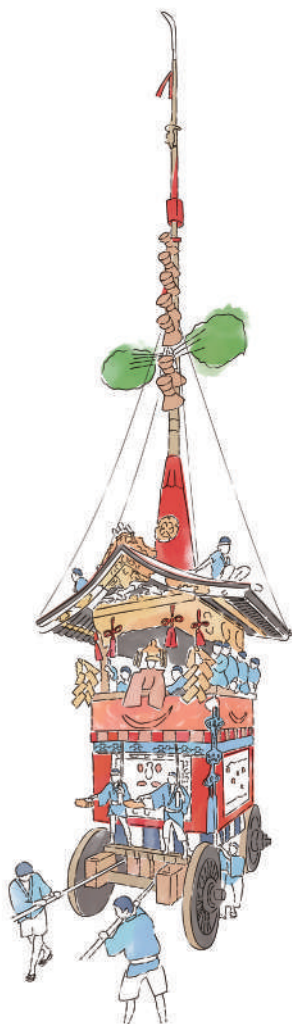
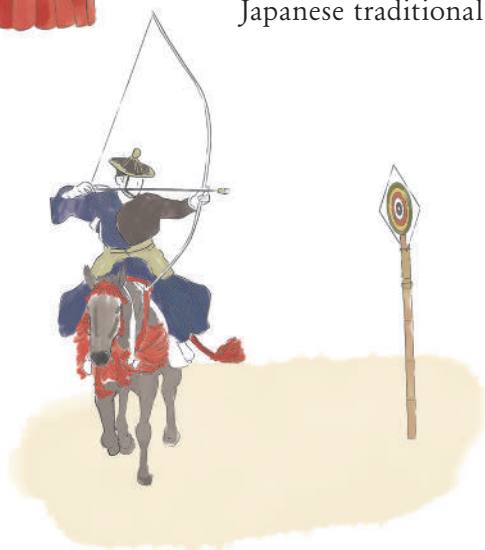
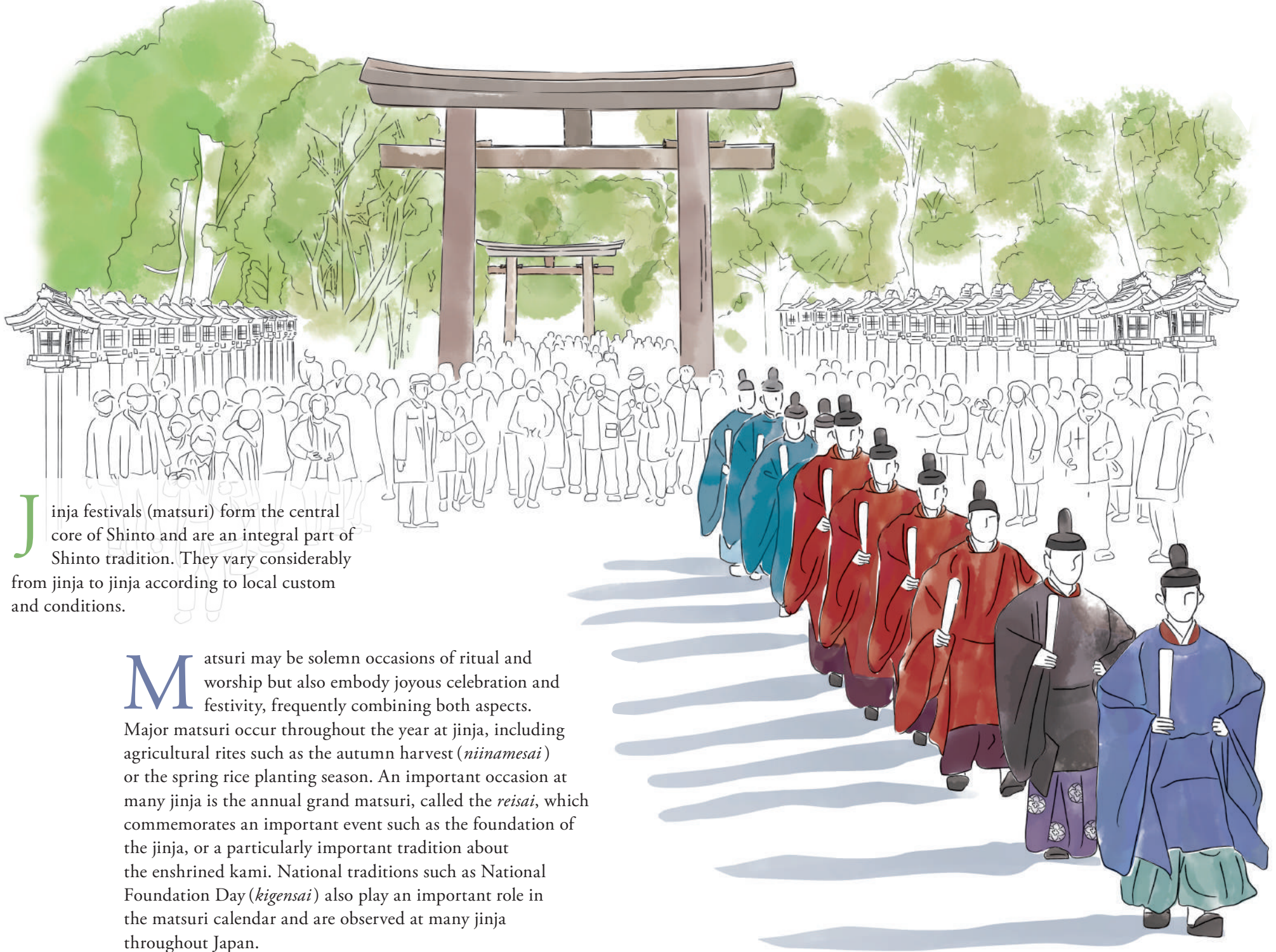


