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# Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion

## An Anthropological Study of the Supernatural

Seventh Edition

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## *In Memoriam*

Arthur Lehmann, my dear friend and co-author of this book, died of lung cancer at his home in Chico, California, in September 1999. Although dreadfully weakened by his disease, Art insisted on maintaining active involvement in the fifth edition of *Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion*. Indeed, just weeks prior to his death, we worked several days at the university library, agonizing over the final selection of articles to be either added or deleted. Art would have been pleased to know that Pamela Myers Moro has become a co-author for future editions.

Throughout his long battle with cancer, Art was somehow able to keep his wonderful high spirits and *joie de vivre*. Art was revered on campus for his intellect, wit, and devotion to students and the discipline of anthropology. Blessed with a gift of blarney and love of people, he was also a favorite of the larger campus community. A short walk to the library from the anthropology building always turned into a time-consuming social trek, as Art found it necessary to hail every passing groundskeeper, maintenance person, or staff member—all of whom addressed him fondly as “Art”—and exchange bawdy jokes or the latest campus gossip.

Art’s great sadness during the last months of his life was the realization that he would not be returning to Central African Republic to continue his longtime research with Pygmies.

Art is survived by his wife, Sharon, and his son, Jonathan. We all miss him terribly.

James E. Myers

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# Preface

## The Story of This Book

This volume was initially inspired by our desire to assemble a book of readings that would captivate and engage students in undergraduate courses on the anthropology of religion. At the time of the first edition, the other available texts—though of high scholarly standards—failed to communicate the excitement of anthropology in a form accessible to undergraduate students with relatively little background in the field. In our view, the cross-cultural study of religion and the supernatural is one of the most compelling subfields of anthropology, a topic guaranteed to motivate students if presented in the right manner. The title *Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion: An Anthropological Study of the Supernatural* was selected to highlight the broad realm of religious expression addressed by anthropologists, far beyond what many students might initially think of as “religion” or “church.”

Informed by our own experiences as classroom teachers, we continue to feel that the best way to teach this subject is to present a range of scholarly voices in anthology format, from both classic and contemporary authors, with ethnographic materials from North America as well as the rest of the world. The original co-editors—Arthur Lehmann and James Myers—held decades of experience teaching at a state university with students of widely varying motivations and academic backgrounds, at graduate and undergraduate levels. New co-editor Pamela Moro’s teaching experience has been at liberal arts colleges, where instructors are likely to emphasize classroom discussion and the critical reading of texts.

Together we share the goal of conveying our excitement about anthropology and providing students with a solid grounding in the issues, theories, and fundamental ethnographic content of the discipline. We want to help students apply anthropological perspectives to issues that are relevant both in their own lives and in the world at large.

## The Approach of the Text

As editors, our thinking about the content and scope of this book has also, of course, been shaped by our own experiences as ethnographers. Arthur held a career-long fascination with religion, medicine, and healing in Central Africa and the Caribbean, as his numerous trips to the field attested. James’s research in the United States, initially with Native American communities in California and later on nonmainstream forms of body modification, led him to issues of identity, resistance, and, perhaps most simply, what it’s like to be a minority in a complex, rapidly changing society. Pamela’s research on music in Thailand has brought her to consider the interplay of music, ritual, festival, and the sacred worldview associated with Buddhism. Long hours watching dance processions at temples in northern Thailand, sitting with musicians at cremation services in Bangkok, and observing altars honoring the deities associated with music have inspired her consideration of religion as an integral part of human experience. Much of the thinking behind the recent editions of this book springs from these experiences as well as our observations of changes within the anthropological study

of religion itself. Our inclusion of a chapter on globalization is a response to the inescapable fact of global change and its preeminent place in current anthropological scholarship. Our combined research experiences on three continents leave us profoundly aware of the significance of religious change in our world today.

The study of religion is historically significant within the discipline of anthropology. Some of the earliest questions asked by 19th-century anthropologists had to do with the development of religion and the pan-human concern with the ultimate. Throughout the 20th century, all major anthropological theorists addressed religion in one way or another. In the more recent eras of feminist, postmodern, and critical anthropology, religion and the supernatural have remained key concerns—grounds for experimental ethnographic writing and grist for new ways of thinking about culture. The study of religion has been amenable to the four-fields approach of anthropology, most evident in studies of altered states of consciousness (including the religious use of drugs), ethnomedicine, and questions about the relationship between science and religion. Inquiry into this subject brings us to many of the issues facing humanity today—such as ethnic, political, and economic conflicts expressed in terms of religion; controversies regarding religious autonomy versus state authority, in the United States and elsewhere; religion as a force for emancipation as well as a way to maintain the status quo, for local agency and globalization. In our own multicultural society, religion is one of the most salient features of difference, and, for many of us, brushing up against individuals of different faiths is one of the main ways we encounter cultural contrast on a local level. We sincerely feel that the anthropological approach to understanding religion (assisted by contributions from related fields, such as religious studies, sociology, and psychology) offers sound hope for a just and tolerant humanity.

