

ISMEO
ASSOCIAZIONE INTERNAZIONALE
DI STUDI SUL MEDITERRANEO E L'ORIENTE

SERIE ORIENTALE ROMA

FONDATA NEL 1950 DA GIUSEPPE TUCCI

DIRETTA DAL 1979 DA GHERARDO GNOLI

Scientific Board:

Timothy H. Barrett, East Asian History, School of Or. and African Studies, London

Alessandro Bausi, Äthiopistik, Asien-Afrika-Institut, Universität Hamburg

Peter Kornicki, East Asian Studies, Cambridge University

Daniel Potts, Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology and History, Inst. for the Study
of the Ancient World, New York University

Editor: Adriano V. Rossi

NUOVA SERIE

Vol. 41

R O M A
ISMEO
2024

This volume has been published with a contribution from MUR Project “Storia, lingue e culture dei paesi asiatici e africani: ricerca scientifica, promozione e divulgazione”.

TUTTI I DIRITTI RISERVATI

ISBN 978-88-6687-278-8 ISSN 0582-7906

© 2024 Scienze e Lettere S.r.l.
Via Alessandro Malladra, 33 – 00157 Roma
Tel. 0039/06/4817656 – Fax 0039/06/48912574
e-mail: info@scienzelettere.com
www.scienzelettere.com

© 2024 ISMEO Associazione Internazionale di Studi sul Mediterraneo e l’Oriente,
Roma
www.ismeo.eu

Layout by Paola Borioni

CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i> by Donatella Rossi	VII
L. Verderame, <i>The Quest for Immortality and the Transience of Life in Ancient Mesopotamia</i>	1
M. Casari, <i>Iskandar and Al-Khidr in the Literatures of Islam: Political Power, Prophecy and Divination in the Legend of the Bath of Immortality</i>	13
L. Capezzone, <i>Medicine, Jurisprudence, Divine Inspiration: Marginal Notes on the Knowledge of the Shiite Imams</i>	29
M. Clemente, <i>Immortality through Relics in Tibetan Hagiographies: The Case of Lha bTsun Rin Chen rNam rgyal (1473-1557)</i>	43
F. Lunardo, <i>rJe tshe 'Dzin ma, A dGe lugs pa Long Life Practice</i>	53
C. Simioli, <i>The Multidimensional Nature of the Mercury Procedures as Described in the Ten Million of Quintessential Instructions, The Relics (man ngag bye ba ring bsrel) of Zur mkhar ba mNyam nyid rDo rje</i>	77
D. Rossi, <i>Today as Yesterday: A Spiritual Advice for the Degenerate Age</i>	93
F. Pregadio, <i>Destiny and Immortality in Taoism</i>	115
C.L. Ghidini, <i>Under the Spell of Antiquity: Orikuchi Shinobu and the Water of Eternal Youth</i>	135

G.A. Testa, <i>The Jingoji Yakushi and the Production of Wooden Images of Bhaisajyaguru (the Healing Buddha) in Japan during the Late Nara (710-794) and Early Heian (794-1185) Periods</i>	149
F. Cristaldi, <i>Places of Worship of the Chinese Population in Rome as an Indicator of Territorial Stabilisation</i>	183
A. Kotic, A.L. Ai, <i>Spirituality and Psychological Stress in Covid Pandemic of Chinese Immigrants in Europe</i>	201
<i>Contributors</i>	227

FOREWORD

The contributions contained in this Volume represent one of the outcomes of the activities linked to a research funded by Sapienza University of Rome (RM11916B45F8FE71) entitled Fate and Immortality in Asia: A Cross-cultural Perspective, a multi-disciplinary Project focused on the role played by fate in the quest for immortality and on issues related to immortality per se understood in its broadest sense.

The main Project objective was formulated to analytically investigate religious, philosophical, literary, and anthropological-psychological responses to the notions of fate and immortality—with specific reference to Ancient Mesopotamia, the Arab World, China, India, Japan, Persia, Tibet—with the intention of synergistically contextualising those responses in a comparative bridge-building framework geared towards the definition of a preliminary blueprint to be utilised for trans-disciplinary inquiries and epistemological-dialectical debates in the relevant fields. In that regard, the opportunity to publish this Volume with the prestigious Serie Orientale Roma of ISMEO – The International Association for Mediterranean and Oriental Studies appears as a propitious step in the right direction.