# 祭

## MATSURI

Japanese traditional festival





**J**inja festivals (*matsuri*) form the central core of Shinto and are an integral part of Shinto tradition. They vary considerably from jinja to jinja according to local custom and conditions.

**M**atsuri may be solemn occasions of ritual and worship but also embody joyous celebration and festivity, frequently combining both aspects. Major *matsuri* occur throughout the year at jinja, including agricultural rites such as the autumn harvest (*niinamesai*) or the spring rice planting season. An important occasion at many jinja is the annual grand *matsuri*, called the *reisai*, which commemorates an important event such as the foundation of the jinja, or a particularly important tradition about the enshrined kami. National traditions such as National Foundation Day (*kigensai*) also play an important role in the *matsuri* calendar and are observed at many jinja throughout Japan.



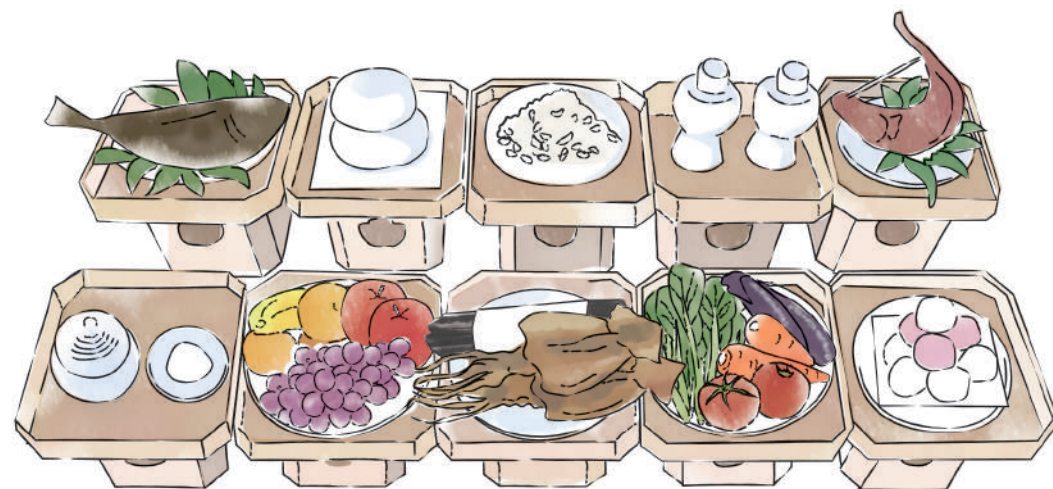
