lived. In Norse mythology *Yggdrasil* holds a central position as a link between the world of men and the universe, and in Japanese thinking every aspect of nature is protected by *kami*. Respect for nature and for the world in which we live in is reflected differently in the Japanese culture and in the old Viking's culture. *The tree* however remains a symbol of growth and fertility in both cultures.

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Axis mundi and the Symbolism of the Centre in Japanese Mythology  
The Tree and the Column in Japanese Festivals  
– Similarities to Elements from Norse Mythology –

Renata Maria Rusu

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Axis mundi and the Symbolism of the Centre in Japanese Mythology  
The Tree and the Column in Japanese Festivals  
– Similarities to Elements from Norse Mythology –

Renata Maria Rusu

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The Tree and the Column in Japanese Festivals  
– Similarities to Elements from Norse Mythology –

Renata Maria Rusu

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Axis mundi and the Symbolism of the Centre in Japanese Mythology  
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– Similarities to Elements from Norse Mythology –

Renata Maria Rusu

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Axis mundi and the Symbolism of the Centre in Japanese Mythology  
The Tree and the Column in Japanese Festivals  
– Similarities to Elements from Norse Mythology –

Renata Maria Rusu

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Axis mundi and the Symbolism of the Centre in Japanese Mythology  
The Tree and the Column in Japanese Festivals  
– Similarities to Elements from Norse Mythology –

Renata Maria Rusu

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Axis mundi and the Symbolism of the Centre in Japanese Mythology  
The Tree and the Column in Japanese Festivals  
– Similarities to Elements from Norse Mythology –

Renata Maria Rusu

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Axis mundi and the Symbolism of the Centre in Japanese Mythology  
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Renata Maria Rusu

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