Immortality represents a compelling aspect of Asian religious and philosophical concerns surrounding death and spiritual salvation. Fate and immortality-related notions and beliefs generated doctrines, liturgies, specialised procedures and praxes conceived and sanctioned according to the distinct Weltanschauung of the aforementioned geo-cultural realities. They informed salvation propositions, healing narratives, and curative methods up to the present time. They also informed mythological provenance and contributed to mold national identities and collective images of the latter. Even so, a specific research on the proposed themes had never been carried out in a systematic way, neither in terms of individual cultural spheres nor in a comprehensive or comparative mode. In order to contribute to filling such a long-standing research gap, the research methodology envisaged to fulfill the Project objectives entailed the combination of a dyadic

architecture, structured upon a historical-textual approach implying the identification, analysis, and study of ad hoc primary textual sources, and an ethno-anthropological-psychological approach based on fieldwork, interviews with knowledgeable experts in Asia, case studies involving Asian migrants in Europe.

In particular, the Project aimed to answer the following research questions: how were notions of destiny and immortality formulated and how were they developed through the course of history in the specific contexts? What are the most prominent soteriological and eschatological views connected to the achievement of immortality? What are the liturgies and praxes employed to avert death and the danger of death? Are there funerary rituals or praxes that 'grant' immortality? Are these liturgies and praxes socially accepted and diffused? Can immortality be achieved without transcending the physical body? What is the image of the liberated self and how does it relate to the mortal one in the various Asiatic cultural contexts? To which extent do theories of immortality influence healing and practices? What is the role of divination? In what way do religious experts interpret relevant textual authority and legitimate it in present-day social circumstances? Does immortality have to be proven and how could it be proven? What kind of gender dynamics intervene in constructing notions of fate and immortality? Are there specific female practitioners who play(ed) any role in that regard? Is there an ethic of immortality? Is there an aesthetic of immortality? How do notions of fate and immortality contribute to the definition of cultural and religious identities and to the nation-building process?

The involved participants were: seven scholars from the Sapienza Department of Oriental Studies (Leonardo Capezzone, Mario Casari, Michela Clemente, Filippo Lunardo, Donatella Rossi, G. Aurora Testa, Lorenzo Verderame); one from the Sapienza Department of History, Anthropology, Religions, Art History, Media and Performing Arts (Flavia Cristaldi); one from the Sapienza Department of Psychology of Development and Socialisation Processes (Ankica Kopic); two from the University of Naples L'Orientale, Department of Asian, African and Mediterranean Studies (Chiara Luna Ghidini and Carmela Simioli); one from the Institute of Sinology, Friedrich Alexander University, Erlangen-Nuremberg (Fabrizio Pregadio); and one from the Institute for the Study of Religions in Kraków, Jagiellonian University (Sacha Malgorzata).

Meanwhile, the calamitous COVID-19 pandemic broke out, so that it was impossible to implement field research in Asia within the time limits of the Project, not to mention the fact that the Project itself came to a halt for the same reason. Eventually, a workshop with round table discussion was

convened in hybrid form at Sapienza (September 2022), to which all the aforementioned Project members participated. The workshop focused on three main analytical axes: a) *Destiny, divination, and eschatology: theories of immortality in Asian thought*; b) *Approaches to long life and immortality: liturgies, techniques and practices in Asia*; c) *Ethics of long life: destiny and immortality in Asian cultural and social contexts*. Later on, a seminar on the Project topics was also organised as part of the curricular activities of the Department of Oriental Studies's Doctorate in Asian and African Civilisations, which involved the participation of eminent scholars from Norwegian, French, and Czech university institutions (March 2023). Lastly, a calligraphic exhibition was held in the Dept.'s Library featuring seven independent artists, who entertained the students and the public by offering the direct experience of creating calligraphy in various Asian scripts—Bengali, Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Persian, and Tibetan—containing terms and expressions relating to Fate and Immortality (May 2023).

The eclectic collection of essays that make up this Volume is culturally articulated starting from the mythological narratives on the heroes and gods of Ancient Mesopotamia, to then embrace the Arabic and Persian literatures, climb the soteriological and alchemical peaks of the Land of Snows, face the Taoist challenges to immortality in the Middle Kingdom, savour the delicacy of a water of eternal youth and marvel at the persistent faith in the salvific power of the iconic Healing Buddha in Japan, to finally reach Europe and learn how religious sentiment and the strength of human closeness influence the well-being of immigrant ethnic populations and contributed to psychological management of the pandemic stress.