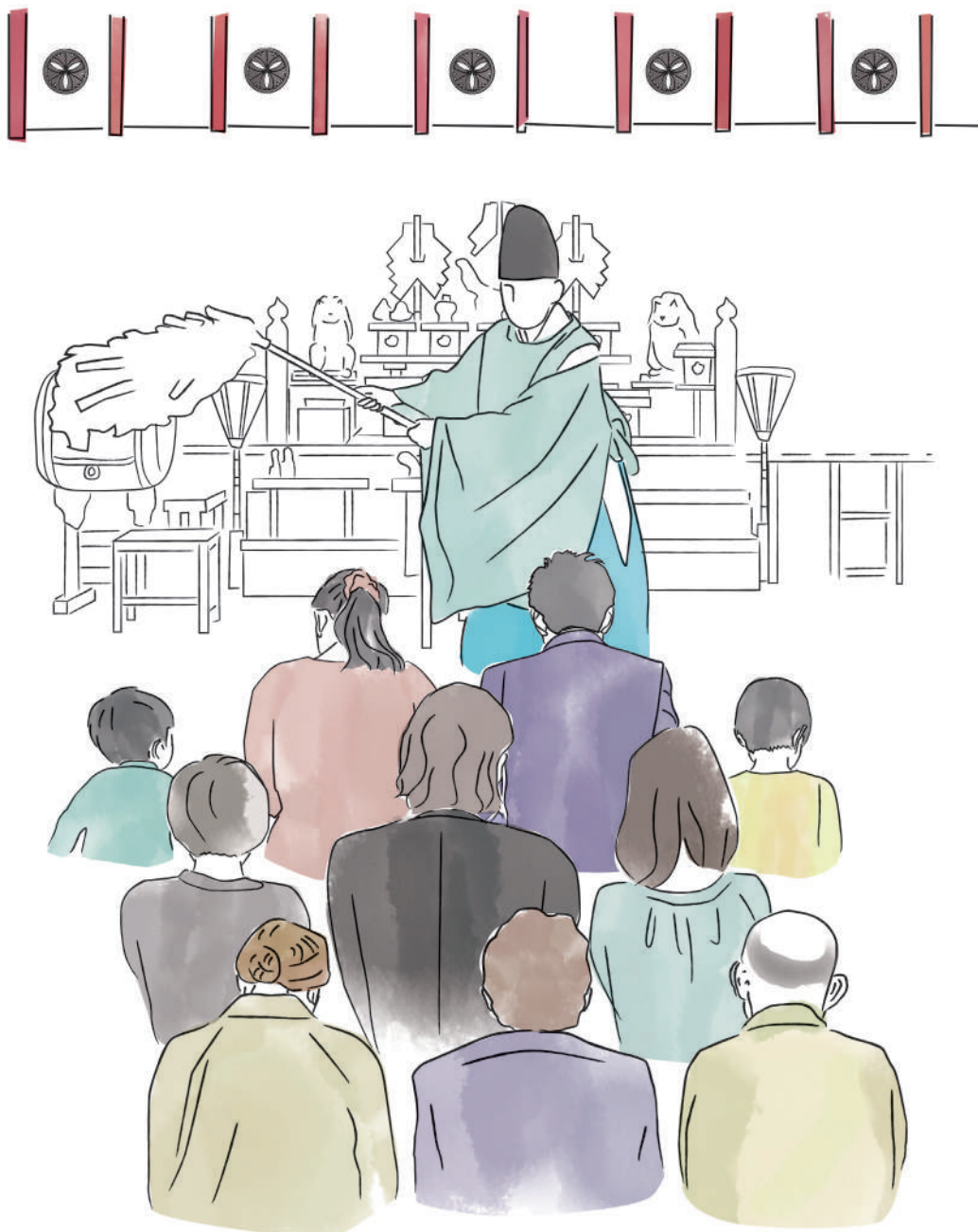


Essentially, matsuri welcome, pay respect and give thanks to the kami for their continued support and benevolence. Matsuri are also an opportunity to provide the local community and visitors with an occasion to celebrate and enjoy themselves in a festive, and at times, exuberant atmosphere.



At many jinja in Japan, as the matsuri approaches, jinja attendants are busy preparing the jinja buildings and grounds for festival day. Fresh straw ropes (*shimenawa*) are strung beneath the eaves of the main buildings and doorways and white zig-zag paper streamers (*shide*) are attached. Small sprigs of the sacred *sakaki* tree are often hung from the pillars of the torii gate. On the eve of the matsuri, Shinto priests spiritually prepare themselves by abstaining from certain foods, ritually bathing and secluding in the priest quarters to concentrate on their religious duties.