## Content and Organization

As in earlier editions of this book, in our selection of content we have chosen not to emphasize any particular ideological angle within the anthropology of religion. The multiple authors included in each chapter represent a range of interests, geographic foci, and ways of looking at each subject. Discipline-based

vocabulary and style of scholarly writing varies from author to author, often reflecting the time period of each article's original publication. Our hope is that the contrasts and continuities among the various articles within each chapter will help readers begin to compare and evaluate not only content but the approaches of different anthropologists.

The book is divided into ten chapters, beginning with a broad view of anthropological ways of looking at religion and moving on to some of the core topics within the subject, such as myth, ritual, and the various types of religious specialists. Although instructors may choose to utilize articles in any order they wish, there is a loose continuity to the chapters: thinking about certain types of specialists (for example, shamans) leads us to consider the religious use of hallucinogenic drugs, which in turn takes us to religion and healing and then to the related topics of magic, divination, and witchcraft. The scope of the book widens again in the concluding chapters, as we present materials on religious change, from small-scale movements of protest to contemporary flows of culture, transcending the boundaries of nations.

## Key Features

- *Chapter-Opening Essays:* These succinct, informative essays introduce the reader to the central concepts that unify each chapter.
- *Article Introductions:* Each article is prefaced with a brief introduction, drawing attention to the key themes and arguments of the work. In some cases, we have used these article introductions to make connections between selections in the volume or to recommend related scholarly works. Students may wish to use these short editorial introductions not only as preparation for reading each article but also as a review.
- *Breadth of Coverage:* As in previous editions, we have retained our commitment to integrating the analysis of religion in the West with ethnographic studies of less familiar examples. In each chapter, one or two articles deal specifically with contemporary North America.
- *Classic and Modern Selections:* Although the majority of the articles are contemporary pieces, we have also included classic readings by Mary Douglas, E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Clifford Geertz,

Horace Miner, Bronislaw Malinowski, Victor Turner, and Anthony F. C. Wallace.

## Features of the Seventh Edition

- Strengthened commitment to classical anthropological literature by including works from the mid 20th century by Claude Lévi-Strauss, John Beattie, Barbara Myerhoff, Roy Rappaport, and Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff.
- Increased coverage of the Islamic world as studied by anthropologists. The text now includes articles devoted to the pilgrimage to Mecca by West Africans, Muslim women's dress, and female rites of passage in Egypt and Sudan.
- Articles focus on the distinction between science and religion as well as the scholarly study of religion and how it contrasts with belief. An essay by noted author Stephen Jay Gould dismisses the conflict between science and faith, arguing that the two are non-overlapping ways of understanding the world.
- A chapter on religious globalization provides insights into religion as a transnational phenomenon. This chapter includes materials on religious conflicts, religion and the state, the issues of women and religious minorities, and the impact of new technology and worldwide entertainment media.
- Chapter 3 is devoted to a lengthy treatment of ritual, a key area of anthropological inquiry.
- Chapter 7 combines the closely related topics of witchcraft, sorcery, divination, and magic and emphasizes the common theme of human attempts to control or manipulate the supernatural.
- Timely and controversial issues are addressed in new articles on religion and nationalism—including violent expressions of faith, Tibetan Buddhism under Chinese rule, witchcraft in Great Britain, and medical use of prayer.
- A list of suggested readings concludes each chapter. These lists may be of assistance to the instructor, but they are also intended to provide a foundation for students pursuing independent research on topics related to the chapter.

- A comprehensive glossary, with terms new to the present edition, as well as an extensive index of subjects, authors, and titles and a bibliography of references from the volume's articles, offer students further help.

## Supplements

Visit our companion Web site at [www.mhhe.com/moro7](http://www.mhhe.com/moro7) for instructor and student resources. The student center features helpful chapter outlines and quizzes. The password-protected instructor center contains an indispensable instructor's manual and comprehensive test bank.

## Acknowledgments

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J.E.M.  
P.A.M.