

PREFACE

The title of this book speaks of an island culture. Despite the many things they have in common, the island communities of the Yaeyama group to which Hateruma belongs show so much variety and so many peculiarities in their cultural configuration that the use of the term island cultures is indeed justifiable. This certainly holds for Hateruma, where – under the influence of ecological, historical, political, and other factors – the interaction between social and religious phenomena has led to a specific cultural pattern. Intensive intra-cultural research of the kind we wanted to carry out on Hateruma and of which this book is the result, would seem to be the primary condition for inter-cultural comparison with respect to the entire Yaeyama island group. But the question as to whether it is already too late for this condition to be satisfied, is one which must perhaps be answered in the affirmative.

The data on which the present volume is primarily based were collected during a period of field research between April and December of 1965, which was supported by the Netherlands Organization for the Advancement of Pure Research (Z.W.O.). Our research was concentrated on – but was by no means limited to – the socio-religious aspects of this island culture which, compared with other islands of the Yaeyama group, is rather well integrated and in 1965 was shared by some 1,300 people living in five villages. Both Hateruma and its population were small enough to permit us to cover the entire island and to get to know most of the households in the degree of intimacy that seemed necessary to obtain an insight into the functioning of the social and religious fabric of their culture. At the same time, however, the island was too large and its unwritten history too long and complicated to allow us to lay bare the culture of Hateruma in all its details, its full depth, and its ultimate structure.

There were other problems too. Although living in the central village of Mae seemed convenient, the relative disadvantage of “belonging” to Mae proved to be much greater than we could have anticipated and exerted an influence on our relationship with the other villages and their inhabitants. A much greater and more important difficulty had to do with language. Although a majority of the inhabitants can make themselves understood to a certain extent in standard Japanese – the language we had to start with – the culture of Hateruma found and still finds its verbal expression in the local vernacular. Without at least a working knowledge of this vernacular it is, for instance, difficult if not impossible to understand and analyse the orally transmitted texts which played an important role in our investigations.

After the return to Europe (in March, 1966), the following articles were published: “Haterumajima no kamigyōji ni tsuite”, *Okinawa bunka* No. 23, 1967, pp. 25–40 (revised reprint in *Okinawa bunka ronsō*, vol. 3, 1971, pp. 360–374); “The ritual invocations of Hateruma”, *Asian Folklore Studies*, vol. XXVI–2, 1967, pp. 63–109; and “Rain ritual on Hateruma”, *Asiatische Studien*, vol. XXVI, 1972, pp. 10–42. Several

unforeseen circumstances retarded the further analysis of the material, but even more delay was caused by lacunae found retrospectively in the text material. After short intermittent visits to Hateruma by Mrs. Ouwehand, we found it necessary to return to Hateruma for a longer stay. In this second period of fieldwork (October 1975 – February 1976), made possible by the Schweizerische Nationalfonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung, we were confronted with altered circumstances.

Ten years had gone by. On the 15th of May, 1972, Hateruma had become part of Okinawa prefecture under full Japanese sovereignty. The island's material situation in particular had changed: the expanded commercial production of raw sugar had visibly increased prosperity. A paved ring-road facilitated the motorized transport of sugar-cane; many new, concrete tombs and houses had been built; television and telephones had abolished the severe isolation; an effective watersupply system fed by the largest spring on the island had put an end to the often acute water shortage; electricity around the clock now made it possible to use refrigerators and washing machines, although the lack of a drainage system made the removal of waste water a serious problem; and lastly, tourism from Japan proper had begun to "discover" Hateruma to a disturbing degree.

But what surprised us the most was the tenacious resistance of the folk religion. There had been every reason to expect that certain tendencies – already visible in 1965 and in themselves understandable – toward rationalization of the socio-religious system would become stronger as the years passed and the population became smaller. This had not, however, occurred to a degree necessitating a total revision of the material collected in 1965. The present book could therefore – unless explicitly stated otherwise – still be based on the situation prevailing in 1965. But we were able to make short trips to Hateruma, after 1976, too, the most recent in 1982, which made it possible to register changes, obtain answers to residual questions, and solve a number of problems. The long incubation period of this book had at least the advantage that we knew not only exactly what questions must still be asked and that we could formulate them precisely, but also that experience had shown how to put these questions in a way which could be expected to yield an unequivocal answer.

In the intervening years other publications have appeared, including the ethnographical description of Hateruma by Miyara Takahiro (1972), the joint study by Sumiya Kazuhiko and Josef Kreiner (1975), and even – we mention this with great pleasure – a book written and privately published in 1977 by the young islander Kayamoto Shōichi and intended in the first place for the people of Hateruma. However, because of the different nature and scope of these publications and the divergent approaches taken by the authors, we are of the opinion that the present work is not superfluous and is perhaps even more urgently needed.

Many – far too many – of the older and especially valuable informants of 1965 were no longer alive when we returned in 1975. Without mentioning them by name, we wish to acknowledge our debt to them with respect and gratitude. Our gratitude extends to all of our informants and indeed to all the inhabitants of Hateruma, who received us with such great frankness and warmth. The hospitality and kindness of the Ōdomari family of Mae village, who housed and fed us and helped us in so many ways,

remain unforgettable. We are especially indebted to the priestesses of Hateruma for their exceptional kindness in allowing Mrs. Ouwehand to participate in their rituals and to record their ritual texts as well as for their patience in assisting us with a preliminary analysis of these texts.

Our warm thanks are due to Professor Mabuchi Tōichi, of Tokyo, who stimulated us by his own exemplary fieldwork in the Ryukyus, who urged us to undertake research on Hateruma, and who smoothed our "road over the sea" in such an unselfish way.

For financial support of the fieldwork that formed the basis of this book we are indebted to the Netherlands Organization for the Advancement of Pure Research (Z.W.O.) and the Schweizerische Nationalfonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung. The former organization generously made the publication of this book possible. Gratitude is also due to the Stiftung für wissenschaftliche Forschung an der Universität Zürich for financial aid in preparing the photo documentation and the maps.

Mrs. Inez Seeger took on the difficult task of preparing the English text of this book. I am most grateful to her for her patience and lack of indulgence with an often stubborn author.

I also wish to express my gratitude to Messrs. E. J. Brill, the publishers of the book, and particularly to Mr. J. Verschoor and Mr. B. Dijksterhuis for their help and advice.

Without the active collaboration of my wife during the two periods of fieldwork and without the additional trips she made alone to Hateruma, in short without the "blessing of the *bunari*", this book could not have been realized in this form. Words cannot encompass my debt to her.