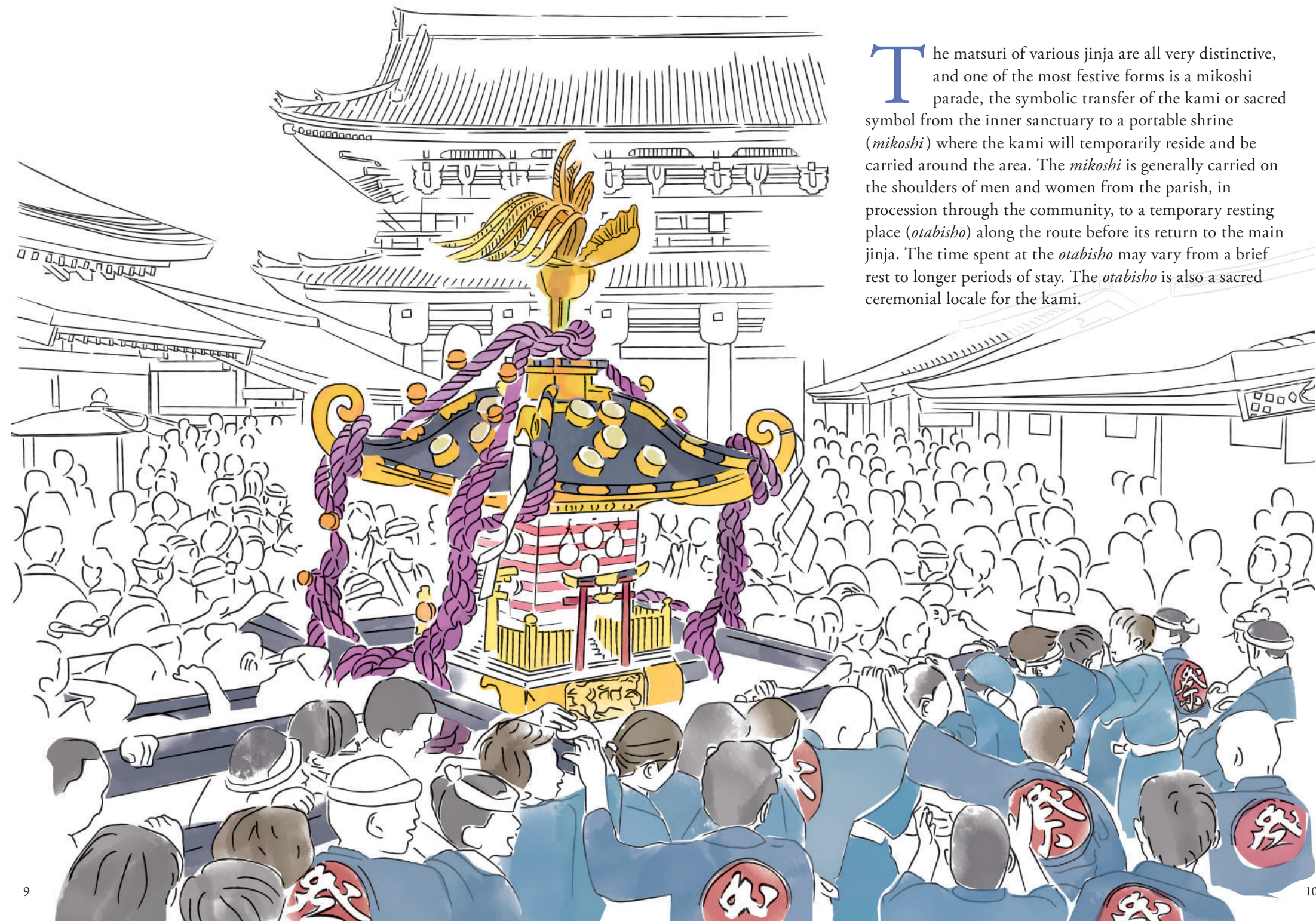
On the day of the matsuri, priests, musicians and jinja adherents gather at the main jinja to perform purification rites (*harae*) before approaching the kami. The priests, having purified the assembled people, then make an offering of food (*shinsen*) on small wooden stands, and the chief priest recites a prayer to the kami (*norito*). The offerings may include rice, sake (rice wine), fish, seaweed, vegetables, fruit, sweets, salt and water. Following this the assembled bow twice, clap their hands twice and then bow once again with an attitude of sincerity and reverence. The ceremony ends with removal of the food offerings, and is followed by a collective meal (*naorai*) at which the attendees traditionally consume the offerings. This ranges from an almost entirely symbolic sip of sacred sake (*miki*) to a full meal for everyone.