In particular, Lorenzo Verderame's article, *The Quest for Immortality and the Transience of Life in Ancient Mesopotamia*, analyses anthropogenies and other literary passages to examine the concept of mortality and immortality starting from the Epic of Gilgameš and discussing the centrality of the death of Enkidu as the key event of the story which determines Gilgameš' quest for immortality.

In *Iskandar and Al-Khidr in the Literatures of Islam: Political Power, Prophecy and Divination in the Legend of the Bath of Immortality*, Mario Casari focuses on the passage from the political function of the Legend to its more spiritual and divinatory readings, highlighting an aspect of the transformation of Muslim intellectual attitudes during the classical era vis-à-vis the conceptualisation of the nature of humankind, the physical world, and their laws.

Leonardo Capezzone, in his *Medicine, Jurisprudence, Divine Inspiration: Marginal Notes on the Knowledge of the Shiite Imams*, analyses the concept of authority of the spiritual leader—the Imam descending from the

Prophet Muhammad—centred on a charismatic kind of knowledge that gave prominence to the figure of the Imam, in order to contextualise the conception of knowledge/power by investigating the persistence of non-Islamic ideas in early Shiite religious culture.

Michela Clemente's Immortality through Relics in Tibetan Hagiographies: The Case of Lha bTsun Rin Chen rNam rgyal (1473-1557) analyses immortality through the hagiographies of the Tibetan master lHa btsun Rin chen rNam rgyal (1473-1557) and discusses the cult of relics, which are venerated because they encapsulate both the spiritual power and the memory of deceased masters.

Filippo Lunardo's rJe tshe 'Dzin ma, A dGe lugs pa Long Life Practice, explores the relationship between that specific tantric instruction and its figurative symbols to prove its efficacy, in terms of transformative powers, towards the attainment of spiritual salvation.

Carmela Simioli, with The Multidimensional Nature of the Mercury Procedures as Described in the Ten Million of Quintessential Instructions, The Relics (man ngag bye ba ring bsrel) of Zur mkhar ba mNyam nyid rDo rje, analyses those instructions, which describe the entire process devoted to both the obtainment of the mercurial panacea for the realisation of an extraordinary body and the achievement of ultimate liberation.

Donatella Rossi's Today as Yesterday: A Spiritual Advice for the Degenerate Age, presents the translation and analysis of a short bon-po text containing a prophetic revelation, proposing emic and comparative reflections as complements to the research motifs of the Project.

Destiny and Immortality in Taoism, by Fabrizio Pregadio, surveys some of the principal themes related to the subject matter and the way in which notions of fate and immortality are variously conceived in Taoism.

In Under the Spell of Antiquity: Orikuchi Shinobu and the Water of Eternal Youth, Chiara L. Ghidini investigates how the Japanese writer and folklorist Orikuchi Shinobu (1887-1953) employed the theme of water to deliver his own version of antiquity and offer an alternative fate for twentieth-century Japan.

G. Aurora Testa, in her The Jingoji Yakushi and the Production of Wooden Images of Bhaiṣajyaguru (the Healing Buddha) in Japan during the Late Nara (710-794) and Early Heian (794-1185) Periods, re-examines a series of wooden sculptures of the Medicine Buddha (Jap. Yakushi Nyorai, Skrt. Bhaiṣajyaguru) to investigate the religious and cultural role of Buddhist images during the Heian Period.

Flavia Cristaldi's article, Places of Worship of the Chinese Population in Rome as an Indicator of Territorial Stabilisation, examines the places of worship frequented by Chinese citizens residing in Rome, highlighting their

location within the urban space and their main functional characteristics as indicators of the Chinese community territorial stabilisation in Italy.

The collection of essays ends with the scientific contribution of Ankica Kosic and Amy L. Ai, Spirituality and Psychological Stress in Covid Pandemic of Chinese Immigrants in Europe, whose rich content explores whether beliefs in spiritual support and in the immortality of the soul may have moderated the relationship between the concern about Covid-19 and relevant psychological distress.

It is hoped that the Volume will contribute to fueling interest in the topics covered and that it will be a stimulus for further in-depth studies and academic discourse.

Rome, October 28th, 2023

DONATELLA ROSSI
Editor