A performance of sacred dance (*kagura*) and ancient court music (*gagaku*), particularly at larger jinja, is often presented in addition to the formal rites. This constitutes an aspect of entertainment and pleasure for the kami and is enjoyed by attendees as well.





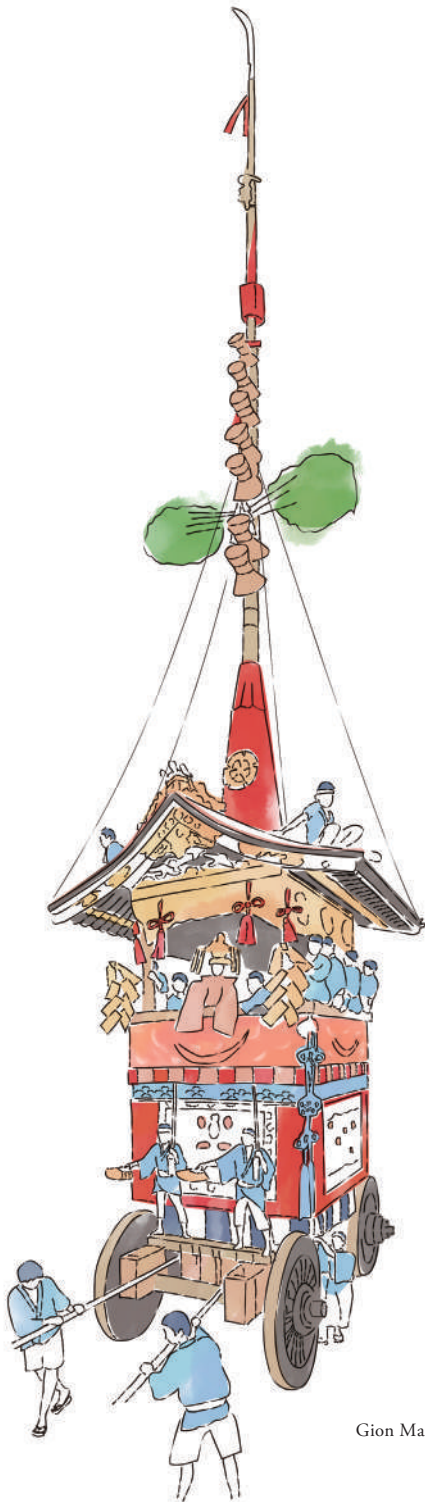
The matsuri of various jinja are all very distinctive, and one of the most festive forms is a mikoshi parade, the symbolic transfer of the kami or sacred symbol from the inner sanctuary to a portable shrine (*mikoshi*) where the kami will temporarily reside and be carried around the area. The *mikoshi* is generally carried on the shoulders of men and women from the parish, in procession through the community, to a temporary resting place (*otabisho*) along the route before its return to the main jinja. The time spent at the *otabisho* may vary from a brief rest to longer periods of stay. The *otabisho* is also a sacred ceremonial locale for the kami.



These colourful *mikoshi* processions are accompanied with much pageantry and rhythmic shouting as they pass by the homes and shops of the parishioners who receive the blessings of the kami.

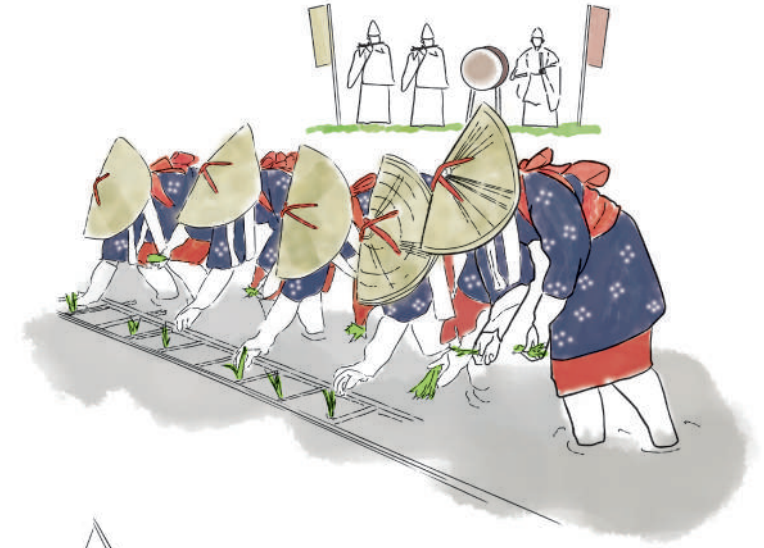
At some festivals children dress up in period costumes and accompany the *mikoshi* to the sound of traditional music. During the matsuri, stalls offering drinks, souvenirs and food are set up in the jinja grounds and along the procession route—this festive atmosphere is celebrated by parishioners and visitors alike. In ancient times these processions were often solemn occasions to revere the kami and feel a sense of awe in their presence, the practice being to carry the *mikoshi* in a stately and austere manner. There are still jinja in Japan that observe this type of matsuri.



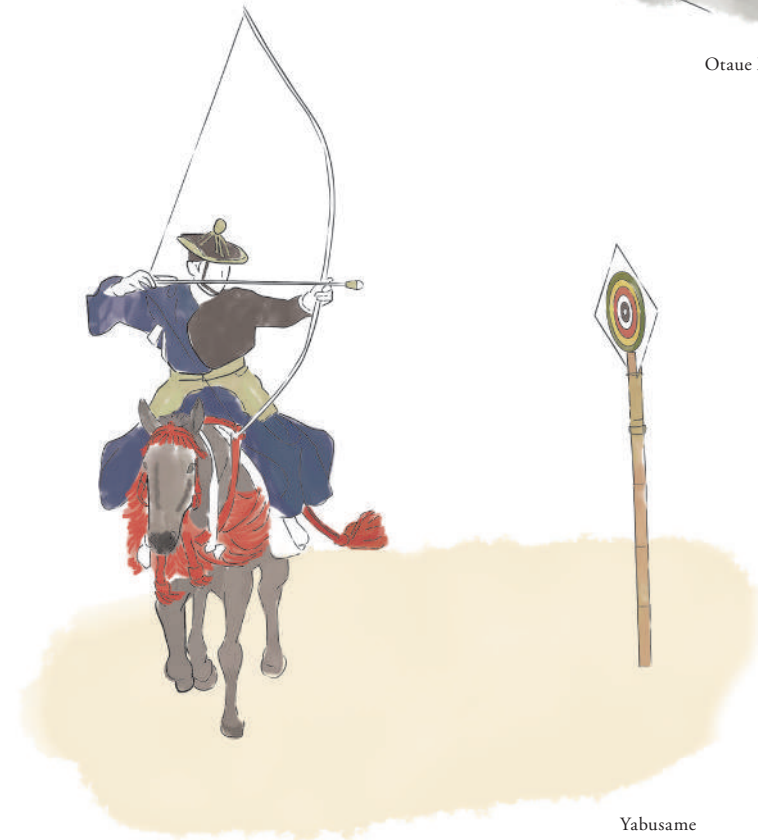


Gion Matsuri in Kyoto

Matsuri come in a variety of forms. A typical one involves a unique festival float (*dashi*), which is slowly pushed and pulled through the streets on wooden wheels. *Dashi* are beautifully decorated and often carry musicians and performers who entertain the onlookers from atop the float. Other matsuri involve annual agricultural practices such as the rice-planting festival (*otau*), where priests perform purification rituals and distribute rice seedlings before participants begin planting to the accompaniment of ancient song and dance. *Yabusame* (horseback archery ceremony) is another historically important matsuri, where archers dressed in samurai costume attempt to hit targets at full gallop on the jinja grounds. It is important to note that these matsuri contain both solemn and light-hearted features. Most of them were originally regarded as offerings to the kami in the form of divine entertainment.



Otau Matsuri



Yabusame





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